

## NEW READINGS ON WOMEN AND EARLY MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE

CROSS-DISCIPLINARY STUDIES IN HONOUR OF HELEN DAMICO

Edited by

HELENE SCHECK and CHRISTINE KOZIKOWSKI







# NEW READINGS ON WOMEN AND EARLY MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE



## **CARMEN MONOGRAPHS AND STUDIES**

CARMEN Monographs and Studies seeks to explore the movements of people, ideas, religions and objects in the medieval period. It welcomes publications that deal with the migration of people and artefacts in the Middle Ages, the adoption of Christianity in northern, Baltic, and east-central Europe, and early Islam and its expansion through the Umayyad caliphate. CMS also encourages work that engages with the histories of the Global South and interdisciplinary approaches that explicitly incorporate material culture.

### **Editorial Board**

Andrea Vanina Neyra, *CONICET, Buenos Aires* Jitske Jasperse, *Humboldt-Universität, Berlin* Kathleen Neal, *Monash University, Melbourne* Alice Sullivan, *University of Michigan* 

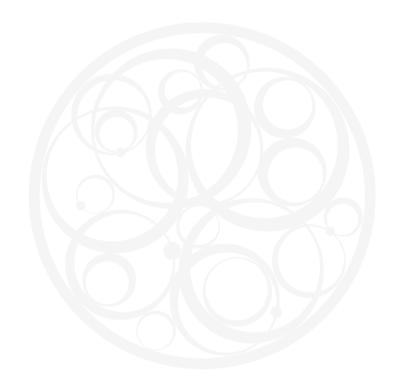
FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE ONLY

# NEW READINGS ON WOMEN AND EARLY MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE

CROSS-DISCIPLINARY STUDIES IN HONOUR OF HELEN DAMICO

Edited by
HELENE SCHECK and CHRISTINE E. KOZIKOWSKI





## **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

© 2019, Arc Humanities Press, Leeds

The authors assert their moral right to be identified as the authors of this work.

Permission to use brief excerpts from this work in scholarly and educational works is hereby granted provided that the source is acknowledged. Any use of material in this work that is an exception or limitation covered by Article 5 of the European Union's Copyright Directive (2001/29/EC) or would be determined to be "fair use" under Section 107 of the U.S. Copyright Act September 2010 Page 2 or that satisfies the conditions specified in Section 108 of the U.S. Copyright Act (17 USC §108, as revised by P.L. 94—553) does not require the Publisher's permission.

ISBN (print): 9781641893305 eISBN (PDF): 9781641893329

### www.arc-humanities.org

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CRO 4YY

## **CONTENTS**

Lis	t of Illustrations
Lis	t of Abbreviationsix
Not	te from the Editorsix
Int	roduction: Feminism and Early English Studies Now STACY S. KLEIN
	PART ONE: LITERACY AND MATERIAL CULTURE
1.	Anglo-Saxon Women, Woman, and Womanhood  GALE R. OWEN-CROCKER
2.	Beyond Valkyries: Drinking Horns in Anglo-Saxon Women's Graves  CAROL NEUMAN DE VEGVAR
3.	Embodied Literacy: Paraliturgical Performance in the <i>Life of Saint Leoba</i> LISA M. C. WESTON
4.	Imagining the Lost Libraries of Anglo-Saxon Double Monasteries  VIRGINIA BLANTON
	PART TWO: ENGENDERING MARRIAGE AND FAMILY
	XDC HI IX (ANITHE DRESS
5.	A Textbook Stance on Marriage: The <i>Versus ad coniugem</i> in Anglo-Saxon England
	JANET SCHRUNK ERICKSEN97
6.	The Circumcision and Weaning of Isaac: The Cuts that Bind  CATHERINE E. KARKOV

7.	Saintly Mothers and Mothers of Saints  JOYCE HILL
8.	Playing with Memories: Emma of Normandy, Cnut, and the Spectacle of Ælfheah's Corpus  COLLEEN DUNN
	PART THREE: WOMEN OF THE <i>BEOWULF</i> MANUSCRIPT
9.	The Missing Women of the <i>Beowulf</i> Manuscript  TERESA HOOPER
10.	Boundaries Embodied: An Ecofeminist Reading of the Old English <i>Judith</i> <b>HEIDE ESTES</b>
11.	Listen to the Woman: Reading Wealhtheow as Stateswoman  HELEN CONRAD O'BRIAIN
12.	Reading Grendel's Mother  JANE CHANCE
	PART FOUR: WOMEN AND ANGLO-SAXON STUDIES
13.	Female Agency in Early Anglo-Saxon Studies: The "Nuns of Tavistock" and Elizabeth Elstob  TIMOTHY GRAHAM
14.	The First Female Anglo-Saxon Professors  MARY DOCKRAY-MILLER
Sele	ct Bibliography277
Inde	ex of Manuscripts
Gen	eral Index285

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures				
Figure 2.1	Diagrams of Graves (18) 17 and Graves 18 (17)			
Figure 2.2	Copper-alloy bindings of the besom(?)49			
Figure 2.3	Horn tip and rim; bronze tube50			
Figure 2.4	Grave 43, drinking horn mounts, headgear53			
Figure 6.1	Abraham sleeps with Hagar			
Figure 6.2	The birth of Isaac			
Figure 6.3	The birth of Ishmael			
Figure 6.4	The weaning of Isaac			
Figure 6.5	The burial of Sarah			
Figure 13.1	Opening of the Laws of King Æthelberht of Kent			
Figure 13.2	Elizabeth Elstob's facsimile transcript, opening of the Laws of King Æthelberht			
Figure 13.3	Opening of the Rochester Cartulary250			
Figure 13.4	James Smith's facsimile transcript, opening of the Rochester Cartulary			
Figure 13.5	Elizabeth Elstob, transcript of Cambridge University Library MS Gg. 3. 28			
Figure 14.1	Map of US women's colleges offering Anglo-Saxon			
Figure 14.2	Ida Josephine Everett in her office at Wheaton College265			
Figure 14.3	Portrait of Heloise Hersey, professor of Anglo-Saxon at Smith College			
Tables				
Table 4.1	Education of Anglo-Saxon abbesses and their influence on others 90 $$			
Table 4.2	Evidence of educational training and types of textual engagement $\dots 91$			
Table 8.1	Ælfheah in Anglo-Saxon Liturgical Calendars			
Table 8.2	Ælfheah in Anglo-Saxon Litanies			



FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE ONLY

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASE Anglo-Saxon England

ASPR Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records
BHL Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina

CCSL Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum

DOE Dictionary of Old English
EETS Early English Text Society

e.s. Extra Series
o.s. Original Series

s.s. Supplementary Series

MGH Monumenta Germaniae Historica

PASE Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England database (www.pase.ac.uk)
PL Jacques Paul Migne, ed. *Patrologia cursus completus. Series Latina.* 

PMLA Publications of the Modern Language Association

Sawyer Peter Sawyer's Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography,

updated and revised as e-Sawyer (http://esawyer.org.uk)

### NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

During the production of this volume the discipline has confronted itself with the racial connotations that have attached to "Anglo-Saxon" even when denoting a period of history in a particular place. While it has been conventional to use "Anglo-Saxon England" to refer to the language, literature, and culture of England from the end of the Roman period to the Norman Conquest, the editors of the collection adopt the term "Early Medieval England" as reflected in the title of this volume to underscore the linguistic and cultural diversity of the people inhabiting the island at that time as well as to respect and nurture diversity within our field of study. Production had advanced sufficiently to prevent contributors from revising usage, so conventional usage stands within individual essays.



FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE ONLY

## INTRODUCTION: FEMINISM AND EARLY ENGLISH STUDIES NOW

### STACY S. KLEIN\*

IN MAY 2014, a group of Anglo-Saxonists gathered at the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, Michigan, for a roundtable to develop plans for a "new" version of Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessy Olsen's pathbreaking volume, New Readings on Women in Old English Literature, which appeared nearly thirty years ago.<sup>1</sup> Discussions concerning the shape and content of the proposed volume were lively, yet they produced, perhaps unsurprisingly, little consensus. Feminist scholars tend to resist univocal narratives; lack of consensus is thus a proud hallmark of feminist research. The attraction to debate and difference in feminist theory and praxis serves as an acknowledgement of how variables such as age, social status, race, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality produce profoundly different social and psychological realities for women. Such differences help to explain the necessarily diversified and fractured nature of feminism's aims and goals. The appeal of plurality and dissent also lies in their longstanding role as catalysts for feminist knowledge production, an enterprise that has, historically, thrived on self-critique and on a willingness to think beyond its previously constructed borders. As Elizabeth Weed writes: "The critical advantage of the feminist project has been that when one area of feminism has settled on a truth, another has emerged to disrupt that truth, to keep at bay truths too easily produced by cultural and political formations."2

Perhaps the most damaging of these "too easily produced truths," and one that feminists during the past half century have sought to disrupt, is the idea of Woman as a unitary group. Women of colour and queer feminists, in particular, have made great strides in exposing the category of Woman as a fantasy of commonality, fabricated through the repression of individual women's lived experiences, as well as a normativizing concept that naturalizes rigid sex-gender systems based on strict polarities and categorical distinctions between men and women. Questions about thoughtful plurality, multiple perspectives, and differences among women figured centrally at the Kalamazoo roundtable in 2014. They also figured centrally in the early Middle Ages. The wide range of Old English terms for denoting women and female figures, such as wif (woman); wifmann

<sup>\*</sup> Rutgers University. ssklein@english.rutgers.edu

I New Readings on Women in Old English Literature, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

**<sup>2</sup>** Elizabeth Weed, "Introduction: Terms of Reference," in *Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Weed (London: Routledge, 1989), ix–xxxi at xxxi.

(woman-person); fæmne (maid or virgin); ides (noble woman); hlæfdige (mistress [over servants] or lady); cwen (queen or female consort); cwene (female serf or prostitute); nunne (nun); meowle (maiden); mynecen (female monk); myltestre (prostitute); widuwe (widow); bryd (bride); mædencild (female child); mægð (maiden or virgin), indicates that the Anglo-Saxons were highly attuned to differences among women—differences that stemmed from such factors as social rank, marital status, sexual purity, religious affiliation, and age—and, more broadly, that Woman was as much a fiction during this period as it is in modernity.<sup>3</sup>

Yet if Woman is a fictional category, it is nevertheless true—as feminist activists and post-structuralist thinkers have shown—that fictions of gender serve a variety of functions, providing, for example, political platforms for elaborating social demands, or psychological structures for constituting lives of cultural legibility. Two other sessions at the 2014 Congress, designed specifically to honour Helen Damico, explored some of those gendered operations in the context of Anglo-Saxon England and addressed many of the desiderata produced at the initial roundtable discussion. It thus seemed fitting to the organizers and editors to gather this scholarship together under the rubric of a new *New Readings* volume. Alexandra Hennessey Olsen warmly endorsed the idea, remarking that she had greatly enjoyed collaborating with Helen on the original volume and welcomed a new one in Helen's honour.

The present volume takes the fictional concept of Woman as a heuristic device for exploring the social roles, gendered symbols, material structures, and cultural institutions available to female figures in Anglo-Saxon literature and culture. By tracing the ways in which women as different as, say, landed queens, learned nuns, female monsters, mothers of saints, and martyred prostitutes are depicted in the Anglo-Saxon literary, historical, and cultural imagination, individual essays uncover the many identities and forms of agency available to women during this period. Collectively, the essays reveal that differences among women, both modern and medieval, are rightly understood as the effect of subjects' material placement within specific discursive networks and cultural practices, rather than as fixed or essential signs of identity grounded in biology.

The editors and contributors thus present *New Readings on Women and Early Medieval English Literature and Culture* in honour of Helen Damico, whose life and work have significantly expanded our knowledge of the mythical, materialist, and social dimensions of women in the early medieval textual imagination. Individual essays focus almost exclusively on women. When men do appear, it is largely in relation to social roles traditionally coded as masculine (e.g., fatherhood), to symbols of masculinity coopted by

#### FOR PRIVATE AND

<sup>3</sup> The nuances and subtle shades of meaning in these terms are difficult to capture. The definitions that I have provided are by no means exhaustive, but are intended merely to give a sense of the broad semantic range of "woman" in Anglo-Saxon writings. For further discussion, see Christine Rauer, "Mann and Gender in Old English Prose: A Pilot Study," Neophilologus 101 (2017): 139–58; also useful is Anne Curzan, Gender Shifts in the History of English (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

women (e.g., drinking horns), or to institutional structures, such as marriage or monasticism, that powerfully impacted Anglo-Saxon women's lives. The volume's insistent focus on women and female figures is not intended to suggest that maleness and masculinity are rightly understood as "beyond question" or as self-evident aspects of an unchanging human nature. Indeed, one of the most productive insights of second-wave feminism has been the recognition that maleness and masculinity are social and discursive constructs whose boundaries must be constantly interrogated and re-imagined so that men (as well as women) might be freed from restrictive gender norms and social transformation effected for all members of society.

Yet this "return to women" as the primary subject of analysis enables the individual contributors to attend carefully to the multiple and complex forms of female identity in early medieval texts. The implications of these findings extend far beyond providing a fuller and more inclusive historical record. As Jean Howard reminds us, "representations of the past [...] continue to authorize action in the present and to constitute the categories and assumptions through which contemporary subjects live their relations to the real." By focusing their energies on differences among women rather than on oppositions between men and women, the essays presented here alert us to the deep pluralities of gender in Anglo-Saxon literature and culture, putting to rest once and for all any sense of Anglo-Saxon England as having bequeathed to us a rigid two-sex system as part of our modern historical legacy.

The essays at hand further encourage us to challenge modern relations of power and to envision alternative social relations for the future by revealing a past filled with surprisingly flexible gender roles, sex-gender systems, and opportunities for both men and women. Indeed, when Judith Butler envisions a future marked by new forms of gender, she acknowledges that "the genders I have in mind have been existing for a long time." The project before us, then, Butler contends, "is not a question merely of producing a new future for genders that do not yet exist [...] It is a question of developing [...] a new legitimating lexicon for the gender reality that we have always been living." Some of the lexemes can be found in the Anglo-Saxon past.

The individual contributions to the present volume address a range of issues and topics, and emerge from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Yet they are united in their shared commitment to furthering a set of goals that have proven central for feminist scholars working in early historical periods:

- (l) To produce new histories that include women in order to provide a more balanced, and thus more accurate, account of the past.
- (2) To rewrite the categories though which the past is constituted, asking questions that invite attention to women's lives, thereby demonstrating that what counts as

**<sup>4</sup>** Jean E. Howard, "Feminism and the Question of History: Resituating the Debate," *Women's Studies* 19 (1991): 149–57 at 151.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Butler, Undoing Gender (New York: Routledge, 2004), 219.

