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Her Syndan Wælcyrrian: Illuminating the Form and Function of the Valkyrie-Figure in the Literature, Mythology, and Social Consciousness of Anglo-Saxon England

Authors	Purser, Philip A.
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*HER SYNDAN WÆLCYRIAN: ILLUMINATING THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF THE
VALKYRIE-FIGURE IN THE LITERATURE, MYTHOLOGY, AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF
ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND*

by

PHILIP A. PURSER

Under the Direction of Edward John Christie

ABSTRACT

The image of the warrior-woman, or Valkyrie, occurs, in a number of forms, throughout the Anglo-Saxon corpus. Her appearance and function in these writings may be subdivided into three primary registers: the named-appearances of the *wælcyrge*, unnamed appearances of the *wælcyrge* in the charms and riddles, and unnamed appearances of the *wælcyrge* in heroic verse. Since the mid-1800's scholars have defined the *wælcyrge* in terms of the *valkyrja*, or Scandinavian Valkyrie figure, which is reductive and misleading

and has caused an eclipse-effect in which the native elements of the *wælcyrge* have gone underestimated and undervalued. This is due in part to the scant amount of surviving evidence in Old English that references the *wælcyrge*. By closely investigating the texts in which the *wælcyrge* appears, I will attempt to demonstrate that the Anglo-Saxon conception of the Valkyrie figure is idiomatic, complex, and vastly different from the Old Norse conception of the *valkyrja*, and cannot be accurately defined by the same parameters which define the *valkyrja*.

The differing genres in which the *wælcyrge* appears also showcase the differing values and forms which differing demographics of Anglo-Saxon society held for the *wælcyrge*. Such a disparate range of value present in one character of folklore suggests that the *wælcyrge* was a multivalent figure within Anglo-Saxon folklore. At the liturgical level, the epic poetic level, and the folk-verse level, the Valkyrie image is revelatory of the complexities accompanying the native folklore of the *wælcyrge*. Many aspects of the *wælcyrge* are reflected in similar war-woman figures of pre-Anglo-Saxon, Germanic cultures, as well as in later, Scandinavian verses that post-date the usage of the *wælcyrge* in England. The function of the *wælcyrge* within a long tradition of Germanic, Anglo-Saxon, and Scandinavian works shows that the native English war-woman was not a figure used in isolation, but was part of a medieval dialogic in which the female divinity as an agent of war, cunning, and death was paramount. The inherent complexities present in the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie-figure are key to interpreting her role within the tripartite structure of Anglo-Saxon literature.

INDEX WORDS: Valkyrie, Valkyjur, Wælcyrge, Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Scandinavian

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PHILIP A. PURSER

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PHILIP A. PURSER

Committee Director: Edward John Christie

Committee: Scott Lightsey

John Burrison

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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Dedication

This dissertation is written in dedication to my late father, Arlis Purser (1943-2011), who was an avid reader of Anglo-Saxon verse, Old Norse poetry, and the fiction of J. R. R. Tolkien. Of particular interest to Dad was *Beowulf*, which factors heavily into this dissertation. He also loved the sagas of the Icelanders, namely *Egil's Saga* and *Grettir's Saga*. Dad encouraged me in all things, not the least of which was my education. Thus, this document, the capstone assignment marking the attainment of my doctoral degree and the completion of my formal education, is solemnly dedicated to the memory of my father.

Thanks for everything, Dad. I miss you.

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Introduction:

From the *Alaisiagae* to *Wælcyrrian*

Numerous cultures throughout the medieval North had room in their mythological aesthetic for demonic and angelic female figures. These women were spectral in substance, war-like or terrifyingly monstrous in appearance, and battle-savage in disposition. Often, they had the supernatural powers of flight, foresight and prophecy, the ability to weave magical spells and to decide the fates of men in battle. In Germany and the hinterlands north of the Rhine, these spectral war-women were the *idisi*, who, according to the tenth-century *Merseburg Charm*, weave the invisible bonds of terror which cause men to panic or hesitate at the critical moment in battle. These bonds of the *idisi* trap men and engender their deaths in combat. Conversely, those same *idisi* figures have the power to free other warriors of their bonds-of-fear, such that they may do the killing. Says the *Merseburg*

Charm:

*Eiris sazun idisi, sazun hera duoder;
suma hapt heptidun, suma heri lezidun,
suma clubodun umbi cuoniouuidi:
insprinc haptbandun, inuar uigandun.*¹

Once sat the *idisi*, sitting here and there,
Some make bonds, some impede the army,
Some break the chains all around,
Escape the bonds! Flee the enemy.

In Celtic Ireland, the war-women manifested as the *Morrigna*, a hideous sisterhood of sharp-clawed hags who appear to warriors before a battle to give grim prophecy to those soon to perish. Preserved in twelfth-century manuscripts of the legendary *Tain bo Cualnge* and *Togail na Tebe* as a sometimes-youthful, sometimes-haggard, yet exceptionally

malevolent woman, the *Morrighu* is a virulent specter with who devours human flesh and bathes in human blood.

The most widely recognized form of the spectral war-woman occurs in Scandinavia, where she manifests as the *valkyrja*, or the Valkyrie. In Norse literature and material culture, the war-woman may appear as one of two types. Like her Irish cousin, who may be foul or fair, the Scandinavian form may be radiant and youthful, or decrepit and ghastly. In her malevolent aspect, the *valkyrja* hungers for the blood of living warriors and actively campaigns for their destruction. The youthful and beautiful Valkyrie figure, however, is the handmaiden to Odin, the god of death and poetry. In this capacity, the *valkyrja* leads slain heroes to their rest in Valhalla. An encomium written shortly after the death of Norway's *Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri* (c.920-961), *Hákonaramál* displays the radiant *valkyrjur* in their military splendor:

*Vísi þat heyrði,
hvat valkyrjur mæltu
mærar af mars baki;
hyggiliga létu
ok hjalmaðar sátu
ok höfðusk hlífar fyrir.²*

Hear the lofty lords of war,
How the Valkyries speak,
Maidens, mounted on horseback,
Winsome horse-lords,
Wearing high-helms,
And holding shields as shelter.

Popularized by Wagner's 1856 opera, *Die Walküre*, this form of the war-woman has become tantamount in Western thought as the dominant form. Thus, the word "Valkyrie" is often used by literary critics as a catch-all term for the war-divinities of numerous cultures, without necessarily being Scandinavian. It is common to refer to the *Morrigna* or the *idisi*

as the Irish or Germanic Valkyries, respectively. In this study, therefore, I will also use the word “Valkyrie” to refer to a number of types of war-woman divinity when appropriate.

A fourth form of the Valkyrie exists in Anglo-Saxon England. Known as the *wælcyrge*, this form is the least understood of all the manifestations of the Northern war-woman. She occurs less often in the Anglo-Saxon corpus than the Irish form occurs in Irish literature, and she is far less often encountered than the Scandinavian forms as found in skaldic and eddaic poetry of the ninth through the fourteenth centuries. The *wælcyrge* is named only twelve times in the Anglo-Saxon corpus: seven appearances occur in the Latin-Old English glosses of the ninth century, two appearances occur in the very late tenth-century copies of *The Wonders of the East*, and three appearances occur in the homiletic writings of Wulfstan and other bishops during the early decades of the eleventh century.³ The *Proclamation of 1020*, sometimes called *Cnut's Manifesto*, a political treatise from the court of Cnut the Great delivered shortly after Cnut's 1019 voyage to Denmark, describes the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge* as being one of a number of malicious sinners whose crimes against God and the folk are responsible for bringing down the wrath of the Almighty on the Anglo-Saxons in the form of a righteous plague of the Vikings. Says the *Proclamation of 1020*:

For ðam þe ealle biscopas secgað, þæt hit swyþe deop wið God to betanne, þæt man aðas oððe wedd tobrece. eac hy us furðor lærað, þæt we sceolon eallan magene & eallon myhton þone ecan mildan God inlice secan, lufian & weorðian & ælc unriht ascunian, ðæt synd mægslagan & morðslagan & mansworan & wiccean & wælcyrrian & æwbrecan & syblegeru.⁴

For it is as the bishops say, that it is very much with God to be amended if one breaks an oath or a pledge. Further, they declare that we ought, with all our might and all our main, seek and love and honor God, who is mild, and all of us must avoid unrighteousness, the deeds of kin-slayers, manslayers and murderers and perjurers and witches and Valkyries and adulterers and incests.

In none of the texts in which she is named is the *wælcyrge* described in great detail or characterized as a major figure. Owing to both the rarity of her presence and the tangential nature of her character in these occurrences, the *wælcyrge* has received very little scholarly attention. Most scholars of Anglo-Saxon literature and mythology consider the word *wælcyrge* to be little more than an Anglicized form of the Old Norse word, *valkyrja*, which held considerable currency in medieval Scandinavia and Iceland. The assumption, therefore, that the *valkyrja* is the nominate form of the war-woman, and that the *wælcyrge* is an Old English manifestation of the same mythological figure, has come to dominate much of the dialectic on Northern mythology.

The result of this has been that scholars have placed diminished value on the *wælcyrge* as an unimportant or insignificant figure in the mythology or aesthetic of Anglo-Saxon England. Charles Donahue writes that the *wælcyrge* was little more than “female demons who were connected with war and viewed with sensations of horror,” and H. R. Ellis Davidson similarly speculates that the “*wælcyrge*...was known to the Anglo-Saxons” merely by its dithematic name, meaning “chooser of the slain.”⁵ Early scholar Thomas Northcote Toller defines the *wælcyrge* not in terms of her relation to the Anglo-Saxons, but as a type or form of the Old Norse Valkyrie, the *valkyrja*.⁶ Even Helen Damico, the most recent champion of the war-woman of Northern antiquity, sees the *wælcyrge* as a “reflex” of the Old Norse *valkyrja*; a “reflex” being a copy or an unoriginal English answer to the primary Old Norse form.⁷ A fundamental understanding of how the Old English *wælcyrge* both relates to and differentiates from the other Valkyrie-types is prerequisite to further illumination of both the form and the function of the *wælcyrge* in Anglo-Saxon England. This relationship between all forms of the Valkyrie is found in Roman Britain.

Near the eastern-most reaches of Hadrian's Wall, in the northeastern region of England, stand the crumbling remains of a fort-township. Known during the days of Roman occupation as *Vercovicium*, the fort-settlement is more popularly known as Houssteads fort. The fort, like the wall, was raised by Hadrian Augustus in AD 122 as defense against the barbarian Picts harrying beyond the northern border of Romanized Britain.⁸ The small fort-settlement's construction was oriented around a defensive outer wall to the north, a cultivated field system to the west, and an earthen-rampart vallum, accompanied by a network of protective trench-works to the south. The fort-remains of *Vercovicium* also show signs of a once elaborate arrangement of civic construction. A stone bathhouse lies south of the fort's defensive wall, a well-preserved latrine and the remains of a granary rest on the periphery of the settlement, and numerous house sites and stone-lined dugouts likewise give testament to the spectrum of human activity once seen here.⁹

Among the traces of human activity embedded in the rough-hewn stonework at *Vercovicium* are three votive inscriptions. Two are chiseled into small altar-stones in a temple dedicated to Mars, and a third is carved into a stone archway over what had been a door to a temple dedicated to the same Roman god.¹⁰ The first of the altar-stone inscriptions, a small, columnar votive archeologically cataloged as RIB 01593, reads: *DEO MARTI THINCSO ET DVABVS ALAISAGIS BEDE ET FIMMILEN(A)E ET N(UMINI) AVG(USTI) GERM(ANI) CIVES TVIHANTI V(OTUM) S(OLVERUNT) L(IBENTES) M(ERITO)* "For the god, Mars Thincsus and both Alaisiagae, Bede and Fimmilena, and the divine Emperor, we Germanic tribesmen of Tuihanti freely and with honor fulfill our oaths."¹¹ The second votive stone, RIB 01594, bears a very similar textual inscription to RIB 01593: *DEO MARTI ET DVABVS ALAISAGIS ET N(VMINI) AVG(VSTI) GER(MANI) CIVES TVIHANTI CVNEI*

FRISIORUM VER(COVICIANORUM) SE(VE)R(AINI) ALEXANDRIANAI VOTVM SOLVERVNT LIBENT(ES) M(ERITO) “To the god, Mars, and the two Alaisiagto, and as the divinity of the Augustus the Germans who are Tuihantian citizens of the Cuneus of Frisians, the Verlutonensian [and] Serverianus Alexandrianas perform their vow willingly and to deserving objects.”¹² The third inscription follows the same sacerdotal pattern of the first two insofar as it invokes the female deities, as well as the divine emperor, while concluding by giving unmitigated declaration of promises-kept by the inscriber: *DEABVS ALAISIAGIS BAUDIHILLI(A)E ET FRIAGABI ET N(UMINI) AVG(VSTI) N(UMERVS) HNAUDIFRIDI V(OTVM) S(OLVIT) L(IBENS) M(ERITO)* “To both Alaisagae Boudihillia and Friagabis, and to the divine Emperor, the men of Hnaudifridius willingly and deservedly fulfill our vow.”¹³

The third inscription differs most notably from RIB 01593 and RIB 01594 in that it omits the mention of the god Mars, and, in paying homage to the *Alaisiagae*, it invokes a different pairing of names. This inscription calls upon *Baudihilliae* and *Friagabi* instead of *Bede* and *Fimmilene*, as invoked in RIB 01593. They also bear the engravers’ devotion to two female war-deities, the *Alaisiagae*. The lettering of the inscription is stacked on the flat face of a small column. The obverse of this column bears a relief carving of a female figure dressed in fine, flowing robes. She appears to be holding one hand, her right, aloft with palm up and open in a gesture of triumph. Her left hand, however, hangs cunningly at her side, where she clutches what appears to be a short knife or dagger partially hidden amid the folds of her garment. The physical proximity of the female sword-bearing figure to the votive inscription led German linguist Theodor Siebs (1892) and Alexander Haggerty Krappe (1924) to speculate that two women referenced in the inscription and the single woman present in the full-figure relief are the prototype war-women whence the medieval

conception of the Valkyrie, in all the cultures to whom she is an important mythological figure, would evolve.¹⁴



Fig. 1.1) RIB 01593. Left-hand image shows the front of the votive bearing dedicatory inscription to the god Mars, the divine emperor, and the two *Alaisiagae*, *Bede* and *Fimmilene*, while the right-hand image, the obverse of the votive, clearly illustrates the raised-relief carving of a female-warrior figure, holding in her left hand, point-downward, a short sword or battle-knife, amid the folds of her regal raiment.¹⁵ Alexander Krappe notes that this pictorial female figure is “doubtless one of the *Alaisiagae*.”¹⁶

The idea that the *Alaisiagae* were the point-of-origin for the Valkyrie figure was initially championed by Theodor Siebs.¹⁷ As the earliest and “the principle defender of the theory that the *Alaisiagae* were Valkyries,”¹⁸ Siebs inspired Alexander Haggerty Krappe to further investigate the bearing that the *Alaisiagae* have on the Valkyries of later culture.

Krappe posits that the *Alaisiagae* are a fossilized form of proto-Valkyrie. He believes that the Celto-Germanic soldiers who brought the figures to England preserved their name and memory, at that point in Valkyrie evolution, in the inscriptions at Hadrian's Wall, and that later Valkyrie-forms evolved as Celto-Germanic culture spread throughout the north.

Krappe claims that "this much may be safely asserted: the very character of the ex-votos [at Hadrian's Wall] furnishes *prima facie* that the two *Alaisiagae* [sic] are at the root of the Valkyrie myth or at least stand very near to it."¹⁹ John Lindow (1989) similarly claims that "much of Norse mythology, and, indeed, much of Norse literary culture derived from Celtic and Germanic Britain, with England as the link"²⁰ between the disparate cultures.

Likewise, based on Krappe's assessment, Hilda Ellis Davidson claims that the "[*Alaisiagae*] seem to have developed later into the Scandinavian Valkyries and the minor goddesses of the Irish sagas."²¹ The *Alaisiagae* are the source of the continental *idisi*, the Norse *valkyrjur*, and the Irish war-goddesses, the *Morrigna*.

Scholarly understanding since Krappe has been that while the *valkyrja* is a direct descendant of the *Alaisiagae*, the *wælcyrge* is not a direct descendant of the *Alaisiagae*, but merely an Anglicized form of the *valkyrja*. The gap between the *Alaisiagae* at Hadrian's Wall and the Anglo-Saxon form of Valkyrie is unknown to historians, archeologists, and linguists. I do not intend to bridge that gap in this project, but I do intend to add the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge* to the list of other Valkyrie-figures currently cited by scholars as stemming from the tradition of the *Alaisiagae*. Scholarly efforts in the field of Northern mythology since the connection between the *Alaisiagae* and the Valkyrie was forwarded by Theodor Siebs and Alexander Haggerty Krappe have been largely aimed at tracing the evolution, relationship, and diversification of the Irish, Scandinavian, and Germanic Valkyrie types.

W. M. Hennessey, C. Lottner, and Charles Donahue investigate the Celtic-Irish branch of the Valkyrie tradition, while H. R. Ellis Davidson, H. Munro Chadwick, and Nora K. Chadwick champion the Scandinavian line. These and other scholars, whom I discuss in chapter one, have championed the form, function and relationship of each of these Valkyrie-types to one another, as well as posited theories for the descent of these diverse sisters-in-arms from their common source, the *Alaisiagae*. From this dialectic, however, the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie-type has been largely absent. Two scholars in recent years, Alaric Hall and Helen Damico have given more consideration to the *wælcyrge* as an independent Valkyrie-form, but neither has illuminated the *wælcyrge*-figure in full, and neither has addressed each occurrence of the *wælcyrge* in the Anglo-Saxon corpus. Part of the scope of this project, therefore, is to argue that the *wælcyrge* is not merely an Anglicized form of the *valkyrja*, but is another type of war-woman whose form and function in Anglo-Saxon literature mark her as another descendant form of the *Alaisiagae* with definite physical form and complexity of function within Anglo-Saxon England. While certain similarities exist between all forms of the Northern war-woman, I will argue that the Anglo-Saxons did not need the *valkyrja*, the *Morrigna*, or the *idisi* in order to find value in their own native *wælcyrge*.

This study will be the first to survey the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge* in all her forms and all her appearances in the corpus, and to show how those various forms of the *wælcyrge* functioned in the respective genres of Anglo-Saxon literature in which they appear. In the following chapters, I will address the various types of *wælcyrge*-appearance in the corpus, and I will show how the native English form of the Valkyrie, much like the Irish and Scandinavian forms, to whom so much scholarly attention has been given, are diverse, complex, and meaningful figures in the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic. Through close inspection of

the Anglo-Saxon glosses, *The Wonders of the East*, the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* and other homiletic texts, in the *Charms* and the *Riddles*, and of the narrative structure of the Grendel's mother episode of *Beowulf*, I will attempt to demonstrate that the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge* is a viable and valuable form of the Northern war-woman and that the Anglo-Saxon conception of the Valkyrie was rich, intricate, and dynamic. The *wælcyrge* was an Anglo-Saxon gloss for underworld goddesses, and the Old English embodiment of a female monster who corrupts her victims with venom. She was an integral part of the medicinal charms in which the invisible world of spirits and specters factored heavily on the health and well being of real-life persons. She was a monster living in far distant lands in the Old English writings in the *mirabilis* genre. In the homilies, the *wælcyrge* was used by the bishops of late Anglo-Saxon England as a rhetorical device to denounce sinful behaviors and practices among the populace. The *wælcyrge* was used by the riddle-makers in the *Exeter Book* as an alternate answer to clever riddles that pun on elements of Northern mythology. Throughout this project, I will argue that these various forms of literature reflect the *wælcyrge* as a complex and multifarious figure in Anglo-Saxon England.

Chapter one will be divided into two major sections. In the first section, I will showcase the twelve named occurrences of the *wælcyrge* in the Anglo-Saxon corpus in the original Old English with translations to follow. I will also specify in this section how I classify types of Valkyrie appearances in the corpus, and how I define appearances of, or allusions to, the *wælcyrge* when she is not called by her racial or class name. I define these as named and unnamed occurrences of the *wælcyrge*. The second section of chapter one will give a concise critical history of the *wælcyrge* as she has been addressed by scholars since 1870. Through this section, I will establish that most scholarship on the Valkyrie as a

figure has focused on the Scandinavian and Irish varieties at the expense of the native Anglo-Saxon form.

In chapter two, I will address each of the named occurrences and classify them according to the type of occurrence they are based on genre lines. I will argue in chapter two that the individual occurrences of the *wælcyrge*, when organized according to genre designations, reveal a multifaceted, evolving form and function within Anglo-Saxon culture. As time passed, and the *wælcyrge* was incorporated into new styles of Anglo-Saxon writing, she became increasingly demythologized. In her earliest appearances in the corpus, the *wælcyrge* is purely the stuff of mythology. She is a goddess and an ethereal monstrosity living in the underworld of the cosmos and the depths of human imagination. By her second wave of appearances in the *mirabilis* genre, the *wælcyrge* was real in a sense, but only at the farthest reaches of the world. This type of appearance made the Old English Valkyrie a living, breathing being, but one very distantly removed from Anglo-Saxon England. By her third wave of appearances, in the homiletic writings of Wulfstan and other clerical and political writers, the *wælcyrge* had become a very clear and present being in Anglo-Saxon England. Catalogued with witches, assassins, and child-murderers, the *wælcyrge* was, in this genre, a terror who walked the streets of York and incurred the wrath of an angry God upon the denizens of late Anglo-Saxon England. By dissecting the role and purpose for which the writers of these works employ the *wælcyrge*, I will attempt to show a clear pattern of demythologization.

Chapter three will be the first of two chapters in which I address the unnamed appearances of the *wælcyrge*. These are appearances in which the figure is alluded to or mentioned by descriptors other than the racial name "*wælcyrge*."²² In this chapter, I will

address the unnamed appearances of the *wælcyrge* in the Anglo-Saxon charms and in the riddles of the *Exeter Book*. I will argue that these unnamed occurrences illustrate facets of meaning that the *wælcyrge* possesses in Anglo-Saxon England that cannot be found, or are only alluded to, in the named occurrences discussed in chapter two. In the charms, the *wælcyrge* functions as an agent of disease in a medicinal system in which the invisible world plays a significant role. In the riddles, the *wælcyrge* seems to echo images found in one of the votive stones at Houssteads Fort in the form of symbolism with the swan, and the ability to shape-shift with the swan. The impetus of chapter three is largely my argument that different registers of Anglo-Saxon society receive and view the *wælcyrge* in different ways. To the clergy writing the homilies of the early eleventh century, the *wælcyrge* is a thoroughly maligned being, but to the laity for whom the puns and jests of riddles and the herbs and chants of medicinal healing are daily affairs, the *wælcyrge* is seemingly met with a very different reception.

Chapter four will be the second of two chapters in which I address the unnamed appearances of the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie. In this chapter, I will argue that the writer of *Beowulf* incorporates a narrative structure for part of this poem that presages a similar narrative structure found in 13th-century Norse writings. This narrative structure, known as the Valkyrie-Diptych, is one in which two Valkyrie figures, one evil and one benevolent, vie for the fate of the narrative's hero. By arguing that Wealhtheow functions as the beneficent Valkyrie figure and Grendel's mother functions as the malevolent Valkyrie figure, with the fate of Beowulf being the fulcrum about which they turn, I hope to show that the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* successfully incorporates a narrative type that attains greater literary capital in twelfth-century Norse culture. This chapter will show that the

Anglo-Saxons, far from borrowing the concept of the Valkyrie from the Norse tradition as so many scholars have surmised, actually contributed to the narrative functions that the *valkyrjur* would come to possess in later Norse literature.

My ultimate concern in this study is to illuminate the *wælcyrge* in a way that critics have not done before. Despite over a century of scholarship that reduces the *wælcyrge* to a sub-species of *valkyrja* or ignores her presence within the corpus as something uniquely Anglo-Saxon, I hope that my close reading of the named and unnamed occurrences of the *wælcyrge* will reveal her as a dynamic and complex figure in Anglo-Saxon mythology. Like the *ylfe* or the *wyrm*, or any other of a number of supernatural monsters in the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic, the *wælcyrge* was a significant and meaningful player in the Anglo-Saxon worldview. She had powers and properties. She had volition and agency and form and function. These women-of-war were culturally valuable and viable figures within the Anglo-Saxon panorama of what Alaric Hall calls a “vividly realized world of men and monsters.”²³ In this world, as Hall shows, the realms of the supernatural and the realistic could, and often did, overlap. Through close historical, linguistic, comparative, and rhetorical analysis of the usage of the word *wælcyrge*, I will attempt to provide, as Hall posits in regard to Old English elves, more extensive “insight into how [these] supernatural beings could feature in Anglo-Saxon constructions of the world.”²⁴

¹ John Jeep, *Medieval Germany: An Encyclopedia*. Oxford, Routledge. 2001: 112-13.

² Finnur Jónsson, *Udvalg af Norske og Islandske Skjaldekvad*. Copenhagen, 1929: 221.

³ See Walter John Sedgefield. *An Anglo-Saxon Prose Book*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1928: 283-4.

⁴ Walter John Sedgefield. *An Anglo-Saxon Prose Book*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1928: 283-4.

⁵ Charles Donahue, “The Valkyries and the Irish War-Goddesses” *PMLA* 56 (1) 1941: 3, H. R. Ellis Davidson, “Valkyries” *Medieval Folklore: A Guide to Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002: 422.

⁶ See Joseph Bosworth and Thomas Northcote Toller. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1898: 1153.

⁷ See Helen Damico, "The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature" *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, Indianapolis, Indiana State University Press, 176-192. See also, Helen Damico, *Beowulf's Wealththeow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984.

⁸ See Peter Salway, "Roman Britian: 55 BC- AD 440" *Roman and Anglo-Saxon Britian*, Kenneth O. Morgan, ed. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988: 1-33.

⁹ For further details on the civic history of the fort settlement and the archeological studies based around Houssteads Fort, see A. L. F. Rivet, "Celtic Names and Roman Places," *Britannia*, 11 (1), 1980: 1-19, J. G. Crow, *Houssteads Roman Fort*, London, English Heritage Press, 1989, Edward L. Ochsenschlager and Anna H. Griffiths, "Classical Excavations in England and Wales," *The Classical World* 63 (1) 1969: 11-17, R. P. Wright, "Roman Britain in 1961: Site Excavations II: Inscriptions" *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 52 (1 & 2) 1962: 160-199, J. A. Biggins and D. J. A. Taylor, "A Geographical Survey of Houssteads Roman Fort," *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 33 (2) 2004: 51- 60, J. G. Crow, *Houssteads*, London, Batsford, 1995.

¹⁰ Budge notes that the stone bearing these inscriptions is in "height 1ft 6 ½ inches, breadth 1 ft 4 ½ inches," and is one of hundreds of similarly inscribed and illuminated stone votives unearthed in the area dating from earliest Roman occupation to well after the Great Age of Migrations. See Sir Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, *An Account of the Roman Antiquities preserved in the Museum at Chesters, Northumberland*. London, Gilbert & Rivington. 1903: 335.

¹¹ W. Thompson Watkins, "The Roman Inscribed Altars Recently Found at Borcovicus" in *The Antiquary*, John Charles Cox, ed. London, Elliott, 1884: 131.

¹² Watkins, "Borcovicus," 137.

¹³ Watkins, "Borcovicus," 136.

¹⁴ Theodor Siebs. "Beiträge zur deutschen Mythologie II, Things und die Alaisiagen," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* XXIV, 1892: 433-456, "Neues zur germanischen Mythologie," *Mitteilungen der schleischen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde* XXV. Alexander Haggerty Krappe. "The Valkyries" *Modern Language Review* (21) 1, 1926: 55-73.

¹⁵ Images appear in Sir Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, *An Account of the Roman Antiquities preserved in the Museum at Chesters, Northumberland*. London, Gilbert & Rivington. 1903: 190, 193. Images are in the public domain.

¹⁶ Krappe. "Valkyries," 57.

¹⁷ Theodor Siebs. "Beiträge zur deutschen Mythologie II, Things und die Alaisiagen," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* XXIV (1892): 433-456, "Neues zur germanischen Mythologie," *Mitteilungen der schleischen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde* XXV (1924): 1-17.

¹⁸ Charles Donahue. "The Valkyries and the Irish War Goddesses", *PMLA* 56 (1) 1941: 9.

¹⁹ Krappe, "Valkyries," 57.

²⁰ John Lindow. "Norse Mythology and Northumbria: Methodological Notes" in *Anglo-Scandinavian England: Norse-English Relations in the Period before the Conquest*, John D. Niles and Mark Amodio, eds. Boston, University Press of America, 1989: 25.

²¹ H.R. Ellis Davidson. *Pagan Scandinavia*. New York, Praeger, 1967: 72.

²² I refer to the word *wælcyrge* as a "race" in Anglo-Saxon thought for two primary reasons. The first is that by the early eleventh century, Wulfstan of York lists human sinners in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, and he includes the *wælcyrge* among these humans. Moreover, the earlier appearances of the *wælcyrge* depict her as an anthropomorphic being, imbued with numerous humanistic characteristics. Throughout the Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse corpuses, monsters are considered as racial others: Grendel and his mother are of the lineage of Cain, cynocephali of *The Wonders of the East* are humans, and even Fafnir, the dragon of the Sigurd legend, began life as a tyrannical human. Thus, the term "racial" seems appropriate in reference to the *wælcyrge* based on the evidences in the corpus. Secondarily, scholarship tends to think of the monsters of medieval thought as races. John Friedman notes that by the tenth century, the Anglo-Saxon texts of the *mirabilis* tradition reflect the classical thought on the matter. Early Latin and Greek thought considered monsters living beyond the fringes of civilization not as other species, but as forms of radically different races. See John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Thought and Art*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1981.

²³ Alaric Hall. *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*. Rochester, Boydell, 2009: 54.

²⁴ Hall, *Elves*, 54.

Chapter One:

Textual Presence and Concise Critical History of the *Wælcyrge*

This chapter consists of two sections. The first section is a presentation of the occurrences of the named Valkyrie in Old English literature, and the second section is a concise critical history of the scholarship investigating the function of the *wælcyrge* in Anglo-Saxon culture and literary consciousness. In the first section, I categorize the named-occurrences of the *wælcyrge* into three major subdivisions organized along chronological lines. The first sub-group of *wælcyrge* appearances is comprised of seven occurrences that come in the glossaries of the late eighth to early ninth centuries. I call the first seven examples the gloss-type appearance. The gloss-type appearances of the *wælcyrge* pre-date the other sub-groups of *wælcyrge* appearances by roughly a century. The second major sub-group is the mirabilis-type, which appears in the genre of the mirabilis, which is a genre in which marvelous or wondrous elements are presented in the uninflected tone appropriate for the conveyance of factual information. The mirabilis genre contains two references to the *wælcyrge*. The third and final subdivision of the named occurrence of the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie consists of three examples likely written within three decades of the mirabilis-type appearances. Works in the third category, which I call the pastoral-type, decry the Valkyrie as an agent of the Devil in league with witches and incurring the wrath of an angry God.

Not only do my delineations follow chronological lines, but each grouping reflects a different dimension of the cultural valuation placed on the *wælcyrge* by the writers presenting her. During the time frame in which the *wælcyrge* appears in Anglo-Saxon

literature, the figure of the war-woman stands at the center of a dialogic in which proponents of Christianity and practitioners of heathen healing rituals vie for dominance over the *wælcyrge*. The Christian monks presenting the Valkyrie in the pastoral-type appearances cast the war-woman in a rhetorically negative light. Conversely, the healers and *wiccan* described in the Anglo-Saxon charms maintain the *wælcyrge* for her importance in the folk-remedies and pre-Christian charms of the Anglo-Saxon people. Thus, my method of organizing the *wælcyrge* into two major categories, the named and unnamed appearances, and my further subdividing the named category into three constituent sub-categories, follows the delineations of the *wælcyrge* that were seemingly in place in Anglo-Saxon England from the late eighth century through the early eleventh century.

The second half of this chapter is a concise critical history of the twelve occurrences of the Valkyrie in Anglo-Saxon England. The critical history of the *wælcyrge* is very sparse. Early works presented the *wælcyrge* as a minor splinter-cell of the more widely known and preserved Valkyrie form native to Scandinavia: the *valkyrja*. In the late nineteenth century, during the height of scholarly emphasis on the Pan-Germanic heritage of many aspects of Northern antiquity and mythology, the *wælcyrge* became subsumed under the auspices of the female war-figures of other cultures. Owing to the etymological similarities between *wælcyrge* and *valkyrja*, many scholars comfortably assumed that close similarity between these words reflected a close similarity between the beings represented by those words. Thus, most scholars defined and understood the *wælcyrge* as a being synonymous with the Scandinavian *valkyrja*. The second half of this chapter will trace that scholarly misunderstanding and demonstrate how later scholars built their own misconceptions of the *wælcyrge* on earlier criticisms of the Anglo-Saxon war-woman and furthered a tradition

of underestimating the Old English *wælcyrge*. This chapter will also highlight recent scholarship that has challenged the tradition of misinterpretation by reading the *wælcyrge* as a strictly Anglo-Saxon figure who may be interpreted and understood outside of the larger, Pan-Germanic heritage.

Aims of the Survey

In his seminal work on the religion and warrior-ethos of the Greek, Roman and Teutonic cultures, *The Heroic Age*, H. Munro Chadwick writes that “Valkyries (*walcyrge*) are not unfrequently mentioned in Anglo-Saxon literature.”¹ This “not unfrequent” mention of the Valkyrie in Old English occurs in what I distinguish as two primary forms: the named appearance and the unnamed appearance. In her named appearances, the Valkyrie is called by some spelling of her racial identifier, “*wælcyrge*.” In her unnamed appearances, she is never labeled as “*wælcyrge*” or called by any form of class or racial identifier that would associate her directly with the Valkyrie tradition, but the physical form and behavior she exhibits clearly positions her within the confines of the Valkyrie figure. In this chapter and in chapter two, I consider only those figures who are named *wælcyrge*. Those in the unnamed category will be discussed at length in chapters three and four. The frequency and validity of occurrences of the unnamed Valkyrie in Old English literature is a matter of debate.² In his review of Helen Damico’s *Beowulf’s Wealhþeow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, Joseph Harris notes the overly reductive cladistics inherent in Damico’s reading of Anglo-Saxon heroines, such as Judith and Elene. Says Harris of Damico’s categorization of Anglo-Saxon female characters: “In relating Wealhtheow to ‘the valkyrie-figure’, Damico casts her net very wide— almost any female with gumption— ...

becomes assimilated to ‘the valkyrie’ ... It seems as if only three categories of analysis are employed: male, valkyrie, and (almost implicitly) non-valkyrie.”³ Scholarly consensus on just which characters may be reasonably read as an Old English unnamed occurrence of the Valkyrie figure is disparate at best.

My aim in investigating the named appearances of the Valkyrie in Old English texts is to construct a clearer picture of what this being was in the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic than have been constructed by previous scholars. In addition to being a subject of an on-going dialog between religious groups in Anglo-Saxon society, the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie undergoes a three-phase process of demythologization. In her earliest occurrences, she is purely the stuff of ether; she is equated to otherworldly goddesses and deities of myth and imagination. The *wælcyrge* then evolves into a quasi-realistic being that lives in the outer reaches of the world; she is a wanderer in the distant wastes and a monster that, while not likely to ever physically cross the path of an Anglo-Saxon, is certainly capable of haunting his imagination simply by virtue of her physical existence in the far-distant lands beyond the horizon. Finally, the *wælcyrge* abandons her distant abode in the East and migrates, through the rhetoric of Wulfstan and other liturgical writers, to the very heart of Anglo-Saxon England. In these late incarnations, the *wælcyrge* is a clear-and-present threat to the physical and spiritual well-being of the Anglo-Saxon nation. In the writings of Wulfstan and his admirers of the early 11th century, the *wælcyrge* is a literal figure of menace whose malevolence is to be feared and hated by followers of Christianity.

My mission is two-fold: I will illuminate the basic characteristics of the *wælcyrge* in her 12 named occurrences, and I will trace the trajectory of demythologization through which the *wælcyrge* passes between her earliest appearances in the mid-800’s and her final

appearance in the Old English corpus in 1020. I will use my subdivisions of appearance (the gloss-type, the mirabilis-type, and the pastoral-type) to show that a dialogic was in action during the Anglo-Saxon period of England in which the Valkyrie was a central player. The glossators and scholars associate the *wælcyrge* with Greek goddesses of the underworld, murder, vengeance, strife, and the physical and moral corruption of men. The genre of the mirabilis portrays the *wælcyrge* as a hideous monster, more concerned with the physical destruction of men than with the moral corruption of men. And the homiletic writers, all of whom deeply despise the *wælcyrge*, associate them with witchcraft and unholy healing arts. To these writers, the *wælcyrge* is of such a spiritually corruptive nature as to be one of many agents whose malevolence is enough to bring down the wrath of God on the heads of all Anglo-Saxons as individual sinners, and to incur the judgment of the Almighty against the entirety of the nation.

The Gloss-Type Occurrences of the Wælcyrge

In the 9th-century glosses, the word *wælcyrge* was used to gloss the names of Greek and Roman goddesses and divine, female agents of warfare, blood-vengeance, and concupiscence. These are *Allecto*, *Bellona*, *Tisiphone*, *Heneris*, and *Ueneris*, and they all appear in MS Cotton Cleopatra A. III, and Plantin-Moretus 16.2. These two lexical glosses seem to imply that the glossators saw enough parallels between the powers and attributes of the Greek and Roman mythological goddesses and the supernatural nature of the native English *wælcyrge* to warrant using the word *wælcyrge* to make native sense of the exotic, foreign goddesses for an audience unfamiliar with the Greek divinities. However, we also find the *wælcyrge* as a gloss for ignoble, murderous beings and wretched monsters, like the

Gorgons. The pairing of such dissimilar lemmata with the same gloss forces us to reexamine each pairing and reassess the possible rhetorical value present in the *wælcyrge* in these named appearances.

The first comes in MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III, which is organized alphabetically and is dateable, according to Kitterlick, to the early 930's.⁴ The *Cleopatra Glossary* is divided itself into three smaller glossaries, the *First-, Second-, and Third Cleopatra Glossaries*, respectively. The word *wælcyrge* appears twice in the *First Cleopatra Glossary* and once in the third. The first gloss comes at entry 0280 and illustrates the use of the word to illuminate the Latin name of a goddess of the underworld: "*Allecto, wælcyrige.*"⁵ *Allecto* is the Greek and Roman divinity of the underworld who is closely associated with wrath and moral corruption. The second gloss comes shortly afterward in the *First Cleopatra Glossary*. Entry 0731 contains the lemma-gloss pairing "*Bellona, wælcyrge.*"⁶ *Bellona* was a Roman deity to whom sacrifice was allegedly made during times of war. In numerous classical writings, including the histories of Ammianus Marcellinus, she appears on the eve of battle to herald victory for one army, and defeat for another.⁷ The third and final appearance of the word comes near the end of the *First Cleopatra Glossary* and contains reference to yet another female divinity of classical origin. In this case, however, the Anglo-Saxon word for Valkyrie is used to gloss not a single divinity, but an entire race of beings. Entry 2960 has: "*Herinis, wælcyrge.*"⁸ The *Herinis* are the Furies, the Greek sisters of wrath and vengeance who appear in Aeschylus's *Orestes*, Vergil's *Aeneid*, and Ovid's *Metamorphosis* as the wicked hags who are born of Night and exist only to exact revenge against mankind.⁹

The *Third Cleopatra Glossary*, large portions of which have been shown by Quinn to have come from the *First Cleopatra Glossary*, contains two lemma-gloss pairings featuring

the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie.¹⁰ The first is entry 1847: “*Bellona, wælcyrge*.”¹¹ The second comes very shortly thereafter, at entry 2080: “*Allecto, wælcyrge, tessa*.”¹² The second word glossing *Allecto* here is *tessa*, a unique truncation of the Anglo-Saxon word *hægtessa*, meaning “a witch, hag, or Fury...pithonessa”¹³ according to Bosworth-Toller, and a “fury, witch, pythoness” according to Clark-Hall.¹⁴ The importance of the word *tessa* to our reading of the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie will be considered in chapter three.

The two remaining *wælcyrge*-glosses appear in two texts contained in MS Plantin-Moretus 16.2 (which is a conflation of several formerly distinct manuscripts, including Plantin-Moretus 32 and British Library MS Add. 32,246).¹⁵ The first is entry 741 in the text of former MS Antwerp Glossary 6: “*Tisiphona, wælcyrrie*.”¹⁶ Here the word is spelled with an *-ie* ending, rather than the *-ge* ending found repeatedly in MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III, though McBryde’s research into linguistic variation in terms associated with Anglo-Saxon folklore shows that this alternate spelling is inconsequential to any meaning of the figure.¹⁷ In this gloss, the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge* functions to illuminate the name of yet another divine figure of Greek mythology. *Tisiphone* is the hellish sister of *Allecto* who, according to Vergil’s *Aeneid*, stands guard at the gates of Tartarus. The tenebrous hag waits, clutching her viper-lash and her flaming brand, for approaching shades. She is a sleepless figure of eternal vigilance whose wrath is terrible and whose anger is unyielding.¹⁸ The second gloss of *wælcyrrie* comes from the miscellaneous class-glosses added to the Plantin-Moretus 16.2 manuscript copy of Aldhelm’s *De Laude Virginitatis*. This gloss-lemma pairing contains another unique goddess from Roman mythology: “*Ueneris: gydene, wælcyrrie*.”¹⁹ This goddess, *Ueneris*, or *Venus*, is the Roman goddess of love, sexuality, wanton carnality, and amorous concupiscence, and her unique glossing as a *wælcyrrie* will be analyzed in

chapter two. One of only two occurrences of the gloss-type appearance of the Valkyrie in which a second word is used to gloss the lemma, this pairing adjoins the word *gydene* as a gloss to *Venus*. The word *gydene* “in Anglo-Saxon means ‘a goddess.’”²⁰ Owing to the radical difference in character between Venus and the other divine figures in these texts for whom the word *wælcyrge* is the gloss, much debate has arisen as to the validity of this pairing.²¹ This gloss-lemma pairing has led numerous scholars to discredit the pairing as scribal error on the part of the glossator. This scholarly stance will be evaluated in chapter two.