<sup>6</sup> Butler, Undoing Gender, 219.

- established "knowledge" is often shaped by research that takes men's lives as an unquestioned standard and that overlooks or distorts women's experiences.
- (3) To reassess received knowledge about women and gender roles in the past, thus revealing the variable and constructed nature of sex-gender systems, social institutions, and gender roles that have become so entrenched that they often appear as transhistorical aspects of human nature.
- (4) To mobilize the past as grounds for envisioning alternative futures and for asking what it might mean to be free of gender altogether.
- (5) To undermine teleologically driven accounts of history that would draw a straight line from medieval oppression to modern freedom.
- (6) To use misogyny and other aspects of gender inequity as a lens for challenging all inequalities and forms of difference that affect women or intersect with gender.

Although many of the volume's essays challenge established views of women in Anglo-Saxon England, they are nevertheless marked by an evident respect for earlier scholarship. Collectively, the contributors seek to build on existing feminist research in Anglo-Saxon studies rather than to supplant it. This stance toward prior scholarship takes its cue from feminist standpoint theory, which sought to question the masculinist underpinnings of critical methodologies rooted in the destruction and dismissal of other approaches, ideas, and scholars.<sup>7</sup> This tone is also part of a broader shift in Literary Studies that has increasingly come to recognize the shortcomings of critique and to insist on the value of careful (and caring) reading and description, characterized by attention and concern for one's primary materials.<sup>8</sup> As Tolkien's allegory of the great tower erected from old stones makes clear, new visions are often built on earlier foundations and by capitalizing on materials bequeathed to us from the past.<sup>9</sup> Or, as one

**<sup>7</sup>** For early work on feminist methodologies and scholarly approaches, see Sandra Harding, "Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?," in *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 1–14; and also, in this same collection, Nancy C. M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," 157–80.

**<sup>8</sup>** For recent work on literary approaches that are driven by an ethics of care and reparation rather than destruction, see Heather Love, "Truth and Consequences: On Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," *Criticism* 52 (2010): 235–41; as well as the essays in *Critique and Postcritique*, ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), especially Love, "The Temptations: Donna Haraway, Feminist Objectivity, and the Problems of Critique," 50–72. Also useful is Robyn Wiegman, "The Times We're In: Queer Feminist Criticism and the Reparative "Turn," *Feminist Theory* 15 (2014): 4–25.

**<sup>9</sup>** J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture, Proceedings of the British Academy 22 (1936): 245–95, with the tower allegory at 248–49. For a reading of the masculinist underpinnings of Tolkien's essay, see Clare A. Lees, "Men and Beowulf," in Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 129–48.

contributor to the present volume puts it: "What I have hoped to accomplish here is to put a harmony on her [Helen Damico's] song." <sup>10</sup>

Given that the present volume aims to further a set of relatively well-established goals in feminist studies and also to extend prior scholarship, one might be tempted to ask what, if anything, is so very new about it? The question is further problematized by the vexed status of newness itself within feminism. In her 1977 manifesto "Poetry is not a Luxury," feminist writer and civil rights activist Audre Lorde cautioned against the danger of becoming overly invested in the possibility of newness, warning that "sometimes we drug ourselves with dreams of new ideas [...] But there are no new ideas still waiting in the wings to save us as women, as human [beings]. There are only old and forgotten ones, new combinations, extrapolations and recognitions from within ourselves—along with the renewed courage to try them out." Lorde concludes her manifesto with the rejoinder that "there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt." 12

By the end of the twentieth century, the status of newness within feminist studies had become even more problematic. In 1996, Judith Butler went on record "suggesting that feminist theory has no other work than in responding to the places where feminism is under challenge [...] something like a submission to the demand for rearticulation." Ten years later, *PMLA* featured a special Theories and Methodologies section entitled "Feminist Criticism Today: In Memory of Nellie Y. McKay," that included essays such as "Feminist Deaths and Feminism Today" and "Notes on the Afterlife of Feminist Criticism," which questioned whether academics might be experiencing exhaustion (or even boredom) with feminist approaches, and whether the success of feminist scholarship, as witnessed in part through its incorporation into the academy, might have contributed to its own demise by dulling the political edge from which it had historically drawn much of its energy. 14

In light of these recent challenges to the vitality of feminist studies, a volume of essays devoted to women in Anglo-Saxon literature and culture might seem to merit some justification. In response, I offer two. The first is to recognize that in practice the "demise of feminism" has proved much exaggerated. Feminist insights have indeed become

**<sup>10</sup>** Carol Neuman de Vegvar, "Beyond Valkyries: Drinking Horns in Anglo-Saxon Women's Graves," below, p. 43.

**<sup>11</sup>** Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984; repr. 2007), 36–39 (2007) at 38. This essay first appeared in *Chrysalis: A Magazine of Women's Culture* 3 (1977) under the title "Poems Are Not Luxuries."

**<sup>12</sup>** Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," 39.

**<sup>13</sup>** Judith Butler, "The End of Sexual Difference?," in *Feminist Consequences, Theory for the New Century*, ed. Elizabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 414–34 at 418. This essay was written in 1996 and appeared in shorter form, in both German and French, in 1997.

**<sup>14</sup>** *PMLA* 121 (2006): 1678–741.

accepted within mainstream scholarship to the point that they are often simply incorporated into broadly conceived studies of history, knowledge, aesthetics, economics, and politics. But questions of gender are still present. As Sharon Marcus explains: "To define an object of study in terms other than gender does not eliminate gender from an analytic framework." Sconversely, scholars who focus on gender in tandem with race, sexuality, and nationality may seem to have abandoned "pure feminism," when in fact feminism has been vitalized by the study of gender as one vector of difference inseparable from others.

The second justification is that if we are indeed witnessing a "Feminist Death" within the academy, it has proven to be a very slow and protracted one, as well as a demise that has happily co-existed for decades with a proliferation of remarkably vibrant feminist scholarship. The pioneering collection of essays, Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New Century (2001), opens with Misha Kavka's assertion that "Feminism ain't what it used to be," a fact that, she contends, "threatens to mark our words on the subject with the anger, grief, denial, or resignation of those mourning at a graveside."16 As Kavka predicts, many of the volume's essays contain statements to this effect, such as Biddy Martin's contention that "Women's Studies has lost much of its critical and intellectual vigor"<sup>17</sup> or Judith Butler's claim that "I think for many of us it is a sad time for feminism, even a defeated time." <sup>18</sup> Similarly, the pathbreaking volume, Conflicts in Feminism (1990), concludes with a conversation between its two editors, Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller, in which Fox Keller laments that "Today, feminists are [...] more fearful [...] made more fearful by our own eagerness to devalue, censor, and dismiss," and confesses open nostalgia for the "radical thrust [of seventies feminism] from which, we believed, feminists—and women—would generally gain some benefit."19 Such claims, propelled by numerous factors, among them a recognition of the increasingly fractured nature of feminism, as well as the sombre aftermath of 1980s Reaganomics, illustrate that affects such as malaise, disenchantment, and disillusionment (painful as they may be) do not preclude the production of feminist knowledge. Feminism's longstanding capacity for

**<sup>15</sup>** Sharon Marcus, "Feminist Criticism: A Tale of Two Bodies," *PMLA* 121 (2006): 1722–28 at 1725. For a more field-specific example of this kind of research, see Stacy S. Klein, *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), which argues that Anglo-Saxon writers drew on legendary queens and women of extreme social privilege to express their views on a wide range of non-gender-specific social issues, such as conversion, heroism, social hierarchy, counsel, idolatry, and lay spirituality—all vital concerns in early medieval society.

<sup>16</sup> Misha Kavka, "Introduction," in Feminist Consequences, ed. Bronfen and Kavka, ix-xxvi at ix and x.

**<sup>17</sup>** Biddy Martin, "Success and Its Failures," in *Feminist Consequences*, ed. Bronfen and Kavka, 353–80 at 353. Martin's essay first appeared in *differences* 9 (1997): 102–31.

<sup>18</sup> Butler, "The End of Sexual Difference?," in *Feminist Consequences*, ed. Bronfen and Kavka, 414–34 at 418.

**<sup>19</sup>** "Conclusion: Practicing Conflict in Feminist Theory," in *Conflicts in Feminism*, ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (New York: Routledge, 1990), 370–85 at 384.

INTRODUCTION

7

generating new knowledge within difficult political climates is a sobering and yet potentially helpful example for our current age of "Trumpism."

One final reason that the present is a particularly opportune moment for producing a new New Readings volume is that changes in Anglo-Saxon Studies over the past several decades have opened up myriad possibilities for research on women and gender. Two of these developments are indicated by the difference between the title of the 1990 volume, New Readings on Women in Old English Literature, and that of the present one, New Readings on Women and Early Medieval English Literature and Culture. The shift from "Old English" to "Early Medieval" points to an increasing recognition of Anglo-Saxon England's linguistic diversity, and of the exchange of texts, forms, and ideas among English, Anglo-Latin, Irish, Welsh, and Continental writers during this period.<sup>20</sup> The shift from "Literature" to "Literature and Culture" signals an effort to analyze literature within the various social and cultural contexts in which it was produced and circulated, and, more broadly, to bring Literary Studies into conversation with fields such as Archaeology, History, and Religion.<sup>21</sup> Such conversations can take many forms, as suggested by the proliferation of scholarly terms for describing methodologies that strive to cross, or to work at the intersections of, different disciplines. The present volume's claims to present "cross-" (rather than, say, multi-, inter-, or trans-) disciplinary studies indicates its commitment to fostering knowledge production through dialogue and the exchange of ideas across disciplines as opposed to pursuing multi-disciplinary models of accretion in which knowledge from a variety of disciplines is simply gathered together in an effort to produce a more comprehensive whole. The endorsement of cross-disciplinary studies is also intended to underscore the increasing importance of scholarly inquiry that strives to move across disciplines, either individually or collectively, while respecting their particular epistemologies and methodologies, thus resisting any easy urge to transcend disciplinary boundaries or dissolve them altogether.<sup>22</sup>

**<sup>20</sup>** In 2008, after serving for almost a decade as collaborative bibliographers for the "Old English" section of the *Year's Work in English Studies*, Mary Swan and I proposed changing the name of this section from "Old English" to "Early Medieval," in order to capture more accurately the numerous languages, including Old Irish, Welsh, Anglo-Latin, and Anglo-Norman, covered by Anglo-Saxon scholarship. For a good example of comparative research in Anglo-Saxon women's and gender studies, see Helene Scheck, *Reform and Resistance: Formations of Female Subjectivity in Early Medieval Ecclesiastical Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

**<sup>21</sup>** In spite of its ostensible focus on "Old English literature," the 1990 *New Readings* volume, in fact, spanned a remarkable range of disciplines and textual forms, from law to literature, from history to hagiography, and from place-names to poetry, as well as a range of languages, including Old English, Anglo-Latin, and Old Norse.

**<sup>22</sup>** For an admirably clear overview of terms commonly used to describe different kinds of disciplinarity, see Marilyn Stember, "Advancing the Social Sciences Through the Interdisciplinary Enterprise," *The Social Science Journal* 28 (1991): 1–14. More recent reflections can be found in "Introduction: Doctrines, Disciplines, Discourses, Departments," ed. James Chandler and Arnold I. Davidson, Special Issue of *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009): 729–46.

The present volume's cultivation of more fluid and less "disciplined" thought styles, is particularly evident in its emphasis on analyzing literature in relation to the material contexts in which it was produced and circulated. Fred C. Robinson's research helped sensitize Anglo-Saxonists to the importance of situating Old English literature "in its most immediate context," and several essays in the present volume pursue codicological approaches, broadly defined, attending to representations of women in Anglo-Latin manuscripts (Ericksen), or in the *Beowulf* manuscript (Estes, Hooper), as well as to female figures who ought to appear in the Nowell Codex but are nevertheless missing (Hooper).<sup>23</sup> Other essays shed light on the daily lives of Anglo-Saxon women by studying grave goods, including cooking utensils, metal dress accessories, and drinking horns (Owen-Crocker, Neuman de Vegvar), or by analyzing literary figures and gendered symbolism in relation to insights drawn from art history (Karkov), forensic archaeology (Owen-Crocker), or cemetery archaeology (Neuman de Vegvar).

The use of material culture to supplement textual records often works in reverse as well. Two of the volume's essays demonstrate that scrutinizing hagiographical narratives for images of monastic libraries and women readers (Blanton) or for depictions of paraliturgical ritual performances (Weston) may shed valuable light on Anglo-Saxon female patronage, women's literacy, and their engagement with book culture—aspects of history that may otherwise be lost to us due to gaps in the historical record. Joyce Hill's essay uses Anglo-Saxon hagiographical narratives in a similar manner, tracing how discussions of saintly mothers and pre-natal signs of sanctity were used to legit-imize and confirm the sanctity of men, and demonstrating, more broadly, that feminist research may greatly illuminate non-gender-specific topics. Collectively, these essays reveal the value of cross-disciplinary conversations for Anglo-Saxon Studies, as well as the limitations of trying to reconstruct the past on the basis of texts alone.

Efforts to spark cross-disciplinary conversations have been accompanied in recent years by a similar desire to cross long-accepted temporal boundaries. The recognition that strict boundaries of historical periodization, particularly those constructed on the basis of watershed events, such as military conquests, regnal shifts, or large-scale transformations of faith, might occlude a deeper understanding of the realities of women's lives, was famously proposed in Joan Kelly-Gadol's ground-breaking 1977 essay, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" Subsequent research by scholars Mary Swan and Elaine Treharne has allowed the concept to gain traction in Anglo-Saxon Studies. The idea of a "long Anglo-Saxon period," one that stretches far beyond the Norman Conquest of 1066 and acknowledges the afterlife of Anglo-Saxon literary and cultural formations well into the eleventh and twelfth centuries, has created space for investigating possible continuities between pre- and post-Conquest literary cultures, and enabled new feminist research

## FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL

**<sup>23</sup>** Fred C. Robinson, "Old English Literature in Its Most Immediate Context," in *The Editing of Old English*, ed. Fred C. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 3–24.

**<sup>24</sup>** Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koontz, and Susan Stuard (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977; repr. 1987), 137–64 (1977) and 175–201 (1987).