The Mirabilis-Type Occurrences of the Wælcyrge

Of the remaining five occurrences of the named *wælcyrge*, two are adjectival in nature, and they function as descriptors applied to wondrous elements of the natural world. These are the mirabilis-type of occurrence. This form appears in the *The Wonders of the East*, a text in the mirabilis tradition, in two of the three manuscripts in which it exists: MS Cotton Vitellius A.XV and MS Cotton Tiberius B.V. In the first instance, the Valkyrie is referenced in a brief physical description of a marvelous creature that inhabits the wilderness outside Babylon. The Old English text of *The Wonders of the East* in Cotton Tiberius B.V says:

*Eac swa ðær beoð wildor kennede. Ða deor þonne hi monne stefne gehyrað, þonne raðe hi fleoð. Ða deor habbað eahta fet, wælcyrrian eagan, twa heafda. Gyf hi hwylc mann gefon wile, þonne hiera lichoman þæt hy onælað. Ðæt syndon ungefregelicu deor.*²²

Wild beasts are also born there. When these wild beasts hear a human voice, they run far away. The beasts have eight feet, and valkyrie-eyes, and two heads. If anyone tries to touch them, they set their bodies aflame. They are extraordinary beasts.²³

This descriptor focuses on a misshapen beast with *eahta fet*, 'eight legs', *twa heafda*, 'two heads', and *wælkyrian eagan*, 'eyes of the Valkyrie.'²⁴ It is within the power of these Valkyrie-eyed creatures to "set their bodies aflame," should a human attempt to touch them, in an auto-combustive act of self-defense.²⁵ The second appearance of the *wælcyrge* comes as a descriptor of the name of a river near Babylon. According to *The Wonders of the East*: *Capi hatte seo ea in ðære ylcan stowe þe is haten Gorgoneus, þæt is Wælcyrgeinc*,²⁶ "The river is named Capi in the same place, which is called Gorgoneus, that is 'Valkyrie-like.'"²⁷ Both occurrences of the Valkyrie in *The Wonders of the East* parallel the English figure with the Gorgon. These occurrences of the Valkyrie emphasize the eyes of the *wælcyrge* as the seat of her monstrosity, creating deeper parallelism between them and the Gorgons. A quasi-deistic hag of Greek lore with venomous serpents writhing from her scalp, the Gorgon has eyes that can, with a single glance "turn any living man or thing to stone."²⁸ The emphasis on the eyes in *The Wonders of the East* seems to be unique to the Anglo-Saxon understanding of the *wælcyrge*. It is likely that the Anglo-Saxons based these parallels on their understanding of the Greek monster whose source of virulence is in her eyes. Whether this ocular emphasis is a native feature independently paralleled by the Greek Gorgon, or an attribute adopted directly from the Greek Gorgons, the motif of terror-in-the-eyes in the English *wælcyrge* sees no syncretism in the Scandinavian *valkyrja*, the Irish *Morrigna*, or the Germanic *idisi*, with whom the *wælcyrge* has often been compared.²⁹

The Pastoral-Type Occurrences of the Wælcyrge

The final three named references to the *wælcyrge* in Anglo-Saxon literature appear in the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* of Wulfstan, the anonymous *Sermo ad Populum Dominicis*

Diebus, and the *Proclamation of 1020*.³⁰ In all three of these instances of homiletic rhetoric, the image of the *wælcyrge* is used in collocation with the image of the witch (OE *wiccan*, *wyccan*, *wiccean*). Each of these three texts has long been read by scholars as imbued with “propaganda value in conversation with, and conversion of, the Danes” during a time of rapid social change in England.³¹ These mentions of the *wælcyrge* are generally considered historically significant because they appear at a time when Danish raids and Viking atrocity against Anglo-Saxon England reach a high-water mark. Thus, scholars believe that the pastoral-type appearances are powerfully charged with social and religious rhetoric that is strictly valuable in relation to the Danish population in England. Native Anglo-Saxons’ traditional view of the *wælcyrge* is, however, relevant to these occurrences more so than are Danish views on their own native *valkyrja*. As with all appearances of the *wælcyrge*, these need not be conflated with the image and function of the *valkyrja* in order to be culturally valuable to a mixed Anglo-Saxon and Danish population. I will argue that the native attributes inherent in the Old English form of the Valkyrie are all that exist in these occurrences of the *wælcyrge*.

The first of the pastoral-type appearances is in the February, 1014 *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, which Wulfstan of York delivers to the parishioners of his northern-most see.

Wulfstan writes:

*Her syndan þurh synleawa, awa hit þincan mæg, sare gelewede to manege on earde. Her syndan mannslogan and mægslagan and mæsserbanan and mynsterhatan; and her syndan mansworan and morþorwyrhtan; her syndan hadbreccan & aewbreccan, & ðurh siblegeru & ðurh mistlice forligeru forsyngode swyðe and her syndan myltestran and bearnmyrðran and fule forlegene horingas manegel and her syndan wiccan and wælcyrrian; and her syndan ryperas and reaferas and woroldstruderas and ðeofas and þeodscaðan and wedlogan and wærlogan and hrædest is to cweþenne, mana and misdæd ungerim ealra.*³²

Here are many throughout the land, as is easily seen, who have been sorely stained by sin. Here are manslayers and kin-slayers and priest-slayers and church-haters; and here are false oath-makers and those who weave murder; and here are adulterers and whores, and incests who are very much corrupt and here are fornicators and child-killers and many varieties of whore and here are witches and Valkyries, and here are rapists and reavers and plunderers and thieves and enemies of the folk, and pledge-breakers and word-breakers and, to be brief, crimes and misdeeds of all unholy types.

The next appearance comes in the *Sermo ad Populum Domincis Diebus*, or “Homily on the Lord’s Day to the People.” Wanley (1705) and Napier (1883) attribute the *Sermo ad Populum Domincis Diebus* to Wulfstan, but Jost (1950) and Bethurum (1957) have suggested the sermon to have been written in the style of Wulfstan, but not by the homilist himself.³³ Written in the same rhetorical mode of juxtaposing like sinner-types into alliterative groups, the *Sermo ad Populum Domincis Diebus*, found in MS London, Lambeth Palace 489, records the war-woman in this manner:

Þæt syndon godes wiðersacan: morðwyrhtan, hlafordswican and manswaran, manslagan and mægslagan, cyrchatan and sacerdbanan, hadbreccan and æwbrecan, þeofas, ryperas and reaferas, unrihthæmeras, þa fulan, þe forlætað heora cwenan and nimað oðre and þa þe habbað ma, þonne heora rihtæðelcwene, wyccan and wælcyrrian and unlybwyrhtan, unrihtdeman, þe demað æfre be þam sceatte and swa wendað wrang to rihte and riht to wrange.³⁴

These are God’s enemies: murder-workers, lord-betrayers, and traitors, Manslayers and kinsmen-slayers, church-haters and priest-killers, violators of holy orders and adulterers, thieves and rapists and reavers, fornicators, the fouled ones, those who forsake their wives and take unto themselves another and then have more than their rightful woman, witches and Valkyries and assassins, and unrighteous judges who judge according to the coin and so twist wrong, and who twist wrong into right and right into wrong.

While the only extant copy of the *Sermo ad Populum Domincis Diebus* post-dates the year 1060, Napier has argued, on both stylistic and rhetorical grounds, for its having been written between the years 1014 and 1020.³⁵

The third and final pastoral-type appearance of the war-woman comes in the *Proclamation of 1020*. Written by one or more monks, including Wulfstan, working in the court of Cnut after his ascent to the throne of England, the *Proclamation of 1020* is composed shortly after Cnut returns from a 1019 voyage to Denmark. Following in much the same tenor and rhetorical style as the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* and the *Sermo ad Populum Dominicis Diebus*, the *Proclamation of 1020* recalls a list of God-hated sinners, and showcases the Valkyrie among them:

For ðam þe ealle biscopas secgað, þæt hit swyþe deop wið God to betanne, þæt man aðas oððe wedd tobrece. eac hy us furðor lærað, þæt we sceolon eallan magene & eallon myhton þone ecan mildan God inlice secan, lufian & weorðian & ælc unriht ascunian, ðæt synd mægslagan & morðslagan & mansworan & wiccean & wælcyrrian & æwbrecan & syblegeru.³⁶

For it is as the bishops say, that it is very much with God to be amended if one breaks an oath or a pledge. Further, they declare that we ought, with all our might and all our main, seek and love and honor God, who is mild, and all of us must avoid unrighteousness, the deeds of kin-slayers, manslayers and murderers and perjurers and witches and Valkyries and adulterers and incests.

In aligning his own politics and religion with that polity and faith already present in Anglo-Saxon England, Cnut likewise maligns the *wiccean & wælcyrrian* as enemies of the faith, the state, and the social fabric of the nation as a whole.

In the pastoral-type appearances, the *wælcyrge* functions as an emblem of the sin and moral corruption threatening to disintegrate English Christendom. Dorothy Bethurum believes that this appearance of *wælcyrge* speaks to the tensions present between the Anglo-Saxon clergy and the increasing Danish presence in England during the opening decades of the eleventh century. Bethurum writes that:

In a vocabulary predominately West Saxon, there are some Scandinavian loanwords as *eorl* for *ealdormann*, *þræl* for *þeow...wælcyrrie*, and possibly

wicing, þegengyld, nydgyld, and nydmage. These are only expected of a man who addresses audiences in York.³⁷

Likewise, Dorothy Whitelock also believes that the insertion of the word “*wælcyrrie*” into these three works is nothing more than a response by Wulfstan to the diverse population in England at the time. Whitelock writes of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* that “it is natural enough that an archbishop of York should adopt some of the vocabulary of the Scandinavianised North.”³⁸ Bethurum and Whitelock ignore the possibility of a native tradition of the *wælcyrge* and posit that this Anglo-Saxon creature is nothing more than an Anglicized spelling of the Old Norse *valkyrja*. In chapter two, I will challenge that reading by arguing that the English *wælcyrge* has rhetorical resonance with an English audience independently of any associations with an Anglo-Scandinavian population in the see of York or elsewhere in England.

Each reference to the Valkyrie figure in Old English is brief. While certainly she does not occur in Anglo-Saxon writings with the frequency of other supernatural beings, such as the elf (OE, *ælf*, *ylfe*) or the dragon (OE, *draca*, *wyrm*), the Old English Valkyrie is a being to whom the Anglo-Saxon writers attribute meaning. This meaning varies as usage of the word varies between genres and time periods. Such variation warrants further investigation than is current in criticism. In seeking to illuminate the Anglo-Saxons’ valuation of the *wælcyrge*, I will argue that these variations reflect an evolving need among the Anglo-Saxons to define the monstrous. Roy Liuzza writes that “we must remember as we read Anglo-Saxon literature that we are not simply looking *through* these texts at individuals and their society transparently depicted with photographic fidelity, but *at* the texts for signs of the work they once did in the culture that used them.”³⁹ These “signs” of the role and function that the *wælcyrge* fulfilled in the Anglo-Saxon literary aesthetic are at

the core of my project. I seek to closely investigate the appearances of the *wælcyrge* in order to discover “signs of the work [she] did in the culture that used [her].” Scholars have underestimated the *wælcyrge* by casing her meaning and attributes to the Anglo-Saxons almost exclusively in terms of the *valkyrja*’s meaning and attributes to the Old Norse people. I will argue that the previous assessments of the *wælcyrge* have been imprecise in their assigning her strictly *valkyrja* traits, characteristics, and cultural meaning. While my research in chapter four will demonstrate that, within the genre of heroic poetry, the *valkyrja* does seem to have a largely analogous relationship to the *wælcyrge*, this similarity of form and function between these two figures is restricted to a specific narrative style, and does not apply to the named occurrences of the *wælcyrge*. Different genres of Anglo-Saxon writing will define and use the *wælcyrge* differently.

Concise Critical History of the Wælcyrge

The critical history of the word *wælcyrge* is brief. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, few scholars approached the word comprehensively. Thus, much critical understanding of this word is fraught with cultural incongruities and incomplete interpretations. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the trend among scholars has been to illustrate the English *wælcyrge* as merely a subordinate concept of the Old Norse *valkyrja*, treating the OE evidence as a splinter of the codified and more thoroughly mythologized *valkyrja*. In 1941, Charles Donahue wrote that scholars working with the *wælcyrge* have only “scanty available evidences” from which to extract meaning.⁴⁰ While the exacting etymological parallelism between the two words *wælcyrge* and *valkyrja* does suggest that the concepts behind these words could easily overlap, such an assumption is problematic

in that the missing gaps in the Old English tradition are not fully explained by the better-preserved evidences from the Old Norse tradition.⁴¹ There are many aspects of the Old English *wælcyrge* that differentiate her from the Old Norse *valkyrja*.

Scholarship into the Valkyrie began with W. M. Hennessey's 1870 article "The Ancient Irish Goddesses of War," which differentiates the Scandinavian and Germanic forms of war-woman from the Irish figures of *Morrighu* and her blood-soaked sisters. Hennessey briefly mentions the Anglo-Saxons in the article, and then he writes that they are merely participants in the *valkyrja* tradition.⁴² Hennessey points to an 878 entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* referencing a Norse Valkyrie myth as proof of Anglo-Saxon participation in the Scandinavian tradition of the *valkyrja*. Hennessey in no way acknowledges the *wælcyrge*. Wolfgang Golther (1890) is the first to address the *wælcyrge* as an entity separate from all other forms.⁴³ Although he mentions the Anglo-Saxon conception of the *wælcyrge* only briefly, Golther put forward numerous claims as to the variations of form assumed by the Germanic war-woman and her ancient values as a religious icon to the warrior-caste in the Teutonic cultures.⁴⁴ Beyond clearly making distinction between the Anglo-Saxon variant type of war-woman and her Scandinavian and Germanic cousins, Golther forwards no other insightful claims about the Anglo-Saxon war-woman.

In 1898, T. Northcote Toller adds a substantial amount of material to Bosworth's research, published in 1838, and republishes *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. This emended edition contains the entry-word *wælcyrge*. Golther's distinction between the English and the Scandinavian types does not seem to influence Toller, whose definition of the *wælcyrge* is framed not in terms of the Anglo-Saxon war-woman, but rather in terms of her

Scandinavian sister-in-arms, the *valkyrja*. Toller defines the *wælcyrge*: “According to the mythology, as seen in its Northern form, the ‘Val-kyrjur’ were the goddesses who chose the slain that were to be conducted by them to Odin’s hall– Val-halla.”⁴⁵ The Bosworth-Toller dictionary gives a definition which is applicable strictly to the Scandinavian *valkyrja*, not the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge*. By focusing on the Old Norse “Val-kyrjur” and the accompanying concepts of Odin and Valhalla, which are entirely absent from any named occurrence of the *wælcyrge* in Old English literature, Toller does not include possible native aspects of the English war-woman. In so doing, Toller establishes a tradition for scholarly understanding of the *wælcyrge* as a marginally English monster defined strictly in terms of the Norse *valkyrja*.

Later lexicographical works, such as *Webster’s Dictionary*, perpetuate this scholarly eclipse by stating that the OE *wælcyrge* is a “chooser of the slain,” whose form and function is “akin” to the *valkyrja* both in etymological construction and lexical meaning.⁴⁶ Although Toller mentions the glosses and their corresponding lemmata, the best that *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* can forward of the relationship between these pairings in Old English is that “something of the old idea is still shewn in the...glosses.”⁴⁷ That “something of the old idea” of choosing the slain and escorting them to Odin’s halls of the dead is, as I will show, not at all evident in the Anglo-Saxon conception of the Valkyrie. At no point in the corpus does a *wælcyrge* either select the dead from the battlefield, or escort them to the halls of the slain or any type of afterlife. Bosworth-Toller do go on to specify a bifurcation to the Anglo-Saxon sense of the war-woman in noting that “elsewhere [*wælcyrge*] is used apparently with the sense of witch or sorceress.”⁴⁸ While this assessment is correct in that Wulfstan and his stylistic admirers repeatedly use the word *wælcyrrian* in collocation with the word

wiccan, it is incomplete in that it lumps the role of the *wælcyrge* as a real-world monster together with her mythological function in the glosses. No differentiation or individual consideration is given by Bosworth-Toller to the unique presence and function of the Valkyrie in *The Wonders of the East*. Bosworth-Toller essentialize the *wælcyrge* as a subgroup of the Norse form, and assigns her a bipartite, rather than a tripartite, role in Anglo-Saxon literature.

Due in part, perhaps, to *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, nearly a century of scholars and students of the Valkyrie tradition came to think of the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge* as virtually synonymous with the Old Norse *valkyrja*. Such a reading prohibits the possibility that there are native elements associated with the war-woman that define the *wælcyrge* as a uniquely Anglo-Saxon conception. By eclipsing the work done by Golther to separate the *valkyrja* and the *wælcyrge* into two distinct species of northern war-women, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* sets the standard for reading the *wælcyrge* as a *valkyrja*. This paradigm of reducing the English *wælcyrge* to an ethnographic variant of the Scandinavian *valkyrja* established itself among scholars of English and Northern antiquity. Adolf Schuller (1902) and Gustav Neckel (1913) follow in this tradition of defining the *wælcyrge* only in terms of the *valkyrja*.⁴⁹ Even later scholars, including M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij, J. S. Ryan, Brian Branston, and A. L. Meaney perpetuated the Anglo-Saxon war-woman in terms of her Norse sister, the *valkyrja*.⁵⁰ Richard Jent, in his 1921 “Die mythologischen Ausdrücke im altgermanischen Wortschatz,” and Jan de Vries in his 1935 *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, provide only cursory information on the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie.⁵¹ Jent acknowledged her as a separate entity from the Scandinavian and Germanic forms, but goes on to make no further comment suggesting unique elements that would comprise her

native character.⁵² Jan de Vries draws attention to the omnipresence of the war-woman in the Indo-European tradition. Focusing on the Vedic tradition of the *apsara* sky-goddesses, the Germanic swan-maidens, the Irish *Morrigna*, and the Old English and Old Norse forms of the Valkyrie, de Vries argues that all forms of the spectral war-woman are joined in their ancestry and see differentiation only insofar as the culture that used them transposed their respective values atop the pliable matrix of the war-woman. However, like most scholars before him, de Vries conjoins the Old English *wælcyrge* and the Old Norse *valkyrja* into a single entity.

The first study in the twentieth century to view the *wælcyrge* as a distinctly Anglo-Saxon figure is that of Alexander Haggerty Krappe (1926).⁵³ In “The Valkyries,” Krappe distinguishes the variant forms of the Valkyrie figure just as Golther did nearly four decades earlier. After clearly separating the English, Irish, and Scandinavian forms, Krappe points toward three votive carvings at the Roman fort-settlement of Vercovicium at Hadrian’s Wall. He writes that to the current understanding of the Valkyrie mythos, “these monuments...must now be added.”⁵⁴ The carvings to which Krappe points are the *Alaisiagae* or war-woman figures carved by Germanic mercenaries serving in the Roman legions posted in England. Krappe advances the theory that “the very character of the ex-votos furnishes *prima facie* evidence that the two Alaisiages [sic] are at the root of the Valkyrie myth or at least stand very near to it.”⁵⁵ By asserting that the Valkyrie myth had very early roots in England, Krappe thrusts the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge* into the fore in a completely new way. Krappe regards the Scandinavian *valkyrja* as a later derivative of the English *wælcyrge*.

H. Munro Chadwick (1926) also interprets the *wælcyrge* as having a wide range of cultural value and attributes outside her relationship to her Scandinavian sister.⁵⁶

Chadwick does not seem to have been influenced by Krappe, as even in the wake of Krappe's assertion on the primacy of the English form, Chadwick considers the *wælcyrge* within the confines of its dithematic onomastic construction. Chadwick addressed her as literally a "chooser of the slain," and wrote of her:

In England, as in the North, both human and supernatural beings were included under this term, though they were not always clearly distinguished from witches. But, more than this, the poetic description of valkyries which we find in the Edda can likewise be traced in Anglo-Saxon poetry...it is to be remembered that the word *wælcyrge* can hardly mean anything else than 'chooser of the slain'In the glossaries, the word is used to translate *Eurynis*, *Herinis*, (i.e., *Erynis*), *Tisiphone*, *Allecto*, [and] *Bellona*. The first three occur in the *Corpus Glossary*; hence, the suggestion that the word *wælcyrge* is borrowed from Norse is inadmissible.⁵⁷

Chadwick's claim that the word *wælcyrge* cannot possibly be a borrowing from the Norse agrees with Krappe's claim that the English war-woman is an entity distinct from her Northern kindred. Chadwick focuses on the literal, dithematic etymology of the word, but does not suggest that the *wælcyrge* is entirely defined by this dithematic meaning. His evaluation of the *wælcyrge* is revelatory in that he suggests that the English Valkyrie is, in some way, a prefiguration of the Norse form that would come into the ascendancy in Eddaic poetry in later Iceland. Chadwick does, however, follow in the tradition of Bosworth-Toller in pointing to only a bifurcation, rather than a trifurcation, of the *wælcyrge*, for he says that she appears as either the gloss for Greek and Roman figures, and as the witch-like figure appearing in the writings of Wulfstan. Like Bosworth-Toller, Chadwick does not consider the mirabilis-type appearance of the war-woman in the Anglo-Saxon translation of *The Wonders of the East*.

In 1941, Charles Donahue published “The Valkyries and the Irish War-Goddesses,” in which he proposes that scholars reconsider the evidence forwarded by Hennessey in 1870 as to the relationship between the Irish *Morrighu* figure and the Valkyries of the Scandinavian tradition. Donahue’s evaluation of the Valkyrie briefly draws attention to specific elements present in Old English texts that parse the image of the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie form:

The Old English word *wælcyrge*, the exact equivalent of Old Icelandic *valkyrja*, seems to have been applied to female demons who were connected with war and viewed with sensations of horror. The word is used to gloss *Erinyes*, *Tisiphone*, *Allecto*, and *Bellona*. Wright, by a textual emendation, makes the word translate *Parcae* also. We need not accept Wright’s emendation, however, to conclude that the Old English Valkyries had something to do with the fates of men. The name means ‘choosers of the slain.’ i.e., those who picked the men who were to fall on the battlefield.⁵⁸

Donahue concludes, somewhat vaguely, that the *wælcyrge* was “connected with war and viewed with sensations of horror.” Donahue was right to dismiss Wright’s emendation, but, he went on to point to the “exact equivalent” etymology between *wælcyrge* and *valkyrja*. By suggesting this etymological kinship, Chadwick latently suggests an exact parallel between the figures represented by each word. This etymological link erects an interpretive fallacy, by which the *wælcyrge* does not warrant scholarly attention beyond the dithematic parameters of its name or its seeming parallelism with the Old Norse. Donahue is also somewhat misleading in his considering the *wælcyrge* as having “something to do with the fates of men.” No Anglo-Saxon usage of the word *wælcyrge* is imbued with any sense of the Fates (as Wright’s dicey emendation posits), and at no point in the corpus do we find the named *wælcyrrian* functioning, as do their Scandinavian counterparts, as actual “choosers of the slain” or in any manner similar to the Fates or the Furies of Classical mythology.⁵⁹

The *wælcyrge* became an object of fascination in an entirely new way with the 1959 publication of Nora K. Chadwick's "The Monsters and Beowulf," in which Chadwick proposed that readers of the poem view Grendel's mother as an unnamed incarnation of the malevolent Valkyrie figure cut from a similar cloth as the otherworldly "choosers of the slain" present in skaldic poetry.⁶⁰ Chadwick asks that readers familiar with tropes and elements common to the malevolent half of the Valkyrie tradition read those elements in the behaviors, movements, motivations, and actions of Grendel's mother. Chadwick suggests readers of *Beowulf* view Grendel's mother as a Valkyrie type whose goal is the annihilation of the narrative's hero. Chadwick wrote: "the conception of Grendel's mother...is perhaps comparable to the earliest... conception of the valkyrie."⁶¹ Owing to the composition of *Beowulf* antedating the first appearance of the malevolent Valkyrie figure in Scandinavian literature, Chadwick wrote that "in the conception of Grendel's mother, we seem to have an earlier [Valkyrie] conception than that which gained wide currency in Scandinavian lands."⁶² Chadwick's proposal quickly elicited a response, and much of her focus was revitalized by H. R. Ellis Davidson's exhaustive investigation into Old Norse and Old English representations of the *Hel* figure, and the corresponding *dísir*, or death-bringing Valkyrie figures, prevalent in Old Norse and late Teutonic myth.⁶³

Georges Dumézil wrote *Les Dieux des Germains* (1959), in which he echoes the claims of Jan de Vries that all Valkyrie types are fundamentally Indo-European in their origin, and that subdivision of the figure is a secondary consideration to reading the similarities between the types of Valkyrie. Dumézil does not agree with the research of both Golther and Krappe on the differentiation of the *wælcyrge* from all other forms of Valkyrie, but instead claimed that the Valkyries are, rather, a direct splinter off the Vedic

tradition. Dumézil claimed that “the Valkyries have reminded scholars, and justly so, of the [Vedic] Marut, the companions of Indra.”⁶⁴ The *Marut*, or *Marutagana*, to which Dumézil referred are storm divinities recorded in the *Rig Veda* who function as the attendants for the god, *Indra*. Dumézil also claimed that the Valkyries of the northern tradition “maintain the Indo-European structure” of being servants to a higher god of death. In claiming this, Dumézil ignores the figure of the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge*, over whom, as Krappe and H. Munro Chadwick independently illustrated in 1926, no higher authority holds sway.⁶⁵ According to Chadwick, “we have no evidence to prove... that the valkyries were associated with Woden” in Anglo-Saxon culture.⁶⁶

In recent years, scholars have once again addressed the incongruent relationship between the *wælcyrge* and the *valkyrja*. Helen Damico (1984) addresses the Old English *wælcyrge* largely in the war-woman’s own, Anglo-Saxon terms.⁶⁷ In her *Beowulf’s Wealhþeow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, Damico bases her readings of Wealhþeow and Grendel’s Mother on Nora K. Chadwick’s assertion that two, polarized varieties of Valkyrie are present in Old English literature. Damico also relies heavily on the Scandinavian *valkyrja* as she appears in Icelandic skaldic and eddaic poetry in defining the elements of Wealhþeow that reflect the Anglo-Saxon war-woman. Damico claims that, much in the same way that Grendel’s mother is an Anglo-Saxon representation of the malignant Valkyrie figure, Wealhþeow functions in *Beowulf* as a beneficent Valkyrie figure. Damico believes that the character of Wealhþeow embodies both native Anglo-Saxon characteristics, as well as elements of the Scandinavian *valkyrja*. Damico wrote that “both the convivial [Scandinavian] and discordant [Anglo-Saxon] aspects of the... [Valkyrie] figure are a part of Wealhþeow’s character.”⁶⁸ To this end, Damico, much like Krappe and

Chadwick, reads the *valkyrja* as a figure who shares deep concordance with the earlier *wælcyrge* figure.

Alaric Hall (2009) briefly cases the *wælcyrge* in terms of her value to the Anglo-Saxons and separates her from other northern war-women. Hall resists traditional scholarship on the *wælcyrge* and promotes a reading of her that does not define the English form solely in terms of her Scandinavian counterpart.⁶⁹ In his *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, Hall sees the *wælcyrge* as a being of cultural value and distinction independently of her Scandinavian sister to the north.⁷⁰ Like other unsung Anglo-Saxon creatures of superstition, the *wælcyrge* is, to Hall, a native English entity worthy of consideration as a strictly Old English figure in her named form. In her unnamed form, however, Hall briefly focuses on the *wælcyrge* as she manifests in Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry and medicinal charms. Hall gives some consideration to the Old English Valkyrie as she relates to the Irish *Morrigna*, the Norse *valkyrjur*, and the German *idisi*. Like Damico, Hall believes that “the weapon-bearing women...have long histories in [Old] English” literature, and that those “long histories” bear consideration independently of a Scandinavian contextualization.⁷¹ Hall’s treatment of the *wælcyrge* is brief, however. Aside from proposing that the *wælcyrge* be read as a figure independent of the *valkyrja*, Hall gives no further information as to how the *wælcyrge* functioned in Anglo-Saxon literature.

A number of scholars have given minor consideration to the *wælcyrge* in recent years, including Gillian Overing (1990), Michael J. Enright (1995), and Thomas A. DuBois (1999), and Karen Louise Jolly (1996) who briefly addresses the role of the *wælcyrge* in the charms.⁷² Jolly writes that supernatural beings of Germanic origin, such as *ylfe* and *wælcyrrian*, function in a “medical context... [and] interweave Christian and Germanic

beliefs... [into] a coherent synthesis” in the Anglo-Saxon charms.⁷³ Jenny Jochens (1995), cites the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie figure that is feminized in form but masculine in battle-function.⁷⁴ She also notes that the “foreign influence” of this Anglo-Saxon figure “reassigned the feminine role[s]” of weaving, cup-bearing, and concupiscence to the beneficent *valkyrja* figure in the Old Norse tradition.⁷⁵ Jochens also claims that direct influence from the Anglo-Saxon form “significantly domesticated and feminized the earlier masculine” gender roles of the malevolent *valkyrja* figure and transformed her from a non-human monstrosity into a feminine figure with masculine battle-prowess.⁷⁶ All of these scholars view the *wælcyrge* through a lens of gender-criticism and do not consider the native folklore elements present in her appearances in Old English literature.

My purpose in this dissertation is to isolate all named and unnamed occurrences of the *wælcyrge* and analyze how the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie functioned within the Old English aesthetic. Different periods in Anglo-Saxon history seem to show a change in perception of the *wælcyrge*. Likewise, different literary genres with different agendas behind them also approach the *wælcyrge* differently. The homiletic, politically-charged writings of Wulfstan of York, for example, portray the *wælcyrge* in an unequivocally negative light, while the charms present the spectral war-woman as a dangerous, but not necessarily evil figure whose presence in the invisible world of medicine and healing is essential. When studied in depth, the occurrences of the named and unnamed *wælcyrge* show an indigenous mythological figure who exists at the nexus of intense social dialog. Between the earliest years of her evidenced existence in the early tenth century and her final appearance in Anglo-Saxon literature in the eleventh-century MS LLP 489, the *wælcyrge* undergoes a number of changes of form and function. Chapter two will address the function of the

wælcyrge in each of the three genres in which she is called by name, and demonstrate how a dialog surrounding her demythologization is in play between these genres. Likewise, chapter two will investigate how elements of her being beyond her association with the *valkyrja* are present in her named appearances.

¹ H. Munro Chadwick. *The Heroic Age*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1926: 412.

² In his "Othin in England: Evidence from the Poetry for a Cult of Woden in England", J. S. Ryan argues that the image of the raven bears close enough syncretism to the image of the war-woman as we see her in manifest in Irish war-goddesses and Norse Valkyries, as to be considered an allusion to or form of the *wælcyrge*. Says Ryan: "We have seen from *Exodus* that the raven may be held to be a *wælcyrge*... in the movement of the ravens, and the wheeling of the *guth* in the *Exodus* battle, there is the link with the Birds of Battle and the Valkyries, who may originally have been conceived of as ravens, like the *Wælceasiga*" (474, 477). The *Wælceasiga* to which Ryan refers here is the raven who picks over the battlefield in *Exodus*. See J.S. Ryan, "Othin in England: Evidence from the Poetry for a Cult of Woden in England" *Folklore* 74 (3) 1963: 460-480.

³ See Joseph Harris, "Review: *Beowulf's Wealhþeow and the Valkyrie Tradition* by Helen Damico" *Speculum* 61 (2) 1986: 401.

⁴ See Wolfgang Kitterlück. "Die Glossen der Hs. British Library Cotton Cleopatra A.III: Phonologie, Morphologie, Wortgeographie." *Europäische Hochschulschriften: Reihe XIV, Angelsächsische Sprache und Literatur*. Frankfurt, Main, 1998.

⁵ William Garlington Stryker. "The Latin-Old English Glossary in MS Cotton-Cleopatra A.III" (dissertation) Stanford, 1951: 8. See also See Thomas Wright *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies* ed. Richard Wülker. London, Trübner, 1884: 347.

⁶ Stryker, *Glossary*, 14. Wright, *Vocabularies*, 360.

⁷ See Ammianus Marcellinus. *The Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus: During the Reigns of the Emperors Constantius, Julian, Jovianus, Valentinian, and Valens*. trans. C. D. Yonge. London, Bell, 1894: 370.

⁸ Stryker, *Glossary*, 49. Wright, *Vocabularies*, 417.

⁹ Ovid, *The Metamorphosis*. Charles Martin, ed. New York, W. W. Norton Co., 2009.

¹⁰ See J. J. Quinn, "The Minor Latin-Old English Glossaries in MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III" (dissertation) Stanford University, 1956.

¹¹ Quinn, *Minor*, 61.

¹² Quinn *Minor*, 64.

¹³ Joseph Bosworth and Thomas Northcote Toller. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1898: 499.

¹⁴ J. R. Clark-Hall. *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000: 165.

¹⁵ See Lowell Kindschi. *The Latin-Old English Glossaries in MS Plantin-Moretus 32 and British Library Additional 32,246*. (dissertation) Stanford University, 1955. See also David Porter. *The Antwerp-London Glossaries: The Latin and Latin-Old English Vocabularies from Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus 16.2-London, British Library Add. 32246*, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2011.

¹⁶ Kindschi, *Plantin-Moretus 32*, 241.

¹⁷ J. M. McBryde. "Charms to Recover Stolen Cattle" *Modern Language Notes* 21 (6) 1906: 183.

¹⁸ Publi Vergili Maronis, *Aenedios*. Oscar E. Aguilera. ed. Universidad de Chile, Santiago, 1997.

¹⁹ Arthur Simpson Napier. *Old English Glossaries*. Oxford, Clarendon, 1900: 1, 116.

²⁰ Wright, *Vocabularies*, 466.

²¹ See H. Munro Chadwick, *The Heroic Age*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1926: 412-413, 412n, Charles Donahue, "The Valkyries and the Irish War-Goddesses," *PMLA* 56 (1) 1941: 1, 3, Mary S. Serjeantson, "The Vocabulary of Folklore in Old and Middle English" *Folklore* 47 (1) 1936: 59-60.

²² Andy Orchard. *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2003: 186.

²³ Orchard, *Prodigies*, 187.

- ²⁴ Orchard, *Prodigies*, 187.
- ²⁵ Orchard, *Prodigies*, 187.
- ²⁶ T. Oswald Cockayne. *Narratiunculæ: Anglice Conscriptæ* London, J. R. Smith Publishers, 1861: 35.
- ²⁷ Orchard, *Prodigies*, 191.
- ²⁸ Arthur Cottrell and Rachel Storm, *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Mythology*. London, Aarness, 2002: 46.
- ²⁹ W. M. Hennessey. "The Ancient Irish Goddesses of War." *Revue Celtique* 1 1870: 32-55, C. Lottner, *ibid.*, 55-7., Adolf Schullerus. "Zur Kritik des altnordischen Valhollglaubens," *PBB* XII, 221-282., Joseph Bosworth and Thomas Northcote Toller. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Cambridge, Cambridge U. Press, 1898: 1153, Wulfgang Golther, "Studien der germanischen Sagengeschichte, I Der Valkryjenmythus" *Münchener Abhandlungen, philosophisch-philologische Classe XVIII* 1890: 399-438, H. M. Chadwick. *The Heroic Age*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1926: 411-412, Gustav Neckel. *Walhall, Studien über germanischen Jenseitsglauben*. Dortmund, 1913. Of most especial importance to this study is Gustav Neckel's sense of the English *wælcyrge* as little more than a southern incarnation of a solidly Norse concept conceived among the tribes north of the Rhine in the centuries prior to the Great Age of Migrations; see *ibid.*, 5-6., Richard Jent, "Die mythologischen Ausdrücke im altgermanischen Worschatz," *Anglistische Forschungen*, LVI 1921: 209, Alexander Haggerty Krappe. "The Valkyries." *Modern Language Review* 21 (1) 1926: 55-73, Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin, Vorwort, 1935, Charles Donahue. "The Valkyries and the Irish War-Goddesses," *PMLA* 56 (1) 1941: 1-12, Donahue places especial focus on the English form of what he considers a common Germanic Valkyrie on p. 2-4, 6. Nora K. Chadwick, "The Monsters and Beowulf" *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of their History and Culture*. ed. Peter Clemons. London, Bowes & Bowes, 1959: 171-203., J. R. Clark-Hall. *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000: 393. Clark-Hall, unlike Bosworth-Toller, gives only the literal, etymological definition of the word *wælcyrge*, broken down into its constituent parts, *wæl-* and *-cyrge*, and defines them literally as "chooser of the slain," giving no further hint at the nature or cultural value of the being to the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic.
- ³⁰ I group the *Proclamation of 1020* with these two homiletic texts because the influence of Wulfstan in the rhetorical structure of the *Proclamation* (and his very likely having a hand in writing the *Proclamation*) is too significant to ignore, and the single appearance of the *wælcyrge* in the political treatise of the *Proclamation* does not, in my estimation, warrant the recognition of a fourth type of *wælcyrge* appearance.
- ³¹ Ryan, *Othin*, 462.
- ³² Elaine M. Treharne. *Old and Middle English: c.-890-c.1400: An Anthology*. London, Blackwell, 2004: 232.
- ³³ For a discussion of Wanley's assessment of Wulfstan, see George Hickers. *Linguarum Veterum Septentrionalium Thesaurus Grammatico-Criticus et Archeologicus* London, Sheldoniano, 1705: 140, Arthur Simpson Napier. *Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit*. Berlin, 1883:291-9, see Karl Jost. *Wulfstanstudien*. Swiss Studies in English xxiii. Bern, Francke Ag Verlag, 1950, See Dorothy Bethurum. *The Homilies of Wulfstan*. Oxford, Clarendon, 1957.
- ³⁴ Felix Liebermann. *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*. Berlin, Halle, 1903-16: 274.
- ³⁵ Napier, *Homilies*, 291-302.
- ³⁶ Walter John Sedgfield. *An Anglo-Saxon Prose Book*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1928: 283-4.
- ³⁷ Bethurum, *Homilies*, 54.
- ³⁸ Dorothy Whitelock. ed. *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1976: 44.
- ³⁹ Roy M. Liuzza. ed. *Old English Literature*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002: xiii.
- ⁴⁰ Charles Donahue. "The Valkyries and the Irish War-Goddesses," *PMLA* 56 (1) 1941: 3.
- ⁴¹ Wulfgang Golther, in 1890, is the first to forward any notion that the English *wælcyrge* is a distinct being from the Scandinavian *valkyrja*, but his sense of individuality between the beings is eclipsed by the later conclusions of Neckel and others. Later scholarship, such as that forwarded by Nora K. Chadwick and Alaric Hall, suggests that the Old English form not only predates, but may also directly influence, the later Old Norse forms of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries.
- ⁴² W. M. Hennessey, "Ancient Irish War-Goddesses" *Revue Celtique* 1 1870: 32.
- ⁴³ Wolfgang Golther. "Studien zur germanischen Sagengeschichte. I Der Valkryjenmythus" *Münchener Abhandlungen Philosophische-Philologische Classe XIII* 1890: 399-438.
- ⁴⁴ Golther, "Valkryjenmythus," 414.
- ⁴⁵ Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, 1153.
- ⁴⁶ Philip Badcock Gove, ed. *Websters' New International Dictionary*. Chicago, Donnelly, 1961: 2530.
- ⁴⁷ Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, 1153.

⁴⁸ Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, 1153.

⁴⁹ See Adolf Schullerus. "Zur Kritik des altnordischen Valhollglaubens." *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 12, 1902, 221-282, Gustav Neckel. *Walhall, Studien über germanischen Jenseitsglauben*. Dortmund, 1913.

⁵⁰ M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij. "Valkyries and Heroes" *Arkiv for Nordisk Filologi* 97 (7) 1982: 81-93, J. S. Ryan. "Othin In England: Evidence from the Poetry for a Cult of Woden in Anglo-Saxon England" *Folklore* 74 (3) 1963: 460-480, Brian Branston. *The Lost Gods of England*. London, Thames & Hudson, 1957, A. L. Meaney. "Woden in England: A Reconsideration of the Evidence." *Folklore* 77 (2) 1966: 105-115.

⁵¹ Richard Jent, "Die mythologischen Ausdrücke im altgermanischen Worschatz," *Anglistische Forschungen*, LVI 1921: 209, J. de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin, Vorwort, 1935.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Alexander Krappe. "The Valkyries" *The Modern Language Review* 21 (1) 1926: 55-73.

⁵⁴ Krappe, "Valkyries," 56.

⁵⁵ Krappe, "Valkyries," 57.

⁵⁶ H. Munro Chadwick. *The Heroic Age*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1926.

⁵⁷ Chadwick, *Heroic Age*, 412.

⁵⁸ Donahue, "Goddesses," 3.

⁵⁹ Wright, *Vocabularies*, 189 (n).

⁶⁰ See Nora K. Chadwick. "The Monsters and *Beowulf*" *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of Their History*. London, Bowes & Bowes, 1959: 171-203.

⁶¹ Chadwick, "Monsters", 175.

⁶² Chadwick "Monsters", 177.

⁶³ See H. R. Ellis Davidson, *The Road to Hel: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature*. New York, Greenwood, 1968.

⁶⁴ Georges Dumézil. *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*. ed. Einar Haugen. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1973: 42.

⁶⁵ Dumézil, *Gods*, 123.

⁶⁶ Chadwick, *Heroic Age*, 412.

⁶⁷ Helen Damico. *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984. "The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature" *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*. eds. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen. Bloomington, Indiana U. Press, 1990: 176-192.

⁶⁸ Damico, *Tradition*, 19.

⁶⁹ Alaric Hall. *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*. Rochester, Boydell, 2009: 85-86, 162-4.

⁷⁰ See Alaric Hall. *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*. Rochester, Boydell, 2009.

⁷¹ Hall, *Elves*, 162.

⁷² Gillian Overing. *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf*. Carbondale, University of Southern Illinois Press, 1990, Michael J. Enright. *Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tene to the Viking Age*. Dublin, Four Courts Press, 1995, Thomas A. DuBois. *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age*. Philadelphia, U. of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, Karen Louise Jolly. *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

⁷³ Jolly, *Religion*, 98.

⁷⁴ Jenny Jochens. *Women in Old Norse Society*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1995: 107.

⁷⁵ Jochens, *Women*, 107.

⁷⁶ Jochens, *Women*, 137.

Chapter Two:

Her Syndan Wælcyrrian: Form, Function, and Demythologization of the Wælcyrge in Anglo-Saxon England

The Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge* occurs in three primary genres in Old English texts. These are the glosses, the *mirabilis* or tales of wonder, and the homilies and law codes. In this chapter, I analyze the evidence in each of these genres, seeking to show that, collectively, this evidence demonstrates two significant aspects of the *wælcyrge* in the Old English sources. Firstly, these investigations will reveal that the *wælcyrge* has physical form and characteristics beyond the *valkyrja*-like qualities that have long been projected onto her. Secondly, representations of the *wælcyrge* were in a state of flux even in late Anglo-Saxon England. From her first appearances in manuscripts datable to the 930's to her final appearance in the homilies of the 1020's, the *wælcyrge* goes through a process of demythologization. It is my purpose in this chapter both to illustrate that enough evidence remains in the corpus to reconstruct the form and characteristics of the *wælcyrge*, and also to show that the function of the *wælcyrge* varied with the genre in which she appears.

The first of the genres in which the *wælcyrge* appears is the gloss. Interpreting a glossary can be difficult. It is important to determine the glossator's understanding or misunderstanding of the relationship between the lemma and its accompanying gloss word. One of the fundamental hazards in using glosses to assess the values attributed to the *wælcyrge* is the uncertainty of the relationship between the gloss and its corresponding lemma. Alaric Hall claims that the relationship between the gloss and the lemma is unidirectional.¹ That is to say, Hall believes that the gloss functions to illuminate a foreign

word or concept for a reader not familiar with the language in which the lemma is written.² Thus, the gloss functions, in part, as a translational tool to bridge the gap of understanding between the recipient reader of the gloss-language and the foreign language of the lemma. Hall points out that “although glosses were meant as equivalents to their lemmata, this does not mean that the reverse is also true: inversions like ‘*Wælcyrge* is...glossed with *Bellona*’ are misguided and misleading.”³ Hall holds that, without any other source of information to shed light on the word and concept represented by the gloss, strict inversion of the gloss-lemma relationship is incorrect.

William Stryker, however, has shown that a lemma may be reliably helpful in ascertaining the meaning of the gloss. Stryker points out that “finding the source of a Latin lemma sometimes throws a ray of light on a puzzling gloss,” and he goes on to say that a gloss may “def[y] understanding until one has discovered the thought behind the source passage.”⁴ This phenomenon is especially prevalent in the lexical gloss, which, as Patrizia Lendinara points out, “provides one synonym or one quasi-synonym for the word of the text.”⁵ Lendinara shows that this type of gloss is the least complicated and least prone to error in juxtaposition of the lemmata with a corresponding *interpretamenta*.⁶ The consistency between *wælcyrge* as gloss and its corresponding lemmata lends support to the bidirectional relationship Hall restricts. In the case of *wælcyrge* as a lexical gloss, it is true that, as Stryker posits, our understanding of the Latin lemma may “throw a ray of light” on our need to better define and more accurately read the Old English woman-of-war in her gloss-type occurrences. Lendinara extols the value of the glossary as a literary tool for interpretation. She writes:

Every set of glosses and glossaries should...be evaluated in terms of its individual features. An analysis of the Anglo-Saxon glossaries as texts with

their own individuality will also yield evidence on the range of reading and method of scholarship followed in that age.⁷

As a literary text that is subject to the same modes of critical interpretation as any other medieval genre, the Old English glossary holds many nuanced clues to the meaning and value of its gloss words and the reception of their corresponding lemmata among the Anglo-Saxons. Investigation and interpretation of these gloss words may temper Hall's warning against drawing definitive conclusions based on single glosses read in the inverse, while at the same time confining its conclusions about the *wælcyrge* within reasonable parameters based on reoccurring evidences within the collective Latin lemmata. This study will proceed on a foundation supported by Stryker and Lendinara, with careful consideration for Hall's resistance to reading a Latin lemma as casting lexical light on its corresponding Old English gloss.