INTRODUCTION

9

in Anglo-Saxon Studies.<sup>25</sup> As Elizabeth Tyler has recently shown, women negotiated the eleventh-century conquests of England, both Danish (1016) and Norman (1066), differently than men, participating in multi-lingual, international networks, comprised of both lay women and female monastics, that allowed them to serve as bridges between Anglo-Saxon and later European literary culture.<sup>26</sup>

Tyler's analysis of the important role that Anglo-Saxon women played as ambassadors of Latin literary culture long after 1066 exemplifies newer, more flexible approaches to periodization that have effectively re-oriented the study of early medieval women and gender. Early feminist scholars tended to investigate how monumental historical changes, such as the sixth-century conversion of barbarian kings, the Norman Conquest of 1066, or the twelfth-century Gregorian reforms, affected the general power and status of women, as well as the institutions that affected them most directly (e.g., double monasteries, marriage). More recent research, by contrast, has taken a skeptical stance toward these events and sought to show that the story is more complicated and the project of feminist history more diverse than tracing the decline of a "Golden Age" for Anglo-Saxon women or identifying the precise events—whether Christian conversion, the eradication of double monasteries, or the Fourth Lateran Council—that marked its demise.

Particularly striking in this regard has been the treatment of Anglo-Saxon women and gender in relation to Christianity and its associated texts and genres, such as homilies and hagiographical narratives.<sup>28</sup> Many of the watershed events used to demarcate strict chronological boundaries for the Anglo-Saxon period tended to centre on Christianity (e.g., the Fall of Rome, conversion of England, clerical reforms). As a result, early studies of Anglo-Saxon women and gender tended to focus on the opportunities and forms of power offered to women by Christianity, such as queens' participation in Christian conversion or abbesses' administrative control over double monasteries;

**<sup>25</sup>** See Elaine Treharne, *Living Through Conquest: The Politics of Early English, 1020–1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and also Treharne, "Categorization, Periodization: The Silence of (the) English in the Twelfth Century," *New Medieval Literatures* 8 (2006): 247–73. Other useful discussions are found in Mary Swan and E. M. Treharne, eds., *Rewriting Old English in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

**<sup>26</sup>** England in Europe: English Royal Women and Literary Patronage, c. 1000-c. 1150 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> Important early feminist research that sought to trace the ways in which large-scale historical transformations affected the general status of Anglo-Saxon women and female literary figures includes Christine Fell, Cecily Clark, and Elizabeth Williams, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992); and Pat Belanoff, "The Fall (?) of the Old English Female Poetic Image," *PMLA* 104 (1989): 822–31.

**<sup>28</sup>** For a thoughtful study of Anglo-Saxon women and Christianity, with particular attention to the formation of the cultural record itself, and with women's relation to its processes of production and reception, see Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

or, conversely, to investigate how Christianity's increasing codification in late Anglo-Saxon England, as witnessed, for example, in Benedictine reformers' efforts to enforce priestly celibacy and enclosure for religious women, may have contributed to women's presumed decline in status. Embracing a more fluid sense of periodization effectively took the focus off of monumental religious shifts, most notably Christian conversion and monastic reform, and paved the way for investigating the many local, and often informal, possibilities available for religious women in the midst of large-scale institutional changes. Newer research, including that found in the present volume, has begun to reveal the diverse meanings that accrued to institutions powerfully underwritten by Christianity (e.g., marriage, monasticism, reform) over the duration of the early Middle Ages and in the hands of different writers (Ericksen); and, more broadly, to show that concepts that have, historically, played a central role in feminism, such as agency, the self, literacy, and power, may have meant something different then from what they mean now.<sup>29</sup>

The injunctions of modern feminist writers such as Lorde and Butler, among others, that looking backward and resurrecting old ideas might, paradoxically, help us to access new ones and, ultimately, provide the necessary perspective for creating a more viable future resonate strongly with Anglo-Saxon understandings of newness and related concepts. For example, an Anglo-Saxon poet's skill was believed to reside less in his or her ability to compose wholly original verse than to use well-known rhythms and familiar formulas as the basis for creating fresh combinations. Similarly, the enterprise of *inventio* (from which our modern term "invention" derives) referred to finding something that already existed rather than to discovering something completely new. These social attitudes, both modern and medieval, regarding the salutary effects of retrospection alert us to the highly contingent nature of ideas such as newness and invite sustained consideration of the 1990 *New Readings* volume, as well as its difference from the present one.

The 1990 publication of *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* marked an important milestone in the history of Anglo-Saxon Studies. Although women such as Elizabeth Elstob, Dorothy Whitelock, and Rosemary Woolf had made significant contributions to the field of Anglo-Saxon Studies, research on Anglo-Saxon women, or on female characters and gender in Old English literature, was relatively scarce in the late twentieth century, and also sequestered in lesser-known journals and thus difficult to access. Prominent male Anglo-Saxonists had long elided female figures or marginalized questions of gender, a way of (not) seeing exemplified in Tolkien's self-proclaimed efforts to "confine myself mainly to the *monsters*—Grendel and the Dragon";<sup>30</sup> or in Adrian Bonjour's characterization of Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother as simply

## FOR PRIVATE AND

**<sup>29</sup>** See, for example, Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), which expands modern understandings of human agency by showing that late Anglo-Saxon monastic culture was founded on concepts of "agent action" rooted in, paradoxically, obedience to others.

<sup>30</sup> Tolkien, "The Monsters and the Critics," 246.

a "transition between the two great crises." The diminution of women and female characters often operated in subtle and seemingly harmless ways as, for example, in the nineteenth-century German philologist Friedrich Klaeber's monumental edition of *Beowulf*, which glosses terms such as *milde*, *glaed*, *freondlabu*, *liðe*, and *gedefe*, as "kind" or "kindness," thus transforming the powerful and accomplished Queen Wealhtheow into a sort of Victorian "angel in the house," and, more broadly, the Anglo-Saxon past into an historical period in which the categories male/female and masculinity/femininity map directly onto binaries such as active/passive.<sup>32</sup>

The original *New Readings* volume made great strides in displacing oppressive androcentric narratives about Anglo-Saxon England and in foregrounding women's multiple and varied roles in the Anglo-Saxon textual past. By focusing on the agential aspects of female mourning in Old English elegies, for example, or by charting women's participation in Anglo-Saxon legal and documentary culture, individual essays sought to disrupt simplistic, masculinist constructions of early medieval England as a warrior society dominated by men and their interests, with women relegated to peaceweaving and passive laments for slain warriors, whose deaths would be avenged only by their "brothers-in-arms." In so doing the 1990 *New Readings* volume demonstrated not only the richness of the Anglo-Saxon period for studying women and gender, but also that attention to women could broaden our knowledge of Anglo-Saxon culture more generally.

As Joan Scott and others have cogently argued, however, the goal of feminist scholar-ship is not simply to "add women" but rather to remake the categories through which the past is constituted.<sup>33</sup> Or, as Elizabeth Weed hypothesizes, "if feminism's special strength is the specificity of its politics, we must attend to structures of knowledge which will allow that specificity to be produced."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the 1990 *New Readings* volume did far more than to place women and gender at the centre of literary and historical analysis. By structuring the volume's essays under rubrics such as "The Historical Record," "Sexuality and Folklore," "Language and Difference in Characterization," and "The Stereotype Deconstructed," rather than by longstanding categories of analysis, such as, say, "Heroism," "Kingship," or "Pagan/Christian Conflicts," Damico and Olsen provided a fresh lens for investigating the past, while situating Anglo-Saxon Studies in the midst of cutting-edge theoretical approaches that were transforming Literary Studies in the 1980s and 1990s, such as New Historicism, Queer Studies, Semiotics, and Post-structuralism.

**<sup>31</sup>** Adrian Bonjour, "Grendel's Dam and the Composition of *Beowulf*," *English Studies* 30 (1949): 113–24 at 117; quoted in Jane Chance, "The Structural Unity of *Beowulf*: The Problem of Grendel's Mother," in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. Damico and Olsen, 248–61 at 248. For further discussion, see Chance's essay, "The Problem of Grendel's Mother," in the present volume, 209–225.

**<sup>32</sup>** Josephine Bloomfield, "Diminished by Kindness: Frederick Klaeber's Rewriting of Wealhtheow," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 93 (1994): 183–203.

**<sup>33</sup>** Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 1053–75.

**<sup>34</sup>** Weed, "Introduction," in *Coming to Terms*, ed. Weed, xxxi.

The knowledge structures that subtend the present volume derive organically from the material at hand. Rather than trying to imagine pre-conceived categories that might contain or encapsulate female experience, or to use the collected essays for creating a master narrative about women in the Anglo-Saxon literary and historical imagination, the editors of the volume sought to allow the arguments and findings contained in the various essays to dictate the categories, and, further, to imagine categories that might foster cross-fertilization and conversation among the individual essays. In addition, each one of the four categories used to organize the volume—Literacy and Material Culture, Marriage and Family, Women of the *Beowulf* Manuscript, and Women in Anglo-Saxon Studies—honours a major strand of Helen Damico's research.

The essays here (all commissioned and newly written for this volume) effectively fulfill Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen's call to "pose 'new questions' to 'very old records'" and to engage closely with overwhelmingly male-authored writings in an effort to generate a more accurate reading of the primary texts, as well as to demonstrate the vitality and richness of Anglo-Saxon literature for feminist thought. In keeping with feminist mandates for revision, championed by Damico, the newness of most of the essays resides less in their discovery of original materials than in their recovery of previously occluded aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture, as well as in their ability to help us see familiar texts in a different light. The contributors' relentless quest for knowledge, manifested in their openness to new questions and to approaches that cross linguistic and disciplinary boundaries, offers a fitting means of honouring Helen Damico, whose life and work exemplify these very qualities.

One of the hallmarks of Helen Damico's research is a sensitivity to the complex relationship between textual representations of women and material culture. In "Beowulf" 's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition (University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), for example, Damico traces the symbolic resonances associated with royal women in the Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse literary imagination, particularly in their roles as agents for circulating cups at feasts and for distributing treasure. The first section of this volume, "Literacy and Material Culture," honours the interdisciplinary nature of Damico's research by focusing on the ways in which Anglo-Saxon material culture may enrich our knowledge of the symbolic associations that accrued to female characters in early medieval literature, and, conversely, how depictions of female figures in Anglo-Saxon hagiography and Anglo-Latin texts may be used to supplement lost, or otherwise incomplete, historical records.

Gale Owen-Crocker opens the volume with a broad interdisciplinary survey of "Anglo-Saxon Women, Woman, and Womanhood." She moves from evidence of women acting as donors and witnesses in Anglo-Saxon wills and land-grant charters, to female names recorded in the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England database (PASE), to representations of women in Old English poetry and hagiography, and concludes that

**<sup>35</sup>** "Introduction," in *New Readings on Women*, ed. Damico and Olsen, 3. Damico and Olsen are here citing Sheila C. Dietrich, "An Introduction to Women in Anglo-Saxon Society (ca. 600–1066)," in *The Women of England from Anglo-Saxon Times to the Present: Interpretive Bibliographic Essays*, ed. Barbara Kanner (Hamden: Archon, 1979), 32–56 at 33.

textual evidence offers relatively limited information about the daily lives of women in Anglo-Saxon England. By contrast, Owen-Crocker argues, cemetery archaeology provides valuable evidence for understanding women's social roles, as there are literally thousands of female Anglo-Saxon inhumation graves dating from the fifth to the seventh centuries. Using grave goods, such as weaving swords, brooches, rings, metal clasps, beads, and vessels, Owen-Crocker reconstructs Anglo-Saxon women's dress and engagement with textiles in daily life, while also charting other occupations in which women may have participated, such as baking, entertainment, and healing. Owen-Crocker contends that forensic archaeology offers important ways forward for understanding women and gender. Testing for the amount of collagen in bones, for example, indicates pregnancy or lactation, whereas DNA and isotope testing may allow scholars to reconstruct women's ancestry and patterns of immigration. Owen-Crocker closes her essay with the provocative claim that information gleaned from furnished cemeteries reveals more about Woman as a generic category than about the lives of individual women.

Carol Neuman de Vegvar's essay, "Beyond Valkyries: Drinking Horns in Anglo-Saxon Women's Graves," likewise investigates material culture, with particular attention to the few exceptional examples in which ornamented drinking horns have been found in Anglo-Saxon women's graves. De Vegvar reminds us that such horns are typically found in elite men's graves; when found in women's graves, these objects hint at the range of (presumptively male) roles women may have played in early Anglo-Saxon society. Grave goods found in Grave 17 at Wakerley, Northamptonshire, Grave 43 at Fonaby in North Lincolnshire, and Grave 124 at Castledyke South in Barton-on-Humber, North Lincolnshire, provide the central focus for the essay. As De Vegvar argues, the Anglian context of Grave 17 and Grave 43, along with the presence of wrist-clasps in both burials (as well as in their respective cemeteries), suggest ancestral ties and possibly lingering personal connections to Scandinavia, in which the deposition of drinking horns in women's graves was a more usual occurrence. De Vegvar points to the fact that metalwork-fitted horns may be interpreted as a mark of social distinction, particularly aurochs horn, which must have been imported from the Continent and is associated with princely burials. She contends that the anomalous inclusion of metalwork-fitted horns in Wakerley Grave 17 and Fonaby Grave 43 may indicate unusual social roles for the women with whom these horns were buried. The essay concludes by suggesting that Wakerley may have been a plague cemetery, thus explaining both the low numbers of male burials and the inhumation of a woman with a drinking horn at this site and potentially also at Fonaby. As De Vegvar writes: "If the men of Wakerley were absent fulfilling their military obligations to an overlord at the time of an outbreak of plague at home, it is very possible that they would have left the community, by intention temporarily, in the capable hands of a senior woman, probably from the family of the leader of the community, and consigned to her as well any symbol of authority that may have been associated with local leadership, such as the aurochs-horn drinking horn."

Lisa M. C. Weston writes on "Embodied Literacy: Paraliturgical Performance in the Life of Saint Leoba," with an eye toward identifying traces of Leoba as an author. Weston contends that one place in which we may glimpse Leoba's literacy is in the paraliturgical rituals created and performed by Leoba and her community in response to various

calamities and crises. Understanding these rituals properly, Weston argues, requires us to shift attention away from individual literacy and toward a "collaborative embodiment of textuality that promotes identification across bodies and time." She shows that the collaborative, communal, and appropriative nature of literacy in these ritual performances is in keeping with the imitative style of Leoba's writings, and particularly with their appropriation of Aldhelm's words to mark her own identity and establish her membership within a textual community. Weston's essay demonstrates the importance of community in creating literacy, as well as the central role that literacy plays in creating community. By revealing the extent to which Leoba's prophetic dream and its interpretation, as much as her letter and prayer, are based in shared iconography, scriptural narrative, and exegesis, Weston illustrates the communally embodied nature of Leoba's literacy, as well as the nature of literacy at Wimborne (the place where Leoba was educated), and at Bischofsheim (the community she founded).