The Gloss-Type Wælcyrge

My investigation begins with MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III. The word *wælcyrge* appears more frequently in the MS CC A.III than anywhere else. Containing three smaller glossaries, called the *First-*, *Second-*, and *Third Cleopatra Glossaries*, respectively, Cotton Cleopatra A.III draws from a number of earlier sources, including Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, the *Corpus Glossary* and Aldhelm's *De Laude Virginitatis*.⁸ Wright dates MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III as "a manuscript apparently of the eleventh century," though recent paleographical research conducted by Philip Rusche places the manuscript in the 930's.⁹ Many of the entries present in the *First Cleopatra Glossary* are repeated from the *Third Cleopatra Glossary*, which has been shown by Wolfgang Kitterlick to be a copy of older texts dating to the mid-eighth century, prior to the earliest Danish raids against the English at

Lindisfarne.¹⁰ Thus, scholars may reasonably posit that the earliest written record of the word *wælcyrge* in Old English occurs in or before the 930's. According to Kitterlick, this *terminus a quo* may extend as far back as the late eighth century.

The *First Cleopatra Glossary* (folios 5r-75v) names two divinities and a class of divinity from Greek and Roman antiquity: *Allecto*, *Bellona*, and *Herinis*. *Allecto*, a monstrous Greek deity of the underworld, is glossed in the *First Cleopatra Glossary* as “*wælcyrige*”¹¹ and again in the *Third Cleopatra Glossary* as “*wælcyrge*.”¹² Taken from the Greek *Ἀληκτώ*, *Allecto*'s name translates as “Anger without End” or “Unending Wrath.”¹³ While scholars note the prevalence of onomastic value in virtually all named Valkyries in the Scandinavian tradition, the Scandinavian form is not the only precedent in finding resonance between *Allecto* and the English *wælcyrge*. J. S. Ryan argues that the onomastic name-orientation is present in Anglo-Saxon writings. Ryan sees a connection between the raven and the Valkyrie in the Old English use of the word *guð* (OE, “war”) and its Old Norse cognate, *guðr* (ON, “warfare”). Ryan notes that “in Old Norse, *guthr* was the name of a Valkyrie and it is possible that such a personified notion existed also in Old English, where it might have had the sense of a bird-like shadow, a presence which, like the raven, is wheeling overhead.”¹⁴ Certainly it is possible that the raven exemplified as *guð* in Old English is akin to the Scandinavian proper name *Guðr*, who is a *valkyrja* of note in *Völuspá*, the greater *Nafnabulur*, *Darraðarljóð*, and the *Gyflaginning* of the *Prose Edda*. There are no other instances in which an English Valkyrie is called by name, but this does not preclude the possibility that the onomastic value of the lemma had bearing on the glossator's chosen word in translating that lemma for his audience.

The glossator's certain understanding of the character of *Allecto* helps scholars to understand the earliest appearance of the *wælcyrge* is imbued with violence. *Allecto* is a goddess of violence, strife, anger, and overweening hatred, and beside this name the glossator of MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III writes the word "*wælcyrige*." Moreover, the glossator writes an explanation of *Allecto* beside her entry in the gloss: *Suscitat Allecto scaevas ad scandal mentes*,¹⁵ "With her left hand, *Allecto* builds-up lies and deceits." The Anglo-Saxon conception of *Allecto*, therefore, focuses on her powers of deception and her penchant for falsehoods. Further evidence of how the Anglo-Saxon glossators conceived of *Allecto*'s idiosyncratic character may be suggested in her presence in the glossator's source material. Appearing at lines 323-329 in Book VII of Vergil's *Aeneid*, *Allecto* is portrayed as a physically hideous figure, whose internal character and essence are likewise stained with corruption. Vergil writes in Book VII of the *Aeneid*:

*Haec ubi dicta dedit, terras horrenda petiuit;
luctificam Allecto dirarum ab sede dearum
infernisque ciet tenebris, cui tristia bella
iraeque insidiaeque et crimina noxia cordi.
odit et ipse pater Pluton, odere sorores
Tartarae monstrum: tot sese uertit in ora,
tam saeuae facies, tot pullulat atra colubris.*¹⁶

After thus speaking, [Juno], horrendous, sought the earth,
summoning Allecto, the grief-bringer, from the halls
of war-like gloom, from the infernal darkness,
in whose heart stirs anger, treachery, and the blot of crimes.
Loathed and hated by her father, Pluto, and loathsome to her sisters,
is this monster of Tartarus; she is a changer of forms,
her features are savage, from her sprout black snakes.

Later in Book VII, at line 335, Vergil imbues *Allecto* with the *potes unanimos armare in proelia fratres*,¹⁷ "sow chaos among the unified brothers." This ability to stir men out of one accord resonates with the description of her character found in MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III.

Further, we find that the seat of *Allecto*'s corruptive power to deceive and twist the hearts of humans to violence comes from the *atra colubris* "black serpents," which entwine themselves in her hair. She infects her victims with the corruptive venom of her snakes, which, Gorgon-like, writhe from her scalp and strike her victims, sowing discordant thoughts and battle-madness in them. In turning the heart of Queen Amata against the men of Troy, *Allecto* employs her venomous brood for the purpose of poisoning the queen's mind and her resolve against the Trojans:

*Huic dea caeruleis unum de crinibus anguem
conicit, inque sinum praecordia ad intima subdit,
quo furibunda domum monstro permisceat omnem.
ille inter uestis et leuia pectora lapsus
uoluitur attactu nullo, fallitque furentem
uipeream inspirans animam; fit tortile collo
aurum ingens coluber, fit longae taenia uittae
innectitque comas et membris lubricus errat.
ac dum prima lues udo sublapsa ueneno
pertemptat sensus atque ossibus implicat ignem.*¹⁸

Then the goddess slings a snake at [Amata] from her hair,
And it plunges into her breast, seeks her in-most regions;
Driven mad by the creature, she stirs strife throughout the house.
Slithering between her garment and her smooth breast,
It coils, unfelt and unknown, about the mad woman,
Exhaling its viperous breath, the powerful serpent
Is as a necklace of twisted gold, loops like ribbon
Knotted in [Amata's] hair; it slithers all over her body.
In a short time, the liquid venom sinks in, like an illness;
It taints her senses and wraps her bones with flames.

The knowledge of Virgil possessed by the Anglo-Saxon glossators has been much debated, though recent critics believe that knowledge of the *Aeneid* existed among the glossators for the *First-* and *Third Cleopatra Glossary*.¹⁹ *Allecto*, glossed as a *wælcyrige*, establishes a baseline for scholarly understanding of the earliest Anglo-Saxon perception of the Valkyrie. The Old English *wælcyrge* in this gloss seems to have been a non-human female figure who

was physically hideous in form and deceitful and corruptive in function. Read as a synonymic gloss, the *wælcyrge* was to the glossators what *Allecto*, at least in some measure, was to the Greeks: a violent and corruptive divine entity. Were this the only gloss to mention the war-woman, students of the Valkyrie tradition would be at the whims and falsehoods of conjecture; in keeping with Hall's assertion on the slippery, bidirectional slope of the gloss-lemma relationship, one could not absolutely posit much based on this single gloss-lemma pairing. Thus, a small measure of light is cast upon the *wælcyrge* by investigating her Latin lemma.

The subsequent lemmata in MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III reinforce this perception of the *wælcyrge* as an Anglo-Saxon female divinity of malice and corruption. The second lemma to be glossed by *wælcyrge* in MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III is *Herinis*. Wright notes that *Herinis* is "a corruption for Erinnys, one of the Furies."²⁰ This gloss posits a synonymic relationship between the *Erinyes* as a class of being and the *wælcyrge* as a class of being. In antiquity, the *Erinyes* (Greek: *Ἐρινύες*) "were the avenging goddesses of Greek mythology," whose class name means "the angry ones."²¹ According to Greek myth, the *Erinyes* are a race of beings born from the blood of the Titan, Ouranos, and they function as avengers who "are pitiless to mortals who had wrongly shed blood."²² Not surprisingly, many of the same attributes associated with the *Erinyes* as a race are individually associated with *Allecto* as an idiosyncratic member of that race: snakes for hair, bloody associations, the ability to rouse men to violence, an underworld existence, and an overall pestilential relationship with mankind. To the glossator's mind, the word *wælcyrge* seems to have been sufficient to convey both the unearthly horror of physical form of the *Erinyes*,

as well as the seething malevolence and will-toward-violence that comprises the character inherent in *Allecto* and the hellish race to which she belongs, the *Herinis*.

The third appearance of the English Valkyrie in Cotton Cleopatra A.III is as a definitional gloss to the Roman goddess, *Bellona*, who, like *Allecto*, is glossed both in the *First-* and the *Third Cleopatra Glossaries*, as “*wælcyrge*.”²³ Bearing close association with Mars, *Bellona* “appears on the battlefield” just prior to military engagement and heralds victory for the army to whom she appears.²⁴ *Bellona* shares many of her war-like aspects with *Allecto*, but she is physically cut from a far less demonic cloth. *Bellona* and *Allecto* both are associated with violence and war, yet *Bellona* is a deity of open, righteous combat, while *Allecto* is a decidedly more nefarious deity who deals in the hatred and vitriol that turns the human heart towards surreptitious bloodshed. Also unlike *Allecto*, *Bellona* is a figure of human stature and human appearance. She is associated with the spear as her weapon of choice, and she wears armor. She is associated with the torch or brand as a symbol of the civil unrest she is capable of igniting among whole nations.²⁵ Like *Allecto*, *Bellona* (from the Latin *bellum*, meaning “war”) has a name that reveals her military function of conjuring “the fierceness of battle frenzy” in her chosen army.²⁶ The fourth-century Roman chronicler and historian, Ammianus Marcellinus writes of *Bellona* at Adrianpole in 378 AD:

*Cumque arma ex latere omni concuterentur et tela, lituosque Bellona luctuosos in clades Romanas solito inmanius furens, cedentes nostri multis interclamantibus restiterunt et proelium flammaram ritu ad crescens terrebat militum animos, confixis quibusdam rotatis ictibus iaculorum et sagittarum.*²⁷

And while arms and missiles of all kinds were meeting in fierce conflict, and Bellona, blowing her mournful trumpet, was raging more fiercely than usual to inflict disaster on the Romans, our men began to retreat; but presently, roused by the reproaches of their officers, they made a fresh stand, and the battle increased like a conflagration, terrifying our soldiers, numbers of whom were pierced by strokes from the javelins hurled at them, and from arrows.²⁸

Ammianus Marcellinus also writes of Roman generals, and Emperor Julian himself, offering sacrifice to *Bellona* as a propitiating votive of warfare. As the patron goddess whose blessing is doled out as bloodshed on the battlefield, *Bellona* was solicited for her direct aid and blessing in battle. This presence of the war-woman on the physical battlefield is echoed in the 13th-century Icelandic *Jómsvíkinga saga*, in which Håakon elicits the battlefield aid of the Valkyrie, *Ðorgerðr Hölgabrúðr*, only after propitiating her, as Julian does with *Bellona*, through ritualized human sacrifice.²⁹ Thus, *Bellona* as a lemma glossed by *wælcyrge* both allies, in some regards, the Roman war goddess *Bellona*, the Greek *Allecto*, and the *Herinis*, while at the same time foreshadowing the traits of battlefield-virulence that will come to possess greater currency in the Scandinavian *valkyrja*.

The general similarities between these entities point, perhaps, toward an understanding among some Anglo-Saxons of the *wælcyrge* as a race of female beings who are specifically linked with the ability to stir the hearts of men toward greater acts of violence. These beings are supernatural in their nature and inherently violent in their essence; both revel in the destruction of humans. As the list of supernatural deities glossed by the word *wælcyrge* lengthens, scholars must, according to the stances held by Hall, Stryker, and Lendinara, isolate and set aside the individual attributes of each lemma and come to read all lemmata as a collective in order to interpret the Old English glosses in a way that is collective and cumulative.³⁰ A holistic reading of the *wælcyrge* that identifies the common features between the lemmata is a safe and sustainable avenue towards establishing the form and function of the gloss-type *wælcyrge* in Anglo-Saxon England.

There is a fourth name, *Tisiphona*, for which “*wælcyrre*”³¹ is the gloss in MS Plantin-Moretus 16.2, which is a glossary-supplement to the vocabularies of Ælfric that post-dates

MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III by several decades. A sister to *Allecto* in Greek mythology, *Tisiphona* is another of the underworld *Erinyes*. These sisters “are creatures of Hell who reside there continually.”³² It falls within the jurisdiction of *Tisiphona* to keep vigil at the gates of Tartarus.³³ In Book VI of his *Aeneid*, Vergil portrays *Tisiphona* performing this ghastly duty: *Tisiphoneque sedens palla succincta cruenta / uestibulum exsomnia seruat noctesque diesque*, “*Tisiphona* robed in bloody raiment / guards the vestibule, never sleeping, night and day.”³⁴ Shortly after her entrance in Book VI of the *Aeneid*, the bloody *Tisiphona* wields her lash and shows her vengeful aspect, for *continuo sontis ultrix accincta flagello / Tisiphone quatit insultans, toruosque sinistra / intentans anguis uocat agmina saeva sororum*,³⁵ “the avenger, bearing her whip, hurls herself on the guilty / *Tisiphona* threatens them with snakes wielded in her left hand / she lashes them, and calls for her legion³⁶ of sisters.” *Tisiphona* echoes *Bellona* in that the two are associated with the *funereasque*, “scourge.”³⁷ Like *Allecto*, *Tisiphona* favors the viper as a means of inflicting harm or death upon her victims; *Tisiphona* is here pictured as a malevolent being whose violence comes with the lash in her right hand, and deadly snakes writhing in the other. The eleventh-century Anglo-Latin *Liber Monstrorum de Diversis Generibus*, found in MS Cotton Vitellius A.XV, neatly combines *Tisiphona*’s dual weapons of the whip and the snake into a single, devilish tool of violence. In that text, *Tisiphona* lashes her victims with her *uipereo flagella*, “viperous whip.”³⁸ These elements, as well as the fact that in Greek mythology both *Allecto* and *Tisiphona* are sisters of the race of *Erinyes*, cast these lemmata in a contextually synonymous light. It seems only reasonable and logical for the glossators to use the same gloss word, in MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III and MS Plantin-Moretus 16.2, to

define two Greek figures who are so closely related to one another in their native cosmology.

The consistency with which the gloss of *wælcyrge* is applied to its respective lemmata helps scholars of the Valkyrie tradition to understand two things. First, shared characteristics among the lemmata illustrate that the *wælcyrge* is a firm and specific concept and not simply a generic word for a nebulous, ill-defined boogey, such as we find in the case of other Anglo-Saxon monsters. For example, the *ylfe* has, at best, only a generic “alignment...with monsters and demons” in the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic³⁹ and *gydene* “goddess” is one of the more nebulous descriptors which Anglo-Saxon texts apply to a wide range of female divinities and monstrosities.⁴⁰ Secondly, in keeping with Stryker’s assessment of the gloss-lemma relationship, the common elements present in the *Erinyes*, *Allecto*, *Tisiphona*, and *Bellona* may be read as reflective of elements with which the native Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge* is imbued. Idiosyncratic elements not shared by all, or even the majority, of these lemmata figures, may be dismissed, as they may not safely be relied upon as being representative of the *wælcyrge*’s form and function within the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic.

There is a fifth goddess for which “*wælcyrge*” is the gloss: *Ueneris*.⁴¹ Appearing in the tenth-century MS Digby 146, the word *Ueneris* is a genitive form of the Latin *Wenus*, or *Venus*.⁴² The Roman “goddess of love, beauty and fertility,” *Venus* is the very personification of love, sensual desire, and sexual concupiscence.⁴³ She is a figure of unrivaled beauty and delicacy, and she was certainly understood in these terms by the Anglo-Saxons, for she is glossed in Aldhelm by the word *lustes*.⁴⁴ This is a word which J. R. Clarke-Hall defines as “desire... pleasure, sensuous appetite.”⁴⁵ Superficially, *Ueneris*

presents a very different view of the *wælcyrge* than is suggested by the previous lemmata. So problematic has been the reconciliation of reading *Venus* as having synonymic relationship to the same word that is elsewhere reserved for the hideous and malevolent *Allecto* and *Tisiphona*, that many scholars have suggested scribal error. Alaric Hall believes that the “glossator [or his] copyists...mis- or reinterpret[ed] the lemmata” of *Ueneris* as holding false association with the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge*.⁴⁶ The glossator defines *Ueneris* in MS Digby 146 by the words *gydene* and *wælcyrge*.⁴⁷ This has led Thomas Wright and Richard Wülker to posit that the glossator merely uses two generic terms here, as he has limited knowledge of the specific role or appearance of *Venus* and that the terms *gydene* “goddess” and *wælcyrge* “Valkyrie” simply function as vague, racial identifiers that position *Venus* as a non-human entity.⁴⁸ Charles Donahue and H. M. Chadwick tackle the problematic glossing of *Ueneris* by simply omitting this gloss from their treatments of the *wælcyrge*. Without giving any consideration to the gloss of *Ueneris*, Donahue says only that “the word [*wælcyrge*] is used to gloss *Erinyes*, *Tisiphone*, *Allecto*, and *Bellona*.”⁴⁹ Chadwick similarly writes that “the word [*wælcyrge*] is used to translate *Eurynis*, *Herinis* (i.e., *Erinys*), *Tisiphone*, *Allecto*, and *Bellona*.”⁵⁰ Mary S. Serjeantson sees no reason to omit *Venus* from the list of divinities glossed by *wælcyrge*. Serjeantson writes that “in the vocabularies...[*wælcyrge*] is used to explain *Tisiphone*, *Eurynis*, *Bellone*, *Allecto*, and even *Venus*,” yet she offers no explanation for this seemingly troubling gloss.⁵¹

While there is no link between the physical appearances of the ghastly *Allecto*, *Tisiphona*, and *Bellona* and the sexually radiant *Venus*, there are linguistic grounds for determining how these figures may be adequately glossed by the same Anglo-Saxon word. Jean-Yves Tilliette writes on the paronomastic relationship between the name of *Venus* and

the Latin word *venerum* or *uenerum*, “poison, ruin, destruction...venom.”⁵² Tilliette writes: “Peut-être faut-il aussi fait un sort au jeu paronomastique sur les mots *Venus* et *veneum*.”⁵³ “There is certainly also a clever relationship of a paronomastic nature between the words *Venus* and *veneum*.” This relationship between *Venus* and venom is echoed in the *Allecto-wælcyrge* relationship as *Allecto* is associated with serpents and their *ueneno* “venom.” *The Aeneid* shows *Allecto* using her *ueneno* to turn the heart of Queen Amata against the Trojans. Similarly, the *Tisiphona-wælcyrge* relationship contains an emphasis on venom, for the *Liber Monstrorum* illustrates *Tisiphona* wielding her *uipereo flagella*, “viperous whip” to contort humans into writhing, corrupt beings.⁵⁴ Thus, onomastic association between the name of *Venus* and the tool of corruption used by the malevolent *Allecto* and *Tisiphona* is readily apparent. Moreover, the word *Allectio* is glossed in MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III by the Old English *tyhtend*, which J. R. Clark-Hall defines as “inciter, instigator” and Bosworth-Toller have as “one who exhorts, incites, instigates...yfel-tyhtend.”⁵⁵ J. R. Clark-Hall defines the Old English verb *tyhtan*, the infinitive form of *tyhtend*, as “to incite, instigate, provoke...persuade, lead astray, seduce.”⁵⁶ This suggests that the Anglo-Saxon glossator knew her character as that of a seducer-toward-violence.

As Vergil portrays her in his *Aeneid*, *Allecto* strips humans of reason and moderation, and she seduces them into acts of bloodshed. A parallel sense of overbearing seduction away from moderation occurs in the figure of *Venus*. In much the same way that the *Erinyes* have the ability to possess their victim’s minds and manipulate their thoughts toward violence, *Venus* has the ability to seduce toward concupiscence. In book IV of his first-century AD poem, *Fasti*, Ovid describes the epithet given *Venus* by her followers based on the powers of seduction that *Venus* exercises over men:

*Roma pudicitia proavorum tempore lapsa est:
Cumaeam, veteres, consuluistis anum.
Templa jubet Veneri fieri: quibus ordine factis,
Inde Venus verso nomina corde tenet.*⁵⁷

In the time of our forefathers, Rome had fallen from a state of chastity, and the ancients consulted the old woman of Cumae. She ordered a temple to be built to Venus, and when that was duly done, Venus took the name of Changer of the Heart (*Verticordia*) from the event.⁵⁸

The dithematic moniker *Verticordia* accompanying *Venus's* name onomastically reveals her role as a persuasive figure whose force of influence cannot be resisted by those whom she chooses. Like the other divinities functioning as lemmata to the English *wælcyrge*, *Venus*, too, bears a name that is indicative of her function as a manipulator. While the Venetian seduction aims at turning the human heart to amorous carnality, and the Allectian drive is an exhortation toward savagery, the common factor in both equations is a sense of imbalance of reason and immoderation of thought brought about by the divine female instigator. In both instances there is association with venom as the catalyst for this imbalance of reason. *Allecto* and *Tisiphona* (and, by extension, the *Herinis*) use venom to seduce the human heart, while *Venus's* name suggests her ability, like venom, to possess a person wholly. On these grounds, *Ueneris* need not be the problematic- or mis-glossing that Wright forwards, and she certainly need not be omitted from the list of terms glossed by *wælcyrge*, as Chadwick and Donahue suggest. Glossed with all of these lemmata, the *wælcyrge* seems to play the role of instigator and inciter in the mind of the glossators. The ability to twist or corrupt the heart is common to all beings glossed by *wælcyrge*, and the use of venom to induce this possession of the mind and heart is common to most figures glossed by *wælcyrge*.

Previous scholars have focused on the disparity of physical form between each lemma, and have dismissed the word *wælcyrge* as a vague bogey meant “to be viewed with sensations of horror.”⁵⁹ Those critics found it difficult to reconcile the *wælcyrge* as a being with form or purpose because the lemmata which the word glosses are seemingly so disparate. When investigated more closely, however, the disparate nature of these lemmata recedes and their commonalities come to the fore. All lemmata have the power to possess the human heart and drive men toward radical actions: *Bellona* drives men to open warfare, *Allecto* and *Tisiphona* to nefarious murder, and *Venus* to amorous carnality. Moreover, the *wælcyrge* seems to be associated with serpent venom as a tool for possessing the hearts and minds of men. This association with venom and corruption is an element which will continue to manifest, as I will argue, in all named appearances of the Old English Valkyrie. While the physical features attributable to the gloss-type *wælcyrge* may vary, ranging from the black and vile *Allecto*, to the armored, war-like *Bellona*, to the voluptuous and sensual *Venus*, the common elements of the lemmata are enough to, as Stryker suggests, “throw a ray of light” on the Anglo-Saxon conception of the *wælcyrge*.⁶⁰ She seems to have been a supernatural woman with the power to twist or possess the hearts of men through the introduction of some type of venom. Moreover, a clear sense of mythology and utter supernaturalism pervades all the glosses involving the *wælcyrge*. At this earliest stage of reference to her, the Anglo-Saxon war-woman is purely a supernatural figure with no sense of corporeality or real-world presence. While her supernatural nature will be replaced by an increasingly realistic presence in the world, her associations with poison and venom will remain present in all her appearances in the corpus.

The Mirabilis-Type Wælcyrge

Having established that the gloss-type appearance of the *wælcyrge* suggests that the Anglo-Saxons viewed the war-woman as a female divinity associated with venom and the power to corrupt, I move now to the second genre in which the *wælcyrge* appears: the *mirabilis*. The *mirabilis*-type appearance heralds the first of two major shifts in the Anglo-Saxon perception of the *wælcyrge*. The *mirabilis*-type pulls the *wælcyrge* from the realm of mythology and positions her in the real world. Through the *mirabilis* genre, the *wælcyrge* joins a host of other marginalized humans, monsters, and beasts that exist in the realm of the quasi-real and quasi-possible in the liminal world of the marvelous.

Roughly a century after the her gloss-type appearances in MS CC A.III, the *wælcyrge* resurfaces in the eleventh-century MS Cotton Tiberius B.V, which contains one copy of *The Wonders of the East*. An Old English contribution to the genre of fantastical travelogue writing, *The Wonders of the East* appears in three manuscripts; two, MS Cotton Vitellius A.XV and Cotton Tiberius B.V, are dateable to around the year 1000, while the remaining manuscript, MS Bodleian 614, is dateable to the opening decades of the twelfth century.⁶¹ I will be discussing the Valkyrie as she appears in Cotton Tiberius B.V, as MS Cotton Vitellius A.XV contains the same information, and MS Bodleian 614 post-dates Anglo-Saxon England and exists outside the scope of this study. Written in both Latin and Old English, Cotton Tiberius B.V contains two *mirabilis*-type appearances of the *wælcyrge*. In this text, the Old English Valkyrie is stripped of the divine qualities she possesses in her gloss-type appearances, and she is represented not as an ethereal goddess, but as a very real, corporeal being.

The role of the *wælcyrge* in the *mirabilis* is largely a function of the role of the marvelous to the medieval audience. The *mirabilis* or the marvelous occupied a very specialized niche in the medieval aesthetic. It functioned as a narrative construction at the midpoint between pedantic factuality and guileful superstition. The beings and monsters in the marvelous are far-fetched and extreme, but the very possibility of their existence makes them all the more hideous to their audiences. Carolyn Walker Bynum argues, with respect to a wide range of medieval texts, that the monsters and feats recounted in the *mirabilis* genre were valuable to their contemporary audiences because they were neither commonplace and accessible, nor were they totally impossible or utterly devoid of realistic presence.⁶² The marvelous tales describe the monstrous and the wild, while coupling those images of monstrosity and barbarism with local idioms and familiar tropes to create a believable and thoroughly wondrous experience for the audience. The result was a genre of writing filled with beings that straddled the border between credible plausibility and gaping unreality. The ultimate key to the popularity of the marvelous as a genre is believability on the part of the audience. Bynum, in paraphrasing Gervais of Tillbury, writes of the relationship between the audience and the *mirabilis*: “If you do not believe in the event, you will not marvel at it. You can only marvel at something that is, at least in some sense, there.”⁶³ Susan Kim and Asa Mittman argue the fusion of the possible and the impossible in *The Wonders of the East* and note the function of the narrative structure of the *Wonders* as a bridge between the foreign and impossible, and the real and everyday. “The very status of the *Wonders* [*of the East*] as wonders,” writes Kim and Mittman, “implies at once the stretching of possibility, and an insistence on the viability of the same possibility, at once the incredibility and the truth of the narrative.”⁶⁴

The Latin text in MS Cotton Tiberius B.V, is part of a tradition conveying a “Greek conception of ethnographical monsters...[that] lived at great distances” from the borders of the known, familiar world.⁶⁵ The Anglo-Saxon translation of the Latin text in MS CT B.V is not in all places a literal translation. The Anglo-Saxon text bears lexical emendation of the *wælcyrge* as a native Anglo-Saxon conception inserted into an otherwise Greek litany of the monstrous.⁶⁶ Insofar as the Anglo-Saxon translator saw fit to add the war-woman into his translation of the Latin, I argue that the English Valkyrie functions to new ends in the genre of the *mirabilis*. While I will show that the *mirabilis*-type occurrence retains some of the characteristics, such as association with venom, present in the gloss-type appearance, I will also show that the *mirabilis*-type *wælcyrge* comes to possess real-world corporeality in a way that the gloss-type *wælcyrge* never possessed.

The Valkyrie will appear twice in *The Wonders of the East*. The fullness of her new rhetorical value is expressed more succinctly in the first of these two appearances. In her second appearance, the *wælcyrge* is a lexical synonym to the name of a river near Babylon. The Latin text says: *Capi uocatur fluuius in eodem loco qui apellatur Gorgoneus*.⁶⁷ “There is a river called Capi in that place, which means Gorgon-like.” The Anglo-Saxon translation offers clarification for the river’s name to a reader unfamiliar with the Hellenistic concept of the Gorgon: *Capi heo hatte seo in ðære ylcan stowe þe is haten Gorgoneous, þæt is Wælcyrinc*.⁶⁸ “The river there is named Capi in the same place, which is called Gorgoneous, that is, ‘Valkyrie-like.’”⁶⁹ This emendation of the *wælcyrge* into the text aides the translator in making more localized sense of a foreign monstrosity. The first occurrence of the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie in the *Wonders* carries this same weight of localizing an exotic monstrosity, but it also expresses a clearer, fuller sense of the *wælcyrge* as a semi-demythologized being.

The first mirabilis-type appearance of the war-woman, which comes only a few fits before the second appearance described above, contains a description of a fantastic monstrosity cased in terms of the Greek Gorgon in the Latin text, and in terms of the *wælcyrge* in the Anglo-Saxon text. The beast described is a human-hating, eight-footed, two-headed animal whose eyes are the seat of tremendous terror. The beast also possesses the ability of self-immolation. The Latin text of MS Cotton Tiberius B.V describes the marvelous creature:

*Praeterea ibi bestiae nascuntur. Hae cum sonum audierint hominum statim fugiunt; pedes habent octenos, oculos habent gorgoneos, bina capita habent. Si quis eas uoluerit adprehendere, corpora sua inarmant.*⁷⁰

Moreover, there are certain wild beasts. They flee at the utterance of a human voice; of feet they have eight, their eyes are those of the Gorgon; two-heads have they. Should someone attempt to capture one, they set their own bodies ablaze.

The text here reads as readers expect that a mirabilis text should. The writer gives no personal judgment or insight into his view of the monster and does not project onto the audience his opinion on how the audience should view the monster. The author is factual, detached, and objective. The beasts are fantastical, but the narrative tone of the passage gives no further contextualization or authorial opinion on the nature or meaning of the eight-legged beast. This serves to heighten the horror and sense of awe present in the text. Kim and Mittman agree with Mary B. Campbell in writing that the marvelous beasts and monsters present in *The Wonders of the East* are “delivered in the unadorned, declarative mode proper to information. The almost total absence of context...greatly intensifies [audience] experience of the grotesque, but at the same time the rhetorical starkness to which that absence belongs suggests for its depiction the status of fact.”⁷¹ This passage of the Latin *Wonders of the East* preserves this sense of the unadorned that is integral to the

mirabilis genre. By virtue of his own authorial distance, the writer forces the audience to assay the monster on his own terms. The audience must construct his or her own reaction to the horror based not on the reactions of the author, but on the given veracity of the beast's existence. The hideous hag-goddesses of the gloss-type *wælcyrge* cannot conjure the same images of terror and wonder that this eight-legged beast inspires simply by virtue of the possibility of its actual existence. Likewise, the gloss-type *wælcyrge* can be fully illuminated based on its corresponding lemma. The mirabilis-type *wælcyrge*, however, is left largely to the imagination of the audience. Furthermore, the description of the beast fuses the real and the cosmological. The beast has a measurable physiology and can be understood as it relates to the world around it. It may be a beast with two heads, but it is still a beast. Yet the beast also contains properties of the unearthly, for it *oculos habent gorgoneos*, "has the eyes of the Gorgon." Constructed entirely in cosmological terms, this descriptive phrase can only allow the audience of the text to assay the fantastical eyes of the monster based on his personal understanding of the Gorgon of Greek myth. The full, cosmological bearing of this descriptor places the listener entirely at odds with his factual understanding of the monster, and forces him to imagine this portion of the beast's being. An audience member can rationally envision a beast with two heads because he has seen beasts. He can reasonably envision a flaming beast with two heads because he has seen flames. But no audience member has ever gazed into the eyes of the Gorgon, and thus, can he only imagine a flaming beast who stares out at the world with such horrific eyes. Never having stared into the *oculos ...gorgoneos*, the listener has not even a faint reference point by which to categorize this facet of the beast's essence. By fusing the corporeal and the

cosmological, the Latin text depicts a monster that is physical, measurable, and rational in some of its parameters, yet supernatural in others.

The Anglo-Saxon translation in MS Cotton Tiberius B.V preserves much of the Latin structure, subject matter and contextualization, while at the same time inserting a number of local idiosyncrasies that are telling of the role of the *wælcyrge*:

*Eac swa ðær beoð wildor kennede. Ða deor þonne hi monne stefne gehyrað, þonne raðe hi fleoð. Ða deor habbað eahta fet, wælkyrian eagan, twa heafda. Gyf hi hwylc mann gefon wile, þonne hiera lichoman þæt hy onælað. Ðæt syndon ungefregelicu deor.*⁷²

Wild beasts are also born there. When these wild beasts hear a human voice, they run far away. The beasts have eight feet, and valkyrie-eyes, and two heads. If anyone tries to touch them, they set their bodies aflame. They are extraordinary beasts.⁷³

In some ways, the Anglo-Saxon translation preserves the “declarative mode proper for information” that is present in the Latin text. The Anglo-Saxon translator, however, breaks this tone in opining to the reader that they register the beast, as he does, as an *ungefregelicu deor*. Andy Orchard translates *ungefregelicu* as “extraordinary,” and Kim and Mittman translate it as “unheard-of,” which I agree with on its literal form.⁷⁴ Unlike the Latin author, who allows the reader to arrive at his own conclusions regarding the unnatural essence of the marvelous beast, the Anglo-Saxon translator explicitly points out the uncanny, *ungefregelicu* nature of the creature. In so doing, he deviates from the uninflected tone common to the *mirabilis* genre. The translator’s evaluation here suggests that the *wælcyrge*-like properties of the beast add to its being *ungefregelicu*. At least part of the uncanny nature of the beast is registered in the eyes, and the scribe’s tonal break from objective to subjective hints at the role that the Valkyrie-eyes played in the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic. While the Anglo-Saxon scribe’s dramatic understatement of the obvious

functions as “an example of the ironic litotes which is a frequent effect in Old English poetry,” his wonderment at the beast reveals, in part, that the Anglo-Saxon reaction to the eyes of the Valkyrie is one of shock and horror.⁷⁵

Absent from the Latin text, the *wælcyrge* also serves to localize a foreign monster. Lexically, the translator posits that the *wælcyrge* is the exact parallel to the hideous Greek snake-woman, just as he does in the first appearance. This use carries resonance with Medusa and her ghastly sisters. In positioning the English war-woman as a direct parallel to the Greek Gorgon, the translator reveals much about the Anglo-Saxon conception of the *wælcyrge*. Examined from a purely physical and monstrous perspective, this mirabilis-type *wælcyrge* retains some of the associations of the gloss-type *wælcyrge*. In terms of the venomous snakes writhing from their bodies, the Gorgons physically resemble the Greek goddesses *Allecto* and *Tisiphona*. Like the Gorgons, the underworld entities of *Allecto* and *Tisiphona* bear close association with snakes as hair and a nearly unbearable ferocity-of-visage. Both the Gorgons and the divine sisters *Allecto* and *Tisiphona* employ these snakes toward their horrifying ends. Moreover, the Gorgon Medusa has often been portrayed in Greek, Attican, and Corinthian art as having snake fangs, and vertically elliptical pupils in her eyes.⁷⁶ Thus, the Gorgon’s eyes and the *wælcyrge*’s eyes are just like the eyes of pit viper snakes. This reoccurring physical element suggests how deeply enmeshed with the serpentine and the venomous was the *wælcyrge* to the Anglo-Saxon mind.

By conveying the serpentine-eyes of the beast in a non-contextualized and believable manner, the translator employs the Valkyrie as synonymic to the Gorgon and takes a major step forward in demythologizing the *wælcyrge* to the Anglo-Saxon audience. Kim and Mittman argue that *The Wonders of the East* is a text that is fundamentally infused

with an “insistence on the real existence of the monstrous” in the lands to the east of Anglo-Saxon England.⁷⁷ In the same way that the Latin text posits a sense of foreboding and terror in the eyes of the Gorgon, the Anglo-Saxon text maintains that a beast, who sees with the eyes of a Valkyrie, roams the lands far to the east. To look this beast in the eyes, therefore, is to look into the eyes of the *wælcyrge*. As Campbell notes, the beasts of the marvelous world must be, at least in some sense, physically real if the audience is to marvel at them. The very nature of the *mirabilis* genre demands that these monsters be, in a sense, real or believable. The *mirabilis* genre *makes* them real. Thus, by virtue of her inclusion in this genre, the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge* has stepped out of the realm of the purely mythological and into the believable world. Somewhere, far beyond his own doorstep and the cobblestone roads which he has trod since boyhood, the Anglo-Saxon audience-member of the *mirabilis* knows, and fears, that the Valkyrie’s eyes *are* real. Should he travel too far into those eastern wastes, the Anglo-Saxon man might be unfortunate enough to experience the uncanny horror that arises from gazing into the *wælcyrrian eagan*.

The Pastoral-Type Wælcyrge

The demythologization of the English Valkyrie experiences a second phase of evolution as she occurs in the pastoral-type appearance, in which the English Valkyrie will abandon the marvelous form and distant abode erected for her in the *mirabilis*-type appearances and come to haunt the hamlets, stalk the streets, and work her corruptions among the denizens of eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon England.

The appearance of the fully-demythologized Valkyrie occurs in three texts. So similar are these appearances, that I will address them collectively, rather than individually

as I did with the gloss-type appearances. The first is the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, of Wulfstan. The second is the *Sermo ad Populum Dominicis Diebus*, which Wanley and Napier attribute to Wulfstan, but which has been shown by Bethurum and Jost to be written in the style of Wulfstan, but not by the homilist himself.⁷⁸ The third is the legal *Proclamation of 1020*, delivered by Cnut in Cirencester shortly after his 1019 return to England and published in the year 1020. Like the *Sermo ad Populum Dominicis Diebus*, the *Proclamation of 1020* has long been attributed to Wulfstan by some scholars, though others disagree. Sedgefield convincingly refutes the long-held assumption that Wulfstan was the sole hand behind the *Proclamation of 1020* in claiming that “the text of the manifest was obviously composed by one or more of the bishops, perhaps by Æthelnoth.”⁷⁹ When read side-by-side, these works reveal a striking similarity of function as regards the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge*. Wulfstan’s *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* describes the English Valkyrie thus:

*Her syndan þurh synleawa, awa hit þincan mæg, sare gelewede to manege on earde. Her syndan mannslogan and mægslagan and mæsserbanan and mynsterhatan; and her syndan mansworan and morþorwyrhtan; her syndan hadbreccan & aewbreccan, & ðurh siblegeru & ðurh mistlice forligeru forsyngode swyðe and her syndan myltestran and bearnmyrðran and fule forlegene horingas manegel and her syndan wiccan and wælcyrrian; and her syndan ryperas and reaferas and woroldstruderas and ðeofas and þeodscaðan and wedlogan and wærlogan and hrædest is to cweþenne, mana and misdæd ungerim ealra.*⁸⁰

Here are many throughout the land, as it seems, who have been sorely stained by sin. Here are manslayers and kin-slayers and priest-slayers and church-haters; and here are false oath-makers and those who work murder; and here are adulterers and whores, and incests who are very much corrupt and here are fornicators and child-killers and many varieties of whore and here are witches and Valkyries, and here are rapists and reavers and plunderers and thieves and enemies of the folk, and pledge-breakers and word-breakers and, to be brief, crimes and misdeeds of all unholy types.

The *Sermo ad Populum Dominicis Diebus* similarly displays the war-woman as a black-listed sinner running amok in the nation, spreading her corruption and working her dark arts to maleficent ends:

þæt syndon godes wiðersacan: morðwyrhtan, hlafordswican and manswaran, manslagan and mægslagan, cyrchatan and sacerdbanan, hadbreccan and æwbrecan, þeofas, ryperas and reaferas, unrihtthæmeras, þa fulan, þe forlætað heora cwenan and nimað oðre and þa þe habbað ma, þonne heora rihtæðelcwene, wyccan and wælcyrrian and unlybwyrhtan, unrihtdeman, þe demað æfre be þam sceatte and swa wendað wrang to rihte and riht to wrange.⁸¹

These are God's enemies: murder-workers, lord-betrayers, and traitors, Manslayers and kinsmen-slayers, church-haters and priest-killers, oath-breakers and word-breakers, thieves and rapists and reavers, unrighteous men, those who forsake their wives and take unto themselves another unworthy harlot over their rightful woman, witches and Valkyries and assassins, men who seem ever seeking wrong, and who twist wrong into right and right into wrong.

The *Proclamation of 1020* likewise portrays the *wælcyrge* as a fully-personified female entity who, like the other sinners and criminals plaguing the nation, threatens the integrity of the nation:

For ðam þe ealle biscopas secgað, þæt hit swyþe deop wið God to betanne, þæt man aðas oððe wedd tobrece. eac hy us furðor lærað, þæt we sceolon eallan magene & eallon myhton þone ecan mildan God inlice secan, lufian & weorðian & ælc unriht ascunian, ðæt synd mægslagan & morðslagan & mansworan & wiccean & wælcyrrian & æwbrecan & syblegeru.⁸²

For it is as the bishops say, that it is very much with God to be amended if one breaks an oath or a pledge. Further, they declare that we ought, with all our might and all our main, seek and love and honor God, who is mild, and all of us must avoid unrighteousness, the deeds of kin-slayers, manslayers and murderers and perjurers and witches and Valkyries and adulterers and incests.

What is immediately apparent between these three passages is the collocation of the witch and the Valkyrie: *wiccan and wælcyrrian*, *wyccan and wælcyrrian*, and *wiccean & wælcyrrian*.

Wulfstan constructs the *wiccan and wælcyrrian* binary as a pairing of mortal sinners who,

along with the other sinners listed in his litany, bring the wrath of a just God down on the English in the form of Viking atrocity. The anonymous homilist of the *Sermo ad Populum Dominicis Diebus* incorporates the same pairing of *femme fatales* in his treatise against the growing defamation of reverence for the Sabbath, which he sees at work in Christendom and which he positions at the center of his sermon. The *Proclamation of 1020* holds the *wiccean & wælcyrrian* as members of a sinner-cast whose malevolence and vice must be purged from among the Anglo-Scandinavian population of an increasingly diverse England.

The repetition in form and presentation of the Valkyrie between each of these texts is similar enough to suggest a single source behind the collocative phrases *wiccan and wælcyrrian*, *wyccan and wælcyrrian*, and *wiccean & wælcyrrian*. Dorothy Bethurum and Karl Jost adamantly argue for the influence of Wulfstan on both the *Sermo ad Populum Dominicis Diebus* and the *Proclamation of 1020*, yet both scholars sternly assert these texts to be the works of copycat scribes and not the work of Wulfstan himself. In pointing out the influence the Wulfstan's style would have over other scribes, Bethurum writes that "Wulfstan's purple passages were used to adorn miscellaneous sermons for a long time" after his delivery of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*.⁸³ Bethurum goes on to argue that Wulfstan's fingerprint, in the form of these "purple passages," may appear as "fragments in other manuscripts" such as "homily...57 on the observance of Sunday," the *Sermo ad Populum Dominicis Diebus*.⁸⁴ Further testament to the longevity and impact of Wulfstan's "purple passages" appears in the late 14th-century composition, "Cleanness," by the anonymous Gawain poet, who lists *wychez & walkyries* among the spiritual enemies of the Christian wayfarer:

*Clerkes out of Caldye þat kennest wer knauen,
As þe sage sathrapas þat sorsory couþe,*

*Wychez & walkyries wonnen to þat sale,
Deuinores of demorlaykes þat dremes cowþe rede,
Sorsers & exorsismus & fele such clerkes.*⁸⁵

In that Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* pre-dates all other usages of the collocation of witch & Valkyrie, I agree with Bethurum and Jost in ascribing the popularity of this "purple passage" to Wulfstan. What Wulfstan had in mind when constructing this "purple" collocation of witch and Valkyrie will reveal more about his perceived relationship between these two female figures.