Virginia Blanton provides tools for "Imagining the Lost Libraries of Anglo-Saxon Double Monasteries," with the goal of deepening our understanding of the education, training, and textual resources that might have been available to religious women living in double monasteries during the seventh and early eighth centuries. Since libraries at women's communities (Blanton focuses on Barking, Coldingham, Ely, Thanet, Whitby, and Wimborne) lack inventories and few of the extant manuscripts from this period have been associated with women's houses, scholarly efforts to imagine women's engagement with book culture have typically been curtailed. Blanton contends that we must look to new resources in order to understand Anglo-Saxon women's involvement with book culture and that the ritualistic practices of nuns, recounted in Anglo-Saxon hagiography, including liturgical singing, processions, and prayer, provide valuable evidence for female patronage, learning, and engagement with texts.

Helen Damico's second monograph, Beowulf and the Grendel-kin: Politics and Poetry in Eleventh-Century England (West Virginia University Press, 2015), focuses on the politics of motherhood and royal kin relations, drawing parallels between literary mothers in Beowulf, such as Grendel's mother and Wealhtheow, and, respectively, the eleventhcentury noblewomen Ælfgifu of Northampton and Emma of Normandy. Beowulf and the Grendel-kin exemplifies Damico's significant contributions to our understanding of marriage and family in early medieval literature and culture. The second section of the present volume, "Engendering Marriage and Family," extends Damico's research on these topics by investigating the diverse ways in which Anglo-Saxon writers imagined marriage and family, as well as how these institutions both opened up and limited opportunities for women. Janet Schrunk Ericksen's essay, "A Textbook Stance on Marriage: The Versus ad coniugem in Anglo-Saxon England," focuses on a 122-line Latin marriage poem that was probably composed by Prosper of Aquitaine in the first half of the fifth century and that formed a core part of monastic education in Anglo-Saxon England. Ericksen contends that the poem "moderates the arguments for celibate marriage laid out by such powerful Anglo-Saxon voices as those of Aldhelm and Ælfric," thus providing an alternative (and far less restrictive) view of women and marital piety. By investigating the manuscript context for the Versus ad coniugem, Ericksen argues that the poem was designed to supply Latin-learners a "more practical and accessible model of marital piety with

which to view the world outside the cloister, as well as [...] a more familiar, if less often lauded, outline of marital relationships."

Catherine E. Karkov sheds light on the symbolic dimensions of mother-child relations and infant care in "The Circumcision and Weaning of Isaac: The Cuts that Bind." Karkov reminds us that "there are many historical studies of circumcision, but there are relatively few of weaning," and offers a rich analysis of Ælfric's version of the weaning of Isaac in the illustrated Old English Hexateuch. Drawing on her extensive knowledge of art history, Karkov demonstrates the numerous ways in which Sarah is visually distanced from her son Isaac, as, for example, in the artist's use of an outline drawing technique that distinguishes her from Abraham and Isaac (whose garments have been filled in with ink wash), and causes her to fade into the crowd of anonymous figures behind her; or in the Hexateuch's illustration of Isaac's birth (folio 25r, Figure 6.2), in which Sarah remains enclosed in a separate space, visually cut off from the figures of the newborn Isaac and of Abraham, her halo-like pillow effectively signifying that Isaac is a child born of divine promise as opposed to carnal lust. Karkov points to the deep theological associations between weaning and the acquisition of true spiritual knowledge. She argues that for early medieval writers such as Bede and Ælfric, the mother's milk "represented the rudiments of the faith that were passed on to the faithful as they progressed toward weaning and true knowledge," but that ultimately, "the mother's milk and the mother tongue are things that, like the foreskin, must be discarded for the paternal bread and Latin of true religious knowledge and the patriarchy of church and kingdom."

Joyce Hill's "Saintly Mothers and Mothers of Saints" illuminates the importance of mother figures and of pre-natal imagery in the "literary canonization" of Anglo-Saxon saints—that is, the pattern of narrative by which the sanctity of an individual was demonstrated and confirmed. Hill traces the means by which holiness of life was demonstrated and acclaimed, and argues that "above all, what the literary canonization needed to convey, in a world not marked by the hostility characteristic of the early church, was divine approbation, supremely in the form of miracles." Hill shows that mothers of saints are featured prominently in relation to miracles, for "just as the divinity of Christ is revealed before his birth, so, in many of the Anglo-Saxon saints' lives, the indwelling of the divine is often signalled by pre-natal signs." Hill's analysis of these little-studied hagiographical motifs reveals the rhetorical finesse required to assert the co-existence of virginity and saintly maternity, and concludes by suggesting that the power of motifs associated with maternity may derive in part from their relationship to social reality.

Colleen Dunn's essay, "Playing with Memories: Emma of Normandy, Cnut, and the Spectacle of Ælfheah's *Corpus*," reflects on Emma's efforts to shape memory and history in order to ensure central roles both for herself and for her youngest son Harthacnut in the midst of the political turmoil of early eleventh-century England. Dunn begins with the brutal murder of Ælfheah, archbishop of Canterbury, in 1012, followed by his victorious return (now as a saint), when Cnut, Emma, and their only son, Harthacnut, led a great procession translating Ælfheah's body from London to Canterbury in 1023. Dunn argues that Emma's involvement in Ælfheah's translation stemmed from her concern for Harthacnut, who at approximately age five, had been entrusted to Thurkill, a core leader of the highly trained and highly feared Jómsvíkings, and a man known for his shifting

loyalties. Dunn contends that when Emma learned that her youngest son was about to be sent away, she took steps to promote the idea of the royal family as generous donors to the church, and, more specifically, of her son Harthacnut as England's rightful king.

The third section of the volume, "Women of the *Beowulf* Manuscript," extends Damico's significant contributions to Anglo-Saxon literary studies by focusing attention on the manuscripts in which Anglo-Saxon texts circulated. Teresa Hooper's investigation of "The Missing Women of the *Beowulf* Manuscript" offers a "corrective codicological reading" of the second half of British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv. Hooper reminds us that the Nowell Codex has lost approximately one quire (out of sixteen) from the Passion of Saint Christopher, thus obscuring the stories of two female martyrs, the prostitute sisters Nicea and Aquilina, who use their sexual allure to deceive the pagan king Dagnus (so as to gain access to his temple), openly ridicule his gods, and desecrate their statues by pulling them down with Nicea's girdle. By tracing the stories of the sisters' martyrdom in several other extant manuscripts, Hooper reveals that the Nowell Codex "highlights a strong correlation between women, monsters, and places of pre-Christian power," and further, that the bodies of both women and monsters function throughout the Codex as signs of the Creator and as opportunities for practising the correct interpretation of signs.

Heide Estes's essay, "Boundaries Embodied: An Ecofeminist Reading of the Old English *Judith*," focuses attention on the geographical terrain, physical and ontological boundaries, and environmental concerns embedded in the Old English verse *Judith*. Estes shows that "the text is suffused throughout with boundaries breached and violated—geographical, gendered, temporal, and religious divides, as well as divisions between humans, animals, and objects, drunk and sober, alive and dead." She contends that in contrast to the biblical Judith, whose status as a pious widow is fairly straightforward, the Old English poem "pushes Judith to the margins of the geographical and social worlds of the poem, and associates her with darkness in ways that indicate discomfort with her status as a powerful woman and a Hebrew." Estes shows how ecocritical approaches can add to our understanding of female figures in Old English poetry, particularly in instances where a woman's status is unclear.