Throughout the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, Wulfstan unwaveringly groups his sinners according to those who share kinship in the nature of their crimes. Wulfstan lists the *mannslagan* and *mægslagan* in collocation, "man-slayers and killers of kinsmen;" he conjoins *mæsserbanan* and *mynsterhatan*, who are the "murderers of priests" and "enemies of monasteries;" *mansworan* and *morþorwyrhtan*, the "false oath-takers" and "murder-planners;" and *myltestran* and *bearnmyrðran* and *fule forlegene horingas*, "whores" and "child-killers and... foul, fornicating adulterers." Criminals against men and family are grouped in binary collocation. Enemies of the clergy and the church are grouped together. Those who work malevolent deception are grouped according to like-kind, and sinners given to conjugal vices and filial destruction are conflated into a single group. It is reasonable to assume that Wulfstan would not deviate from this rhetorical framework when collocating *wiccan* and *wælcyrrian*. Wulfstan sees the *wælcyrrian* as a sinner-type worthy of collocation with *wiccan*, but the exact manner of this association remains unclear in the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* alone. I turn, therefore, to other Old English documents give fuller insight into the exact nature of the Old English witch and, by extension, her relationship to the Old English *wælcyrge*.

Witchcraft, within the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic, included a wide range of abilities. Bosworth-Toller define *wiccecræft* as “*necromantia*,” or the raising of the dead, and they list “*veneficio*,” or female assassin who kills by way of snake venom, as a synonym for *wicce*.⁸⁶ This penchant for the use of snake venom in the slaying or corrupting of humans is a recurring trope in the Anglo-Saxon conception of the *wælcyrge*. The glossaries in MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III and MS Cotton Julius B.VII hint at the connection of the witch to the snake by way of the obscure word *phytonessa* (*phitonissa*), or “snake-woman.”⁸⁷ The term *phytonessa* appears in each of these manuscripts as a Latin lemma glossed by the Old English *helrūnan*, which Bosworth-Toller, Thomas Wright, and J. R. Clark-Hall all agree is a common Anglo-Saxon common epithet for “witch.”⁸⁸ Thus, the Anglo-Saxon witch is the *phytonessa*, or snake-sorceress; she is the *veneficio* who kills by way of venom. Though it is not alluded to in Wulfstan, this penchant for the use of snake venom is the link that binds the *wiccan* to the *wælcyrrian* in the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic. Investigation into the wording of the *Sermo ad Populum Dominicis Diebus* bears out this association.

The *Sermo ad Populum Dominicis Diebus* furthers the perception of the *wælcyrge* as a woman who kills and corrupts by way of snake venom by erecting a tripartite collocation in which the witch and the Valkyrie appear with another female figure: *wyccan and wælcyrrian and unlybwyrhtan*. By bookending the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie with two varieties of venom-casters, the writer creates a three-part collocation that gives further information about the common link that associates all three of these figures. J. R. Clark-Hall defines *unlybwyrhtan* as “worker with spells or poisons.”⁸⁹ Bosworth-Toller define the *unlybwyrhtan* as “a poison maker; one who prepares poisons for the purposes of witchcraft... a *veneficus*.”⁹⁰ By being cast in the same collocation with the *wyccan* and the *unlybwyrhtan*, the *wælcyrrian* are

drawn into the light as figures who use venom to nefarious ends. This is, of course, not the first link between the *wælcyrge* and the venomous serpent. The underworld divinities functioning as the lemmata glossed by *wælcyrge* in the Cleopatra glossaries, *Tisiphona* and *Allecto*, were associated with venomous snakes writhing in their hair and venomous serpents as their weapons of corruption and destruction. The paronomastic relationship between Venus and *uenerum* also reflects the association of the *wælcyrge* with snake venom. Likewise, the translator of *The Wonders of the East* constructs a synonymic relationship between the *wælcyrge* and the Gorgon that is reminiscent of the role played by snake-eyes in the Gorgon myth and the serpentine-danger inherent in the eyes of the Valkyrie.

If the pastoral-type *wælcyrge* has a function that is threatening by way of venom, then she has a form that is even more dangerous. Charles Donahue believes that the tone and context of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* suggests that Wulfstan “had in mind not female divinities but human beings with supernatural powers.”⁹¹ All forms of the *wælcyrge* that I have investigated so far are dangerous, but the pastoral-type outstrips the others in that Wulfstan generates a two-fold rhetorical strategy for transforming the *wælcyrge* from an ethereal or spatially distant being into a fully corporeal human being, albeit with nefarious or even supernatural abilities.

In his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, Wulfstan exhorts his audience with a fierce tone of haste and urgency, and it is this tenor of urgency that comprises the first layer of Wulfstan’s demythologization of the *wælcyrge*. His repeated use of words such as *swyþe* “very much, fiercely, hastily” and phrases such as *ðeos worolde is on ofste* “this world is in haste” and *hit nealæcð þam ende* “it nears its end” instills in his audience an unremitting sense of

impending doom and present calamity.⁹² Wulfstan's rhetoric of severity and presence of his catalogued sinners creates a localized sense of danger. To the audience of the pastoral-type *wælcyrge*, murderers walk the streets, child-killers and fornicators slouch in back allies, witches and Valkyries work their venomous malevolence, and an angry God watches and reproves the entire nation. Moreover, Wulfstan sells these sinners and the wrath of God to his audience as absolute truth; he repeatedly use words like *soð* "truth" and *gecnawað* "to know" (in an amplified form, as the verb *cnawan* bears the intensifying *ge-* prefix) in order to add legitimacy and urgency to the elements in his homily.⁹³ Use of such rhetoric circumscribes doubt in the minds of the audience. Like the murderers and killers of the clergy who raid from the northern seas and extort money from the crown, the *wælcyrrian*, too, are a menacing race of wicked women who threaten the social cohesion and spiritual integrity of Anglo-Saxon England.

A second layer of rhetoric that Wulfstan employs to fully demythologize the *wælcyrge* is his exploitation of his station as archbishop. As Jonathan Wilcox argues, an audience in the northern see of York will accept what Wulfstan preaches to them unquestioningly.⁹⁴ Dorothy Bethurum posits that Wulfstan "exerted...wide political influence and exploited the possibilities of [his] position" to the utmost in his delivery of powerful and convincing homilies.⁹⁵ Bethurum adds that his persuasive power as an orator and his authoritative position as archbishop granted him "control [over] a large element of the population...[by] supplementing the Germanic conception of law as custom with the Christian conception of law as an approximation of divinely revealed justice."⁹⁶ As a spokesman and clerical intercessor for the "divinely revealed justice" of an angry God, Wulfstan promoted real world judgment and persecution of offenders against both secular

law and liturgical law. As such, his list of sinners is not merely a catalog of bad people. It is, rather, a call to arms for Christians and followers of the law to take action and root out the personages among their society responsible for calling down the vengeance of God.

Wulfstan uses and his authority to function as “watch and ward” over Anglo-Saxon Christendom.⁹⁷ His station as archbishop aided him greatly in his pursuit of his “prime function...[of] the protection of the people of God” with an overt sense of “justice and piety [as] his principle concerns.”⁹⁸ This exploitation of his political influence accounts for his conspicuous mentioning of the defamed Æðelræd to a population among whom support for the exiled king needed bolstering.⁹⁹ Wulfstan’s station as archbishop granted him the lateral freedom to identify and incriminate those people who were guilty of socially destructive sin. As figures listed among these abominable people, the *wælcyrrian* are indicted as living, corporeal citizens whose real-world crimes are, in part, responsible for the atrocities committed against the Anglo-Saxons by the Vikings and ordained by a vengeful God.

The *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* is not a document that was contested or scrutinized by contemporary listeners. It is a document delivered by an archbishop, sold as absolute truth, and swallowed wholesale by a fearful and obedient audience.¹⁰⁰ The rhetorical tone and word choice made by Wulfstan, coupled with the political and liturgical authority of Wulfstan as archbishop, makes real to an Anglo-Saxon audience the same *wælcyrge* figure that had formerly been relegated to the realms of mythology and wonder. By including them in his *Sermo*, Wulfstan fully extracts the race of the *wælcyrrian* from the mists of a mythological world and positions them among the tangible and corporeal world of criminals who are in violation of Anglo-Saxon law and the divine laws of Christendom.

Following in the tradition of Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, the anonymous *Sermo ad populum Dominicus Diebus* and the *Proclamation of 1020* likewise portray the *wælcyrge* as a real life personage of malevolent bent and wicked action. The view of the *wælcyrge* expressed in the pastoral-type appearances simultaneously maintains the Anglo-Saxon war-woman as a malignant killer who works her dark arts by way of serpent venom, and pulls her entirely from the realm of the supernatural and into the realm of the material.

In the forward to his *The Lost Gods of England*, Brian Branston argues in favor of employing more adroitly preserved Scandinavian material for the fuller illumination of fragmentary English myth. Using the Wayland story, which exists only as scattered shards in English sources, but which is much better documented in Norse material, Branston writes:

That we are able to solve the problem [of the Wayland story] is due to Norse writings...the unraveling of the threads of this myth forms a most instructive exercise which admonishes us that with outside help we may often clothe with flesh the bones of other Waylands embedded in our native [English] sources.

While Branston's sense of the value of Scandinavian material in the potential illumination of fragmentary English myth is not without value, I point to the inverse possibility. The case of the *wælcyrge* illustrates that excessive reliance on the better-preserved Scandinavian materials can work the opposite effect. Early scholars leapt at a proposition not unlike the one that Branston champions; a few bone shards of the native English *wælcyrge* were unearthed, and scholars made sense of them by layering them with the flesh of the Scandinavian *valkyrja*. But the graft has proven a poor one. The flesh does not fit as neatly as some scholars would have us believe, and the reconstructed being attested in Bosworth-Toller and others is not at all representative of the being who once lived and

lurked in the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic. No evidence remains that the English *wælcyrge* was ever a “chooser of the slain” as we see in the essence and office of the *valkyrja*; she is more than just, as Donahue vaguely posits, something “viewed with sensations of horror” by Anglo-Saxons afraid of a Danish war-goddess. She is not, in the writings of Wulfstan, merely a Norse-borrowing that is, as Dorothy Bethurum posits, “only to be expected” of a holy man delivering sermon to an Anglo-Scandinavian population in the northern see of York.¹⁰¹ Her complexities and native values run deep in the soil of Anglo-Saxon culture. She needs no sister to the north in order to be a fully valid and valuable, a uniquely specific and idiosyncratic, and a simultaneously mythological, wondrous, and real-world figure of Anglo-Saxon myth and folklore. Native English bones may have enough flesh on them still, if scholars care to inspect them more closely, to render a recognizable image of the mythological “Wayland” in question.

It is only by understanding this point that scholars of the Valkyrie tradition may recognize the English *wælcyrge* as a being fully independent from her Norse sister. In so doing, students of the Valkyrie tradition may read these beings for what they were within the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic. The *wælcyrge* was a native Anglo-Saxon race of monster. She was a poisoner and a corruptor in all her forms. She was so widely known and recognized among Anglo-Saxons that she was used by a rhetorician in a sermon aimed at the common populace. Though “scanty available evidences” of her remains, the *wælcyrge* was widely known in Anglo-Saxon England.¹⁰² Only by acknowledging the venomous form, evolving function, and complete demythologization, may modern scholars see in the *wælcyrge*, as Roy Liuzza posits in regard to the mysterious creatures and elements present in Anglo-Saxon literature, “signs of the work they once did in the culture that used them.”¹⁰³

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- ¹ Hall, *Elves*.
- ² See Lyle Campbell, *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction* Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2004: xix.
- ³ Hall, *Elves*, 77.
- ⁴ Stryker, "MS Cotton-Cleopatra A.III," 8.
- ⁵ Patrizia Lendinara, *Anglo-Saxon Glosses and Glossaries*. Brookfield, Ashgate, 1999: 6, See G. R. Wieland, *The Latin Glosses on Arator and Prudentius in Cambridge University Library ms G.5.35*. Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Studies and Texts 61 Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1983.
- ⁶ Lendinara, *Glossaries*, 6-7.
- ⁷ Lendinara, *Glossaries*, 1-2.
- ⁸ See Stryker "MS Cotton-Cleopatra A.III."
- ⁹ Thomas Wright *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies* ed. Richard Wülker. London, Trübner, 1884: 338, see also Philip Guthrie Rusche. "The Cleopatra Glossaries: An Edition with Commentary on the Glosses and their Sources" (dissertation) Yale University, 1996: 33-40.
- ¹⁰ See Wolfgang Kitterlick. "Die Glossen der Hs. British Library Cotton Cleopatra A.III: Phonologie, Morphologie, Wortgeographie." *Europäische Hochschulschriften: Reihe XIV, Angelsächsische Sprache und Literatur*. Frankfurt, Main, 1998.
- ¹¹ Wright, *Vocabularies*, 347.
- ¹² Wright, *Vocabularies*, 538.
- ¹³ Arthur Cottrell and Rachel Storm, *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Mythology*. London, Aarness, 2002: 41.
- ¹⁴ J. S. Ryan, "Othin in England: Evidence from the Poetry for a Cult of Woden in England" *Folklore* 74 (3) 1963: 469.
- ¹⁵ Stryker, "MS Cotton-Cleopatra A.III," 49.
- ¹⁶ Publi Vergili Maronis, *Aenedios*. ed. Oscar E. Aguilera. Universidad de Chile, Santiago, 1997: 238.
- ¹⁷ Vergil, *Aenedios*, 239.
- ¹⁸ Vergil, *Aenedios*, 239-40.
- ¹⁹ John Joseph Hannan Savage, "The Manuscripts of Servius's Commentary on Virgil" *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*. 45, 1934: 158. See also Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, Rochester, Boydell, 2009: 111, W. F. Bolton, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature: 597-1066* (2 vols.) London, Oxford University Press, 1967, Tom Burns Haber, *A Comparative Study of the Beowulf and the Aeneid*, London: Milford, 1931, R. B. Onians, "Review: A Comparative Study of the Beowulf and the Aeneid" *The Classical Review* 47 (5) 1933: 200-1.
- ²⁰ Wright, *Vocabularies*, 419.
- ²¹ Cottrell and Storm, *Mythology*, 44. Luke Roman and Monica Roman, *Encyclopedia of Greek and Roman Mythology*, Camden, Hartwell Press, 2010: 171-2.
- ²² Cottrell and Storm, *Mythology*, 44.
- ²³ Wright, *Vocabularies*, 360, 527. The name *Bellona* also appears in the tenth-century MS. Harley 3376, where she is defined in Latin terms and additionally glossed by the Old English *wylfen*. See Thomas Wright *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies* ed. Richard Wülker. London, Trübner, 1884: 192,194. Clark-Hall defines *wylfen* as "she-wolf." J. R. Clark-Hall. *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Toronto, University Toronto Press, 2000: 426.
- ²⁴ Cottrell & Storm, *Mythology*, 62. See also Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spaworth, eds. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005: 143.
- ²⁵ See Ammianus, Marcellinus. *The Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus: During the Reigns of the Emperors Constantius, Julian, Jovianus, Valentinian, and Valens*. Trans. C. D. Yonge. London, Bell, 1894: 370, Arthur Cottrell and Rachel Storm. *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Mythology*. London, Aarness, 2002: 44-45.
- ²⁶ Samuel Platner. *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*. Oxford, Oxford U. Press, 1929: 83.
- ²⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gesta II*, ed. Wolfgang Seyfarth. Lipsiac, Teubner, 1999: 191.
- ²⁸ Ammianus, Marcellinus. *The Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus: During the Reigns of the Emperors Constantius, Julian, Jovianus, Valentinian, and Valens*. Trans. C. D. Yonge. London, Bell, 1894: 612.
- ²⁹ See *Jómsvíkinga saga: Icelandic Text with English Translation* ed. N. F. Blake London, 1962: 35-37.
- ³⁰ See Patrizia Lendinara, *Anglo-Saxon Glosses and Glossaries*. Brookfield, Ashgate, 1999: 6, See G. R. Wieland, *The Latin Glosses on Arator and Prudentius in Cambridge University Library ms G.5.35*. Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Studies and Texts 61 Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1983, William Garlington

Stryker "The Latin-Old English Glossary in MS Cotton-Cleopatra A.III" (dissertation) Stanford, 1951, Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, Rochester, Boydell, 2009.

³¹ Wright, *Vocabularies*, 189.

³² Robert J. Edgeworth, "Vergil's Furies" *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (3) 1983: 367.

³³ Based on her sedentary function as a gatekeeper and her role as an avenging goddess who delivers retribution on the heads of criminals and murderers, some scholars, following in the tradition of Thomas Wright, posit that the glossing of *Tisiphona* in Plantin-Moretus 16.2 is a scribal error of transposition with *Parcae*, the Roman sisters of fate. The word *Parcae* is the Latin lemma immediately following *Tisiphona* in the glossary. Contextually, I find stronger physical syncretism between *Tisiphona* as an individual *wælcyrre* than the *Parcae* as a racial equivalent of the *wælcyrrian*, for the *Parcae* share very little physical or idiosyncratic syncretism with the English war-woman as we see her in other glosses, *The Wonders of the East*, or in the writings of Wulfstan and his admirers; short of, as Wright does, positing the untenable notion that the *Parcae* were the racial equivalent of the *Erinyes* in the Anglo-Saxon mind based solely on a theoretical scribal error, we may not read the *Parcae* as racial equals to the *wælcyrrian*.

³⁴ Vergil, *Aenedios*, 208.

³⁵ Vergil, *Aenedios*, 208.

³⁶ Numerous scholars have wrestled with the use of the word *agmina* ("column") here. Suggestive that there are legions of sisters, this word is in contrast to the classical perception that there were only three *Erinyes*: *Allecto*, *Tisiphona*, and *Megaera*. The indeterminate numbers potentially associated with these violent sisters is parallel to the vast ranks of *valkyrjur* we find in Scandinavian lore; while some sources claim that there are only as few as three to twelve Valkyries in the Scandinavian pantheon, other texts, such as the late 12th-century *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonr* of the *Poetic Edda*, for example, remembers 27 *valkyrjur*. As we will see in our investigation of the role of a swarm of flying, Valkyrie-figures in the Anglo-Saxon charms, the image of the Valkyrie in terms of her numbers is ever-changing; the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrige*, like the Greek *Erinyes* and the Norse *valkyrjur* comprise a legion of female figures whose ranks seem to swell and shrink indeterminately. See Robert J. Edgeworth. "Vergil's Furies" *The Harvard Theological Review* 76 (3) 1983: 365-367, J. H. Wasznick. "Agmina Furiarum" *The Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1) 1963: 7-11, Lee M. Hollander, trans. *Poetic Edda*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1996: 176.

³⁷ Vergil, *Aenedios*, 239.

³⁸ *Liber Monstrorum*, III.24, Andy Orchard, trans. *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript*. Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1995: 311.

³⁹ Hall, *Elves*, 54.

⁴⁰ Wright, *Vocabularies*, 524.

⁴¹ Arthur Simpson Napier. *Old English Glossaries*. Oxford, Clarendon, 1900: 1, 116.

⁴² See Arthur Simpson Napier. *Old English Glossaries*. Oxford, Clarendon, 1900: 1, 116. See Helmut Gneuss. *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*. Tempe, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies Press, 2000: 91, 151.

⁴³ Cottrell and Storm, *Mythology*, 20. See D. P. Simpson. *Cassell's Compact Latin-English Dictionary*. New York, Dell, 1963: 234.

⁴⁴ Wright, *Vocabularies*, 524.

⁴⁵ Clark-Hall, *Concise*, 222.

⁴⁶ Hall, *Elves*, 77.

⁴⁷ Napier. *Glossaries*. 116.

⁴⁸ Wright, *Vocabularies*, 524.

⁴⁹ Donahue, "War-Goddesses," 3.

⁵⁰ Chadwick, *Heroic*, 412 (n).

⁵¹ Mary S. Serjeantson. "The Vocabulary of Folklore in Old and Middle English" *Folklore* 47 (1) 1936: 59-60.

⁵² See D. P. Simpson. *Cassell's Compact Latin-English Dictionary*. New York, Dell, 1963: 234.

⁵³ Jean-Yves Tilliette. *Des Mots à la Parole: Una Lecture de la Poetria Nova de la Geoffroy de Vinsauf*. Geneva, Droz Press, 2000: 104.

⁵⁴ *Liber Monstrorum*, III. 24, Andy Orchard, trans. *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript*. Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1995: 311.

- ⁵⁵ Stryker, "MS Cotton-Cleopatra A.III," 67, J. R. Clark-Hall. *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000: 353, Joseph Bosworth and Thomas Northcote Toller. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Cambridge, Cambridge, 1898: 1029.
- ⁵⁶ Clark-Hall, *Concise*, 353.
- ⁵⁷ Ovid, *Fasti, Corpus Poetarum Latinorum*, ed. William Sidney Walker. London, Bell, 1875: 445.
- ⁵⁸ Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. Sir James George Frazer in Philipp Fehl, "Rueben's Feast of *Venus Verticordia*" *The Burlington Magazine*, 114 (828) 1972: 160.
- ⁵⁹ Donahue, "War-Goddesses," 5.
- ⁶⁰ William Garlington Stryker, "The Latin-Old English Glossary in MS Cotton-Cleopatra A.III" (dissertation) Stanford, 1951: 8.
- ⁶¹ See Andy Orchard. *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2003. Owing to the late date of composition of MS Bodleian 614, it is not considered as a relevant source for Anglo-Saxon understanding of the Valkyrie within this dissertation.
- ⁶² See Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*. New York, Zone, 2001.
- ⁶³ Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis*, 73.
- ⁶⁴ Susan M. Kim and Asa Simon Mittman. "Ungefrægelicu deor: Truth and the Wonders of the East" *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspective on Medieval Art* June (2) 2010: 1.
- ⁶⁵ Rudolf Wittkower. "'Marvels of the East': A Study in the History of Monsters" *Journal of the Warburg Courtauld Institutes* (5) 1942: 159.
- ⁶⁶ See Rudolf Wittkower. "'Marvels of the East': A Study in the History of Monsters" *Journal of the Warburg Courtauld Institutes* (5) 1942: 159-162. Wittkower notes that fourth-century B.C. Greek *mirabilis* texts came to dominate Western conceptions of India and the people, animals, monsters, and even the geography of the land there.
- ⁶⁷ Andy Orchard. *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2003: 177.
- ⁶⁸ Orchard, *Prodigies*, 190.
- ⁶⁹ Orchard, *Prodigies*, 191.
- ⁷⁰ Orchard, *Prodigies*, 176.
- ⁷¹ Kim and Mittman. *Ungefrægelicu*, 2. See also Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other-World: Exotic European Writing, 400-1600* Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988: 73.
- ⁷² Orchard, *Prodigies*, 186.
- ⁷³ Orchard, *Prodigies*, 187.
- ⁷⁴ Orchard. *Prodigies*, 176, Kim and Mittman, "Ungefrægelicu," 4. See also Joseph Bosworth and Thomas Northcote Toller. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1898: 1107.
- ⁷⁵ Constance B. Heatt, *Beowulf and Other Old English Poems*. New York, Bantam, 1988: 86.
- ⁷⁶ See Thalia Phillis Howe. "The Origin and Function of the Gorgon-Head" *American Journal of Archeology* 58 (3) 1954: 209-221.
- ⁷⁷ Kim and Mittman. "Ungefrægelicu," 3.
- ⁷⁸ For a discussion of Wanley's assessment of Wulfstan, see George. Hickes. *Linguarum Veterum Septentrionalium Thesaurus Grammatico-Criticus et Archeologicus* London, Sheldoniano, 1705: 140, Arthur Simpson Napier. *Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit*. Berlin, 1883: 291-9, Dorothy Bethurum. *The Homilies of Wulfstan*. Oxford, Clarendon, 1957, Karl Jost. *Wulfstanstudien*. Swiss Studies in English xxiii. Bern, Francke Ag Verlag, 1950.
- ⁷⁹ Walter John Sedgefield. *An Anglo-Saxon Prose Book*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1928: 282.
- ⁸⁰ Elaine M. Treharne. *Old and Middle English: c.-890-c.1400: An Anthology*. London, Blackwell, 2004: 232.
- ⁸¹ Felix Liebermann. *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*. Berlin, Halle, 1903-16: 274.
- ⁸² Sedgefield, *Prose*, 283-4.
- ⁸³ Bethurum, *Homilies*, 43.
- ⁸⁴ Bethurum, *Homilies*, 44.
- ⁸⁵ Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Alan Waldron. *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982: 175.
- ⁸⁶ Bosworth and Toller. *Dictionary*, 1213.
- ⁸⁷ Wright, *Vocabularies*, 472.

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- ⁸⁸ See Thomas Wright *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies* ed. Richard Wülker. London, Trübner, 1884: 472, Joseph Bosworth and Thomas Northcote Toller. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Cambridge, Cambridge, 1898: 526, J. R. Clark-Hall. *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000: 176. See also Alaric Hall. *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*. Rochester, Boydell, 2009: 86.
- ⁸⁹ Clark-Hall. *Concise*, 381.
- ⁹⁰ Bosworth and Toller, *Dictionary*, 1120.
- ⁹¹ Donahue, "War-Goddesses," 4.
- ⁹² Joyce Tally Lionarons. *The Homiletic Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan: A Critical Study*, Rochester, Boydell, 2010: 71. See also J. R. Clark-Hall. *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000: 333.
- ⁹³ Clark-Hall, *Concise*, 71.
- ⁹⁴ See Jonathan Wilcox. "Wulfstan's Sermo Lupi ad Anglos as Political Performance: 16 February 1014 and Beyond" ed. Matthew Townend. *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 10. Turnhout, Brepols, 2004: 375-96. Wilcox notes how influential Wulfstan's political position as archbishop of the northern see was in the delivery of his homilies; the level of copycat rhetoric, according to Wilcox, rose sharply after Wulfstan took the office of archbishop of York and delivered his most famous sermon there in February of 1014.
- ⁹⁵ Bethurum, *Homilies*, 69.
- ⁹⁶ Bethurum, *Homilies*, 72, 78.
- ⁹⁷ Bethurum, *Homilies*, 77.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁹ Wilcox, "Political," 390-2.
- ¹⁰⁰ See Dorothy Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan*. Oxford, Clarendon, 1957, Angus McIntosh. *Wulfstan's Prose*. Folcroft, Folcroft, 1970.
- ¹⁰¹ Bethurum, *Homilies*, 78.
- ¹⁰² Donahue, "War-Goddesses," 3.
- ¹⁰³ Roy M. Liuzza. ed. *Old English Literature*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002: xIII.

Chapter Three:

Spear-Women and Swan-Maidens: The *Wælcyrrian* in the Anglo-Saxon Charms & Riddles

In the last chapter, I argued that the named appearances of the *wælcyrge* preserve more aspects of the Anglo-Saxon war-woman than previous scholars have considered. Her personal attributes of being a woman who uses poison or the venom of serpents to work harm against mankind is a repeated trope, as is her ability to literally or metaphorically twist the hearts of men. I demonstrated that the application of Scandinavian elements of the *valkyrja* to illuminate the Old English *wælcyrge* has long obscured critical estimation of the *wælcyrge*. Despite etymological similarity, the *wælcyrge* is nowhere evidenced to be the same as the *valkyrja*. Scholarly belief that the *wælcyrge* is the same as the *valkyrja* has hindered studies that seek to differentiate the two beings.

In this chapter, I investigate the unnamed appearances of the *wælcyrge*. These are figures in the corpus who bear the characteristics of the war-woman, but who are not identified by name. Instead, these *wælcyrge* figures may be signified by adjectival epithets suggestive of their character or suggestive of the role they fulfill in the works in which they appear. The unnamed figure of the *wælcyrge* occurs six times in Anglo-Saxon literature. Twice she appears in the charms, twice in the riddles, and twice, in the form of two characters who play major roles in the poem, in *Beowulf*. In the charms, the unnamed *wælcyrrian* are the stuff of folk tradition. They are invisible workers-of-malice who inflict pain and suffering with their unseen spears, and who must be banished through the healer's *rūncræft* in order for the afflicted person to find succor from the insubstantial attackers. In the riddles, the *wælcyrge* appears once as a possible answer to a riddle that

hints at water, war-craft, and womanhood, and once as a possible distractor, meant to confuse the person being riddled away from the actual answer. In *Beowulf*, Wealhþeow and Grendel's mother function as Valkyrie figures and are integral to the narrative construction of the first half of the poem. In this chapter, I will dissect the presence of the *wælcyrrian* in the charms and the riddles. I will address the matter of the unnamed Valkyries in *Beowulf* in chapter four.

My primary purpose in this chapter is two-fold. In the first section, I argue in favor of the wide diversity of valuation placed on the *wælcyrge* by differing social strata in Anglo-Saxon England. In investigating the charms, I will attempt to demonstrate that the representations of the unnamed *wælcyrge* are imbued with the properties of non-Christian Anglo-Saxon folklore. In the charms, the *wælcyrge* is represented in a manner befitting a pre-Christian monster that must be dealt with in pre-Christian terms. A fundamental part of the faith-healer's worldview of sickness and wellness, the unnamed *wælcyrge* factors into the ceremonial cure against a sudden pain in the afflicted. As such, she is invoked and exorcised by the healer through the recitation of the charms in which she is an element. The *wælcyrge* in the charms demonstrates how radically different are the perceptions of different tiers of Anglo-Saxon society toward the figure of the war-woman. While the clerical leaders of the church condemn the *wælcyrge* as a human among the black-listed sinners who made "England... corrupt to the breaking point," the healers and herb-masters who remember the *wælcyrge* in their medicinal charms view her as an equally mortal enemy who exists not in a Christian cosmology, but in a Germanic system in which the entire world is "alive with spiritual entites," the exorcism of which follows folk, not Christian, formulae.¹ In the homilies in which she occurs, the *wælcyrge* is part of the

Christian cosmology: a living human being capable, through her vices, of bringing down the wrath of the Christian God. In the charms, however, the *wælcyrge* is a part of a non-Christian cosmology. The war-woman of the Anglo-Saxon charms is embraced by the laity as a spectral force of pain and malevolence, but not as a figure to be purged or hated, as is promoted by the writings of the clergy. Through her inclusion in medicinal and folk remedies, the *wælcyrge* appears not as she was railed against by the bishops in the homilies of the eleventh century, but as she had long been seen by the lay-healers and folk of Anglo-Saxon England. Karen Jolly has shown that the charms are written by learned clerics and imbued to some extent and in some instances with Christian elements. However, these charms are what Jolly calls “middle practices” between Germanic, pre-Christian magic and post-Conversion, Christian miracles.² As such, elements of the non-Christian in the charm remain viable during the period in which the “middle practices” are enacted by the healers and laity of Anglo-Saxon England. Thus, the written charms reflect the non-Christian elements of healing and exorcism still being acknowledged and embraced in post-Conversion Anglo-Saxon England.

In the second section of this chapter, I argue that presence of the *wælcyrge* in the riddles reflects a widespread conception of the war-woman prevalent among the common class in Anglo-Saxon England. Scholarly consensus has long held that the Valkyrie was possessed of her greatest aesthetic currency in medieval Scandinavia. Hilda Ellis Davidson summarizes this in writing that the Valkyrie is a supernatural figure “who play[s] a considerable role in the literature of medieval Scandinavia, Denmark, and Iceland,” but she gives little attention to the role that the Old English form played in Anglo-Saxon England.³ By comparison to the *valkyrja* remembered in literary and material culture in medieval

Scandinavia, the amount of evidence showcasing the *wælcyrge* in Anglo-Saxon England is scant, indeed. This paucity of surviving evidence, however, is not an accurate measure by which to qualify the popularity of the *wælcyrge* in Anglo-Saxon England. Paull Baum has shown that the Anglo-Saxon riddles “must be regarded as popular” in their themes and imagery.⁴ The repeated presence of the *wælcyrge* in these texts is representative of the widespread currency that the *wælcyrge* possessed in Anglo-Saxon England. By virtue of the function of the riddles as texts that hinge on the familiar and the everyday, and the inclusion of the *wælcyrge* in this genre, knowledge of the *wælcyrge* may be regarded as widespread among the common folk of Anglo-Saxon England. Thus, section two of this chapter argues that the scant quantity of literary and artistic evidence preserving the *wælcyrge* after the medieval period is not a correlative of the popularity of the *wælcyrge* during the medieval period. The inclusion of the *wælcyrge* in the riddles suggests that the *wælcyrge* was a much more culturally viable and popular concept to the Anglo-Saxons than previous scholars have considered.

If scholars of the Valkyrie tradition are to recreate, as fully and as accurate as is possible, the form and function of the *wælcyrge* to the Anglo-Saxons, then the presence of the unnamed form of the war-woman must be considered. As she appears in the Germanic rituals of the medicinal charms and the casual, non-religious tone of the riddles, the *wælcyrge* presents two more facets of her being. She was a popular image to common people, and she was not imbued with the profoundly negative sense of evil which Wulfstan and his stylistic followers ascribe to her in the homiletic sources. The *wælcyrge* was valued differently and viewed by different tiers of society. By investigating the non-Christian use

of the *wælcyrge* in Anglo-Saxon England, scholars may better understand the Old English war-woman and the purposes she served in the culture that used her.

The Wælcyrge in the Anglo-Saxon Charms

The Anglo-Saxon charms are short incantations designed to address and cure the ailments of afflicted persons by way of both the performance of magic and the application of herbal medicine. The charms, the lion's share of which occur in "a Northumbrian manuscript of the late eleventh century," showcase the medicinal and magical beliefs of the Anglo-Saxons at a time when the conversion of England was not absolute.⁵ Christianity on the island was in flux; numerous political events gave rise to larger and smaller scales of backsliding against Church doctrine and these events brought about spikes in the popularity and practice of non-Christian theology.⁶ During the second wave of Viking incursion against England during the tenth century, heathen customs and rituals on English soil became so popular that critics now refer to this period as an era of "neo-paganism," in which the old rites and faiths were resurrected within the borders of Christendom.⁷ The earliest oral formulation of the charms predates the era of neo-paganism, but as they are preserved in later manuscripts, the charms reflect a culture that has long been in religious flux. In the late state in which they are preserved, the charms as folk-formulae reflect neo-pagan elements, Christian elements, and most rarely, pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon native spiritual elements.

The charms in MS Harley 585 are comprised of elements, images, and language that derive from a number of cultural traditions. Brian Branston writes that the Anglo-Saxon healing charms are "a mixture of Old English, Latin, Greek, Celtic, Hebrew, and Norse

elements sometimes reduced to plain gibberish, with a superficial Christianization to add to the confusion.”⁸ These works are, according to Kevin Crossley-Holland, “short incantations that are...the oldest surviving pieces of Germanic literature” that seem to “hark[en] straight back to the time of pagan religious practices” before the entirety of England was Christian.⁹ The charms contain many aspects of native Anglo-Saxon folk tradition during a time when Christian principles and Augustinian conversionary practices were otherwise desolating the cosmologies indigenous to the people of the North.

The Church’s struggle against heathen survival and revival in Anglo-Saxon England is evidenced in numerous medieval documents. Alcuin’s famous letter to the Mercian bishop Speratus, decrying the use of Christian learning to record tales of the heroes, for example, suggests, as Daniel Donoghue posits in regard to pagan stories of Germanic antiquity, “that the pagan [traditions] continued... well after the Anglo-Saxons converted to Christianity.”¹⁰ William A. Chaney gives a detailed description of the religious rituals of the heathen that perpetuate throughout the North long after the official conversion to Christianity.¹¹ Peter Hunter Blair summarizes the Church’s policies against the literary preservation of non-Christian dogma and images in writing that “it was against the interests of the Church that knowledge of heathen ways should be perpetuated in writing and as consequence, references to heathenism in the written records are generally to its suppression and only on rare occasions, to the details of its practices.”¹² While most works of the Anglo-Saxon period were sanitized by the Christian clerics who wrote and transcribed them, filtering out “knowledge of heathen ways” as they went, the charms, at least in some instances, escaped such cultural and spiritual erasure. Jolly shows that “although Christian authors condemned pagan charms as magic, they allowed those

remedies using Christian words and rituals with herbs,” which explains why Germanic occult imagery survived into writing from the oral tradition.¹³ Through this phenomenon, multiple Anglo-Saxon charms preserve many aspects of the very same heathen faith and practice that the Church sought so ardently to eradicate from written texts.

John Richardson cites the edict of Gregory to Abbot Mellitus to place Christian relics in the heathen places of worship upon the island, and notes that “metaphorically, *Wið Færstice* is an instantiation of Gregory the Great’s injunction to place churches in the pagan places of worship” in England during the earliest days of conversion.¹⁴ He writes that the heathen figures and elements in the charms are a syncretic form of Christianity, and that “*Wið Færstice*... is a web of closely connected pagan images over which control is gained by the Christian God.”¹⁵ In much the same way that Wulfstan weaves the *wælcyrge* into the Christian mythos of his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, the war-woman in charms hints at a non-Christian element (and, by extension, a marginally or imperfectly Christian audience who recognizes her) having value within a Christian paradigm. Richardson’s assertions that the *Wið Færstice* charm is a work incorporating both non-Christian elements and Christian overlay very much supports my reading of the charm as revelatory of the form and function of the *wælcyrge* to the Anglo-Saxon who works in or is familiar with the healing charms. That the work in the charms is a form of part-heathen and part-Christian spiritualism is evidenced in Ælfric’s homilies:

Se wisa Augustinus cwæð, þæt unpleolic sy þeah hwá læce-wyrte ðicge; ac þæt hé tælð to unalyfedlicere wíglunge, gif hwá ða wyrta on him becnitte, buton he hí to ðam dolge gelecge. Þeah-hwæðere ne sceole we urne hiht on læce-wyrtum besettan, ac on ðone Ælmihtigan Scyppend, þe ðam wyrtum ðone cræft forgeaf. Ne sceal nan man mid galdre wyrte besingan, ac mid Godes wordum hí gebletsian, and swa ðicgan.¹⁶

The wise Augustine said that it is not dangerous if one eats a medicinal herb; but condemns it as an illegal charm if one ties herbs on himself, unless he lays them on a sore. Nevertheless, we should not set our faith on medicinal herbs, but on the Almighty Creator, who has given the craft to those herbs. Nor shall anyone enchant an herb with a charm, but with God's word shall he bless it, and so eat it.¹⁷

That Ælfric feels it is necessary in this homily to spell out the difference between the Godly use of herbs and the ungodly, or illegal enchanting of the herbs with the charm, suggests that as late as the early eleventh century, the charms comprised a fundamentally non-Christian ritual that was in sore need of replacement by the blessings of God. Ælfric here expresses the active and necessary need for change in Anglo-Saxon society; were the charms as perfectly Christian as some scholars seem to believe, the homilies of this kind, which actively seek further transformation among the rituals of the folk, would long since have become moot in Anglo-Saxon England.¹⁸

As a genre of writing that preserves many heathen elements, the charms provide unique insight into the Germanic elements of the non-Christian religion, mythology, and worldview that existed alongside, and in syncretism with Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England. As Karen Jolly writes, "the charm remedies found in late Anglo-Saxon medical manuscripts provide a rare glimpse into the intermingling of a Christian worldview and Germanic folklore."¹⁹ Jolly has shown how a close reading of the charms may be helpful in illuminating creatures and images present in these texts, which reflect the "intermingling of a Christian worldview and Germanic folklore" of which Jolly writes. Jolly's research addresses the *ylfe*, the "elves," which, like the Valkyrie, are poorly understood in Anglo-Saxon writing, but which are more widely remembered in later, Old Norse writings. Similar insight into the Anglo-Saxon conception of the *wælcyrge* may be elucidated from closer

investigation of the charms with consideration for how the war-woman manifests within these texts.

The charms seem to reflect the war-woman as she was received by a different demographic of Anglo-Saxon society from the clergy. Within the rhetoric of the clergy, the named *wælcyrge* was a human figure, but in the charms, the unnamed form is a non-corporeal, supernatural figure. What distinguishes the appearances of the war-woman in the charms is the sense of native heritage that is preserved in this genre. In the charms, the *wælcyrge* appears much as one would imagine she did to the rune-master and the *wiccan* against whom Wulfstan rails in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. Here, the *wælcyrge* is portrayed as an elemental part of everyday existence. She is a necessary component of the invisible world of human sickness and wellness, and the methodology by which she must be combated in the charms seems to reveal a “Germanic... system with specific beliefs about the cosmos, nature, and the way human beings relate to both.”²⁰ By understanding the specific context and function of the *wælcyrge* in the charms, scholars of the Valkyrie tradition may read another layer of signification and social value to the *wælcyrge* in the Old English literary consciousness.

The *wælcyrge* appears twice in the Anglo-Saxon charms. One of her appearances is in MS Harley 585, the *Lacnunga* book of medicinal recipes, compiled “around the end of the tenth century.”²¹ The war-woman appears in charm A₁, or, *Wið Færstice*, “Against a Sudden Stitch.” *Wið Færstice* record the Old English Valkyrie in the following manner:

*Wið færstice feferfuige and seo reade netele, ðe þurh ærn inwyxð, and
wegbrade; wyll in buteran.
Hlude wæran hy, la, hlude, ða hy ofer þone hlæw ridan,
wæran anmode, ða hy ofer land ridan.
Scyld ðu ðe nu, þu ðysne nið genesan mote.
Ut, lytel spere, gif her inne sie.*

*Stod under linde, under leohtum scylde,
 þær ða mihtigan wif hyra mægen beræddon,
 and hy gyllende garas sændan;
 ic him oðerne eft wille sændan,
 fleogende flane forane togeanes.
 Ut, lytel spere, gif hit her inne sy.
 Sæt smið, sloh seax,
 lytel iserna, wund swiðe.
 Ut, lytel spere, gif her inne sy.
 Syx smiðas sætan, wælspera worhtan.
 Ut, spere, næs in, spere.
 Gif her inne sy isernes dæl,
 hægtessan geweorc, hit sceal gemyltan.
 Gif ðu wære on fell scoten oððe wære on flæsc scoten
 oððe wære on blod scoten, oððe wære on ban scoten,
 oððe wære on lið scoten, næfre ne sy ðin lif atæsed;
 gif hit wære esa gescot oððe hit wære ylfa gescot
 oððe hit wære hægtessan gescot, nu ic wille ðin helpan.
 Þis ðe to bote esa gescotes, ðis ðe to bote ylfa gescotes,
 ðis ðe to bote hægtessan gescotes; ic ðin wille helpan.
 Fleah þær... on fyrgenheafde.
 Hal westu, helpe ðin drihten.
 Nim þonne þæt seax, ado on wætan.²²*

Against a sudden stitch, feverfew and the red nettle that grows by means of a building, and plantain; boil in butter.

Loud were they--oh! loud, When they over the barrow rode,
 They were fierce-minded when they rode over the land.
 Shield yourself now; you can withstand this strife.
 Out, little spear, if there is one here within.
 Stood under a linden-wood shield, under a light shield,
 Where those mighty women readied their might,
 And they screaming spears sent.
 I to them another will soon send,
 A flying spear ahead in opposition
 Out, little spear, if there is one here within.
 Sat a smith, sharpening a seax,
 Little iron, very wonderful.
 Out, little spear, if you are here within.
 Six smiths sat, slaughter-spears wrought.
 Out, spear, not in, spear.
 If a piece of iron is within you,
 The *hægtessan*'s work, it must melt.
 If you were in the skin shot, or in the flesh shot
 Or in the blood shot, or were in the bone shot,
 Or in the limb shot, may your life never be harmed.

If it were shot of the *ēse* or if the shot of elves,
 Or if it were the shot of the *hægtessan*, now I will help you.
 This is remedy for *ēse* shot, this is remedy for elf shot,
 This is remedy for *hægtessan* shot; I will help you.
 Fly there... on mountain's top.
 Hale be you, help of the Lord.
 Then take that seax, put it in liquid.

The affliction against which *Wið Færstice* is a ward, is considered by most scholars to be side-stitches or possibly the onset of general bodily aches and pains for which no obvious, external injury is visible. Felix Grendon writes that *Wið Færstice* “is intended to cure a sudden twinge or stitch, possibly rheumatism.”²³ Francis Peabody Magoun Jr. believes that the ailment of the *færstice* is “conceivably...lumbago.”²⁴ This suffering is believed by both the charm-healer who performs the ceremony of the *Wið Færstice* charm, as well as the afflicted person seeking the charm-healer’s curative arts, to be the result of invisible “shots sent by... spirits flying through the air.”²⁵ These “spirits flying through the air” were considered “witches” or “elves” by Felix Grendon. Magoun furthers Grendon’s elf-theory in writing that these “women are malefic supernatural beings, perhaps to be viewed as dark elves or the like.”²⁶ The interpretation that the female figures in *Wið Færstice* are dark elves, however, is anachronistic. Alaric Hall has shown that the Northern conception of the “dark elf” (ON *døkkálfar*) is a creation of Snorri Sturluson which post-dates the Anglo-Saxon charms by nearly 300 years, and which has no direct corollary in the mythology of Anglo-Saxon England. Helen Damico and Alaric Hall view the violence-makers in *Wið Færstice* as Valkyries.²⁷ Richard North writes that these spirits “were imagined in England as female beings analogous to the late Norse *valkyrjur*.”²⁸ While I cannot agree with North’s claim that the figures in the charms are entirely “analogous” to the *valkyrjur*, I think he is correct in assuming that these figures are the English Valkyries, the *wælcyrge*.

The second appearance of the *wælcyrge* in the charms comes in charm A₄, *Wip Ymbe*, or “Against Swarming Bees,” which occurs in MS Corpus Christi 41 and describes a ritual by which honey bees may be prevented from aggressively swarming. This charm has been shown by Bernhard Bischoff and Rosamund McKitterick to be very similar in form and function to the Latin bee charm, and the German *Lorsch* bee charm, dating to the ninth century.²⁹ McKitterick warns, however, that reading later Germanic literature as straight translation from its Latin precursors is risking oversimplification.³⁰ Kevin Crossley-Holland notes that A₄ may be “concerned with remed[ying] against...the witchcraft that may lie behind the swarming of bees.”³¹ It is difficult, however, to imagine that the charm-master in this charm aims his ritual at anything other than the bees themselves. Like the *Wið Færstice* charm, *Wip Ymbe* references virulent, flying females as the agents of malice within the verse. The text of the *Wip Ymbe* charm reads thus:

*Wið ymbe nim eorþan, oferweorp mid þinre swiþran
 handa under þinum swiþran fet, and cwet:
 Fo ic under fot, funde ic hit.
 Hwæt, eorðe mæg wið ealra wihta gehwilce
 and wið andan and wið æminde
 and wið þa micelan mannes tungan.
 And wiððon forweorp ofer greot, þonne hi swirman, and cweð:
 Sitte ge, sigewif, sigað to eorþan!
 Næfre ge wilde to wuda fleogan.
 Beo ge swa gemindige mines godes,
 swa bið manna gehwilc metes and eþeles.*

Take earth, with your right hand
 throw it under your right foot, and say:
 "I take under foot; I have located it.
 Lo, earth is potent against every sort of creature,
 And against hatred and against forgetfulness,
 And against the mighty spell of man."

Throw gravel over them when they swarm, and say,
 "Alight, victory-dames, sink to the ground!"

Never fly wild to the woodland!
 Be as mindful of my profit
 As is every man of food and home."³²

Charms A₁ and A₄ seem to grant insight into the perception of the *wælcyrían* by the charm-masters, and give critics of the Valkyrie tradition deeper insight into the place occupied by the *wælcyrge* in the literary aesthetic and mythological consciousness of the demographic of Anglo-Saxons who concerned themselves with the charms as the “middle practices” between Germanic magic and Christian miracle. This insight may be traced through three major evidences: 1.) the adjectival epithets by which the *wælcyrían* are called in the charms hint at religious obeisance, 2.) the invisibility of the *wælcyrían*, coupled with their ability to interact with the physical world, suggests a semi-corporeal, semi-ethereal nature which will be reflected in later, Old Norse iterations of the Valkyrie tradition, and 3.) the martial manner with which the *wælcyrían* conduct their attacks positions them in alignment with the gloss-type *wælcyrían*. These bodies of evidence suggest that numerous, pre-Christian qualities of the *wælcyrían* survived the Church’s purge of the “knowledge of heathen ways” in Anglo-Saxon England and reflect the manner in which the “imperfectly Christian” demographic of Anglo-Saxon faith-healers viewed the war-woman.³³

The first element for consideration is the epithetical manner in which the *wælcyrían* are addressed in the charms. In the named-appearances discussed in chapter two, the Old English Valkyrie was called by a number of alternate spellings of her racial identifier. In the charms, however, the war-woman is referenced exclusively by epithets that substitute for her name, give further information about her character, and give further information about how she is viewed by the charm-masters who practice the rituals in which the *wælcyrían* appear.

In *Wið Færstice*, the Valkyries are described as *mihtigan wif*, “mighty women” and in *Wiþ Ymbe*, they are referred to as *sigewyf*, “victory-women.” The epithet *mihtigan wif* implies the power and virulence inherent in the *wælcyrge* figures, while *sigewyf* “is an appellation of the Valkyries” designating them as victorious figures.³⁴ In both cases, the language used to name the *wælcyrrian* is akin in nature to the epithets and kennings of heroic praise poetry. The terms *sigewyf* and *mihtigan wif* are two-word kenning constructions, more often associated with praise poetry than any other genre in the Old English corpus. In calling the Valkyries exclusively by honorific epithets, the author of the charms pays them respect and gives testament to both the glory of their station as “victorious-women” and “mighty women,” while at the same time designating himself as learned enough in lore to recognize these female figures for exactly whom they were and to wield power over them within the scope of the charm. By calling a deity to be dispelled or overcome by an epithetical name that is reflective of that deity’s powers or identity, the charm-master will exercise greater power over the deity and be more apt to dispel it.³⁵

If this is true, then the presence of the Valkyrie-figure in the “magical, native pharmacopeia” of the charms is indicative of the reverence for the *wælcyrrian* that was once predominant in Anglo-Saxon England.³⁶ The charm-master’s use of honorific epithets to both honor and hold sway over the *wælcyrrian* suggest a survival of Valkyrie-veneration surviving late into Saxon England. Moreover, *Wið Færstice* is an “exorcismal” charm, requiring the banishment of evil forces as prerequisite to curing the afflicted. Of this quality, Felix Grendon notes that one of the critical elements in the ability of the charm-master to cure the ailment of the afflicted is in the diagnosis of the ailment through proper invocation of the divine malignities responsible for the victim’s pain.³⁷ Proper execution of

the exorcism-charm involving gods or divinities required appropriate pacification or cozening of the deity. Of the epithets used in charms A₁ and A₄, Grendon writes that the honorific kennings of *mihtigan wif* and *sigewyf* were “probably used... with the idea of mollifying or conciliating” the malevolent spirits into granting the charm-master his or her request and abandoning their campaign against the afflicted.³⁸ Only after the charm-master had successfully mollified the *wælcyrrian*, could he exorcise the malevolent war-women and cure the patient who suffered under their attacks.

Jolly has shown that the use of honorific or periphrastic epithets has long accompanied cult ritual as a way of designating a divinity’s qualities or character, and has long been condemned by the Church in England, especially by such outspoken missionaries as Ælfric of Eynsham, who vehemently decried the invocation of heathen deities in the treating of spiritual and physical maladies.³⁹ In the case of the Valkyries in the charms, the adjectival epithets of *mihtigan wif* and *sigewyf* reflect those figures’ “mythological importance and physical ability to wound or to do harm” in the physical world.⁴⁰ Honorific epithets also suggest respect, obeisance, and reverence on the part of the speaker. This phenomenon also explains why the homiletic writers never call the *wælcyrge* anything other than her objective, racial identifier. To call the war-woman by a praise-epithet is to speak of her in the same manner as the non-Christian and to acknowledge the being’s power, a practice which is strictly condemned by the Church fathers. The willingness of the healers to engage with the Old English Valkyrie in spiritual combat suggests that, much like the Church fathers, the healers saw the war-woman as an enemy of mankind. The Germanic, heroic terminology by which *Wið Færstice* and *Wiþ Ymbe* refer to the Valkyrie, however, “demonstrates a considerable amount of assimilation between [the] opposing”

forces of Christianity and pre-Christian ritual.⁴¹ The lay healers and exorcists who worked in the charms were not willing to objectively refer to the war-woman by the word “*wælcyrge*” as was the Church. Likewise, they were unwilling to fail to mollify the Valkyrie in their attempts to dispel her. By late Saxon England, this demographic of Anglo-Saxon persons still viewed the Valkyrie as a powerful and destructive deity who must be dealt with under very specific conditions if she was to be successfully exorcised. The formal Church, as suggested by Wulfstan’s reference to the *wælcyrrian*, was not willing to participate in such a tradition.

Under both institutions of the formal Church and the popular Germanic cosmology embraced by the charm-healer, the *wælcyrge* was a malevolent force that must be banished. The major difference between the two systems is the prognostic manner in which the war-woman is approached. The Christian church goes about exorcising the *wælcyrge* by calling her by name, identifying her as one of the many sinners who incur the wrath of God upon the English nation, and condemning her as an evil being that must be ward against by the Christian faithful. Operating under a system of Germanic folk tradition, the charm-healer of late Anglo-Saxon England deals with the *wælcyrge* in very different terms. By acknowledging the *wælcyrge* as a supernatural and very powerful being, and by “mollifying or conciliating” the war-woman through the use of heroic, epithetical language, the charm-master banishes the *wælcyrge* according to the parameters of traditional “Germanic lore” that was, by the eleventh century, still alive and functional in Anglo-Saxon England.⁴² The language used to reference the *wælcyrge* in the charms gives excellent example of how, as Jolly writes, “the line between the formal [Christian] and popular [non-Christian] was... [very] fluid. Any given practice or idea could have moved

from the realm of popular religion to formal religion and back.”⁴³ The linguistic treatment given the *wælcyrge* by both Wulfstan and the “imperfectly Christian” charm-healers, is one such practice.

A second thread of evidence granting scholars insight into the cultural value of the *wælcyrrian* in the charms is the semi-ethereal nature of the Valkyries. The charm-master who recites the *Wið Færstice*, does battle against a force that is entirely supernatural in its essence, yet corporeal in its ability to act upon the human senses and inflict pain upon the human body. That the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie is even present and afflicting a person is evidenced only in the pain the beings inflict, not through any sensory input on the part of the afflicted. The *wælcyrrian* are not visible, audible, or tangible in any way to the commoner; only the charm-master can detect the *mihtigan wif* causing the problems. The ability of the Valkyrie to go unseen and unheard by most people, but to nevertheless have the power to enact significant damage on the physical world, is inherent in her appearance in *Wið Færstice*. But to the charm-master, the malevolent *wælcyrrian* have definite physical form.

The first line of *Wið Færstice* notes that the charm-master can hear the *wælcyrrian*, for the charm says *hlude wæran hy, la, hlude, ða hy ofer þone hlæw ridan*, “loud they were, lo, loud when they came riding over the barrow.” The charm conjures a sense of aurality in this line, suggesting that the charm-master can hear the cries and the movements of the charging *wælcyrge*, though the sorely afflicted victim cannot. A few lines later, the aurality of the *wælcyrrian* is again highlighted, as the charm states that the *wælcyrrian* are *gyllende*, “screaming” when they send their spears flying into the flesh of their victim. This semi-

corporeal, semi-ethereal existence of the Valkyrie is revisited in the later, Old Norse tradition of the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries.

In the *Jómsvíkinga Saga*, the would-be hero of the saga, Sigvaldi, is beset by a similarly quasi-ethereal Valkyrie hag named *Ðorgerðr Hölgabrúðr*. In much the same way that the charm-master of *Wið Færstice* alone can see and hear the *mihtigan wif* who threaten the afflicted, the text of *Jómsvíkinga Saga* notes that only certain men can see the malevolent *Ðorgerðr Hölgabrúðr*. As the wicked hag attacks the Viking fleet, the saga notes that only very few men can see the malevolent *valkyrja*: *Það er sagt að Hávarður höggvandi, förunautur Búa, sér fyrstur manna hvar Hörðabrúður er í liði Hákonar jarls, og margir sjá það ófreskir menn, og svo þeir er eigi voru ófreskir*, “It is said that Hávard the Hewer was first to see *Ðorgerðr Hölgabrúðr* above the fleet of Earl Hákon, and then many second-sighted men saw her, though other men could not see [her].” This selective ability of people to see the war-woman is a unique attribute of the *wælcyrge* that is expressed in the charms, but nowhere else in the corpus.

The goddesses for whom the *wælcyrge* is a gloss are not beings that are visible to human beings. Allecto, for example, strikes at Queen Amata in Virgil’s *Aeneid* with purely invisible weapons, for the snake which she hurls at Amata *uoluitur attactu nullo, fallitque furem*, “curls unfelt and unknown, about the mad woman.”⁴⁴ Moreover, Aldhelm’s description of Allecto, coming at lines 2635-7 of his *Carmen de Virginitate*, stress the purely incorporeal virulence of her attacks against mankind. Here, the weapons she brings to bear against mankind are entirely spiritual:

*Haec solet ad bellum ferratum ducere contos
Horrida facturos animabus vulnera sanctis,
Nostras ni dominus mentes defendat inermes.*⁴⁵

She brings iron-tipped spears to battle,
Which would cause jagged wounds to holy souls,
If the Lord did not protect our defenseless minds.⁴⁶

The later references to the *wælcyrrian* that appear in the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, the *Sermo ad Populum Dominicis Diebus*, and the *Proclamation of 1020*, give no indication that the Valkyries are, in any way, less corporeal or substantial or visible than any of the other human sinner-types plaguing the state of Old English Christendom. In these instances, the war-woman seems to have lost virtually all of her incorporeal nature. But here, in the charms, the war-woman is selectively visible. The charm-master views her as a being that is fully a part of the corporeal world of living men, while at the same time fully a part of the world of the spiritual. Such a dualistic existence, with presence in both the spiritual and the physical world, is very much out of keeping with Christian theology in early Anglo-Saxon England, but has precedent in the writings of Bede. In his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*, Bede recounts the death of a nobleman who is bodily wounded by two demonic figures:

*Surgentesque duo nequissimi spiritus, habentes in minibus uomeres,
percusserunt me, unus in capite et alius in pede; qui uidelicet modo cum magno
tormento inrepunt in interior corporis mei, moxque ut ad se inuicem
perueniunt, moriar.*⁴⁷

And, leaping forth, two very evil spirits, holding spikes in their hands, struck me, one in the head and the other in the foot. These, in manifest fashion, crept with great twisting into the inside of my body, and as soon as they arrive, each in turn, I will die.⁴⁸

Of this element of the supernatural having the ability to inflict very real-world wounds on a living human, Alaric Hall comments: “Bede’s construction of a fatal ailment as a supernaturally inflicted weapon suggests that Anglo-Saxon conceptions of illness as supernaturally inflicted weapons” both predate the manuscript of *Wið Færstice* and assign

value to the supernatural monstrosities of the invisible world that are present in the late-Saxon rendering of the *wælcyrge* in the Anglo-Saxon charms as a genre.⁴⁹ This reading of the *wælcyrge*, as a being that is both insubstantial and corporeal in her ability to inflict harm, grants insight “into how [these] supernatural beings could feature in Anglo-Saxon constructions of the world.”⁵⁰

The third layer of evidence that allows scholars to see more deeply into the popular perception of the *wælcyrrian* is the unequivocally martial nature of her presence in both *Wið Færstice* and *Wiþ Ymbe*. In both of these charms, the war-woman bears numerous bellicose associations. While these associations seemingly place the *wælcyrrian* in the same tradition as the “choosers of the slain” present in the Old Norse tradition, a closer reading of the charms alongside the gloss-type appearances of the named-Valkyrie figure, will help to unite the *mihtigan wif* and the *sigewyf* with the image of the war-like Valkyrie present in the glosses. The association with spears, combat, and open warfare that the charm-Valkyries bear suggests that the popular view of the *wælcyrge* in Anglo-Saxon England bore striking similarities to the *Alaisiagae* of Roman Britain, and were not dependent upon Norse influence for their war-like associations.

The first time the *wælcyrrian* are referenced in *Wið Færstice*, they are described in martial terms. The poet writes: *Hlude wæran hy, la, hlude, ða hy ofer þone hlæw ridan, wæran anmode, ða hy ofer land ridan*, “Loud they were, lo, loud when over the barrow they came riding. They were fierce-minded when they rode over the land.” The poet presents Valkyries here as a cavalry unit. They are *hlude* “loud” and are *anmode* “fierce-minded” in their purpose in much the same way that a military force would be if riding in formation and ready to engage an enemy in combat. The word *anmode* appears often in the

corpus in spiritually or physically militaristic contexts, including a scene describing the unwavering resistance of the folk against a pagan king in *Cædmon* and the fierce attitude of a demon striving against God in *Genesis B*.⁵¹ The application of the term *anmode* to the *mihtigan wif* strongly suggests that the charm-master views the war-women as an extremely powerful and war-resolute force.

The poet goes on to write that the mighty women *hyra mægen beræddon*, “[They] marshalled their forces” and took an active battle position opposite the afflicted person and the charm-healer. Immediately after taking formation, *hy gyllende garas sændan*, “they, screaming, hurled spears.” Once the poet turns his attention to the spears of the Valkyries, he will continue to revisit this image over and over throughout the verse. Shortly after expressing the danger inherent in the vicious hurling of the *garas*, “spears,” by the *mihtigan wif*, the poet writes that he will combat the Valkyries in like manner: *ic him oðerne eft wille sændan, fleogende flane forane togeanes*, “I to them another [spear] will hurl, a spear flying ahead in opposition.” It is the *lytel spere*, “little spear[s]” thrown by the *mihtigan wif* that cause the *færstice*, “sudden stitch” in the victim. In invoking the cause of the pain, the charm poet writes that *Syx smiðas sætan, wælspera worhtan*, “six smiths sat, slaughter-spears crafting.” Alaric Hall believes that that these *smiðas* are a reference to the story of Wayland, the legendary smith of Anglo-Saxon lore, and that they are mentioned because they are forging the magical weapons thrown by the *mihtigan wif* in much the same way that Wayland forges enchanted blades shortly after he joins forces with the Valkyries of *Hervör*, *Ölrún*, and *Svanhvít*.⁵² So significant is the spear to the malevolent powers of the *mihtigan wif* that the recipe in the charm for curing the pain involves the melting of the spear out of the afflicted person’s flesh. Writes the poet: *Gif her inne sy isernes dæl*,

hægtessan geweorc, hit sceal gemyltan, “if a piece of iron is within you, a hag’s work, it shall melt.” In *Wip Ymbe*, similar association between the *sigewyf* and the spear is maintained along thematic lines, if not overt linguistic lines in that the bees come armed with stingers and inflict pain in their victims with these *lytel speres*.⁵³

This association between the war-woman and the spear does not occur in any of the pastoral-type appearances, the miriabilis-type appearances, or in most of the gloss-type appearances. It does, however, bear resonance with one incarnation of the gloss-type occurrence of the Valkyrie. The figure of *Bellona*, for whom the word “*wælcyrge*” is used as a gloss in MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III, is associated in Roman lore with the spear as her chosen weapon and as an emblem of her virulence in combat.⁵⁴ As I have shown in chapter two, *Bellona* is a goddess associated with warfare, open-combat, and the martial prowess of the female warrior. She is a virtually insurmountable force in Roman mythology, and associations between her and the *wælcyrge* position the Anglo-Saxon war-woman in a similarly battle-virulent station. Such bellicose associations, coupled with the poet’s emphasis on the spear as the tool of the Valkyrie, reinforce the Anglo-Saxon notion that the *wælcyrge* was connected with images of warfare and battlefield combat. Scholars need not look to the spear-wielding *valkyrjur* as a source of influence upon the Anglo-Saxon perception of their own native war-woman, as Dorothy Bethurum and Dorothy Whitelock suggest, in respect to the presence of the Valkyrie in the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* of Wulfstan.⁵⁵

The charms’ early date of composition, coupled with the association of the spear as the war-woman’s weapon of choice, further suggests that any critical position claiming that the Old English form of the Valkyrie draws from elements found in the Old Norse form, is

anachronistic and reductive.⁵⁶ The English war-woman was already associated with the spear long before the rise of the *valkyrja*. The Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge* found association with the spear through some of her gloss-type appearances. The Old English association between the spear and the war-woman in England predate such associations in Norse literature by over a century.

So war-like are these images of the *mihtigan wif* and the *sigewyf*, that the charm-master even writes of himself, his duties as an exorcist, and the plight of the afflicted person in martial terms. The poet of *Wið Færstice* writes that he *stod under linde, under leohtum scylde*, “stood under linden, under [the] light shield,” when he confronted the *mihtigan wif*. He likewise invites the afflicted to similarly shelter beneath a strong shield: *Scyld ðu ðe nu, þu ðysne nið genesan mote*, “Shield yourself now, this onslaught you must withstand.” The first stage of the exorcism involves the charm-master, just like the Valkyries, hurling a spear into the throes of combat. The poet writes, immediately after the Valkyries begin hurling their *garas* at him and the afflicted, that *ic him oðerne eft wille sændan*, “I to them another [spear] soon will send.”

In a similar idiom, the charm-master behind the *Wiþ Ymbe* spell likewise incorporates battlefield tactics in facing the *sigewyf*. While the charm initially praises the power of the earth by writing *eorðe mæg wið ealra wihta gehwilce*, “earth is potent against every living creature,” he goes on to tell any would-be enactors of the charm-recipe to *wiððon forweorp ofer greot, þonne hi swirman*, “sling gravel against them when they swarm.” The verb used in this line, *forweorp*, is defined by J. R. Clark-Hall as “to throw” and by Bosworth-Toller as “to cast.” Superficially, the charm simply suggests throwing gravel at the *sigewyf*, but this line also carries military implications that the medieval audience

would almost certainly have understood. In the continental European army, from the Iberian peninsula north through Germania and even into Scandinavia, the gravel slinger was a unit of medieval foot-soldier who carried a sling and large pouch of stones meant to be hurled like bullets against an opposing enemy force.⁵⁷ S. J. Greep has shown that the sling was a viable weapon in England during the medieval period, as well.⁵⁸ Thus, the recommendation of the charm-master to sling gravel against the *sigewyf* carries martial connotations that, while not instantly recognizable by a modern audience, would certainly have been recognized by medieval audiences.

Ultimately, in the charms, scholars may view the *wælcyrrian* not as the clerical or monastic writers saw her, as a purely physical being, nor as the glossators saw her, as synonymous with purely ethereal beings, but as the charm-practitioners and the spell-casters saw her, as dualistically corporeal and ethereal beings without physical presence of form, but possessed of the ability to wound the living by way of tiny, invisible spears. To the demographic of Anglo-Saxon society for whom the charms were a viable avenue toward healing and wellness, the *wælcyrge* was also a decidedly martial figure. Like the Roman goddess of warfare and open combat, *Bellona*, the *wælcyrge* is a war-figure who is closely associated with the spear as her weapon of destructive power. As the recipient of honorific epithets from her would-be exorcists who seek to mollify her “rebellious spirit” and placate her prior to her charm-induced exorcism, the war-woman of the Anglo-Saxon charms is a spiritually powerful and feared figure in early eleventh-century England.⁵⁹ To this demographic of Anglo-Saxons, the war-woman is a potent and dangerous being.

Because “it was against the interests of the Church that knowledge of heathen ways should be perpetuated in writing,” these facets of the Anglo-Saxon war-woman were

suppressed by the Church. While some elements present in the named-appearances of the *wælcyrge* are reinforced or expounded upon by the presence of similar qualities in the charms, other elements of the *wælcyrge* expressed in the charms are found nowhere else in the corpus. Owing to the diligence of the Church in “sanitizing” the documents and writings of the period, the figure of the *wælcyrge* as she was viewed and valued by the marginal, “imperfectly Christian” population exists in only two charms. Karen Jolly reminds scholars that “conversion does not necessarily entail the obliteration of pre-Christian traditions, but opens the possibility of cultural transformation.”⁶⁰ In the charms, scholars find the *wælcyrge* in a non-obliterated, pre-Christian form. *Wið Færstice* and *Wip Ymbe* showcase the *wælcyrge* in terms of who she was and how she was viewed and valued among the laity in Anglo-Saxon England during a period of “cultural transformation” from the popular heathenism of magic and ritual, to the formal Christianity of doctrine and dogma.

The Wælcyrrian in the Anglo-Saxon Riddles

The *wælcyrrian* also appear in two Anglo-Saxon riddles. In the riddles, the war-woman is not called by name owing in part to the very nature of the riddles as a genre. Descriptions of beings which may be interpreted as Valkyries do occur in two riddles. The presence of the war-woman in the charms reveals how one demographic of Anglo-Saxon society viewed and valued the *wælcyrge*. The presence of the *wælcyrge* in the riddles demonstrates her popularity at other levels. Marie Nelson notes that “reading the riddles can teach us something of the audience for which they were intended.”⁶¹ By reading possible *wælcyrge* figures in the riddles, scholars may learn “something of the audience” among whom the *wælcyrge* was a widely known figure, as well as how that audience

viewed the Anglo-Saxon war-woman. The presence of the Old English Valkyrie in the riddles suggests that the wælcyrge had a following outside of religious rhetoric of the Church and the mystical pharmacoepia of the folk-healer.

As a genre of writing, the riddles are comprised of three major components: the metaphor, the tenor, and the gap.⁶² The metaphor is a vehicle for the true answer to the riddle; this is the portion of the riddle which gives the most insight into the riddle's correct answer. The tenor of the riddle is comprised of the elements that distract or purposefully mislead the person being challenged by the riddle. Paull F. Baum writes of the tenor that "in the riddle there is introduced an element of calculated deception; the resemblance [between the metaphor and the tenor] is submerged in deliberate ambiguity."⁶³ The third component is the gap. This is the linguistic or thematic difference between the metaphor and the tenor, or between the answer and the distractor. The gap begins as a narrow set of differences in which it is difficult to tell the differences between the metaphor and the tenor. As the riddle progresses, the gap widens, thereby presenting more evidence that should lead the person being riddled to choose the metaphor-answer and not choose the tenor-distractor as the answer he offers to the riddle. It is in the gap that, as Archer Taylor writes, this "description must contain some discordant detail to put the hearer on his guard and suggest the correct answer."⁶⁴ In order for the riddle to work, both the metaphor and the tenor must be common things with which the person being riddled is intimately familiar.

Riddle metaphors are sometimes domestic items, such as churns or keys, livestock or food items, such as onions or bread-loaves, weather phenomenon such as storms or sunshine, or common elements of folklore. If the metaphor is not a common or well-

understood thing, then the riddle is moot, as the person being challenged has no chance of answering the riddle and has equally zero chance of being tricked into selecting the tenor as his answer, as total ignorance of the tenor and the metaphor on the part of the person being challenged ultimately negates the gap and essence of the riddle. Baum notes that the riddle's metaphor has a "significance [that] is assumed to be more or less easily recognized" by the person being riddled.⁶⁵ This significance is amplified through the possibility that the person being challenged has the option to manipulate the purposeful ambiguity of the metaphor and the tenor to propose that "by the [riddler's] stated terms, there could be more than one legitimate answer."⁶⁶ Thus, the knowledge base and cleverness of the person being riddled may well trump the cleverness of the riddler if he responds with an unexpected answer that is not incorrect.

The *Exeter Book* riddles draw both their tenors and their metaphors from material that represents the popular literacy of the Anglo-Saxon commoner. Nelson writes of this popular literacy that "the riddles enabled or compelled members of the Anglo-Saxon audience to draw upon several areas of knowledge to find their solution. These areas involved the heroic, patristic, and erotic perspectives of the man in the mead halls and in the monasteries, and they reflected the multiple frames of reference which were the natural result of the fusion of cultures" occurring between societal registers in Anglo-Saxon England.⁶⁷ Thus, the riddles have a very wide and common appeal; the riddles, according to Nelson, are a democratic genre, and they draw upon democratic knowledge for their tenors and their metaphors. Having joint origins in both the secular and patristic oral traditions of the common man, the riddles were later recorded, elevated, and sanitized in church monasteries. Of the origins of the riddles, A. J. Wyatt remarks that "after a secular

youth, the riddle[s] passed some time in a monastery.”⁶⁸ As was true with the charms, however, not all of the riddles were entirely stripped of their secular elements. In two such riddles, I contend, the image of the *wælcyrge* remains. In one, the Valkyrie functions as the metaphor; she is the answer to the riddle. In another, the Valkyrie is the tenor, in that she is meant to distract the person being riddled away from the actual answer of the riddle.⁶⁹

The first riddle in which the *wælcyrge* appears is *Riddle 8*. In this text, the Valkyrie functions as the tenor, meant to distract the person being challenged from arriving at the riddle’s correct metaphor. The relevant portion of *Riddle 8* in Cathedral Library MS 3501 states:

*Wiga is on eorþan wundrum acenned
dryhtum to nytte of dumbum twam
torht atyhted þone on teon wigeð
feond his feonde fer strangne oft
wif hine wrið.*

A warrior is wondrously brought into the world
for the use of lords by two dumb things;
brightly extracted, which for his hurt
foe bears against foe. Strong though he is
a woman binds him.⁷⁰

In this stanza, the war-woman appears in the last two lines: *fer strange oft / wif hine wrið*, “strong though he [is], a woman him binds.” This reference to the *wælcyrge* draws on “the Germanic-heroic perspective” in that it echoes the warrior-binding *idisi* of the tenth-century Germanic *Die Merseburger Zaubersprüche* charm.⁷¹

*Eiris sazun idisi, sazun hera duoder;
suma hapt heptidun, suma heri lezidun,
suma clubodun umbi cuoniouuidi:
insprinc haptbandun, inuar uigandun.*⁷²

Once sat the *idisi*, sitting here and there,
Some make bonds, some impede the army,
Some break the chains all around,

Escape the bonds! Flee the enemy.

Rudolf Simek regards the *idisi* as “some kind of Valkyrie” whom he remarks “have the power to hamper enemies” in battle in Germanic mythology.⁷³ Similar warrior-binding female figures appear in the Norse tradition. The Valkyrie figure of *Herfjöturr*, (ON *her-* “army,” *-fjötr* “fetter”) is a figure who is capable of binding even the strongest warriors. Andy Orchard translates the name of *Herfjöturr* as “Host-Fetter,” while Simek reads her as “Fetter of the Army.”⁷⁴ Donahue writes that “as a common noun, [*Herfjöturr*] means a terrifying weakness that comes over a warrior, hindering his ability and presaging his death.”⁷⁵ Thus, the tenor of the *wælcyrge* functions in the tradition of the Valkyrie as a figure who can bind and subdue even the strongest warrior in combat.

The presence of the *wælcyrge* in this capacity strongly suggests to critics of the Valkyrie tradition that the concept of the warrior-binding figure was possessed of enough cultural currency in Anglo-Saxon England as to be inserted as a tenor-distractor in the riddles of the common folk. The Valkyrie functions as the prime, most compelling distractor in the riddle (the broader the gap, the less parallel or ambiguous are the tenor and the metaphor). It is through the Valkyrie as a vehicle of the tenor that riddle 8 “hold[s] the line between revealing too much and preserving a necessary obscurity” of the riddle’s true metaphor-answer.⁷⁶ The generally accepted answer for riddle 8 is “fire.” The notion that a woman may bind the fire is in respect to the *wif*’s role in the domestic capacity, the fire being the prime tool for light, heat, and meal-preparation in the home. Thus, one possible tenor is *wælcyrge*, in that the war-woman has the ability to literally and psychologically bind the warrior with a form of battle-paralysis that is represented by chains (this charm and the *idisi* are discussed at greater length in chapter four), while the

actual answer of the riddle reveals that the *wif* of the riddle to be simply a mortal woman who cooks or washes with fire. Her tending the fire is cased as her binding a warrior.

The second, and more significant, appearance of the *wælcyrge* is in riddle 72:

*Ic wæs fæmne geong feax har cwene,
Ond ænlic rinc on ane tid;
Fleah mid fulgum and on flode swom,
Deaf under yþe dead mid fiscum,
Ond on foldon stop –hæfde ferð cwicu.*

I was a young woman, a grey-haired queen,
At the same time, a peerless warrior;
Flew with birds, swam in the sea,
Dove under wave, dead among fishes,
And on land stepped, possessed of a living soul.⁷⁷

The answer to riddle 72 is disputed. Baum sees the metaphor-answer as “Siren” or “Water,” while Ericka von Erhardt-Siebold interprets the answer as stemming from the writings of Greek philosopher, Empedocles (though Baum notes that “just how an Anglo-Saxon came to know [the writings of] Empedocles is not clear”).⁷⁸ Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson write that “the solution [to riddle 72] is unknown. Scholars have suggested answers –“cuttlefish,” “swan,” “water,” “siren,” “writing,” ship’s figurehead,” etc.– but none satisfies all the conditions set forth in the poem.”⁷⁹ Likewise, Marcella McCarthy’s reinvigoration of Eduard Müller’s claim that “the sun” as a satisfactory answer also comes up short. In so far as the image of the *wælcyrge* can satisfy all of the elements of this riddle, I propose that a viable answer to this riddle is “*wælcyrge*.”

The association of the *wælcyrge* with riddle 72 is traceable through the possible answer of “swan.” The swan is appropriate to virtually all aspects of the riddle, but the swan is especially applicable when the folk figure of the swan-valkyrie shape-shifter is considered. In the appearances of the *wælcyrge* I have so far demonstrated there has been

no hint of *versipellis*, or the ability to shape-shift, inherent in the *wælcyrge* figure. Helen Damico notes that “the ability to travel through the air and water connects... the Valkyries in general with the swan-maidens, supernatural females of Germanic legend who were able at will to assume animal form, principally that of a swan.⁸⁰ The close association between the swan and the Valkyrie, however, that exists in Anglo-Saxon folklore, and which will come to possess greater currency in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scandinavia, is rooted in the earliest form of the war-woman present on the island of Britain: the *Alaisiagae*.

The third and largest of the votive stone carvings at Houssteads Fort, Hadrian’s Wall, contains the image of a female-warrior figure on either side of whom there is a swan.⁸¹ Thus, the image which Krappe believes to be the very fountainhead whence Valkyrie myth springs, is a war-goddess juxtaposed with a swan on English soil. Indeed, the association between the *Alaisiagae* and the swan suggests that the bird is divinely sanctioned, and the swan-as-woman motif preserved in the votive carvings presages the main motif of Aarne-Thompson folktale type 402.⁸² The motif on the Hadrian’s Wall votive is not, however, the only equivocation between the swan and the Valkyrie made on the island of England. Anglo-Saxon material culture also preserves the image of the Valkyrie and the swan on the Franks Casket. One panel of the Franks Casket, which dates to the seventh century, depicts “a man catching birds, two of which he is holding by the neck.”⁸³ The birds the man is holding are swans, indicated by the elongate head, long neck, ovate body, and webbed feet, and this scene depicts the capturing of the Valkyries by Wayland.

Wayland and his brothers watch the three Valkyries swimming in their swan-skins, specialized feathers that allow the war-woman to transform into a swan. By capturing the women in swan-form and stripping them of their swan-feathers, Wayland and his brothers

make prisoners, and eventually wives, out of the Valkyries. Brian Branston reads this image of the man holding the swans as the Valkyrie-capture scene, in which either Wayland or his brother Egil ensnares “the Swan-Maidens,” from the story of Wayland.⁸⁴ Briefly referenced in *Deor* (and more briefly in *Beowulf*), the tale of Wayland is heavily fragmented in Anglo-Saxon literature, but survives on in the Icelandic *Volundakviða*. The *Volundarkviða* notes that the Valkyrie brides of Wayland and his brother are young, but that they are “grey” in their swan-form. One of the Valkyrie-brides even bears the name *Hlaðgluð*, or “Swan-Colored.”

Although some early scholars have read this scene from the Franks Casket as the gathering of feathers from birds by which Wayland will make his escape, Philip Souer reminds us that this alternate reading of the casket “is by no means certain.”⁸⁵ The catching of the swans may function as the chronologically earliest scene in the story of Wayland: the Valkyrie-catching scene. This explanation is more solid than the feather-gathering scene, as it both explains why multiple birds are being caught, and it neatly explains the tale’s association between swans and the Valkyries, and it does not complicate the story of Wayland by substituting swan-feathers for the mechanical wings which Wayland fashioned in his smithy. A classical Daidalos-reading of the bird-catching scene is incongruent with too many aspects of the Wayland story to satisfactorily fit, while a reading of this moment as the Valkyrie-catching scene, in which the Valkyries are still in swan-form, makes much more sense.

It must be remembered that the answer to the Anglo-Saxon riddle is often wrapped in layers of metaphor. Thus, searching for a literal answer is the type of exercise that most often stumped the hearer of the riddle. So it is through metaphor that the answer to riddle

72 becomes manifest. The *feax har* of the riddle does not literally refer to grey hair, but to the grey feathers on the head of the swan. In this way, a young female swan may appear to be a regal, “grey-haired” queen, and the two halves of line one, *lc wæs fæmne geong feax har cwene*, are not, as they first seem, mutually exclusive of a single answer. Thus, the image of the woman who is *geong* in her Valkyrie-form and *feax har* in her swan-form is not at all incongruent with riddle 72.⁸⁶ Given the seventh-century construction of the Franks Casket and the third-century carving of the votive at Hadrian’s Wall, the association on English soil between the war-woman and the swan is ancient.

The second line of the riddle is also satisfied when one considered the warrior-prowess associated with the *wælcyrge*. Keeping in mind the associations with the spear and combat, which I have shown to be at work in the charms, and the bellicose associations inherent in the gloss-type appearance equating the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie to the Roman goddess of warfare and combat, *Bellona*, there is very little dissonance in reading the female *wælcyrge* as a warrior-figure in the Anglo-Saxon literary consciousness. This reading “depended on... [the] audience’s Germanic-heroic frame of reference” that allows women to occupy the social parameters of the warrior.⁸⁷ Suffice to say that a figure as commonly associated with weapons, warfare, and slaughter as is the *wælcyrge*, need little explanation to be easily perceived as an *ænlic rinc*, “peerless warrior.”

The remaining lines of riddle 72 bear close similarity to lines in riddle 21, the swan-riddle. The elements of moving through water and land present in riddle 72, *on flode swom...on foldon stop*, “on water swam... on land stood” are strikingly similar to those in riddle 21: *ic hrusan trede... opþe wado drefe*, “I tred the land... and into the waters dove.”⁸⁸ Likewise, the last line of riddle 21, *flode ond foldan*, “water and land,” echoes the same

similarity of form to *on flode swom...on foldon stop*.⁸⁹ These riddles mirror one another once more in the last line of each, for riddle 72 contains *ferð cwicu*, “living spirit,” while riddle 21 makes references to the *ferende gæst*, “moving spirit.”⁹⁰ These images between these riddles seem similar enough to be poetic devices that are stock in the *scop*’s repertoire of riddling in which the proper metaphor-answer is “swan.”

While the word “swan” is appropriate for the last lines of riddle 72, one must see the shapeshifting aspect of the swan-Valkyrie figure at work to answer the conditions of the first half of the riddle. As a “Valkyrie,” the conditions of the first part of the riddle are satisfied, and as a natural “swan,” the second half of the riddle may be satisfactorily answered. Thus, the swan-Valkyrie, which has centuries of precedent in Anglo-Saxon England by the time riddle 72 is recorded in the *Exeter Book*, is an appropriate answer that seems to have been known among the Anglo-Saxons. Baum writes that the answer to most Anglo-Saxon riddles is one that “is assumed to be more or less easily recognized” by the person being challenged by the riddle.⁹¹ Therefore, scholars may presume that the intended audience of the riddles has knowledge enough of the aspects and elements of the *wælcyrge* to offer her as an answer to riddle 72. Thus, the concept of the Valkyrie-swan or the swan-maiden, was not unheard of among the common folk of Anglo-Saxon England. Assuming, as Brian Branston and others do, that the Wayland story was widely possessed of currency in “the Old English landscape,” then another appropriate and very clever answer to riddle 72 could be “one of Wayland’s swan-Valkyrie brides,” or a similar answer that acknowledges the Old English source of swan-maiden lore.

If this reading of riddle 72 is correct, then the Anglo-Saxon audience member who was up on his lore and native stories, would have had in mind yet another image of the

Valkyrie that is radically distinct from that portrayed in the named-appearances and the charm-appearances. This image of the Valkyrie is a regal one, a noble one, and one that draws on heroic verse as its wellspring. This cultural valuation of the Valkyrie as an element of heroic verse will come to define the *valkyrja* in later centuries, but it will first come to possess great meaning for the final appearance of the unnamed-Valkyrie figures in Anglo-Saxon literature. This appearance, as I will investigate in chapter four, comes in the vein of heroic poetry and manifests specifically in the characters of *Wealhþeow* and *Grendel's mother*. In *Beowulf*, each figure will fulfill a function allotted to the good and evil Valkyrie type, which comes into great popularity in Icelandic literature, but which occurs in Anglo-Saxon literature several centuries earlier.

Within the genres of the charms and the riddles, the *wælcyrge* exists in forms that are not hinted at in the named-appearances of the *wælcyrge*. These genres preserve the *wælcyrge* as she was in an unsanitized state. In these writings, she is neither muted by the Church as an element of the non-Christian worldview, nor is she assimilated by the Church, as *Wulfstan* assimilates her, and imbued with an amplified sense of the demonic or wicked or corruptive, with which she is associated in the gloss-type appearances. By understanding the roles that the *wælcyrrian* play in the genres of the charms and the riddles, scholars of Anglo-Saxon literature and culture may possess a clearer sense of the multiplicity of value and the widespread currency that the war-woman possessed in Anglo-Saxon England.

¹ Edwin Duncan. "Fears of the Apocalypse: The Anglo-Saxons and the Coming of the First Millennium" *Religion & Literature* 31 (1) 1999: 21, Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf-Charms in Context*, Durham, University of North Carolina Press, 1996: 27.

- ² Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf-Charms in Context*, Durham, University of North Carolina Press, 1996: 89.
- ³ H. R. Ellis Davidson, "Valkyries" *Medieval Folklore: A Guide to Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs*. John Lindow, John McNamara, and Carl Lindahl, eds. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002: 422.
- ⁴ Paull F. Baum, *The Anglo-Saxon Riddles*. Durham, Duke University Press, 1963: X.
- ⁵ Felix Grendon. "The Anglo-Saxon Charms." *The Journal of American Folklore* 22 (84) 1909: 106. See also, R. M. Liuzza, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: An Edition and Translation of Texts from London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius A.III*, Rochester, Brewer, 2011.
- ⁶ See William A. Chaney "Paganism to Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England." *Harvard Theological Review* 53 (3) 1960: 197-199.
- ⁷ After the invasions begin in 793, England undergoes periods of heathen revival; laws written under the reigns of Alfred the Great, Edward the Elder, Æþelstan, Edmund, Æðelræd, and Cnut the Great make numerous references to resurgences in non-Christian practice and the state's stance toward these rituals. See William A. Chaney "Paganism to Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England." *Harvard Theological Review* 53 (3) 1960: 197-217.
- ⁸ Branston, *Gods*, 38.
- ⁹ Kevin Crossley-Holland, *The Anglo-Saxon World*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999: 269.
- ¹⁰ Daniel Donoghue, ed. *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*. New York, Norton, 2002: 91.
- ¹¹ See William A. Chaney "Paganism to Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England" *Harvard Theological Review* 53 (3) 1960: 197-217. See also William A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: A Transition from Paganism to Christianity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1970.
- ¹² Peter Hunter Blair, *Anglo-Saxon England*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976: 121.
- ¹³ Jolly, *Religion*, 89.
- ¹⁴ John Richardson, "Hlude wæron hy: Syncretic Christianity in the Old English Charm *Wið Færstice*," *Mankind Quarterly* 42 (2001): 22.
- ¹⁵ Richardson, "Syncretic," 23.
- ¹⁶ Benjamin Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: The First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici or Homilies of Ælfric*, London, The Ælfric Society, 1844: 476.
- ¹⁷ Richardson, "Syncretic," 24.
- ¹⁸ See also Karin Olsen, "The Lacnunga and Its Sources: *The Nine Herbs Charm* and *Wið Færstice* Reconsidered." *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 55 (2007): 23-31. Olsen presents evidence for a Classical origin of many of the charms, and shows them to follow formulae of Latin origin. While the formulae may affect the meter, structure, and overall arrangement of the charm, the elements of the charm have been imbued with meaning and value among the folk of Anglo-Saxon England. In the same way that the Old English Valkyrie has been used in the glosses and mirabilis to make sense of Classical monsters and Greek goddesses, the charms may reflect Classical influence as well. This, however, does not undo the prevailing matter of seeing that the Christian church and the lay-healers of the Anglo-Saxon period are at odds over the form and value of the elements within the charms.
- ¹⁹ Jolly, *Religion*, 96.
- ²⁰ Jolly, *Religion*, 97.
- ²¹ Hall, *Elves*, 1.
- ²² Hall, *Elves*, 2.
- ²³ Grendon, "Charms," 214.
- ²⁴ Francis P. Magoun Jr. "Some Survivals of Pagan Belief in Anglo-Saxon England," *The Harvard Theological Review* 40 (1) 1947: 36.
- ²⁵ Grendon, "Charms," 214.
- ²⁶ Magoun, "Pagan," 36.
- ²⁷ Grendon, "Charms," 214.
- ²⁸ Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997: 105-6.
- ²⁹ See Rosamund McKitterick, *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, Bernhard Bischoff, *Anecdota Novissima: Texte des vierten bis sechszehnten Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart, 1984: 285. See also Hilda M. Ransome, *The Sacred Bee in Ancient Times and Folklore*, Dover, Courier-Dover Publications, 2012.

- ³⁰ McKitterick, *Carolingian*, 143.
- ³¹ Crossley-Holland, *World*, 269.
- ³² Grendon, "Charms," 169.
- ³³ Dorothy Bethurum. *The Homilies of Wulfstan*. Oxford, Clarendon, 1957: 112.
- ³⁴ Grendon, "Charms," 217.
- ³⁵ See A. R. Skemp, "The Old English Charms," *The Modern Language Review* 6 (2) 1911: 289-310, Murray Wax and Roasalie Wax, "The Notion of Magic," *Current Anthropology*, 4 (5) 1963: 495-518.
- ³⁶ Thomas A. DuBois, *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999: 104. J. S. Ryan and A. L. Meaney also offer investigations on the rise and eventual decline of pre-Christian faiths and deities in Breton and early Anglo-Saxon England. See J. S. Ryan "Othin in England: Evidence from the Poetry for a Cult of Woden in England" *Folklore* 74 (3) 1963: 460-480, A. L. Meaney, "Woden in England: A Reconsideration of the Evidence," *Folklore* 77 (2) 1966: 105-115.
- ³⁷ Grendon, "Charms," 106.
- ³⁸ Grendon, "Charms," 217.
- ³⁹ See Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England*, Durham, University of North Carolina Press, 1996: 71-95. See also Thomas A. DuBois, *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999: 93-120
- ⁴⁰ DuBois, *Religion*, 105.
- ⁴¹ Jolly, *Religion*, 2.
- ⁴² Jolly, *Religion*, 168.
- ⁴³ Jolly, *Religion*, 27.
- ⁴⁴ Vergil, *Aenedios*, 239.
- ⁴⁵ Rudolf Ehwald, ed., *Aldhelmi Opera*, Berlin, Weidmann, 1919: 460.
- ⁴⁶ Hall, *Elves*, 111.
- ⁴⁷ Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, eds., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991: 500.
- ⁴⁸ Hall, *Elves*, 110.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ Hall, *Elves*, 54.
- ⁵¹ See J. R. Clark-Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000: 22, Joseph Bosworth and Thomas Northcote Toller. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1898: 44.
- ⁵² See Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, Rochester, Boydell, 2009: 16, 41, 113, Brian Branston, *The Lost Gods of England*. London, Thames & Hudson, 1957. Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, Francis Owen, *The Germanic People*, New York, Bookman, 1960, and Lee M. Hollander, *The Poetic Edda*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1996: 159-167.
- ⁵³ Such a reading of the stinger of the bees as analogous to the spears of the Valkyrie is supported by Felix Grendon, "The Anglo-Saxon Charms," *The Journal of American Folklore* 22 (84) 1909.
- ⁵⁴ The name *Bellona* also appears in the tenth-century MS. Harley 3376, where she is defined in Latin terms and additionally glossed by the Old English *wylfen*, "she-wolf." This association between the war-woman and the wolf comes to possess greater signification as scholars find the malevolent Valkyrie figure of *Beowulf*, Grendel's mother, described by the poet in line 1506 as a *brimwylf*, or "water-wolf." R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, & John D. Niles. eds. *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 4th Edition. Toronto, U. Toronto Press, 2008. See chapter 4.
- ⁵⁵ See Dorothy Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan*. Oxford, Clarendon, 1957, Dorothy Whitelock. ed. *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. Revised edition. Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1976: 44.
- ⁵⁶ Hall, *Elves*, 1.
- ⁵⁷ S. J. Greep, "Lead Sling-Shot from Windbridge Farm, St. Albans and the Use of the Sling by the Roman Army in Britain," *Britannia* (17): 1987: 183-200.
- ⁵⁸ See S. J. Greep, "Lead Sling-Shot from Windbridge Farm, St. Albans and the Use of the Sling by the Roman Army in Britain," *Britannia* (17): 1987: 183-200.
- ⁵⁹ Grendon, "Charms," 217.
- ⁶⁰ Jolly, *Popular*, 29.
- ⁶¹ Marie Nelson, "The Rhetoric of the *Exeter Book* Riddles," *Speculum*, 49 (3) 1974: 421.
- ⁶² See Archer Taylor, *English Riddles from Oral Tradition*, Berkeley, 1951: 3-7.

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- ⁶³ Paull F. Baum, *Anglo-Saxon Riddles of the Exeter Book*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1963: x.
- ⁶⁴ Archer Taylor, "The Riddle," *California Folklore Quarterly*, 2 (2) 1943: 129.
- ⁶⁵ Baum, *Riddles*, x.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁷ Nelson, "Rhetoric," 421.
- ⁶⁸ Baum, *Riddles*, x.
- ⁶⁹ See Craig Williamson, *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1977.
- ⁷⁰ Baum, *Riddles*, 11.
- ⁷¹ Nelson, "Rhetoric," 422,
- ⁷² John Jeep, *Medieval Germany: An Encyclopedia*. Oxford, Routledge; 2001: 112-13
- ⁷³ Rudolf Simek. *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*. Rochester, D. S. Brewer. 1996: 171.
- ⁷⁴ Andy Orchard. *Cassell's Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend*, London, Cassell, 1999: 194, Rudolf Simek. *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*. Rochester, D. S. Brewer. 1996: 142.
- ⁷⁵ Charles Donahue, "The Valkyries and Irish War-Goddesses," *PMLA* 56 (1) 1941: 4. See also K. Maurer, "Die Valkyrjen Hlökk und Herfjöttr" *ZfdM* 11 (1) 1883: 341-3.
- ⁷⁶ Baum, *Riddles*, xiii.
- ⁷⁷ Baum, *Riddles*, 51.
- ⁷⁸ Baum, *Riddles*, 52. See also Erika von Erhardt-Siebold, "Anglo-Saxon Riddle 66" *Medium Ævum* (XV) 1946: 48-54.
- ⁷⁹ B. Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986: 224.
- ⁸⁰ Helen Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhpeow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984: 72.
- ⁸¹ See Sir Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, *An Account of the Roman Antiquities preserved in the Museum at Chesters, Northumberland*. London, Gilbert & Rivington. 1903: 190, 193.
- ⁸² See D. L. Ashliman, *Folklore and Mythology*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009.
- ⁸³ Philip Webster Souers, "The Wayland Scene on the Franks Casket," *Speculum* 18 (1) 1943: 105.
- ⁸⁴ Brian Branston, *The Lost Gods of England*. London, Thames & Hudson, 1957: 7.
- ⁸⁵ See Philip Webster Souers, "The Wayland Scene on the Franks Casket," *Speculum* 18 (1) 1943: 104-111.
- ⁸⁶ See Sophus Bugge, *The Saga-Book of the Viking Club II*, Copenhagen, 1901:280-281, Philip Webster Souers, "The Wayland Scene on the Franks Casket," *Speculum* 18 (1) 1943: 104-111, Lee M. Hollander, *The Poetic Edda*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1996: 159-168.
- ⁸⁷ Nelson, "Rhetoric," 421.
- ⁸⁸ Baum, *Riddles*, 22.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁹¹ Baum, *Riddles*, x.

Chapter Four:

Beowulf and the Valkyrie-Diptych Narrative Structure

As I have shown in chapter three, the *wælcyrge* occurs in the Old English corpus at times in an unnamed or unidentified capacity. These unnamed occurrences reflect a marginally or imperfectly Christian form of the war-woman that has resonance with the Germanic *idisi*, in some cases, and with the Teutonic *Alaisiagae* in other capacities. Similarly, the unnamed appearances are not possessed of the same measure of Christianized rhetoric as are the named occurrences of the homiletic- or pastoral-type occurrences discussed in chapter two. I likewise argued in chapter three that some aspects of the unnamed *wælcyrge* figures seem to presage or prefigure the Old Norse *valkyrja* as they appear in Scandinavian literature throughout the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. In this chapter, I consider the unnamed appearances of the *wælcyrge* in Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry and how those appearances suggest yet another layer of cultural valuation for the *wælcyrge* in Anglo-Saxon England. To my reading of the corpus, the appearances of the *wælcyrge* in this genre are her final manifestations in Anglo-Saxon England. The Valkyrie will not resurface in English letters again until the fourteenth-century alliterative revival in the poem, "Cleaness."¹

While the unnamed occurrences of the *wælcyrge* in Old English which I discuss in chapter three have not garnered lengthy or especial attention from scholars, the unnamed appearances of the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie-figure in *Beowulf*, have. In 1984, Helen Damico forwards the notion that a type of narrative structure, which gained great currency in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Icelandic and Scandinavian literature, was represented in

Anglo-Saxon England prior to the mid-eleventh century.² Damico calls this unique narrative structure the “Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure,” and remarks that it is a narrative type defined by the roles played by two, opposing Valkyrie-figures within the narrative, who, being disparate in physical form and motivation toward the narrative’s hero, occupy disparate roles and strive to accomplish opposing goals as regards the fate of the tale’s protagonist-hero.³ The Valkyrie-diptych is a subgenre of the heroic literature that, prior to Damico, was considered not to have existed outside the Old Norse corpus. Damico begins her argument by noting that “in Old Norse literature, two distinct, antagonistic perceptions of Valkyries essentially exist: they are seen as fierce, elemental beings, and as benevolent guardians.”⁴ One Valkyrie figure functions as savior to the living hero, and the other is his would-be executioner. Damico furthers her claim by showing how Norse *skalds* employ the two “antagonistic perceptions of Valkyries” jointly within a single text to create a Valkyrie diptych, noting that “occasionally, the Old Norse documents juxtapose the sinister battle-demon with the radiant, courtly figure” in order to complicate the narrative and heighten the narrative tension toward the hero’s quest.⁵

By establishing the parameters by which the “sinister battle-demon” and the “radiant, courtly figure” of the Old Norse Valkyrie-diptych may be understood, Damico lays the foundation for her assertion that the Old English characters of Wealhþeow and Grendel’s mother may also be read as figures within the diptych paradigm. Wealhþeow may be read, according to Damico, as a the “radiant, courtly [Valkyrie] figure,” who brings succor and prophesy to the hero, and Grendel’s mother may be read as the “sinister battle-demon” type of Valkyrie whose function in the narrative is to offer tribulation, violence, and mortal calamity to the hero. Damico forwards the possibility that *Beowulf*, as a text, is

the earliest instance of the Valkyrie-dyptych, in that the manuscript of *Beowulf* predates all Old Norse forms of this narrative structure by nearly 200 years.⁶ Damico goes to great lengths illustrating how Wealhþeow functions as a benevolent Valkyrie-figure, though she dedicates far less time demonstrating the ways in which Grendel's mother functions in the capacity of the "grim, baleful figures" of the malevolent Valkyrie-type.⁷

While Wealhþeow and Grendel's mother have been considered by Damico, my reading of these figures and their functioning within the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure shows that there are yet more evidences that locate both Grendel's mother and Wealhþeow as Anglo-Saxon participants in a literary tradition considerably more complex than any other form of writing hinging on the *wælcyrge*. In this chapter, I will argue that there is one further evidence by which scholars may read Wealhþeow as a Valkyrie figure in the tradition of the Valkyrie-diptych, and two further evidences by which scholars may read Grendel's mother as a malevolent Valkyrie-figure in *Beowulf*.

The additional evidences which I present here will further illustrate certain aspects of the *wælcyrge* as she existed in the Anglo-Saxon literary consciousness. These additional evidences further demonstrate that it is untenable to define the Old English *wælcyrge* strictly in terms of the *valkyrja*, as the complexities and nuances of the *wælcyrge* predate the earliest literary representation of the *valkyrja*. The evidence that I consider in this chapter will also serve to bolster Helen Damico's assertion that "the Valkyrie-figure seems to be as much a part of the Anglo-Saxon literary consciousness as it is of the Old Norse."⁸ Scholarly ability to read additional evidences of a Valkyrie-diptych text that contains the Old English *wælcyrge*, instead of the Old Norse *valkyrja*, also reinforces John Lindow's assessment that "much of Norse mythology, and, indeed, much of Norse literary culture

derived from Celtic and Germanic Britain, with England as the link.”⁹ That this bifurcated function of the *wælcyrge* would come to possess greater currency in later Scandinavia also gives testament to how the idiosyncratic complexities of the *wælcyrge* were evolving in elaborate and binary directions long before the composition of Old Norse texts containing the *valkyrja* figure. The evidences that I here consider have gone unremarked upon by previous scholars in any significant way. These evidences further demonstrate the complexity and multiplicity of function that the *wælcyrge* possessed in Anglo-Saxon heroic verse.

The Valkyrie-Diptych Narrative Structure

Before I progress with both my presentation and analysis of the evidences that I find in *Beowulf* that support a reading of Wealhþeow and Grendel’s mother as the *in bono* and the *in malo* Valkyrie types, respectively, I will give an overview of this narrative type as it occurs in the Old Norse tradition. By understanding both the narrative construction of and fundamental elements present within the diptych structure, as well as understanding the specific parameters of the “two distinct, antagonistic” Valkyrie-figures (what Joseph Harris calls “the *in malo* and *in bono*” Valkyrie-figures) integral to the Valkyrie-diptych as a subgenre of heroic literature, scholars may better locate Wealhþeow and Grendel’s mother as early, Anglo-Saxon participants in what has long been considered a strictly Old Norse literary tradition.¹⁰ I give the following overview of the Valkyrie-diptych narrative tradition in order to contextualize the evidences that I forward for more accurately locating Wealhþeow and Grendel’s mother as Valkyrie-types functioning within this tradition.

In the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure, the text's hero is confronted at separate times by each of two Valkyrie figures, and it is this relationship between the hero and each Valkyrie about which the tension and action of the diptych turns.¹¹ As Helen Damico notes, the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure is one in which "the grim, baleful [Valkyrie] figure bears an antithetical relationship to the gold-adorned, courtly Valkyrie... each manslayer is opposed to a generous, benevolent female who is her obverse."¹² The role of the beneficent Valkyrie figure in the Old Norse form of the diptych is three-fold. This war-woman tasks the hero with his monster or villain-slaying quest, most often by offering him a mead-horn over which he will pronounce his oath of monster-slaying; she provides supernatural aid or advice to him prior to or during his mission; and she often weds the hero or functions, in a more or less concupiscent manner, as his bride.¹³

In physical form, the beneficent Valkyrie figure is a mixture of both courtly and martial qualities.¹⁴ She may carry a sword at points in the narrative, as we find in the case of Brynhildr in the short, thirteenth-century lay, *Helreið Brynhildar*, and the longer, fourteenth-century *Völsunga Saga*. Or she may be dressed in armor, as we find in the case of both Brynhildr and Sváfa, of the Helgi cycle of lays contained in the early thirteenth-century, *Poetic Edda*. Physically, the good Valkyrie figure is always exceptionally beautiful. We find this in all Valkyrie-diptychs, the most pronounced of which showcase the goddess Freyja, in the thirteenth-century lay, *Hynduljoð*, in which the benevolent figure is described by the lay's hag in sexually alluring terms.¹⁵ As Damico also notes, on onomastic terms, the name of the good Valkyrie figure may also be indicative of the role she plays in the narrative.¹⁶ In these capacities, the benevolent figure functions as the savior and succor to the narrative's hero.

The malevolent *valkyrja* of the diptych interacts with the hero as an agent of malice whose ultimate purpose is diametrically opposed to the agenda of the beneficent Valkyrie figure.¹⁷ The malevolent war-woman's task is primarily two-fold: she is a figure often motivated by vengeance or the desire to participate in a blood-feud, and her combat with the narrative's hero is always direct.¹⁸ While the benevolent half of the Valkyrie-diptych pairing may rely on subterfuge to surreptitiously aid the narrative's hero, the malevolent figure in the narrative always performs her combat with the hero directly. Damico notes that in physical form, the evil Valkyrie is almost always hideous and often very large or gigantic.¹⁹ In the *Helreið Brynhildar*, for example, the hag is identified as *gýgr*, or "giantess," while the enormous Valkyrie-figure of Hrimgerðr is a "Norse giantess" of enormous proportions.²⁰ H. R. Ellis Davidson writes that "Valkyries may be represented as huge, menacing, and hideous" beings of great strength, stature, and physical size.²¹ Helen Damico also asserts that the hag-Valkyrie also has an association with the vengeance quest, and seldom does this figure lash out at the hero for reasons other than direct revenge.²² In the thirteenth-century cycle of the Helgi lays, found in the *Poetic Edda*, the malevolent *valkyrja* Hrimgerðr, for example, "seeks to avenge the murder of her father... while Grendel's mother, the Anglo-Saxon [Valkyrie figure], seeks compensation for the killing of her son."²³

The role of the hero in the narrative is to meet with and establish his proper relationship with each of the *in bono* and *in malo* Valkyrie-figures. As the hero encounters the benevolent figure, he will forge bonds of trust and sacred duty with her, and while he encounters the malevolent figure, he will engage in mortal combat with her. Without exception in the diptych tradition, the first Valkyrie-figure whom the hero encounters is the benevolent war-woman. In Damico's reading of *Beowulf* as a text located in the Valkyrie-

diptych narrative tradition, the *in bono* Valkyrie-figure is represented in the character of Wealhþeow, whom Beowulf encounters shortly after his arrival to Denmark, and immediately before he embraces his first martial challenge on Danish soil. Because Beowulf encounters and establishes his relationship with Wealhþeow first, I will begin my argument by showcasing Damico's assessment of Wealhþeow and forwarding my sense of the additional evidences by which she may be read as a *wælcyrge* functioning as the *in malo* half of the Valkyrie diptych narrative tradition.

Wealhþeow as a Benevolent Valkyrie-Figure

In her *Beowulf's Wealhþeow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, Helen Damico articulated several major pathways by which Wealhþeow may be read as a Valkyrie-figure: 1.) an onomastic reading of Wealhþeow that highlights the dithematic elements of her name as revelatory of her character within the poem; 2.) an alternate reading of her physical description that posits her possibly being dressed in armored garments in Heorot; and 3.) the sacerdotal moment in which Wealhþeow presents Beowulf with the ale-horn and his making a boast over the horn as she tasks him with his sacral duty.²⁴

To the first pathway, Damico asserts that Wealhþeow is a complex *wælcyrge* figure who presages the Valkyries of the Old Norse tradition in that her name, like so many of their names, is imbued with dithematic value.²⁵ Of the first half of her name, *wealh-*, Damico arrives at the conclusion that through a process of "phonological blending" that made the *-h* silent, came to possess "conflated etymological meaning" similar to the Old Norse word, *Valr-*, meaning "slain."²⁶ The second half of the dithematic name, *-þeow*, Damico argues, means "servant of the chosen" and carries priestly connotations.²⁷ Thus,

Damico argues that Wealhþeow's name, fully meaning "servant of the chosen slain in battle" functions similarly as a name that gives onomastic insight into the bearer's role as a Valkyrie-figure, and notes that this configuration occurs repeatedly in Old Norse iterations of the Valkyrie-diptych.²⁸ Thus, Damico interprets "Wealhtheow" as meaning "the servant of the chosen slain in battle," and believes that this bespeaks her role of handing out mead in Heorot as analogous to the horn-bearing duties of the courtly Valkyrie in Old Norse material culture.²⁹ While acknowledging that this interpretation of the name of Heorot's queen is not in keeping with Thomas D. Hill's translation of the name as "foreign slave," Damico points toward the context of the Valkyrie-diptych in noting that "as discordant as the idea of slaughter seems when associated with the benevolent nature of the queen's actions, it is, nonetheless, harmoniously appropriate when Wealhþeow is perceived as a possible Valkyrie-figure."³⁰

To the second point, Damico's reading of *bēaghroden cwen*, hints that the garment worn by Wealhþeow in the hall is being described in terms of the *skjaldmeyjar* or "shield maidens" described by Saxo Grammaticus. Thus, Wealhþeow becomes neither the queen who is "splendid in rings," as Hal Chickering renders her, nor the "ring-adorned queen" that Benjamin Thorpe sees her as being.³¹ Instead, Damico reads *bēaghroden cwen* alongside its Icelandic cognate poetic term, *brúðr baugvarið*, which is a conscious double-entendre meaning both "woman decked in rings" and "woman carrying a shield" in which the shield is described by the kenning *baugrvarið* or "round, hammered metal."³² Damico writes that:

The use of *bēaghroden* and *baugrvarið* as descriptive terms for women who appear in a military environment and are engaged in actions relative to activity on the battlefield strongly suggests that the terms possess a martial connotative value. 'Shield-adorned' as an alternative meaning would make appropriate their uses as epithets for Sigrúnn and [other literary Valkyries]... since they describe battle dress.³³

The level of ambiguity that is present in the phrase *bēaghroden cwen* allows Damico to suggest that the Old English *wælcyrge* was possessed in the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic of a decidedly martial quality that was reflected in the clothing she wore in the hall. By claiming that Wealhtheow may wear a garment that is bedecked in tiny shields, Damico locates Wealhtheow as a royal woman of the tradition of the battle-women of early medieval Denmark of which Saxo Grammaticus writes in his *Gesta Danorum*.³⁴

The third major evidence by which Damico locates Wealhþeow as the benevolent half of the Valkyrie-diptych is her assertion that the ceremonious manner in which the queen of Heorot offers the mead-horn to Beowulf is an Old English poetic incarnation of the offering of the *-ful* or sacred horn of Germanic antiquity by a Valkyrie figure to a heroic figure in Teutonic tradition.³⁵ Gillian Overing notes that in Damico's reading, this is the moment in which the benevolent Valkyrie figure "charges the hero with his heroic destiny when she offers him the cup, and fulfills her own desire at the same time. She incites the hero to his own possible death in order to help him forge his own heroic 'immortal' identity."³⁶ Damico writes:

When Wealhþeow holds out the *-ful* to the prince, she utters a prayer of thanksgiving to God in which she allusively identifies Beowulf as the purger of evil in Heorot. In accepting the vessel, he accepts this identity. His *gilpcwide* over the *ful* –the pledge to the future– is a seal of destiny.³⁷

Through these three major (and numerous other minor) evidences, Damico argues that Wealhþeow "may very well be the earliest representation of the...noble born Valkyrie, human with supernatural attributes, that permeates the heroic lays of the *Poetic Edda*."³⁸

I will not belabor my chapter by expounding excessively on the evidences Damico already traces, except to say that I believe there are further evidences, unacknowledged in

any significant way by Damico, that grant additional insight into the Anglo-Saxon conception of the war-woman in the Valkyrie-diptych narrative tradition. In addition to the three primary layers of evidence which Damico forwards that suggest Wealhþeow's identity and function as the benevolent Valkyrie-figure in the diptych structure of *Beowulf*, I add that Wealhþeow's function in placing limitations on the fame and riches won by Beowulf for his monster-slaying exploits is significant to her function as a Valkyrie-figure in the poem. Through the formal utterance of speech toward Beowulf and in front of the hosts at Heorot, Wealhþeow limits the fame of Beowulf in the wake of his fulfillment of oaths. Such formal limitation is a duty that comes to possess value within the aesthetic of the Old Norse *valkyrja* of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and seems to further show that the radiant battle maidens of the Icelandic eddaic tradition who concern themselves in the affairs of mortal, living men, have clear precursor in the Anglo-Saxon literary consciousness and that the Anglo-Saxon conception of the *wælcyrge* was considerably more sophisticated than early scholars considered.³⁹

After Beowulf spends the night in Heorot and rends Grendel's arm from his shoulder, the king throws a feast, at which Beowulf is honored through the presentation of riches and accolades. During this feast, Wealhþeow speaks to Beowulf and declares publicly how he must revel in his riches:

*Brūc ðisses bēages, Bēowulf lēofa,
hyse, mid hæle, ond þisses hrægles nēot,
þēodgestrēona, ond geþēoh tela,
cen þec mid cræfte ond þyssum cnyhtum wes
lāra liðe. Ic þē þæs lēan geman.
Hafast þū gefēred þæt ðē feor ond nēah
ealne wīdeferhþ weras ehtigað,
efne swā sīde swā sæ bebūgeð,
windgeard, weallas. Wes þenden þū lifige,*

*æþeling, ēadig. Ic þē an tela
 sincgestrēona. Bēo þū suna mīnum
 dædum gedēfe, drēamhealdende.
 Hēr is æghwylc eorl oþrum getrywe,
 mōdes milde, mandrihtne hold;
 þegnas syndon geþwære, þēod ealgearo,
 druncne dryhtguman dōð swā ic bidde.⁴⁰*

Use this collar, dear Beowulf,
 O, youth, with prosperity, and this mantel enjoy,
 These lordly treasures, and thrive well;
 Animate thy self with vigor, and to these boys be
 In counsels gentle; I will therefore, be mindful to reward thee.
 Thou hast that achieved that thee, far and near,
 Throughout all of time, men will esteem,
 Even as widely as the sea encircles the
 Windy land-walls. Be thou while thou livest
 A prosperous noble. I will grant thee
 Presious treasures. Be thou to my sons
 Gentle in deeds, holding them in joy,
 Here is every man to the other true,
 Mild of mood, to his liege lord faithful;
 The thegns are united, the people are ready,
 The drunken vassals do as I bid.⁴¹

In this speech, Wealhþeow formally acknowledges Beowulf's fame, while at the same time limiting the parameters of that fame. Her limitation comes in three major types, each of which has later echoes in Old Norse texts of the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure. The limitations that Wealhþeow places on Beowulf come in terms of 1.) behavioral limitations (as they concern the regnal succession of the Danes), 2.) limitations of financial or material wealth, and 3.) spatial / temporal limitations of the reach and duration of his fame. Each of these limitation-types functions to bind the hero into the Valkyrie-figure's service in the wake of his monster slaying quest.

The first pronouncement of fame limitation that Wealhþeow places on Beowulf is one limiting his behaviors concerning the court of Heorot and the regnal succession of Denmark. She tells Beowulf exactly how to behave in his dealings with the royal court of

Denmark; Wealhþeow encourages Beowulf to enjoy his riches: *cen þec mid cræfte ond þyssum cnyhtum wes / lāra līðe*, “animate thyself with vigor and to these boys be in counsels gentle.”⁴² After initially advising that Beowulf be gentle with her sons, Wealhþeow repeats her command for behavioral obedience from Beowulf by saying *bēo þū suna mīnum / dædum gedēfe, drēamhealdende*, “be thou to my sons / gentle in deeds, holding them in joy.”⁴³ Wealhþeow’s sense that Beowulf’s fame may make him unruly or dangerous to her sons is clear through her repeated pronouncement of the code by which he must conduct himself in relation to the princes of Heorot. Wealhþeow concludes her behavior-limiting announcement to Beowulf by referencing the manner in which all men of her court behave and the fundamental power that she wields over all the Danish thegns: *Hēr is æghwylc eorl oþrum getrywe, / mōdes milde, mandrihtne hold; / þegnas syndon geþwære, þēod ealgearo, / druncne dryhtguman dōð swā ic bidde*, “Here is every man to the other true, / mild of mood, to his liege lord faithful; / the thegns are united, the people are ready, the drunken vassals do as I bid.”⁴⁴ In reminding Beowulf of the manner in which all the thegns of Heorot conduct themselves, and her own place as a dominant figure to whom all *dryhtguman* pay obeisance, Wealhþeow instills in her speech an absolute standard regarding his behavior in the wake of his being showered with fame by the Danes.

The second type of fame-limitation that Wealhþeow pronounces against Beowulf regards his financial or material wealth. Tied inextricably to the first limitation Wealhþeow places on the mighty Geatish prince, this limitation on Beowulf’s fame places conditions on his winning of gold and riches. Wealhþeow opens her speech with a seemingly conditionless invitation to partake in well-earned riches: *Brūc ðisses bēages, Bēowulf lēofa, / hyse, mid hæle, ond þisses hrægles nēot, / þēodgestrēona, ond geþēoh tela*,

“Use this collar, dear Beowulf, / O, youth, with prosperity, and this mantel enjoy, / these lordly treasures, and thrive well.”⁴⁵ Wealhþeow immediately follows this seemingly innocuous command with her first direction for Beowulf to treat her sons kindly. Seemingly very astute as to the placement of her commandments in her speech, Wealhþeow then states: *Īc þē þæs lēan geman*, “I will therefore be mindful to reward thee.”⁴⁶ Holding the promise of rewards over Beowulf as part of her commandment to him regarding his behavior to her sons, Wealhþeow indirectly limits his ability to garner wealth from the Danes. This formula is repeated a second time only a few lines later, but in reverse order. Wealhþeow tells Beowulf: *Īc þē an tela / sincgestrēona. Bēo þū suna mīnum / dædum gedēfe, drēamhealdende*, “I will well grant thee / precious treasures. Be thou to my sons / gentle in deeds, holding them in joy.” In this second instance of her reminding him of the price of his garnering riches from the Danes, Wealhþeow reiterates that material wealth garnered for the slaying of Grendel is not, as Hroðgar’s unchecked generosity earlier in this scene, and after the slaying of Grendel’s mother, suggests, freely given. Instead, Wealhþeow announces to Beowulf that Danish generosity hinges directly on his adherence to her pronounced behavioral limitations.⁴⁷ Through this repeated formula, Wealhþeow makes one thing clear: her bounty of riches is contingent upon Beowulf’s adherence to her behavioral limitations. Should he break her first edict, she will break the second.

The third type of limitation that Wealhþeow’s speech pronounces upon Beowulf regards the spatial and temporal borders of his fame, and it is in this limitation that Wealhþeow is most unconditionally generous. In the wake of his slaying Grendel, Beowulf will be, according to Wealhþeow, *Hafast þū gefēred þæt ðē feor ond nēah / ealne wīdeferhþ weras ehtigað, / efne swā sīde swā sæ bebūgeð, / windgeard, weallas*, “Thou hast that

achieved that thee, far and near, / throughout all of time, men will esteem, / even as widely as the sea encircles the / windy land-walls.”⁴⁸ Here Wealhpeow confirms to Beowulf that the spatial and temporal limitations of his fame are as metaphorically limitless as the existence of men, and as broad as the waters of the ocean as they lap against distant headlands. Thus, among all men everywhere, Beowulf will be famous for his deeds. While his deeds were not sufficient to garner him unmitigated political movements among Danish regnal succession, and were likewise not enough to garner him limitless or unconditional material wealth from the Danish coffers, they were enough, according to Wealhtheow, to win him fame and renown among men everywhere.

In the capacity of a Valkyrie-figure who, in the wake of the diptych’s hero’s valiant or martial endeavors, pronounces limitations on the fame of the hero, Wealhpeow very much seems to be a prefiguration of the *valkyrjur* figures in Old Norse literature who offer similar pronouncements over the martially-accomplished heroes in their own texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the case of the behaviorally and financially limiting pronouncements, we find Wealhpeow to be echoed in the figure of Sigrúnn, in the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*. In an episode that bears marked similarity to Wealhpeow’s fame-limiting speech to Beowulf, Sigrúnn lays conditional limitations on the lay’s eponymous hero, Helgi, after he has triumphed in his martial quest. Sigrúnn casts prophesy on the scope and spread of Helgi’s fame and his duties to that fame:

*Kvámu þar ór himni hjálmvítr ofan
Óx geira gnýr – þær er grami hlífðu;
Ðá kvað þat Sigrún, sárvítr fluga
Át hálu skær af hugins barri;*

*"Heill skaltu, vísi, Virða njóta,
Áttstafr Yngva, ok una lífi,*

*Er þú fellt hefir, inn flugartrauða
Jöfur, þann er olli ægis dauða.*

*Ok þér, buðlungr, samir bæði vel
Rauðir baugar ok in ríkja mæri;
Heill skaltu, buðlungr, bæði njóta
Högna dóttur ok Hringstaða,
Sigrs ok landa. Þá er sókn lokit.*

From high heaven came helmeted maidens,
Waxed the shafts shrilling, who shielded the king
Then said Sigrúnn, sang the arrows,
The ogress's horse at the eagle's food,

'Hail to thee, hero! In happiness live,
Ingvi's scion hold sway over the men:
Unfeeling foe felled now hast thou,
In swordplay who slew sea kings many.

Now, folk-warder, befit thee well with
The red-gold rings and the ruler's daughter,
Hale shalt, hero, hold these twain:
Hogni's daughter and Hringstead eke,
Victory and wealth: is the war ended.⁴⁹

Sigrúnn here places behavioral and material limitations on Helgi that are very similar to those laid on Beowulf by Wealhþeow. In much the same way that Wealhþeow bids Beowulf to *wes þenden þū lifige, / æþeling, ēadig*, “be thou whilst thou livest, a prosperous noble,” Sigrúnn commands that Helgi *Virða njóta*, “in happiness live.” Afterward, Sigrúnn structures her speech around the deeds of Helgi and addresses the matter of behavioral and material limitation. Says Sigrúnn: *ok þér, buðlungr, samir bæði vel / rauðir baugar ok in ríkja mæri; / heill skaltu, buðlungr, bæði njóta / högna dóttur ok Hringstaða, / sigrs ok landa*, “Now, folk-warder, befit thee well with / red-gold rings and the ruler's daughter /hale shalt, hero, hold these twain, / Hogni's daughter and Hringstead also, / victory and wealth.” In this text, the benevolent Valkyrie figure gives to Helgi all the things –castle,

court, lineage, and a place within regnal succession– that were denied to Beowulf by Wealhþeow.

Wealhþeow’s speech preserves the regnal succession of Heorot for the bloodline of Hroðgar by commanding Beowulf to adhere to behavioral strictures toward her sons.⁵⁰ Likewise, her speech places conditions on his garnering of material riches for his martial acts. In *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, however, Sigrúnn’s pronouncement over throne and riches is much more liberal, for she tells Helgi that, for his valor, he shall receive both the kingdom and its coffers in bidding him *bæði njóta / Högna dóttur ok Hringstaða*, “befit thee well [with] / Hogni’s daughter and Hringstede.” The hall here is a literal hall of riches, and *Högna dóttur* is both a literal and metaphorical gift. Literally, Helgi will claim the woman to his wife, but, in so doing, he will join the blood-lineage of the kingdom as it issues from her womb. Thus, Helgi’s material fame and his behavioral limitations regarding the court are virtually without bound. While the pronouncements that Sigrúnn levels against Helgi are much more generous in material riches and behavioral practices than are those pronouncements Wealhþeow aims at Beowulf, the opposite is true of the spatial and temporal limitations.

In *Beowulf*, Wealhþeow is quick to note of Beowulf’s fame that he will be remembered *feor ond nēah*, “far and near” and that “*ealne wīdeferhþ weras ehtigað, / efne swā sīde swā sæ bebūgeð, / windgeard, weallas*, “throughout all of time, men will esteem, / even as widely as the sea encircles the / windy land-walls.” Wealhþeow’s ceremonious proclamation in the wake of Beowulf’s achievement is that the hero’s fame will last *ealne wīdeferhþ*, “throughout all of time.” Beowulf may die knowing that his fame will live on long after his physical demise. The pronouncements that Sigrúnn delivers to Helgi,

however, are more elusive, and seem to focus only on his own temporal lifespan. At the beginning of her pronouncement, Sigrúnn tells Helgi *Heill skaltu, vísi, Virða njóta*, “Hail thee, hero, in happiness live,” suggestive that his life should be filled with happiness. While this divine commandment from a semi-ethereal, semi-human *valkyrja*-figure tells Helgi much about the state of his own bliss during his remaining life, it does not offer any suggestion that his accomplishments will live on after his life. It may be assumed that, because he has been brought into the regnal line by way of Hogni’s daughter, some measure of Helgi’s accolades will live on after his demise in the form of his descendants, but this is not overtly stated in Sigrúnn’s pronouncement. Moreover, Sigrúnn states that Helgi will receive *sigrs ok landa*, “victory and kingdom,” but she places no more temporal guarantees on these things than the fleeting promise of the now. In reminding Helgi that *þá er sókn lokit*, “the war is over,” Sigrúnn does nothing more than close a bloody chapter in Helgi’s past, and does not go on to give him any promise of the future. Even though Sigrúnn’s limitations on his behavioral and material fame afford Helgi considerably more lateral freedom in the wake of his martial accomplishment in life, Sigrúnn’s pronouncement on his spatial and temporal fame is far less glorious than that laid on Beowulf by Wealhþeow.

Other Old Norse forms of the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure that seem to repeat Wealhþeow’s paradigm of pronouncing limitations on certain aspects of the hero’s fame in the wake of his martial accomplishment also appear in the fourteenth-century *Völsunga Saga*. Appearing in the war-wise figure of Brynhildr, the benevolent, stalwart Valkyrie-figure offers a brief pronouncement on the limitations of the hero’s legacy after his defeat of the dragon, Fafnir. Says Brynhildr of the enduring fame of Sigurðr Fafnisbana:

*Sigurðr vá at ormi,
en þat síðan mun*

*engum fyrnast,
meðal öld lifir.*

Sigurd fought the dragon,
And that afterward will be
Forgotten by no one
While men still live.⁵¹

This pronouncement is similar to Wealhþeow's in two primary ways. The first is that the scope of men who will remember Sigurðr is unending. In the same way that Wealhþeow tells Beowulf his works will be remembered by men everywhere, far and near, Brynhildr tells Sigurðr that his fame will be *engum fyrnast*, "forgotten by no one." In terms of the temporality of this fame, the two Valkyrie figures likewise generate similar constructions. Wealhþeow tells Beowulf that his fame will be remembered *ealne wīdeferhþ*, "throughout all time," while Brynhildr informs Sigurðr that his fame will live on *meðal öld lifir*, "so long as men live." In either case, the sense conveyed by the Valkyrie-figure's message is clear: the spatial and temporal limitations on the fame of Beowulf and Sigurðr are as vast as mankind.

Speeches and fame-limitation sanctioned by the benevolent Valkyrie figure is an integral element of the diptych structure. Much in the same way that the later, Old Norse Valkyrie-figures of Brynhildr and Sigrúnn offer fame-limiting edicts to their patron heroes, Sigurðr and Helgi, Wealhþeow as a Valkyrie-figure makes a speech to Beowulf that is imbued with prophetic value regarding three dimensions of his fame. Wealhþeow's words establish parameters on the magnitude and scope of Beowulf's worldly fame, his material rewards, and his social obligations toward Hroðgar's heirs in the wake of his killing of Grendel and fulfilling his horn-oath. Elements of Wealhþeow's speech resonate with the speeches of later figures in the Scandinavian Valkyrie-diptychs. Wealhþeow presents

Beowulf with valuable treasure in the form of *bēages*, *þēodgestrēona* and *sincgestrēona*. She reminds him that he will be famous *ealne wīdeferhþ*, “until the end of time.” And she tells him that the range of his fame will be *swā sīde swā sæ bebūgeð*, *windgeard*, *weallas* “as wide as the borders of the sea, encircled by earth’s walls.” But with this seemingly limitless fame comes stringent pronouncements on Beowulf’s responsibility and behaviors toward the folk and throne of Denmark. Wealhþeow reminds Beowulf of the codes of conduct by which all men in Heorot are bound and she tells him how to comport himself in the impending political trajectory of her kingdom.

Wealhtheow’s function of pronouncing fame and fame-limitations upon Beowulf in the aftermath of his monster-slaying endeavors is unique among representations of the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge*. While Old Norse literature presents scholars with numerous *valkyrjur* who are beneficent, Old English literature does not. In Old English texts, the *wælcyrge* is almost always presented and considered with more or less malevolent terms in mind. She is a goddess of death and corruption, venom and guile, and darkness and immoderation in the glosses. In the *mirabilis*-type appearances, she is a localization of an exotic Greek monster who bears very close association with the divine beings present in the glosses. And in the homiletic appearances, she is presented by Wulfstan as a clear and present enemy of the folk. Even in her less rhetorically-charged appearances in the charms and riddles, the *wælcyrge* is still a hostile, war-like being. Even the war-mindedness and open, violent attack of the *mihtigan wyf* in the *Wið Færstice* charm is unmistakable. In the character of Wealhþeow as a benevolent, fame-limiting *wælcyrge*, therefore, scholars find “the one possible exception to the prevailing view of the Valkyries in Anglo-Saxon literature as baneful [beings].”⁵²

Grendel's Mother as the Malevolent Valkyrie-Figure

In 1959, Nora K. Chadwick forwarded the radical claim that “it would not seem improbable... that the English conception of a Valkyrie, was similar to the earliest Norse conception” as scholars see it in the baleful creatures of spite and bloodshed present in the malevolent Valkyrie-figure.⁵³ Chadwick furthered this claim in writing that “in the conception of Grendel’s mother, we seem to have an earlier conception than that which gained currency in Scandinavian lands... [Grendel’s mother] is an English conception of a Valkyrie, as a fierce and vengeful spirit of the underworld... before she was vested in the romantic trappings of the Norse skaldic poet.”⁵⁴ In respect to the elements of narrative, setting, and characterization present in the Anglo-Saxon and Norse tales involving Valkyrie-like monsters, Chadwick writes that “both literatures bear such a startling similarity as to preclude the possibility of coincidence.”⁵⁵ In much the same way that H. Munro Chadwick sees the courtly, benevolent Valkyrie-figure of the Eddas as having qualities tracable to Wealhþeow, Nora K. Chadwick sees malevolent Valkyrie figures, like “the baleful *Ðorgerðr Hölgabrúðr*” as beings having shared characteristics with Grendel’s mother.⁵⁶

After establishing the functionality of Wealhþeow as the benevolent Valkyrie-figure in the pairing, Helen Damico addresses Grendel’s mother as a possible incarnation of the malevolent half of the Valkyrie-diptych, and she bases much of her assessment of Grendel’s mother on Chadwick’s assertions about the swamp-dwelling dam.⁵⁷ Damico notes that “the *Beowulf* poet follows the customary portrayal of the Valkyrie as a deadly battle-demon in his characterization of Grendel’s mother.”⁵⁸ Damico goes on to assert that Grendel’s mother’s placement opposite Wealhþeow makes her, in part, the malevolent half of the

Valkyrie-pairing, and, as such, she is the earliest recorded figure to function in this role; writes Damico: “Grendel’s mother is the earliest rendering in Nordic and Anglo-Saxon literatures of the female-warrior figure as a battle-demon.”⁵⁹ In establishing that Grendel’s mother exists in “an antipodal relationship to Heorot’s queen,” Damico constructs her argument along three major pathways.⁶⁰ To Damico’s reading, Grendel’s mother satisfies the role of the malevolent Valkyrie-figure in the diptych-structure in terms of: 1.) her large, monstrous physical form; 2.) the overweening drive for satisfaction reflected in Grendel’s mother’s vengeance-quest / blood-feud against Beowulf; and 3.) the sexual corruption or sexualized violence inherent in Grendel’s mother as a trope repeatedly echoed in the malevolent Valkyrie-figures in Old Norse iterations of the diptych. I will briefly summarize Damico’s points in order to contextualize my own assessment of Grendel’s mother.