Helen Conrad O'Briain's essay, "Listen to the Woman: Reading Wealhtheow as Stateswoman," offers a detailed analysis of Wealhtheow's role in *Beowulf*, with particular attention to the ways in which prior scholarship may under-represent her influence in the poem. Conrad O'Briain highlights the poem's resonances with Augustinian categories of spiritual and ethical consciousness and suggests that Wealhtheow reflects the *Beowulf* poet's expectation of an audience receptive to a woman's voice struggling against, or even rising above, marginalization and victimization. She concludes that Wealhtheow's importance in the poem "may suggest not only a culturally accorded power and field of action, but a poet creating a heroic narrative which, exploiting the possibilities offered by new sources in an increasingly hybrid culture, places her in a socially reconstructive role [...] akin to figures such as Gudrun, Bruinhild, Olof, Yrse, and Skuld."

Jane Chance concludes this section by reflecting once again on "The Problem of Grendel's Mother," a title that resonates with her 1980 essay, "The Structural Unity of *Beowulf*: The Problem of Grendel's Mother." Chance aims to highlight new work on

women and gender that has appeared in the (nearly four) decades between the two essays, as well as to investigate individual texts and reading techniques that might aid modern scholars in uncovering a past centred more squarely on Anglo-Saxon women's experiences. Chance traces a number of key publications from the late 1970s to the present day, including Dorothy Whitelock's 1975 revision of Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Reader* and Helen Damico's *Beowulf and the Grendel-kin: Politics and Poetry in Eleventh-Century England* (2015), that have contributed to the decanonization of Anglo-Saxon literary studies and contends that "reading as a woman" entails "acknowledging the importance of non-European (western) cultures" in the formation of Anglo-Saxon textual traditions.

A final distinguishing aspect of Helen Damico's career is her longstanding commitment to the formation and promotion of Anglo-Saxon Studies as a discipline. In addition to her own ground-breaking research, Damico edited the three volumes of Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies on the Formation of a Discipline.<sup>36</sup> By bringing together hundreds of biographical sketches of individuals such as The Brothers Grimm, Ernst Robert Curtius, and Erich Auerbach, Medieval Scholarship sheds valuable light on the personal and professional circumstances of scholars who, along with their published work, figured centrally in the building of a discipline. In her introductory remarks to the second volume of Medieval Scholarship, Damico notes that only three women are included in the volume: Elizabeth Elstob, the first known female scholar of Old English; Edith Rickert, co-editor of the Canterbury Tales; and Rosemary Woolf, a literary critic of drama and religious lyric. Damico concludes that "this paucity of women scholars [...] is illustrative of the late emergence of women as scholars of the medieval period."37 The final section of the present volume, "Women in Anglo-Saxon Studies," responds to Damico's reflections on gender representation by providing a more robust account of the many women, some late emerging and some simply lesser known, who ultimately contributed to the formation of Anglo-Saxon Studies.

Timothy Graham's essay, "Female Agency in Early Anglo-Saxon Studies: The 'Nuns of Tavistock' and Elizabeth Elstob," investigates the grounds of a sixteenth-century belief that the study of Old English was cultivated by nuns in the late Middle Ages and explores lesser-known aspects of the early eighteenth-century scholar Elizabeth Elstob. Graham argues that Matthew Parker's (1504–1575) assertion that nuns were responsible for teaching Old English at Tavistock on the eve of the Reformation is unfounded and that Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756) was, as she herself wrote, "the first Woman that has studied that Language [Old English] since it was spoke." Graham's detailed account of Elstob's career, including her publication of *An English-Saxon Homily on the Birth-Day of St. Gregory* (1709) and *The Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue, first Given in English: with an Apology for the Study of Northern Antiquities* (1715), sheds light on her concern to highlight royal women's involvement in promoting Christianity in

**<sup>36</sup>** Helen Damico, ed., *Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies on the Formation of a Discipline*, 3 vols. (New York: Garland, 1995–2000).

**<sup>37</sup>** Helen Damico, ed. (with Donald Fennema and Karmen Lenz), *Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies on the Formation of a Discipline*, vol. 2: *Literature and Philology* (Garland, 1998; repr. New York: Routledge, 2013), x.

England, as well as her commitment to writing in the vernacular in order to bring knowledge of Old English to a female readership.

Mary Dockray-Miller writes on "The First Female Anglo-Saxon Professors," bringing to light a host of women professors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century whose expertise in Old English language and literature proved to be a valuable credential for securing academic legitimacy and professional opportunities in United States colleges and universities. Dockray-Miller notes that four of the earliest female professors of Anglo-Saxon had no formal academic credentials at all; yet their expertise in the presumably scientific, empirical (and hence masculine-coded) realm of Germanic philology more than compensated for their lack of academic pedigree. She traces the careers of the ten American women who earned the PhD in Anglo-Saxon before 1900, showing how marriage and family life tended to derail their professional involvement in English studies, as in the case of Mary "Mamie" Gwinn, the first American woman to receive a PhD in Anglo-Saxon (PhD, 1888, Bryn Mawr), who left academia after marrying fellow Bryn Mawr professor Alfred Hodder in 1904.

The essays presented here in honour of Helen Damico offer, in short, new paths into an increasingly rich area of study. Their diversity and freshness, along with their archival and methodological range, reveal a robust commitment to feminist interdisciplinarity, while their refusal of any grand master narrative takes seriously the complexity of Anglo-Saxon women's lives, as well as the elusive relationship between history, literary symbols, textual representations, and social and cultural practices. To be sure, no single volume, regardless of how many voices it contains or disciplines it embraces, is positioned to offer a global perspective on feminist Anglo-Saxon studies. Feminism has taught us that we cannot see everything; there is no single place or objective stance that might enable a kind of ur-view of our field. The critiques of women of colour and "third world" women have made clear the importance of extending our gaze to encompass a more global Middle Ages, while post- and transhumanist studies, in conjunction with fields such as Environmental Humanism, Maritime and Oceanic Studies, and New Materialisms, have urged us to move beyond limited notions of "personhood," and to embrace new conceptions of agency and individuality in ways that are appropriate to relational ontologies. Future studies of Anglo-Saxon women and gender will surely build upon the work begun in this volume and take up some of these challenges. Foremost among them will be the need to balance the apparently competing, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, turns within feminism toward rethinking subjects that reveal women's traditional roles, such as marriage and family, along with the propulsion toward post-gender theory and transhumanism, schools of thought that promise to liberate both men and women from debilitating gender norms even as they threaten to elide many women's lived experiences.

One of my favourite memories of Helen Damico is of a conversation we shared in June 2001, during a National Endowment for the Humanities seminar on "Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts and Texts," led by Timothy Graham and Paul Szarmach at the British Library, in London. When I asked Helen what she found most satisfying about being a professor of early medieval literature, she replied: "What I love most is helping students and other scholars improve their work—to see something evolve, to witness the making

of progress and to be a part of that progress." The present volume is offered in the spirit of Helen's remarks—in the hopes of witnessing and participating in the ongoing project of recovering a fuller history of Anglo-Saxon women and gender. It is a project that is marked by the constant critique, revision, and updating that defines feminist praxis and that has, in fact, been made possible by Damico's own scholarship, which has provided the conceptual room and support for such new work. In this respect, the new *New Readings* volume marks an exciting moment in early medieval gender studies, as well as a salutary reminder of how much work remains to be done.







FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE ONLY