To the first point, Damico compares the physical form of Grendel’s mother to the physical form of malevolent Valkyries in the Old Norse diptych tradition. Damico notes the seeming physical similarities between Grendel’s mother and the war-women of the Old Norse texts:

The *Beowulf* poet follows the customary portrayal of the Valkyrie as a deadly battle-demon in his characterization of Grendel’s mother. As Chadwick argues, the grim aspect of the Valkyries is epitomized in Anglo-Saxon poetry by the *wælgæst wæfre* ‘roaming slaughter-spirit. Certainly, the epithets used to describe the battling giantess support Chadwick’s statement. The *brimwylf*, ‘she-wolf of the sea’ has formidable strength. She is a *merewif mihtig*, ‘mighty sea-woman, a *mihtig mānscaða*, ‘mighty evil ravager,’ a *micle mearcstapa*, ‘great boundary-stalker,’ and she delights in carnage –she is a ‘horror glorifying in carrion’ (*atol æse wlanc*).⁶¹

Seeing strong parallels to the Old Norse form of evil Valkyrie in the diptych tradition, Damico focuses her assessment of Grendel’s mother on the comparison to two specific Old Norse figures who are analogous to Grendel’s mother.

The first of these figures is the monstrous *Đorgerðr Hölgabrúðr*. Appearing in the thirteenth-century *Jómsvíkinga Saga*, the murderous Valkyrie *Đorgerðr Hölgabrúðr* plays a direct role in the slaughter of human beings and is described by the sagaist as being a *flagð*.⁶² Geir T. Zoëga defines *flagð* as “female monster, ogress, giantess.”⁶³ Damico traces the similarities between *Đorgerðr Hölgabrúðr* and Grendel’s mother in terms of their both claiming human sacrificial victims and their both being physically monstrous of form.⁶⁴ Damico writes that “Nora Chadwick allies the battle sorceress [*Đorgerðr Hölgabrúðr*] with Grendel’s mother, the *helrune* who likewise delights in blood and slaughter and who (like Thorgerth) is kin to [the Valkyrie-] class of war spirits” who offer combat directly to hero-figures and exhibit supernatural powers of war-virulence.⁶⁵ Damico likewise sees physical similarities between Grendel’s mother and *Hrimgerðr*, the enormous, evil Valkyrie from the thirteenth-century Valkyrie-diptych *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonr*.⁶⁶ In terms of *Hrimgerðr*’s likeness to Grendel’s mother through her physical monstrousness, Damico writes:

The Norse giantess has traits reminiscent of the *merewif mihtig* ‘mighty mere-woman’ of Beowulf. *Hrimgerth* is characterized as a witch, a dusk-rider, a corpse-hungry giantess, loathsome to mankind...*Svava* [sic] and *Hrimgerth* are adversaries. Both vie for possession of the hero... the relationship is analogous to that between *Wealhtheow* and Grendel’s mother.⁶⁷

By tracing the similarities between the physical size, form, and characteristics between *Hrimgerðr*, *Đorgerðr Hölgabrúðr*, and Grendel’s mother, Helen Damico argues that, like her Old Norse successors, Grendel’s mother may be read as “a supernatural female of the dark, sinister type” commonly found in the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure.⁶⁸

The second pathway by which Damico locates Grendel’s mother as a participant in the Valkyrie-diptych tradition is through her overweening desire for vengeance against Beowulf. Damico notes that in the same way Grendel’s mother yearns for vengeance

against the mighty Geat for the slaying of her son, other *in malo* Valkyrie-figures of the diptych tradition are driven by vengeance and blood-feud. Of the baleful *Đorgerðr Hölgabrúðr*, Damico writes that “the creature is corrupt... and insatiable in her desire for revenge.”⁶⁹ Of the malevolent *Hrimgerðr* and her parallels to Grendel’s mother, Damico writes, “Hrimgerth, the Norse giantess, seeks to avenge the murder of her father, *Hati*, ‘the Hated One,’ while Grendel’s mother, the Anglo-Saxon [Valkyrie], seeks compensation for the killing of her son.”⁷⁰

Broadening her scope from the specific qualities associating Grendel’s mother with the figures of *Hrimgerðr* and *Đorgerðr Hölgabrúðr*, Damico considers the imbalance of desire and emotion that is inherent in all Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie figures. Damico writes that Valkyrie-figures of the Old Norse tradition “exhibit similar intemperate longing for self-fulfillment,” which often manifests in the form of blood-feud or revenge-killing.⁷¹ Her investigation into this aspect of the Valkyrie-figure brings Damico to her final major assessment of the malevolent half of the Valkyrie-diptych: the sexual corruption inherent in the *in malo* figure.

The third major evidence by which Damico locates Grendel’s mother as a malevolent Valkyrie figure in the diptych tradition stems from the “intemperate longing for self-fulfillment” mentioned above. Damico sees this, in the Anglo-Saxon war-woman, manifesting as moral or sexual (maternal) corruption. “Moral corruption is not foreign to the Valkyries,” writes Damico; “the [*Beowulf* poet’s] implicit condemnation of Grendel’s mother... shows the doubleness of her character” as both a blood-thirsty killer and a sexually maligned hag.⁷² Damico notes that “the intensity of emotion that turns into desire for revenge... in Grendel’s mother” is very closely aligned with “perverted eroticism” in the

Old Norse iterations of the Valkyrie-diptych.⁷³ Although she is not the only critic to suggest that Grendel's mother is motivated by perverted sexuality (or maternity) or a carnal desire turned malevolent when mixed with feelings of desire for revenge, Damico's assessment is the first to establish a link between these qualities in the Anglo-Saxon war-woman and her Old Norse successor in the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure.⁷⁴ Damico establishes that the Anglo-Saxon representation of the malevolent Valkyrie-figure is a figure imbued with an imbalance of desire, both in terms of blood-venegance and sexual malignity; Damico writes that "in *Beowulf*, as in several Old Norse works, the figure exists both as an abstract battle-demon and as a specific personage in a courtly environment, with the dominant traits of violence and excessive longing or perverted eroticism."⁷⁵

As was true of her investigations into Wealhþeow as a benevolent Valkyrie-figure in the diptych tradition, Damico asserts numerous more minor assessments that locate Grendel's mother within the malevolent half of the diptych structure. I will not, however, belabor my dissertation with an exhaustive assessment of these minor evidential pathways. Suffice to say that I briefly mention the major evidences by which Damico situates Grendel's mother within the Valkyrie-diptych narrative tradition in order to contextualize my own readings of Grendel's mother as a Valkyrie figure for an audience unfamiliar with Damico's research. By foregrounding my own assessment of Grendel's mother as an *in malo* figure in the diptych tradition, I will show that Damico's argument may be supplemented with additional evidences locating Grendel's mother as an early, Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge*-figure whose form and function in *Beowulf* illustrate yet another dimension of the Anglo-Saxon war-woman and showcases the complexity and

sophistication with which this figure was incorporated into the Old English genre of heroic verse.

There are, I believe, two major pieces of evidence in *Beowulf* that Damico does not extensively consider, but which are central to my reading of Grendel's mother as a Valkyrie-figure within the diptych tradition. I argue that these evidences are integral to a scholarly reading of Grendel's mother as an Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge* fulfilling the role of the malicious figure in the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure. These evidences are: 1.) Grendel's mother's ability to cripple or bind her enemies with paralyzing and debilitating fear that renders them ineffective in combat; and 2.) the *Beowulf* poet's emphasis on Grendel's mother's claws as her primary tool of violence.⁷⁶ In these ways, Grendel's mother closely inhabits both the form and function of the malevolent figure in the Old Norse Valkyrie-diptych narrative tradition.

The first evidence that I forward as a measure by which to locate Grendel's mother as a malevolent *wælcyrge*-figure in the diptych tradition is her apparent ability to inflict terror-paralysis on her enemies. This unmanning power is born of her horrific appearance, and is a reemerging trope in the Old Norse episodes of the Valkyrie-diptych. It also occurs in other Germanic texts in which the war-woman is a significant feature.

In *Beowulf*, Grendel's mother inflicts a debilitating power on the hall-defenders of Heorot. When the sun sets after an evening of revelry in the newly monster-purged hall, the female monster comes seeking her blood-vengeance for her slain son. Grendel's mother breaks into the hall and finds a host of sleeping thegns. After being discovered, but prior to her physically grabbing Æschere, Grendel's mother inspires a wild terror in the hearts of the Danish hall-defenders. The *Beowulf* poet describes the actions taken by the

hall-thegns during the first few moments after Grendel's mother is discovered in the hall of Heorot:

*Ðā wæs on healle heardecg togen
sweord ofer setlum, sīd rand manig
hafen handa fæst; helm ne gemunde,
byrnan sīde, þā hine se brōga angeat.*⁷⁷

Then was in the hall the hard-edge drawn,
The sword over the seats, many a broad disk
Rais'd fast in hand, helm the warrior remembered not,
Nor the ample byrnie, when terror was on him shed.⁷⁸

At their first contact with Grendel's mother, the hall-thegns take up their blades in an attempt to offer positive offense against the intruding hag. So aggressive and effective is this offensive gesture by the hall-thegns that Grendel's mother is initially in fear for her life. The poet writes that *heo wæs on ofste, wolde út þanon / feore beorgan, þá heó onfundon wæs*, "she was in haste, would out from thence, save her life, as she was discover'd."⁷⁹ The life-threatening offense that the hall-thegns bring to bear against the hag bespeaks their battle prowess, but they are not able to offer an equally effective defense against the she-marauder's assault. The poet tells us that the men are unable to offer solid defense against the hag's attack because they *ne gemunde*, "remember not" their helmets and their armor. Klaeber defines *gemunde* as a verb meaning "to bear in mind" and Bosworth-Toller define it as meaning "to remember, bear in mind, consider."⁸⁰ Moreover, the *Beowulf* poet explicitly tells us *why* each man fails to defensively prepare for battle. It is not because he does not have enough time to prepare, and it is not because he does not have the appropriate armaments at the ready.

The *Beowulf* poet specifically tells us that each hall retainer falters in his combat-preparedness *þā hine se brōga angeat*, "when he was seized by terror." Benjamin Thorpe

renders this passage as “when terror was on him shed,” and Bosworth-Toller define *angeat* as a past-preterit form of the verb *angitan*, meaning “to get, lay hold of, seize... Hine se brōga angeat *terror seized him*.”⁸¹ In a moment of mental incapacity inspired by the sudden invasion of Grendel’s mother, the hall thegns of Heorot give no mind to their defensive weaponry. Grendel’s mother causes the unmaning terror which seizes each hall-defender and renders him mentally unable to offer up a positive defense against her attacks. She inflicts upon each man a battle-paralysis by which he becomes unmindful of his defensive armaments. This battle-paralysis leads to physical unpreparedness in that each man *helm ne gemunde / byrnan side*, “remembered not [his] helmet, or broad byrnie.” Such battle paralysis makes each thegn less able to commit to battle, and more vulnerable to physical attack by the vengeful hag. While they are able to offensively wield their weapons, the men are entirely unable to provide for their own defense in combat.

As we see in the episode in which Beowulf wrestles with the tarn-hag in her underwater lair, the armor of a warrior is the only piece of his arsenal that can save him from her wicked clutches. Thus, the unleashing of a terror that makes warriors forgetful of their armor is a tactic that conspicuously and overtly tilts the scales of battle in favor of the fiendish hag. The *Beowulf* poet tells us that Beowulf’s donning of his armor just prior to his dive into the mere is a conscious act (which he specifically and consciously did not perform in his battle with Grendel) meant to preserve his life during his encounter with Grendel’s mother:

*Gyrede hine Beowulf
Eorlgewædum: nalles for ealdre mearn;
Scolde herebyrne, hondum gebroden,
Síd and searofáh, sund cunnian,
Seó ðe bāncofan beorgan cuþe,
Þæt him hilde gráp hreþre ne mihte,*

*Eorres inwitfeng, alder gesceþðan.*⁸²

Clad himself Beowulf in war-like weeds:
 For life he car'd not; his martial byrnie must
 With hands twisted, ample and curiously variegated,
 Tempt the deep, which his body
 Could well secure, so that hostile gripe his
 Breast might not, the wrothful's wily grasp,
 His life injure.⁸³

This conscious act of donning his armor to prevent Grendel's mother's taking his life, coupled with the slaughter of Æschere during a fight in which the hall-thegns gave no mind to their armor, suggests that the terror inflicted by Grendel's mother is a strategy meant to give power and victorious edge to her own fighting style, as she is clearly capable of ending the life of any man whom she encounters who is not protected by armor. Her battle-terror is not simply a fear that makes men's offensive combat ineffectual; it is a debilitating fear that renders men inept in offering adequate defense and leaves them vulnerable to further attack. Her ability to inspire a crippling battle-terror in men and cause them to forget their war-byrnies, helps Grendel's mother to effectively render the hall-thegns fully vulnerable to her attacks and helps to make her a very virulent and dangerous opponent in the poem. By inflicting such imbalanced terror on her adversaries, Grendel's mother tilts the scales of combat in her favor before a martial encounter can even begin.

The ability of Grendel's mother to enthrall men with fear-inspired battle-ineptitude may be likened to the war-fetters or battle-bonds which the Teutonic literary tradition holds as items forged by and placed on men-of-war by evil Valkyrie figures. These fetters are not physical bindings, but metaphorical or ethereal bonds which are invisible, but which have very real-world implications that the warrior afflicted by these ethereal bonds will suffer a very real and deadly lapse of battle-judgment or courage. Even though the

being weaving the terror-bonds may be supernatural or physical, H. R. Ellis Davidson notes that the war-fetters they create “are not likely to be physical bonds, but rather [are] fetters of the mind” that cause otherwise stalwart men to become extremely ineffectual in terms of the defensive entrenching that they can conduct in combat.⁸⁴ The malevolent Valkyrie’s ability to inhibit her enemies’ defensive-sensibilities, thereby swaying the tide of the ensuing combat, is widely attested in the Old Norse diptych-structure as well as in Germanic and non-diptych Scandinavian sources involving Valkyries. Ellis Davidson reminds us that the war-fetters are a kind of “hostile magic” that “must not be confused with the onset of panic in battle.”⁸⁵ She notes that many men who succumb to the war-fetters cast by Valkyries are immune to normal battle-panic, for each is “an exceptionally brave man and a splendid fighter.”⁸⁶ For Ellis Davidson, the war-fetters with which the malevolent Valkyries shackle their victims engender “a kind of battle paralysis, like that experienced in a nightmare,” in which the terror of an approaching threat prevents the warrior from properly taking a defensive position to ward against that approaching threat.⁸⁷

Throughout Old Norse and Germanic texts involving the *in malo* Valkyrie figure, the wicked war-woman uses this power of seizing men in terror-fetters to cause their defensive skills and courageous sensibilities to falter at the critical moment in which battle is joined. With respect to the Old Norse *valkyrjur*-figures, Helen Damico writes that “binding and fettering, as well as engendering battle paralysis, are considered to be functions of [Scandinavian] Valkyries.”⁸⁸ In the greater *Nafnaþulur* and in the *Grímnismál* in MS AM 748 I 4to, scholars find the maleficent *Herfjöturr*. This Valkyrie-figure is the very personification of the bound, inept feeling that overwhelms the warrior in battle. Charles

Donahue notes that the word *herfjotur* “means literally ‘army-fetter’ ... as a common noun it means a terrifying weakness that comes over the warrior, hindering his battle-abilities and presaging his death.”⁸⁹ Geír T. Zoëga likewise defines *Herfjöturr*, both the common noun and the Valkyrie’s name, as “war-fetter.”⁹⁰ In onomastic terms, therefore, the name of this Valkyrie is insightful as to the terror she brings to the battlefield; any young warrior who faces the *Herfjöturr*, will succumb to a paralysing panic that causes him to forget or ignore his defensive skills and bring about his own demise.

The twelfth-century poem, *Darraðarljóð*, found in MS AM 132, contains Valkyrie-figures who weave a grisly tapestry (on a loom made from swords, bloody spears, and severed human heads) and fortell the deaths of Vikings and Irish at the Battle of Clontarf; the poem calls these figures *sóknvarðar*.⁹¹ Zoëga identifies *sóknvarðar* as a dithematic epithet consisting of *sókn-*, meaning “attack, fight,” and *-varðar*, meaning “hinder, prevent.”⁹² The composite epithet may reasonably be rendered as “battle-hinderers” or “fight-preventers,” not in the sense that they prevent a fight from happening or stop a battle from taking place, but in the sense that they stop single men from finding the wherewithal to dedicate themselves to defensive capabilities when the opposing army launches an offensive campaign. They pull the fight out of individual men, or stop individual men from successfully joining battle. To hinder the fight in a man, therefore, is to promote his slaughter at the hands of the unbound, uninhibited enemy. Read in this manner, the blood-draggled Valkyrie-figures who weave a tapestry about the death of doomed men in *Darraðarljóð* are the “battle-hinderers” who prevent men from defending themselves appropriately and effectively, and, insodoing, engender their deaths on the battlefield.

Numerous scholars have noted that the ability of the evil Valkyrie figure to cast paralyzing fear over a group of warriors is also attested in the malignant *idisi* figures of the *Die Merseburger Zaubersprüche*, the *First Mersburg Charm*. Rudolf Simek notes that the *idisi* are “some kind of Valkyrie” who “have the power to hamper enemies” in battle in Old Norse tradition.⁹³ The imagery of the *idisi* as a continental Valkyrie in the *Mersburg Charm* also suggests parallels to the role of terror-bringer and army-paralyzer of Grendel’s mother in *Beowulf*. The first stanza of *Mersburg Charm* describes how the *idisi* bind warriors in battle, causing fatal hesitation when battle is joined:

*Eiris sazun idisi, sazun hera duoder;
suma hapt heptidun, suma heri lezidun,
suma clubodun umbi cuoniouuidi:
insprinc haptbandun, inuar uigandun.*⁹⁴

Once sat the *idisi*, sitting here and there,
Some make bonds, some impede the army,
Some break the chains all around,
Escape the bonds! Flee the enemy!

Helen Damico notes that “the force of [Grendel’s mother’s] surprise attack on the hall, as well as the panic it creates in the warriors, reasonably identifies the *ides áglæcwíf* with the *idisi* of the Merseburg Charm,” and from this identification, coupled with the evidences from the onomastic significance of *Herfjöturr* and the deadly *sóknvarðar* we may more accurately locate Grendel’s mother as the only Anglo-Saxon participant in a Germanic literary tradition in which the malevolent female functions as a type of *in malo* Valkyrie-figure.

Beyond the similarities that they seem to possess with the malevolent figures in the Scandinavian Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure, the *idisi* in the *Mersburg Charm* evoke thoughts of the *Alaisiagae* of the third-century votive inscription at Hadrian’s Wall, which

Krappe cites as the fountainhead of all forms of the Valkyrie. Theodor Siebs reads the name of one of the *Alaisiagae*, *Friagabis*, as meaning “freedom-giver.”⁹⁵ Siebs’ translation of *Friagabis* suggests that this member of the *Alaisiagae* as a race was also a figure tied to the binding of warriors in battle. In this case, however, *Friagabis* seems to be a benevolent Valkyrie who could “break the chains” of battle-paralysis, thereby loosening a man and preventing his death.⁹⁶ R. C. Bosanquet writes that the names of both the *Alaisiagae* recorded at Hadrian’s Wall are significant to the binding and freeing of men on the battlefield. Writes Bosanquet: “Baudihillia and Friagabis...have been interpreted as ‘ruler of battle’ and ‘giver of freedom.’”⁹⁷ The names of both *Alaisiagae* suggest that these figures served roles opposite that of the malevolent Valkyrie-figures and that a struggle between opposing female war-divinities accompanied the *Alaisiagae* of the third century; one of these figures terrified and bound men, while the other functioned as a “giver of freedom” on the battlefield. This polarity of the binding-female –her ability to both fetter a man and set him loose– is likewise present in the *Merseburg Charm*, for the verse alludes to some women forging bonds (*suma hapt heptidun, suma heri lezidun*, “some make bonds, some impede the army”), while at the same time alluding to other women who loosen and break the fetters afflicting the army (*suma clubodun umbi cuoniouuidi*, “some break the chains all around”).⁹⁸

Jacob Grimm connected the powers of terror-paralysis to both the *idisi* of the *First Merseburg Charm* and the Scandinavian Valkyries, but Grimm did not connect these powers to the war-women of the Anglo-Saxon tradition.⁹⁹ Similarly, Charles Donahue reiterates the the Valkyrie-ability to evoke terror-paralysis in noting that “the noble [*idisi*] of the Germanic charm seem to correspond to the Scandinavian Valkyries” in terms of their ability

to debilitate their adversaries through overweening fear.¹⁰⁰ While Helen Damico agrees with Donahue that the *wælcyrge* as a being that was, at times, “viewed with sensations of horror” by the Anglo-Saxons and believes that, in some regards, they, like the *idisi* and *valkyrjur*, can shackle men with fetters of terror; Damico associates this power not with Grendel’s mother, but with Modthrytho.¹⁰¹ Damico cites the *Beowulf* poet’s use of the word *wælbende* (l.1936a), which she renders as “fetters of the slain,” in suggesting that Modthrytho is possessed of this Valkyrie-like ability.¹⁰² The word *wælbende* is a unique entry in the corpus, which Bosworth-Toller defines as “a deadly, mortal band.”¹⁰³ Of the *wælbende* mentioned in *Beowulf*, Damico writes that “Modthrytho’s weaving of slaughter-bonds is reminiscent of the weaving of chains and twisting of shackles in which the *idisi* of the Merseburg charm engage, and the paralytic state that grips her victim is analogous to the terror that the *idisi* generate in their [victims].”¹⁰⁴

In order to more clearly and accurately locate Grendel’s mother as a *wælcyrge* figure active in the Valkyrie-diptych narrative tradition, I assert that the same connections that Damico draws between Modthrytho and the *idisi* can likewise be drawn between the fettering powers of the *idisi* of the *Merseburg Charm* and the ability of Grendel’s mother to engender defensive battle-lapse in men’s minds during her night-raid at Heorot. By causing the vanguard of Heorot to *helm ne gemunde, / byrnan side*, “to helm g[i]ve no mind / nor to broad byrnie,” through her evocation of an incapacitating *bróga*, “terror” with which each man was irrevocably, and, in the case of Æschere, fatally *angeát*, “seized,” Grendel’s mother seems to be a *wælcyrge* who is very much possessed of the ability to cripple her warrior-enemies through sensations of overweening terror. Just like the *idisi* of the *Merseburg Charm*, the *sóknvarðar* of the *Darraðarljóð*, and the individual *valkyrja*-figure

of *Herfjöturr*, remembered in the greater *Nafnaþulur* and *Grímnismál* (which contains a stanza in which good Valkyries are opposed to bad, in diptych-fashion), Grendel's mother is capable of conjuring an all-possessing terror, which seizes men, causes them to forget to apply their defensive training, armor, and combat skills, and, ultimately, leads to their demise.¹⁰⁵ In much the same way that the *sóknvarðar* of the *Darraðarljóð* cause the deaths of both Viking raiders and Irish defenders at the Battle of Clontarf, and the *idisi* of the *Merseburg Charm* engender the premature deaths of men during times of war in ninth-century Germania, Grendel's mother is able to garner a tactical edge in the melee at Heorot by fettering the defensive capabilities of the hall-warders and claiming the life of one of these men through the application of her debilitating terror. Through an analysis of the ability of Grendel's mother to strip the men of Heorot of their abilities to defend against her attacks by way of their *ne gemunde* their defensive armaments, scholars and critics of the Valkyrie tradition may read Grendel's mother as a viable, Old English participant in the Valkyrie narrative tradition, by which the malevolent war-woman binds living men with fetters forged of mortal fear.¹⁰⁶

In addition to this evidence, I would like to suggest that there is another pathway by which scholars may read Grendel's mother as a participant in the Valkyrie-diptych narrative tradition. The second aspect of Grendel's mother that bespeaks her function as the *in malo* half of the Valkyrie-diptych in *Beowulf* is the very specific martial manner in which she engages the poem's hero. During each of her encounters with humans in the poem, Grendel's mother relies on the grasp of her loathsome claws in order to work her malice. Even though she will wield a knife and try to stab him through his mail-sark in the final moments of her struggles against Beowulf, Grendel's mother is a figure whom the poet

identifies as a clutching, grappling, clawing figure whose primary tools of violence are her *atolan clomum*, “wretched clutches” and her *láp̄an fingrum*, “loathsome fingers.”¹⁰⁷ This emphasis on her hands as the seat of her malevolent powers, I assert, locates Grendel’s mother in the tradition of the *in malo* figure in the Valkyrie-diptych tradition insofar as it parallels her to a number of other Valkyrie-figures within several Old Norse diptych narratives. As I will show, numerous other Valkyrie-figures occupying this niche will likewise be emphasized in terms of their grasping, devilish claws as the primary tools of their bloody malevolence. The malevolent half of the Valkyrie-diptych is often associated with her hands, her fingers, and her claws as both practical weapons for inflicting damage on the narrative’s hero, and as highly visible, outward markers that signify her otherness and her monstrosity.

At her first appearance in the poem, Grendel’s mother slinks into Heorot and finds men sleeping after their feast. Shortly thereafter, she is discovered, and the monstrous woman is in a panic to escape. Before fleeing, however, Grendel’s mother exacts her revenge against the Danes by claiming the body and life of one of their head-men, Æschere. As Grendel’s mother flees the hall, she gathers a handful of human plunder, and the poet places emphasis on her hands as her tool of malice in in this moment: *hraðe heó æþelinga ānne hæfde / fæste befangen, þā heó tó fenne gang*, “of the nobles, quicky she had one / fast seized, as to the fen she went.”¹⁰⁸ A few lines later, the poet tells us that, so ferocious was Grendel’s mother in her hewing claws, that the luckless man did not leave the hall alive. The man whom Grendel’s mother attacked was *rice rand-wíga, þone þe heó on reste abreat*, “a powerful shield-warrior, whom she on his couch destroy’d.”¹⁰⁹ In a scene eerily echoing Grendel’s bloody assault on Hondscio several hundred lines earlier, this moment in the

poem showcases the terrible strength and catastrophic ferocity inherent in the claws of Grendel's mother. The stalwart and accomplished warrior, Æschere, whom the poet laudes as a *hæleþa*, "hero" and a *rice rand-wíga*, "powerful shield-warrior," is slaughtered as he sleeps by the rending claws of Grendel's mother. Not only is she able to bear the unfortunate man away with her into the wilderness when she flees, but, so mighty are her hand-talons, that Grendel's mother is able to physically rend Æschere before she flees the hall.

The next morning, as Beowulf is responding to the urgent summons of Hroðgar, the poet again aims the focus of the narrative toward the might of the claws of Grendel's mother, for Hroðgar informs Beowulf, when he arrives back inside Heorot, that Æschere was slaughtered the previous evening by way of the night-stalking *handbanan*, "hand-slayer" or "one who kills by way of the hands."¹¹⁰ Klaeber glosses *handbona* as "slayer with the hand."¹¹¹ The word *handbona* is used twice more in Beowulf: once at line 460 to describe the murder of Heatholaf by Beowulf's father, and again at line 2502 as Beowulf discusses his slaying of Dæghrefn. Howell Chickering Jr. renders the latter usage as placing specific emphasis on Beowulf's use of his "bare hands" to slay Dæghrefn.¹¹² Thus, while the term is not exclusive in designating the killer as a monster, the term does seem to carry the detail of committing an act of homicide with one's hands, which is a primitive and remarkable form of murder, even in Anglo-Saxon England. Bosworth-Toller define *handbanan*, which does not appear in Old English outside of *Beowulf*, as "one who slays with his own hand" and notes that it is the etymological equivalent of the Icelandic *handbani*, which means "killer by hand."¹¹³ This word gives descriptive detail about the

murder of *Æschere*, and both incriminates Grendel's mother as a ruthless homicide, as well as showcasing her crime as one committed with her actual hands.

The poet emphasizes the claws of Grendel's mother a third time just prior to Beowulf's descent into the dark mere. As he outfits himself with his armaments, Beowulf pays especial attention to his armor and his helm. The poet tells us that he girds his armor *þæt him hilde gráp hreþre ne mihte, / eorres inwifeng, alder gesceþðan* "so that hostile gripe his / breast might not [pierce], the wrothful's wily grasp, his life injure."¹¹⁴ Beowulf's consciousness of the threat posed by the claws of Grendel's mother is clear in this scene. He knows that Grendel's mother is a very capable *handbanan*, and so it is against her savage clutch and rending claws that he must defend himself. Likewise, the narrative tension built by the poet is intensified over the previous arming scene in which Beowulf readies himself for his encounter with Grendel. Prior to his battle with Grendel, Beowulf boasts that he counts himself a match for the fell brute, and consciously and conspicuously sheds his armor. As he prepares for his combat with Grendel, Beowulf *he hím ofdýde ísren byrnan / helm of hafelan*, "he cast off his iron byrnie from himself, the helm from his head."¹¹⁵ So dangerous are the claws of Grendel's mother, however, that while Beowulf was willing to discard his armor and meet Grendel without his protective war-shirt, he is certainly *not* willing to do the same in his battle against Grendel's mother. While the rhetorical passage some lines later (1282b-1287) cryptically suggests that her threat to the Danes was less only by so much as a maiden's power is less than a warrior's when the sword is cloven into the boar-helm, the level of preparedness that Beowulf shows in gearing-up for each encounter suggests that the mighty Geat is well aware that the claws of

Grendel's mother pose a much more dire threat to his life and limb than did the steel-hard nails and iron hand-spurs of *Grendles grape*, "Grendel's grasp."¹¹⁶

The narrative tension surrounding the grim grasp of Grendel's mother reaches its crescendo during a protracted battle-sequence under the dark mere. All the allusions to the threat inherent in the claws of Grendel's mother come to grisly fruition as she seizes Beowulf, drags him into her lair, and falls upon him with her baleful claws. Repeatedly during this scene, the poet highlights the terrible war-talons of Grendel's mother and the potential lethality that they represent for the Geatish prince. As soon as she discovers the man in her watery lair, Grendel's mother lunges for him with her claws, she *gráp bá tógeanes, guð-rinc gefeng*, "grasp'd toward him, the warrior seiz'd."¹¹⁷ Immediately after securing him in her *atolan clommum*, "horrid clutches," Grendel's dam seeks to kill Beowulf by piercing his flesh with her *lápan fingrum*, "loathsome fingers." She is forestalled in her efforts, however, by Beowulf's sturdy armor. By initiating her primary attack with only her *clommum* and her *fingrum*, Grendel's mother shows that she is a ferocious monster fully capable of killing a man with only her bare hands. As soon as she grabs Beowulf, Grendel's mother seeks to become a *handbona* against the Geatish prince in the same way that she slew the Dane, Æschere.

After striking his ineffectual sword-blow against her skull and grappling her to the ground, Beowulf is once more brought near to death by the deadly claws of Grendel's mother. The poet tells us that, in her retaliation, *heó him eft hraþe hand-leán forgeald / grimman grápum, and him tógeanes feng*, "she him again quickly paid a hand-reward / with her fierce grasps, and at him caught."¹¹⁸ In a moment of irony in the wording of the poem, the poet puns on *hand-leán*. Bosworth-Toller define *hand-leán* as "reward, recompense

given by the hand, retaliation.”¹¹⁹ Appearing in *Exodus* and other texts with the sense of reward or retaliation delivered by the hand of the concerned party, the word here carries a rich double *entendre* in that Grendel’s mother’s hands are the source of her violence, and it is with these grim clutches that she delivers to Beowulf his reward for having handled her so roughly. By grabbing him and throwing him to the ground, Grendel’s mother does, indeed, give Beowulf his *hand-leán*.

So devastatingly powerful is the grip of Grendel’s mother that she is able to accomplish against the mighty Geat warrior that which her terrible son could not. After grasping Beowulf in her lair, Grendel’s mother throws him to the ground; she *oferwearþ þá wérig-mód, wigena strengest / féþecempa þæt hé on fylle wearð*, “overthrew then the weary of mood, of warriors strongest / the active champion, so that he was about to perish.”¹²⁰ Such rough manhandling by the hag is made possible by her claws; the threat that the hag poses to Beowulf is made all the more dire because of her clawed hands and her fierce, grappling attacks, which clearly outstrip in ferocity and danger anything that Grendel was able to present to the Geat warlord. While Grendel’s mother will go on to draw her *seaxe*, “knife,” and attempt to stab Beowulf, this act is a final piece to a much longer sequence; the lion’s share of her violence is caused by her terrible claws.¹²¹ That she has thrown Beowulf down on the ground and is able to wield her *seaxe* against him is caused by her earlier grappling maneuver conducted with her fierce grip and her loathsome fingers.¹²²

The emphasis on the claws as a tool of violence recurs in numerous Old Norse iterations of the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure, and the repeated and heavy emphasis that the poet places on the hands of the hag in *Beowulf* helps scholars to locate Grendel’s mother as a monster participating in the Valkyrie-diptych narrative tradition.

Scholars find two primary analogues to Grendel's mother in Old Norse literature, both of whose hands are emphasized by the poets as the most virulent weapons in their arsenal. These monstrous Valkyrie-figures are Hrimgerðr and Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr. While Nora K. Chadwick and Helen Damico have both argued that similarities exist between these figures and Grendel's mother, neither has investigated, to any substantial length, the parallels between these figures in terms of their hands, fingers, and claws as the root of their violence.

The first analogue to Grendel's mother, in terms of her being a malevolent Valkyrie-figure whose claws and hand-strength are pushed to the fore, is Hrimgerðr. Functioning as the arch-villainess in the thirteenth-century heroic Valkyrie-diptych *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonr*, which centers on the Icelandic hero, Helgi, son of Hjörvarðr, Hrimgerðr is an enormous Valkyrie-figure of unnatural strength and titanic size. She lives in an oceanic environment and confronts the lay's hero as he and his companions attempt to sail past her and out of the harbor. Though she does not execute the same level of physical violence against Helgi and his allies that Grendel's mother brings to bear against the Danes and the Geats, Hrimgerðr does attempt to lay her doleful hands on Helgi in a lethal way. At their confrontation, Hrimgerðr threatens Helgi, describing to him what mortal harm she will do him should he come within reach of her wretched claws:

*Gac þv a land
Ef afli treystiz,
Oc hittomc i vic Varins;
Rifia retti
Er þv mvnt, reccr! fá,
Ef þv mer i krymmor komr.*¹²³

Come ashore to me
If in your might you trust.
I await you at the firths of Varins.

Your ribs will shatter,
Such is my promise, sailor,
If you come within reach of my claws.

The mighty Hrimgerðr issues to Helgi a challenge that relies on her physical strength and her baleful claws as her tools of mortal destruction, as she promises to make Helgi's "ribs...shatter" under the force of her devilish claws. Her challenge is both a taunt and a threat, and she has the physical prowess to enforce it. This threat-challenge is similarly issued by Grendel's mother in *Beowulf*. In the same way that Grendel's mother slays Æschere with enough witness such that word spreads of her status as a *handbanan* (Grendel's mother ritualistically, throwing down the gauntlet in a gesture of blood-feud rivalry, thereby tempting Hroðgar to make the next move, which he does, in soliciting Beowulf to venture to the dark mere and slay the hag), Hrimgerðr issues her challenges to both Helgi, the lay's eponymous hero, and Atli, his companion in arms in direct, threatening terms. In both texts, the malevolent Valkyrie-figure kills high-profile figures with her hands, just prior to her confronting the hero of the tale in a manner that heightens the narrative tension of the struggle between the hag and the hero. Grendel's mother slays Æschere, and this causes her infamy as a killer to spread around the hall. Likewise, Hrimgerðr's slaying of the sons of Hlothvarth, who, like Æschere was to Hroðgar, were hall-companions to Helgi and Atli, spreads her infamy as a killer who is capable of inflicting deadly slaughter with her claws.¹²⁴

In the same way that Beowulf was unable to overcome the claws and grappling might of Grendel's mother until he found help in the *ealdsweord etonisc*, "ancient sword of the giants," Helgi cannot hope to overcome Hrimgerðr's *krymmor*, "claws" directly.¹²⁵ Only by his use of subterfuge (in tricking her to stay above ground and turn into stone at the

coming of the dawn), is Helgi able to overcome the mighty hag and her terrible claws. In neither text does the hero have the physical power or strength to overcome the hag on her own terms; each must reach for unexpected and outside help to secure victory over the malevolent Valkyrie-figure's tremendous power. Beowulf uses the ancient sword he finds on the cavern wall to behead the hag before she can grapple him again, and Helgi uses the dawn to turn Hrimgerðr to stone before she can catch him in her cruel claws.

A second, and perhaps more compelling figure that may be read as analogous to Grendel's mother in terms of her use of her hands and claws as her implements of destruction, is the blood-thirsty Valkyrie-figure of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr. Appearing in the thirteenth-century *Jómsvíkinga Saga*, the malevolent Valkyrie-figure of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr is a heathen deity whose aid on the battlefield is elicited through blood-offerings and human sacrifice left at her altar.¹²⁶ Based upon the physical hideousness of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr and her reveling in human carnage, Nora K. Chadwick has written that "it would not seem improbable, therefore, that the English conception of a Valkyrie was similar to... the baleful Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr."¹²⁷ Upon her assessment of Chadwick's claim, Helen Damico writes that, because Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr "is a fierce battle demon...who... delights in blood and slaughter," she (and the Germanic *idisi* with whom Chadwick compares her) may be successfully read as "fittingly characterizing the vengeful battle-demon."¹²⁸ I would like to add to this assessment the poetic emphasis on the claws as another layer of signification that closely aligns Grendel's mother and Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr as two malevolent Valkyrie-figures functioning in earlier and later contributions to the same narrative tradition.

In the *Jómsvíkinga Saga*, a would-be heroic figure, Sigvaldi, must face the hideous Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr in open combat. Sigvaldi brings his fleet into combat against the Jómsvikings in the shadow of a lone island. Early in the battle, the tide of combat is in favor of Sigvaldi, but then the desperate chieftain of the Jómsviking fleet, Earl Hákon, sails away from the battle, scales the island, and makes sacrifice to the Valkyrie, Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr. In exchange for his young son's life, Earl Hákon garners the aid of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr. As the earl returns to his fleet, the savage Valkyrie rises from the deep and unleashes her deadly wrath on the forces of Sigvaldi. In this episode, the skald places heavy emphasis on her hands and her fingers as the source of Þorgerðr's malevolent violence:

Það er sagt að Hávarður höggvandi, förunautur Búa, sér fyrstur manna hvar Hörðabrúður er í liði Hákonar jarls, og margir sjá það ófreskir menn, og svo þeir er eigi voru ófreskir, og það sjá þeir með, þá er lítt að linaði élinu, að ör fló að því er þeim þótti af hverjum fingri flagðsins, og varð ávallt maður fyrir svo að bana fékk af.¹²⁹

Hárvard the Hewing was the first to see Thorgerd Holgabrúð in the fleet of Earl Hákon, and then many a second-sighted man saw her. And when the squall abated a little, they saw that an arrow flew from every finger of the ogress, and each arrow felled a man.¹³⁰

Once she engages in the battle, Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr turns the tide swiftly in favor of the Jómsvikings. Not only do the hands of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr deal death out upon the men of Sigvaldi, but each individual finger on her hand is described as being able to launch a single arrow, for once she begins fighting, *að ör fló að því er þeim þótti af hverjum fingri flagðsins*, [the men of Sigvaldi] saw an arrow fly from each finger of the foul hag-woman." Moreover, the arrow that flies from the tip of each of her fingers is a deadly missile aimed with deadly accuracy, for the poet tells us that *og varð ávallt maður fyrir svo að bana fékk af*, "and each and every one of the arrows struck a man, and each slew him." In an episode of violence that is strikingly similar to the moment in which Grendel's mother attempts to lance her

claws through Beowulf's mail-hauberk and end his life with her *lápán fingrum*, "loathsome fingers," the wicked Valkyrie-figure of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr here fires lethal projectiles from each of her fingers toward the sailors in the Viking fleet. In both texts, the evil Valkyrie uses the tips of her fingers as piercing-weapons, meant to punch through the armor and flesh of the human being against whom they are fighting. While Grendel's mother as Valkyrie-figure failed in her attempt to skewer Beowulf's flesh with her deadly hands, Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr succeeds in her attempts to end human life with her devilish hands, for the poet tells us that every arrow struck and killed one man among the forces of Sigvaldi.

In *Beowulf*, the eponymous hero has the wherewithal to withstand and overthrow the malevolent Valkyrie-figure. In the *Jómsvíkinga Saga*, however, the figure of Sigvaldi, a would-be hero character who came close to achieving his heroic goals, was forced to retreat in the face of the malevolent Valkyrie-figure of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr. Against Sigvaldi and his men, the arrow-tipped fingers of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr work their mischief with deadly accuracy, while the *lápán fingrum* of Grendel's mere-lurking mother are forestalled utterly by Beowulf's *locene leoðo-syrca*, "ring-locked leather sark," and are eventually overcome entirely through his unyielding grit and his savage sword-arm. Thus, the lethal fingers of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr are able to execute their full potential against the saga's human figures in a way that the dagger-like fingers of Grendel's mother's terrible grasp cannot.

In terms of poetic emphasis placed on the hands, claws, and fingers of each of these war-women as the primary implements by which they inflict mortal violence upon their foes, the parallels between Grendel's mother, Hrimgerðr, and Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr are

extensive. Each of these Valkyrie-figures has long and deadly claws with which they seek to pierce the armor and flesh of their foes. The main strength of their hands and the ferocity of their grip is enough to slaughter men in their sleep, hurl mailed-warriors to the floor, rend the sails of Viking ships, and stave-in the ribs of heroes who risk combat against the ghastly hags. Within the Old Norse poetic corpus, the doleful Valkyrie-figures of Hrimgerðr and Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr are typical of the malevolent half of the Valkyrie-pairing in the diptych structure, and they share much in common with Grendel's mother, who is the sole representative of the malevolent half of the Valkyrie-diptych narrative tradition among Anglo-Saxon letters.

Indeed, the figure comprising the malevolent half of the Valkyrie-pairing in the diptych narrative of both the Old Norse and the Old English tradition, when investigated along these lines, proves to be both literally and figuratively a *handbona* of the first order. Grendel's mother slays Æschere with her hands, right in front of an unnumbered quantity of hall-thegns, and she repeatedly attempts to work the same degree of manual malice on Beowulf himself. The giant Hrimgerðr glories in the might of her claws, and calls down a formal threat-boast to Helgi and Atli, in which she promises a brutal, bone-shattering death to either of them should they *krymmor komr*, "come near to [her] claws." And the malevolent, beastly *valkyrja*-figure of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr fires ethereal arrows from the tips of her fingers during a marine melee in which the would-be hero figure of Sigvaldi can do naught but retreat in the face of the Valkyrie-hag's onslaught. In all of these instances, the might of the malevolent Valkyrie-figure is expressed in terms of her hands and her fingers.

Nora K. Chadwick, in 1959, posited that Grendel's mother is a figure very much akin to the Old Norse conception of the Valkyrie as we find it in the figure of *Đorgerðr Hölgabrúðr*, but Chadwick gives no direct parallels, other than the general ghastliness of form and man-eating tendencies, to suggest the exacting similarity between these figures. By 1984, Helen Damico asserts, based, in part, on Chadwick's claim, that Grendel's mother may be read as an Anglo-Saxon figure comprising the malevolent half of the Valkyrie-diptych previously reserved for Old Norse figures. My reading of Grendel's mother is an addendum to the research and claims of both Chadwick and Damico. I agree with Chadwick that Grendel's mother is a representation of the Anglo-Saxon conception of the malevolent war-woman; she is a poetic and highly evolved form of the *wælcyrge* whose physical appearance and physical deeds are ghastly in the extreme. Likewise, I agree with Damico's assertion that "the Beowulf poet follows the customary portrayal of the Valkyrie as a deadly battle-demon in his characterization of Grendel's mother."¹³¹ In terms of her monstrous physical form, her lust for vengeance, and her sexual/maternal corruption, Grendel's mother is shown by Damico to be possessed of numerous elements locating her as an Anglo-Saxon participant in an Old Norse literary tradition. In my reading of the relationship between Grendel's mother and the Old Norse figures that bear seeming analogous relationships to her, I find multiple avenues of similarity existing between Grendel's mother and the Old Norse figures of *Hrimgerðr* and *Đorgerðr Hölgabrúðr*.

In adding these similarities as evidences by which Grendel's mother may be located as an Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge*, functioning in a tale that is the earliest known incarnation of the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure and fulfilling the role of the malevolent Valkyrie-figure in a genre that is almost exclusively encountered in the Old Norse tradition, I mean

to add more substance and consideration to the arguments previously forwarded by Chadwick and Damico.

My ultimate purpose in adding my assessments to those already in existence may be summarized through a consideration of the writings of Nora K. Chadwick. In “The Monsters and *Beowulf*,” Chadwick writes, in respect to the changes that occur to *Beowulf*-analogues as these tales travel across space and through time, “changes and modifications in the[se] stories, therefore, ought not to be allowed to obscure our perception of their underlying unity.”¹³² Underlying all the idiosyncratic and individualizing qualities of the individual tale in question, any analogue contains deep-rooted similarities to its source-tale. In pointing out the similarities between the ability of Grendel’s mother to bind her enemies with bonds of terror and render them less battle-apt, and other war-women figures associated with the Valkyrie-diptych tradition, I mean to show that Grendel’s mother is an Anglo-Saxon participant in the Valkyrie’s ability to shackle her enemies in ‘war-fetters’ of a type. Likewise, in showcasing the similarities in form and function between the *atolan clommum* of Grendel’s mother, the *krymmor* of Hrimgerðr, and the *fingri flagðsins* of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr, I mean to show that all of these malevolent war-women are viewed as ghastly and malevolent by their original audiences in terms of their hideous hands and the violent mischief that they mean to work with them. Through close reading for details like these, I believe scholars may look past the “changes and modifications” that individual stories undergo in their cultural transmission across the miles and from one manuscript to the next, and better focus on the “underlying unity” present between multiple figures whose commonalities and shared attributes suggest that they are all earlier or later participants in the same literary tradition.

Critical Implications

If, as Damico suggests, *Beowulf* may be read as a very early poem in the tradition of the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure, then there are implications for this reading as it concerns the scholarly perception of the *wælcyrge*. The Old Norse Valkyrie-diptych is a narrative type that involves the juxtapositioning of two Norse *valkyrja*-figures and a heroic, human figure. If we assert that *Beowulf* is an Old English participant in this narrative tradition, then we are witnessing not two *valkyrja*-figures vying for control over the hero's fate, but two *wælcyrge*-figures vying for that hero's fate. The dating of the *Beowulf* manuscript, moreover, necessitates that we must reconsider previous scholarly assessment of the relationship between the *valkyrja* and the *wælcyrge*. Roberta Frank, for example, has argued that many aspects of Old Norse court poetry had a profound impact on the literary consciousness of late Anglo-Saxon England, and that much eleventh-century English writing bore the mark of Norse stylistic influence.¹³³ With respect to the *wælcyrge*, at least, the literary exchange occurring during the eleventh century between the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians may well have been a two-way street.¹³⁴ In physical form and narrative function, both the *in bono* and *in malo* forms of the Old English *wælcyrge* seem to have deep resonances with their later, Old Norse complements of the *in bono* and *in malo* forms of the *valkyrja*. As Helen Damico has argued, and as I have added to that argument in this chapter, many aspects reflected in Wealhþeow and Grendel's mother seem to presage the physical qualities and functional attributes of the war-woman present in the Old Norse Valkyrie-diptych narrative tradition.

Specific to the *wælcyrge*, the reading of the poem such as I have investigated in this chapter suggests that the figure of the war-woman in Anglo-Saxon England was considerably more sophisticated and complex within the genre of heroic poetry, than it was in any other genre of Anglo-Saxon writing. In *Wealhþeow*, therefore, scholars may find, as Helen Damico states in regard to the *wælcyrge*, “one possible exception to the prevailing view of the Valkyries in Anglo-Saxon literature as baneful.”¹³⁵ Likewise, in the figure of Grendel’s mother as a malevolent *wælcyrge*-figure, scholars see a form of the Anglo-Saxon war-woman that entails far more complexity of character and evolution of form than that which was hinted at in the named appearances of the *wælcyrge* as discussed in chapter two of this dissertation. The form and function of *Wealhþeow* and Grendel’s mother as participants in the Valkyrie-diptych narrative tradition showcase the benevolent war-woman and her malicious counterpart as complex figures whose individual attributes and function within the narrative of the poem indicate that, by the late tenth or early eleventh century, the Anglo-Saxon poet of *Beowulf* was incorporating the *wælcyrge* in his heroic verse in a manner and to a degree of complexity and intricacy that would not be repeated until the composition of the Valkyrie-diptych texts were written in Old Norse some two hundred years later.

This possibility forces scholars to reevaluate their stance on the relationship between Old English and Old Norse poetry, and well as their understanding of the form and function of both the *wælcyrge* and the *valkyrja* in Northern heroic verse. As more and more textual and linguistic evidences are forwarded which demonstrate that *Wealhþeow* and Grendel’s mother functioned in *Beowulf* in very complex ways (ways that seem to foreshadow the manner in which the *in bono* and *in malo valkyrja*-figures functioned in

Valkyrie-diptych texts of the Old Norse tradition), the nuances and intricacies with which the Anglo-Saxons viewed the *wælcyrge* will become increasingly apparent. From such an orientation, scholars will be able to look past the cultural or temporal “changes and modifications” in these stories, of which Nora Chadwick writes, and will come to possess a clearer and more informed “perception of [the] underlying unity” between *Beowulf* as an Anglo-Saxon text located with the Valkyrie-diptych narrative tradition, and the later, Old Norse works written in the Valkyrie-diptych narrative tradition.¹³⁶

Comparative methodology has revealed numerous analogue relationships between *Beowulf* and Old Norse literature.¹³⁷ The character Glam in *Grettissaga*, for example, has been read as an analogue to the character Grendel in *Beowulf*, and the underwater fight sequence in *Grettissaga* is an analogue to Beowulf’s fight with Grendel’s mother in the dark mere.¹³⁸ Likewise, numerous analogous elements, characters, and narrative constructions exist between *Beowulf* and a number of Scandinavian, Irish, Germanic, and even Classical or Vedic works.¹³⁹ Reading the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure as a narrative form analogous to the Wealhþeow-Beowulf-Grendel’s mother structure in *Beowulf* is no different. The *valkyrja* appearing in the Old Norse Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure may be read as analogous to the earlier Old English *wælcyrge* appearing in Anglo-Saxon forms of the same narrative structure.

Ultimately, the use of the *wælcyrge* in *Beowulf* is the most sophisticated appearance of the war-woman in Anglo-Saxon literature. While she will go unnamed in this appearance, she is bifurcated into two distinct forms, granted purpose and function within the structure’s narrative progression, and given idiosyncratic development and depth of character unrivalled by any other appearance of the *wælcyrge* in the Old English corpus.

While it is untenable to define the *wælcyrge* strictly in terms of the *valkyrja*, it is equally untenable to deny that both the *wælcyrge* and the *valkyrja* were participants in the same literary tradition, or rule out the possibility that the *wælcyrge* had some influence on the development of the *valkyrja*. While the two beings shared commonality at some points along their evolutionary pathways, it is improper and untenable to define one strictly in terms of the other. The sophisticated and complex form and function of the war-women in the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure experience an early incarnation in Anglo-Saxon heroic verse. In the end, scholars may read the *wælcyrge* of heroic poetry as a very complex and intricate being within Anglo-Saxon verse.

¹ Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Alan Waldron. *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982: 175.

² See Helen Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984.

³ Damico, *Tradition*, 17-86.

⁴ Helen Damico. "The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature," *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*. eds. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990: 176.

⁵ Damico, *Tradition*, 43.

⁶ See Helen Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984, H.R. Ellis Davidson, *The Road to Hel: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature*. New York, Greenwood, 1968, Jan de Vries. *Altgermansiche Religionsgeschichte I*. Berlin, Vorwort, 1935, Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*. New York, Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1964, Folke Ström. *Diser, Nornr, Valkyrjor*, in *Kunliga vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademien handlingar*, Filologisk-filosofiska serien I. Stockholm, Almqvist, 1954.

⁷ Damico, *Tradition*, 51.

⁸ Damico, *Tradition*, 50.

⁹ John Lindow. "Norse Mythology and Northumbria: Methodological Notes" in *Anglo-Scandinavian England: Norse-English Relations in the Period before the Conquest*, John D. Niles and Mark Amodio, eds. Boston, University Press of America, 1989: 25.

¹⁰ See Lee M. Hollander, trans. *The Poetic Edda*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1996, Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1995 and *Old Norse Images of Women*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, Lotte Motz, *The Beauty and the Hag: Female Figures of Germanic Faith and Myth*, Vienna, Fassbaender, 1993. See also Joseph Harris. "Review: *Beowulf's Wealhþeow and the Valkyrie Tradition*" *Speculum* 16 (2) 1986: 401.

¹¹ See Helen Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984.

¹² Damico, *Tradition*, 51.

¹³ See Damico, *Tradition*, 1984.

¹⁴ See Damico, *Tradition*, 1984.

¹⁵ See Lee M. Hollander, *The Poetic Edda*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1996: 135-6.

¹⁶ See Damico, *Tradition*, 1984.

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- ¹⁷ See Damico, *Tradition*, 1984.
- ¹⁸ Damico, *Tradition*, 1984.
- ¹⁹ See Damico, *Tradition*, 44-52.
- ²⁰ See Hollander, *Edda*, 264, Damico, *Tradition*, 102.
- ²¹ H. R. Ellis-Davidson. *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions*. Syracuse, Syracuse U. Press, 1988: 163.
- ²² See Damico, *Tradition*, 17-21, 46-49, 70, 102.
- ²³ Damico, *Tradition*, 102.
- ²⁴ While Helen Damico does forward numerous other, less significant, pathways by which Wealhþeow may be read as a Valkyrie-figure, I will not indulge in discussion of those pathways here. Instead, I refer my reader to Damico's own argument. See Helen Damico, "The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature," *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*. eds. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990: 176-192, and *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984.
- ²⁵ Damico, *Tradition*, 58-86.
- ²⁶ Damico, *Tradition*, 66, 67.
- ²⁷ Damico, *Tradition*, 67.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid. See also Damico, *Tradition*, 58-86. Damico spends much of chapter four discussing the onomastic significance of Wealhtheow's name.
- ³⁰ Damico, *Tradition*, 67. See also Thomas D. Hill, "'Wealhtheow' as a Foreign Slave: Some Continental Analogues" *Philological Quarterly* 69 (1) 1990: 106-12, M. Boehler, "Die altenglischen Frauennamen" *Germanische Studien* (98) 1930: 21-47.
- ³¹ Charles W. Kennedy, trans. *Beowulf: The Oldest English Epic*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978: 22, David Wright, trans. *Beowulf*. New York, Penguin, 1957: 41, Howell Chickering Jr., trans. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*. New York, Anchor, 1989: 85, Benjamin Thorpe, ed. trans. *Beowulf together with Widsith and the Fight at Finnsburg*. New York, Barron's, 1962: 42.
- ³² See Damico, *Tradition*, 33.
- ³³ Damico, *Tradition*, 34.
- ³⁴ See Damico, *Tradition*, 33-36, Oliver Elton, trans., *The Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus*, Nendeln, Kraus Publishing, 1967: 310-11.
- ³⁵ See Michael J. Enright, *Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tene to the Viking Age*. Dublin, Four Courts Press, 1995, John L. Greenway. *Gallehus Horns: Mythic Imagination and the Nordic Past*. Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1977.
- ³⁶ Gillian Overing. *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf*. Carbondale, University of Southern Illinois Press, 1990: 80.
- ³⁷ Damico, *Tradition* 56.
- ³⁸ Damico, *Tradition*, 57.
- ³⁹ See H. Munro Chadwick, *The Heroic Age*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1926: 412.
- ⁴⁰ R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, & John D. Niles. Eds. *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 4th Edition. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2008: 43.
- ⁴¹ Benjamin Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 82-83.
- ⁴² Fulk et al. *Klaeber's*, 43, Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 82.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Fulk et al. *Klaeber's*, 43, Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 83.
- ⁴⁵ Fulk et al. *Klaeber's*, 43, Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 82.
- ⁴⁶ Fulk et al. *Klaeber's*, 43, Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 83.
- ⁴⁷ For further reading on the role of the oral pronouncement as relates to gift-culture in Old English literature, and the role of the woman bearing the mead horn during these pronouncements, see Robert E. Bjork, "Speech as Gift in Beowulf," *Speculum*, 69 (4) 1994: 993-1022, Michael J. Enright, "The Warband Context of the Unferth Episode," *Speculum* 73 (2) 1998: 297-337.
- ⁴⁸ Fulk et al. *Klaeber's*, 43, Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 83.
- ⁴⁹ Hollander, *Edda*, 189.

- ⁵⁰ See Michael D. C. Drout, "Blood and Deeds: Inheritance Systems in *Beowulf*" *Studies in Philology* 104 (2) 2007: 199-226.
- ⁵¹ Jesse Byock, trans. *Saga of the Volsungs: The Norse Epic of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990: 83-84.
- ⁵² Damico, *Tradition*, 45.
- ⁵³ Nora K. Chadwick, "The Monsters in *Beowulf*" *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of Their History*. Peter Clemoes, ed. London, Bowes & Bowes, 1959: 177.
- ⁵⁴ Chadwick, "Monsters," 177.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁷ See Damico, *Tradition*, 45-6, 70.
- ⁵⁸ Damico, *Tradition*, 46. Although Damico establishes that Grendel's mother is a participant in the Valkyrie-diptych narrative tradition, she notes that the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure as it occurs in *Beowulf* is atypical of the form as it occurs in Old Norse iterations. Damico writes: "The formal relationship between Modthrytho and Grendel's mother, however, previously noted in Old Norse literature. Whereas in Nordic works, the grim baleful figure bears an antithetical relationship to the gold-adorned, courtly one (as in the Svava-Hrimgerth pairing), in *Beowulf*, the two disparate types serve as parallels... Because they are parallel in function and nature, collectively Modthrytho and Grendel's mother may form one half of a Valkyrie-diptych configuration" (51). While I disagree with Damico's stance that Grendel's mother needs the character of Modthrytho in order to fulfill the parameters of the evil half of the Valkyrie-diptych, the research claims that I forward in this dissertation will treat Grendel's mother as a figure capable of fulfilling the parameters of the *in malo* Valkyrie role in the diptych narrative construction. See Damico *Tradition*, 51.
- ⁵⁹ Damico, *Tradition*, 57.
- ⁶⁰ Damico, *Tradition*, 68. Damico also mentions several minor pathways by which Grendel's mother may be located in the Valkyrie-diptych tradition, though I will not belabor my work in listing them here.
- ⁶¹ Damico, *Tradition*, 46.
- ⁶² *Jómsvíkinga Saga*, kápítuli 34. See Lee M. Hollander, trans, *The Saga of the Jómsvikings*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1990: 101.
- ⁶³ Zoëga, *Dictionary*, 468, 140.
- ⁶⁴ See Damico, *Tradition*, 46, 52-3, 70.
- ⁶⁵ Damico, *Tradition*, 70.
- ⁶⁶ See Lee M. Hollander, *The Poetic Edda*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1996: 169-179, Patricia Terry, trans. *Poems of the Vikings*, New York, MacMillian, 1986: 118-128.
- ⁶⁷ Damico, *Tradition*, 102-3.
- ⁶⁸ Damico, *Tradition*, 102.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁷¹ Damico, *Tradition*, 49.
- ⁷² Damico, *Tradition*, 48.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁴ See also E. Lehmann "Teufels Gossmutter" *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, VIII 1905: 411-430, Martin Puhvel, "The Might of Grendel's Mother" *Folklore*. 80 (2) 1969: 76-91, Jane Chance, *The Woman as Hero in Old English Literature*, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1986, Gillian Overing, *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1990, Jane Chance, "The Structural Unity of *Beowulf*: The Problem of Grendel's Mother" *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* eds. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, Indianapolis, University of Indiana Press, 1990: 284-261.
- ⁷⁵ Damico, *Tradition*, 51, Paul Acker, "Horror and the Maternal in *Beowulf*," *PMLA* 121 (3) 2006: 702-716. Damico believes that this duplicitious duty of the malevolent Valkyrie figure, in *Beowulf*, is split into two persons: Grendel's mother and Modthrytho. Her point about the fundamentally duplicitious drive in the malevolent figure, however, is well taken, just the same, as this duplicitious figure in the Old Norse incarnations of the diptych are always contained in one personage.
- ⁷⁶ While Helen Damico does briefly mention the common feature of a watery lair and combat zone in *Beowulf* and *Helgakviða Hjorvarþssonr*, her assessment of this element is brief, and I believe that the watery lair is a convoluted feature that bears heavy consideration in light of both the Valkyrie tradition and the Irish war-

goddess-tradition of Celtic folklore. Because of the resonances between the watery lair of the hag and the repetition of this trope in both Scandinavian and Celtic sources, I believe that a survey of this image should not be bound within the scope of this dissertation. The domain of the watery lair is in a discussion of the relationship between the Irish/Celtic water monsters, the evil Valkyries of the Old Norse diptych tradition, and the Old English water monsters found throughout the corpus. Too many similarities exist between Celtic sources and Old English for the significance of the Old Norse representations of the watery-lair to be safely or satisfactorily traced to an Old English origin. Moreover, the overwhelming diversity of evidences relating to the body of water as a home to the female monster is, in and of itself, fodder for a dissertation-length project. For these reasons, I will not consider the element of the watery lair as a viable avenue for stringently suggesting that the OE *wælcyrge* is an earlier incarnation of the ON *valkyrja* figure in the diptych tradition. As such, I believe it is worthy of greater, more detailed investigation as it relates to the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian incarnations of the evil war-woman. See Helen Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984: 102-3.

⁷⁷ Fulk et al. *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 45.

⁷⁸ Benjamin Thorpe, trans. *Beowulf together with Widsith and the Fight at Finnsburg*, New York, Barron's 1962: 87.

⁷⁹ Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 87.

⁸⁰ Fulk et al. *Klaeber's*, 415, Joseph Bosworth and Thomas Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1898: 418.

⁸¹ Thorpe. *Beowulf*, 87, Joseph Bosworth and Thomas Northcote Toller. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1898: 43.

⁸² Fulk et al. *Klaeber's*, 51.

⁸³ Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 97.

⁸⁴ H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of the Viking Age*, New York, Penguin, 1996: 63.

⁸⁵ Ellis Davidson, *Gods*, 64.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Damico, *Tradition*, 43.

⁸⁹ Charles Donahue. "The Valkyries and Irish War-Goddesses" *PMLA* 56 (1) 1941: 4.

⁹⁰ *Zoëga, Dictionary*, 195.

⁹¹ See Finnur Jónsson, *Udvalg af Norske og Islandske Skjaldekvad*, Copenhagen, Gads Forlag, 1929, and *Brennú-Njalassaga*. Copenhagen, Hall, 1908, Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson, trans. *Njal's Saga*. New York, Penguin, 1972.

⁹² *Zoëga, Dictionary*, 471.

⁹³ Simek, *Mythology*, 171.

⁹⁴ John Jeep, *Medieval Germany: An Encyclopedia*. Oxford, Routledge; 2001: 112-13.

⁹⁵ Charles Donahue, "The Valkyries and the Irish War Goddesses", *PMLA* 56 (1) 1941: 9.

⁹⁶ Donahue, "Goddesses," 9n.

⁹⁷ R.C. Bosanquet. "On An Altar Dedicated to the Alaisiagae" *Archaeology Aeliana* 19 (1922): 185. See also H. R. Ellis-Davidson. *Gods and Myths of the Viking Age*. New York, Barnes & Noble, 1996: 62.

⁹⁸ John Jeep, *Medieval Germany: An Encyclopedia*. Oxford, Routledge; 2001: 112-13.

⁹⁹ See Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, London, Bell & Sons, 1882.

¹⁰⁰ Donahue, "Goddesses," 4.

¹⁰¹ Donahue, "Goddesses," 3. See also Helen Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984: 41-86. Helen Damico does not regard Grendel's mother as being sufficient for carrying the full weight of the malevolent Valkyrie figure in the traditional dyptich configuration. Instead, she asserts that "the formal relationship between Modthrytho and Grendel's mother, however, differs from the diptych pattern previously noted in Old Norse literature" because Grendel's mother begins many Valkyrie-like qualities and actions in the first part of the poem, that Modthrytho will complete during her digression later in the poem (51). To this end, Damico forwards the possibility that "because they are parallel in function and nature, collectively Modthrytho and Grendel's mother may form one half of a Valkyrie-diptych configuration...the diametrically opposed qualities and traits of the[se] characters... attract the ruling monster of the depths into a fusion with the queen of the high hall (51)."

¹⁰² Fulk et al. *Klaeber's*, 65, Damico, *Tradition*, 46.

- ¹⁰³ Joseph Bosworth & Thomas Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1898: 1153.
- ¹⁰⁴ Damico, *Tradition*, 47.
- ¹⁰⁵ See Lee M. Hollander, trans., *The Poetic Edda*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1996: 53-64. See also Patricia Terry, *The Poems of the Vikings*, New York, Bobbs-Merrill, 1969: 49-52.
- ¹⁰⁶ Charles Donahue, "The Valkyries and the Irish War-Goddesses," *PMLA* 56 (1) 1941: 4.
- ¹⁰⁷ Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 101.
- ¹⁰⁸ Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 87.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁰ Fulk et al. *Klaeber's*, 46.
- ¹¹¹ Fulk et al. *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 391. See Howell D. Chickering, Jr., *Beowulf*, New York, Anchor, 1989: 75, 199.
- ¹¹² Howell D. Chickering, Jr., *Beowulf*, New York, Anchor, 1989: 75, 199.
- ¹¹³ Joseph Bosworth & Thomas Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1898: 506, Geir T. Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004: 184. See also Georges Dumezil, *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*, ed. Einar Haugen, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977: 63. The word *handbani* carries the connotation of one who uses his hands to slay another; this is contrasted, in Old Norse, against the *raðbani*, or "conspirator to murder" who puts premeditated thought into his crime. See John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002: 310.
- ¹¹⁴ Fulk et al. *Klaeber's*, 51, Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 97.
- ¹¹⁵ Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 45-6.
- ¹¹⁶ Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 56.
- ¹¹⁷ Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 100.
- ¹¹⁸ Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 103.
- ¹¹⁹ Joseph Bosworth & Thomas Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1898: 509.
- ¹²⁰ Thorpe, *Beowulf*, 103.
- ¹²¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹²² Fulk et al., *Klaeber's*, 53.
- ¹²³ Henry Adams Bellow, ed. *The Poetic Edda*, New York, American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1923: 277. See also Hollander, *Edda*, 174.
- ¹²⁴ See Lee M. Hollander trans., *The Poetic Edda*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1996: 174, Patricia Terry trans. *Poems of the Vikings*, New York, Bobbs-Merrill, 1969: 122.
- ¹²⁵ Fulk et al., *Klaeber's*, 53.
- ¹²⁶ See Lee M. Hollander, trans. *The Saga of the Jómsvikings*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1990: 92-106.
- ¹²⁷ See Nora K. Chadwick, "The Monsters and Beowulf" *The Anglo-Saxons: Some Studies in their History and Culture*, London, Bowes & Bowes, 1959: 177, see also Nora K. Chadwick, "Ðorgerðr Hölgabrúðr and the Trollding: A Note on Sources," *The Early Cultures of North-West Europe*, ed. Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickins, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1950: 380-398.
- ¹²⁸ Damico, *Tradition*, 70.
- ¹²⁹ Nelson Francis Blake, *The Jomsvikings Saga*, Lansing, University of Michigan Press, 1962: 50.
- ¹³⁰ Lee M. Hollander, trans. *The Saga of the Jómsvikings*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1990: 101.
- ¹³¹ Damico, *Tradition*, 46.
- ¹³² Chadwick, "Monsters," 178.
- ¹³³ Roberta Frank. "Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences Have a Skaldic Tooth?" *Anglo-Scandinavian England: Norse-English Relations in the Period before the Conquest*. eds. John D. Niles and Mark Amodio. London, University Press of America, 1989: 53-68.
- ¹³⁴ See John D. Niles and Mark Amodio, eds., *Anglo-Scandinavian England: Norse-English Relations in the Period before the Conquest*, London, University Press of America, 1989.
- ¹³⁵ Damico, *Tradition*, 45.
- ¹³⁶ Chadwick, "Monsters," 178.
- ¹³⁷ See Margaret Schlauch, "Another Analogue to *Beowulf*," *Modern Language Notes* 45 (1) 1930: 20-12, Henry Bosley Woolfe, "Beowulf and Grendel: An Analogue from Burma," *Modern Language Notes* 62 (4) 1947: 261-2, Rober A. Barakat, "John of the Bear and *Beowulf*," *Western Folklore* 26 (1) 1967: 1-11, Joseph Harris, "*Beowulf*

in Literary History," *Pacific Coast Philology*, 17 (1) 1982: 16-23, R. D. Fulk, "An Eddic Analogue to the Scyld Scyfining Story," *The Review of English Studies* 40 (159) 1989: 313-22, R. Mark Scowcroft, "The Irish Analogues to Beowulf" *Speculum* 74 (1) 1999: 22-64, Martin Puhvel, "Beowulf and Celtic Underwater Adventure," *Folklore* 76 (5) 1965: 254-61.

¹³⁸ See Denton Fox and Hermann Pálsson, trans. *Grettir's Saga*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2001.

See also William Witherie Lawrence, "The Haunted Mere in *Beowulf*" *PMLA* 27 (2) 1912: 208-245.

¹³⁹ See Jesse Byock, trans. *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki*. London, Penguin, 1998.

Conclusion:

The Anglo-Saxon *Wælcyrge*: Recovering a Native Daughter

Since the late nineteenth-century, few scholars have suggested native values of the Anglo-Saxon *wælcyrge*. In 1898, Bosworth-Toller defined the *wælcyrge* in terms of the *valkyrja*, stating that “according to the mythology... the *Valkyr-jur* were the goddesses who chose the slain that were to be conducted by them to Odin’s hall... something of the old idea is still shewn” in the Old English usages of the word.¹ As I have demonstrated in this dissertation, there is no element of the Old English *wælcyrge* that preserves or reflects the “chooser of the slain” aspect of the Old Norse *valkyrja*. Owing to the massive amount of textual and artistic *valkyrja*-related material preserved in the Old Norse tradition, and the very scant evidences that remain of the *wælcyrge* in the Old English tradition, scholars have looked to the *valkyrja* for evidence that reveal clues as to what the *wælcyrge* must have meant to the Anglo-Saxons. This trend among scholars is best expressed by what Brian Branston calls “the remarkable agreement between Old English and Old Norse” literary and artistic consciousness, and the belief that the preserved works of the Old Norse literary and mythological world may be reverse engineered to illuminate the missing components of the Old English literary and mythological world.² This sense of the “remarkable agreement” between the myths and folklore of the two cultures, at least as regards the relationship between the *wælcyrge* and the *valkyrja*, is fundamentally reductive and incorrect. The better-preserved aspects of the Old Norse *valkyrja* are entirely insufficient for illuminating the scantily preserved Old English *wælcyrge*.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to demonstrate three fundamental aspects of the *wælcyrge* that have gone uncommented upon by previous scholars. The first aspect is that the *wælcyrge* may not be thought of in terms fitting the *valkyrja*. The Old Norse *valkyrja* is the product of a poetic tradition that is deeply idiosyncratic and unique to the traditions and narrative elements of Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Iceland. If any relationship may be found between the two war-women of the Germanic North, it is one of influence from the *wælcyrge* to the *valkyrja*. In that the literary evidence for a benevolent *wælcyrge* figure in Old English ante-dates literary evidence of the benevolent, courtly *valkyrja* figure by over two centuries, scholars may read traditions and elements in the *wælcyrge* as early forms of those elements which would come to possess greater currency in the Old Norse literary tradition. As I have attempted to show, it is fundamentally untenable to read the *wælcyrge* as a being that was influenced by the literary representations of the *valkyrja*. Such retrograde scholarship requires heavily reliance on the assumption that a Norse oral tradition prefigured the Anglo-Saxon written appearances of the *wælcyrge*, and there is no solid evidence that supports this theory.

The second fundamental aspect of the *wælcyrge* that I have attempted to demonstrate is the complexity of her form and function within the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic. The *wælcyrge* is an evolving figure and a complex one, which different demographics of Anglo-Saxon society receive and portray differently. The named-appearances of the Anglo-Saxon Valkyrie reflect the learned, fundamentally Christian view of the *wælcyrge*. In her earliest appearances in Old English literature, the Anglo-Saxon war-woman is used to gloss goddesses and malevolent divinities who, despite their idiosyncratic differences of form and characteristics, share the common thread of being able to persuade or move the human

heart toward emotionally imbalanced acts: *Bellona* stirs men to open, righteous warfare, *Venus* stirs men toward overweening concupiscence, and *Allecto*, *Tisiphona*, and the *Herinis* corrupt the human heart toward acts of treacherous, sinister violence. Functioning as a synonymic gloss to these figures, the *wælcyrge* seems to be, within this genre, a fundamentally malevolent figure with supernatural powers that involve using serpents and serpent venom to move the human heart toward radical action.

The second form that the *wælcyrge* takes comes chronologically between her first and third incarnation. This form is as an adjectival descriptor employed within the genre of the *mirabilis*. By casing the exotic monstrosity of the Gorgon to an Anglo-Saxon audience in terms of the *wælcyrge*, the translator of *The Wonders of the East* adds localized meaning to an otherwise unknown element in the text. In order for the horror of the Gorgon to come across fully to the Anglo-Saxon audience of *The Wonders of the East*, this monster must be interpreted in terms that will make sense to an Anglo-Saxon audience. This use of the *wælcyrge* to do that is suggestive of a widespread knowledge on the part of Anglo-Saxons of the *wælcyrge* as a horrifying, and localized figure. Owing to the realistic nature of the *mirabilis* as a genre, in which wonders are made more wondrous in that they are not imaginary, but are sold to the audience as factual, this elevates the *wælcyrge* from the realm of mere superstition, as we find her in the glosses, to the realm of the distantly possible.

The third, and chronologically latest, form of the named-appearance of the *wælcyrge* is the very real-world figure present in the sermons delivered by Wulfstan and other holy-men of the eleventh century. In these appearances, the *wælcyrge* becomes demythologized figure. Wulfstan delivers her to his audience not as a goddess of Classical origin, and not as a geographically distant and marvelous beast, but as a corporeal and very real woman who

walks the streets of England and incurs the very real-world wrath of God in the form of Danish-Viking invasions. By casting the *wælcyrge* in terms of a real woman, Wulfstan and his stylistic admirers generate a new, and fully demythologized station for the *wælcyrge* in the Anglo-Saxon mythological consciousness. By virtue of her appearance in the “truthful” sermons of the archbishop of York, the *wælcyrge* is received by Anglo-Saxon audiences as a very real world figure. She is someone to be feared and hated, someone to be blamed and banished, and someone who is guilty of committing sins and crimes that have brought down the ire of the Almighty against all of Anglo-Saxon England.

The fourth form of the *wælcyrge* comes in her unnamed appearances in the Anglo-Saxon charms and riddles. In these appearances, the *wælcyrge* manifests as she appeared to the faith-healers and common laity of Anglo-Saxon England. Her presence in the charms hints at her value to the “imperfectly Christian” demographic of charm-masters and faith-healers who practiced heathen rituals and non-Christian incantations in curing the ailments of peoples whom the healer believed were being victimized by the invisible *wælcyrge*. While the Christian-sanitized texts containing the *wælcyrge* condemned the war-woman, the heathen incantations that use her showed deference to her as a powerful, supernatural force that must be exorcized if the afflicted person is to recover. The manner in which the “imperfectly Christian” charm-masters of Anglo-Saxon England refer to the *wælcyrge*, by heroic epithets, rather than by a direct racial name, demonstrate the complex station which the *wælcyrge* occupies in the charms as a genre. Even though she brings pain and misfortune to the persons whom she afflicts, the *wælcyrge* is received within the charms as befits a necessary, if dangerous, element of the invisible world. She is not condemned with the same notion of spiritual damnation in the charms as she is in her

named-appearances within the sermons of the early eleventh century. She is, rather, a force to be reckoned with and, ultimately, defeated, but she is not an agent of eternal damnation.

The presence of the *wælcyrge* within the riddles suggests that she was a mythological image that was widely known in Anglo-Saxon England. In that the riddles were drawn from the daily musings of the common folk, the metaphor-answer to the riddles, and the tenor-distractors for the riddles are necessarily elements that were widely known among the common laity. Without the subject of the answer being widely known, the person being riddled would have zero chance of solving the riddle, and the point of asking the riddle would be moot. Likewise, if the distractors of the riddle were not widely known, they would be powerless to lead the person being riddled away from the real answer. Without widespread knowledge of the *wælcyrge*, her presence in the riddles would be ineffectual and rhetorically derelict. By virtue of her insertion into this genre as both a metaphor-answer to one riddle and a tenor-distractor to another riddle, the *wælcyrge* is shown by the riddle-writers to be an element possessed of a significant degree of cultural currency among the common laity of Anglo-Saxon England. The evolving idiosyncrasies present between both the named-appearances and the unnamed-appearances of the *wælcyrge* suggest that the *wælcyrge* was a dynamic and widely known figure who occupied a diversity of roles and functions within the Anglo-Saxon literary and mythological consciousness.

The third fundamental aspect of the *wælcyrge* which I have attempted to demonstrate in this dissertation is that she was an influence on the Old Norse figure of the *valkyrja* as she appears in Norse literature. Nora K. Chadwick notes that the Old Norse and

the Old English forms of the war-woman, as they appear in heroic poetry, bear such “startling similarity as to preclude the possibility of coincidence.”³ Building my estimation of this aspect of the *wælcyrge* from claims such as that forwarded by Chadwick, I have attempted to show that the Old English *wælcyrge* prefigures the Old Norse *valkyrja* in three basic capacities: the benevolent Valkyrie-type, the malevolent Valkyrie-type, and the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure.

Prior to my investigations in this dissertation, other scholars have remarked on the possible influence of the *wælcyrge* on the *valkyrja*, but these assessments have been brief and largely topical, each assessment of the *wælcyrge-valkyrja* relationship addressing only a single aspect of the possible influence of the former on the latter. J. S. Ryan comments on the value of the dithematic name to the characterization of the *wælcyrge* and the *valkyrja*, drawing the conclusion that this trend was present in both literatures, but faded from popular usage in the Old English tradition, yet remained literarily viable in the Old Norse tradition. Nora K. Chadwick, in singling out the figures of Grendel’s mother in *Beowulf* and the monstrous *Ðorgerðr Hölgabrúðr* in the *Jómsvikinga Saga*, notes the similarities between the malevolent war-woman of Anglo-Saxon England and the corresponding maleficent figure from Old Norse. In pointing to the parallels of courtly behavior, onomastic significance, and the offering of the mead-horn and the acceptance of the sacral oath made by the hero over the horn, Helen Damico effectively demonstrates how *Wealhþeow* is a prefiguration of the beneficent Valkyrie figure as she appears in the characters of *Sváfa* and *Sigrúnn* in the *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* cycle of the early thirteenth century, as well as in the figure of *Brynhildr*, of the *Völsunga Saga*. Helen Damico also attempted, less convincingly, to posit that the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure, which was possessed of

great popularity in the writings of thirteenth and fourteenth century-Iceland, is prefigured by the narrative structure of *Beowulf* through the relationship between Wealhþeow, Beowulf, and Modthrytho, with negligible consideration given to Grendel's mother.

Using these critical stances as the foundation of my investigations, I attempted to further the suggestions of Ryan and Chadwick by illuminating additional elements of the character of the benevolent and malevolent Valkyrie figures which are present in Old English literature and which seem to prefigure similar character aspects present in the later image of the Old Norse *valkyrja*. In my evaluation of *Beowulf* as a text which is an early example of the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure, I furthered Helen Damico's stance that Wealhþeow was a prefiguration of the benevolent half of the Valkyrie diptych, but I rejected her notion that Modthrytho was a prefiguration of the malevolent half of this narrative structure. Instead, I look to Grendel's mother as a more significant prefiguration of the evil half of the Valkyrie-diptych pairing in *Beowulf*.

My conclusions to this investigation demonstrate that the actions taken by Wealhþeow in charging Beowulf with his heroic quest in the slaying of Grendel and her ceremonious duties in the hall of Heorot, strongly resemble the actions taken by similar Valkyrie figures in poems and sagas from the Old Norse tradition. Likewise, both the monstrous form and malevolent function of Grendel's mother fulfill the parameters of the wicked Valkyrie figure of the later, Scandinavian tradition. In closely investigating Grendel's mother and the evil hags of the Old Norse world, I found numerous parallels between the Old English and the Old Norse forms, including the hands-on manner in which the hag addresses the hero and the insurmountable power of inflicting incapacitating fear over the average warrior (but not the hero). In showcasing the individual attributes of

Wealhþeow and Grendel's mother, as well as the tripartite interaction between these two characters and Beowulf, I attempted to demonstrate that *Beowulf* is the earliest known text crafted in the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure.

This conclusion may lead scholars to re-evaluate the relationship between the *wælcyrge* and the *valkyrja*, and reconsider the extent to which the Anglo-Saxon conception of the war-woman would come to influence the later, Scandinavian Valkyrie figure, both in her benevolent and malevolent forms. With respect to the early date of the *Beowulf* manuscript in relation to the earliest Old Norse example of the Valkyrie-diptych narrative structure, my conclusions also reinforce H. Munro Chadwick's assertion that "the poetic description of the Valkyries which we find in the [Old Norse verses] can likewise be traced in Anglo-Saxon poetry... hence, the assumption that the word *wælcyrge* is borrowed from the Norse is inadmissible."⁴

My ultimate purpose in addressing the Old English *wælcyrge* has been to show the previously underestimated facets of the Anglo-Saxon war-woman, and, in so doing, illuminate the scope and complexity that the *wælcyrge* came to possess in Anglo-Saxon England. The exact etymological parallelism between the words *wælcyrge* and *valkyrja* has misled many scholars into believing that a similarly exacting parallelism exists between the figures represented by these words. It is reductive, and hazards the untenable, to attempt to recreate a scantily surviving and multifaceted figure of medieval folklore based on a dissection of that figure's dithematic name alone. The assumption of strict and literal onomastic valuation, in this case, has led many scholars down false roads when it comes to accurately interpreting the *wælcyrge*. H. Munro Chadwick participates in this trend in reductive scholarship by writing "it is to be remembered that the word *wælcyrge* can

hardly mean anything else than ‘chooser of the slain.’”⁵ Chadwick relies on a sort of negative evidence to sustain his claim; in the seeming absence of any other answer, Chadwick points to strict onomastic evaluation of the *wælcyrge* as fully defining the creature’s character and value within the Anglo-Saxon literary consciousness. While the dithematic elements in the name “*wælcyrge*” literally mean “chooser of the slain,” and while this name is the exact etymological parallel of the word *valkyrja*, I have attempted to demonstrate, through close readings of the *wælcyrge* and close investigations of the contextualization of each of her appearances and their corresponding genres, that the Old English *wælcyrge* cannot be satisfactorily defined in terms suitable for the Old Norse *valkyrja*. The two are not the same being.

In light of the preceding chapters, I recall Helen Damico’s assertion that “the Valkyrie figure seems to be as much a part of the Anglo-Saxon literary consciousness as it is of the Old Norse” literary tradition.⁶ The diversity of genres and registers in which the *wælcyrge* appears, both in her named and unnamed capacities, as well as the sophisticated narrative structure that employs *Wealhþeow* and *Grendel*’s mother, suggests that the Anglo-Saxon literary consciousness was deeply aware of the *wælcyrge*. Her presence in the glosses, the *mirabilis*, the sermons, the charms, the riddles, and the heroic poetry of the Anglo-Saxons suggests that the Old English *wælcyrge* was a valuable and sophisticated element of literature whose function was multifaceted as per the rhetorical needs of each genre. R. M. Liuzza, in respect to the reconstruction of fragmented Anglo-Saxon texts, writes of the purpose of the medievalist in reconstructing the relevance and value inherent in the Anglo-Saxon corpus:

We are more aware than ever that texts do not simply represent culture, they create it, and so we must remember as we read Anglo-Saxon literature that

we are not simply looking *through* these texts at individuals and their society transparently depicted with photographic fidelity, but *at* the texts for signs of the work they once did in the culture that used them.⁷

Even though very few texts containing the *wælcyrge*, either in named or unnamed forms, have survived the fires and the purges that have plagued the Anglo-Saxon corpus, enough of her presence remains such that scholars may look “at these text for signs of the work” that the *wælcyrge* did “in the culture that used [her].” The Old English *wælcyrge* did work in the Anglo-Saxon culture. She carried meaning and she was received by the folk of Anglo-Saxon England in differing registers at different times and among different demographics. While the surviving examples of the work performed by the *wælcyrge* may be scattered and fragmentary, I have attempted, as Liuzza writes, to “shore up the fragments” of the war-woman and reconstruct the multivalence of meaning that the Anglo-Saxons attributed to their native daughter, the *wælcyrge*.⁸

¹ Joseph Bosworth & Thomas Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1898: 1153.

² Brian Branston, *The Lost Gods of England*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1957: 9.

³ Nora K. Chadwick, “The Monsters and Beowulf” *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of their History and Culture*. ed. Peter Clemoes. London, Bowes & Bowes, 1959: 177.

⁴ H. Munro Chadwick, *The Heroic Age*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1926: 412.

⁵ Chadwick, *Heroic Age*, 412.

⁶ Helen Damico. *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1984: 50.

⁷ R. M. Liuzza, ed. *Old English Literature*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002: xiii.

⁸ *Ibid.*

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