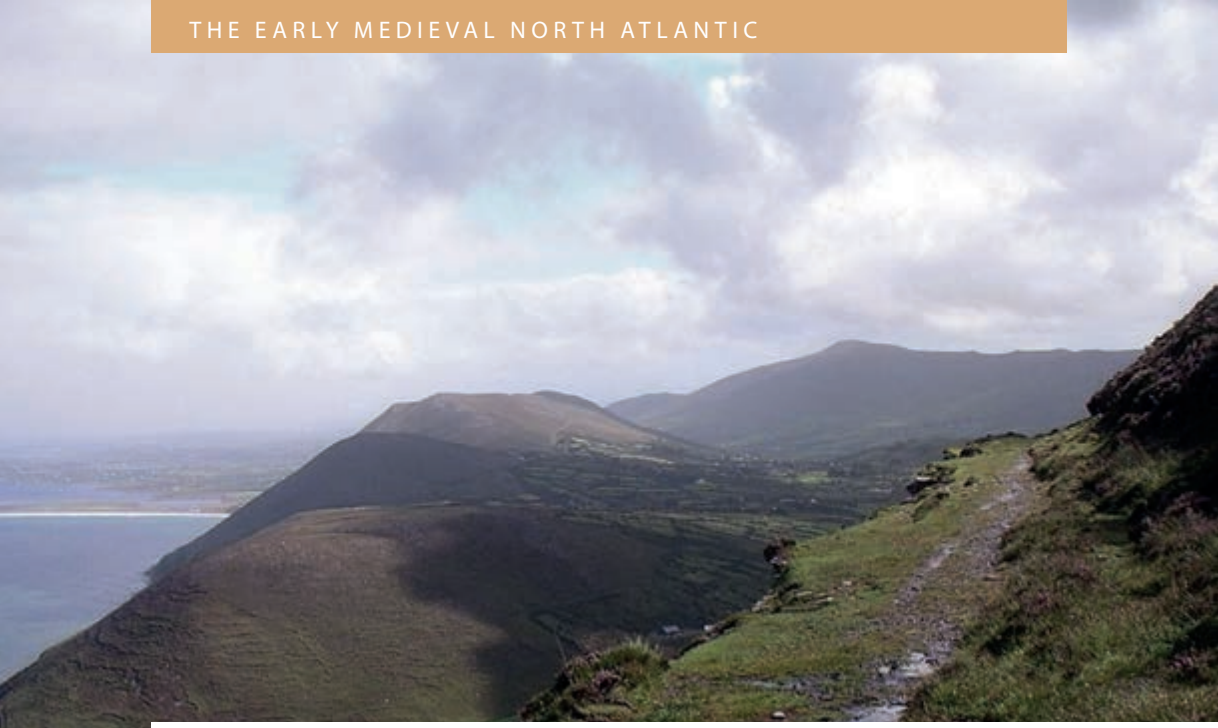

Jeremy DeAngelo

Outlawry, Liminality, and Sanctity in the Literature of the Early Medieval North Atlantic

Amsterdam
University
Press

Outlawry, Liminality, and Sanctity in the Literature of the Early Medieval North Atlantic

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For my parents

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Note

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own, even when the edition cited includes a translation. These may have been consulted (and therefore cited for comparison), but not followed so as to convey nuances in the original languages that may otherwise be missed (the distinction between *ailithre* and pilgrimage, for example). The punctuation has typically been updated as well.

Introduction: The Hermit and the Outlaw

The late medieval poem *The Hermit and the Outlaw* dates from the turn of the fourteenth century, and is preserved in two extant manuscripts.[1] It is a straightforward *exemplum*, highly reminiscent of the parable of the prodigal son, concerning two brothers, one a 'gode ermyte' and the other a 'wylde outlawe' and 'erraunt theff'.[2] The bulk of the story follows the fate of the latter, who makes an ingenuous attempt to repent after encountering a pilgrim in the woods. The humor of his callowness and resistance to hard work eventually gives way to tragedy, however, as what was meant to be an easy penance becomes for him a matter of life or death. Determined to take no water – a drink he normally detests – the outlaw is subjected to intense thirst and is offered only water to slake it. Instead of succumbing to temptation, he opens his veins and drinks his blood, dying in this world but gaining life eternal. The hermit has a vision of his brother rising to heaven and, unaware of the circumstances of his death, bitterly compares his brother's life with his own:

Lorde, what may thys be,
Thys myrthe & thys solempnite,
    My brother ys nowe ynne? –
That neu*er* wrou3t wel, ywys,
But al hys lyfe hadde ladde amys,
And ay do wo & synne.
For to defoylen*e* mayd & wyfe –
Thus he hathe ledde hys lyfe –
    Ne wolde he neu*er* blynne.
Nowe me thenketh y lyue to longe,
Othyr ellys God doyth me wronge,
    That he thus heuene may wynne.

And y that suffyr payn & woo,
Euyl lygge and barfote go,

1 British Library MS Additional 22577 and British Library MS Additional 37492, folios 76^{v} to 82^{v}. The first is a transcription of the other. For editions of each, see 'The Eremyte and the Outelawe', pp. 165-182; and '*The Hermit and the Outlaw:* An Edition', pp. 137-166.

2 '*The Hermit and the Outlaw:* An Edition', lines 28, 30, and 31.

And fast vnto wat*er* & brede,
Hereof me thenketh gret ferly
That he may come to heuene or y,
ffor eu*er* he was a queed.
I wyl be a outlawe & no*n* ermyte
And cast awey my grey abyte
And alle myn other wede,
And robbe and sle, bothe on & other,
And come to heuene as doth my brother,
Thys ys my best reed.[3]

God quickly upbraids the hermit for his resentfulness, and subsequent investigation reveals to him his brother's late conversion and the manner of his death. Reassured of the justice of his brother's salvation, the hermit lives out the rest of his days in devotion and eventually goes to heaven himself.

Both the story and the message of this piece are uncomplicated, yet the *exemplum* only works if one accepts the outlaw and the hermit as moral opposites – one the epitome of depravity, the other the essence of holiness. The outlaw, we are told, is 'erraunt' – that is, he wanders, and the restlessness of his body and the transience of his lifestyle contrasts with the steady, sedentary life of prayer and privation taken up by his brother. The outlaw's errancy speaks also of his theological error, in that he has lived his life in opposition to Christian teaching; the difference between this and his brother's religious steadfastness is crucial to the lesson of the poem. All this makes sense for us in the modern world, as well. Yet so obvious a divergence between the criminal and the hermit was not always the case, not in England nor in the cultures that surrounded it in Britain or in the North Sea. Outlawry, while a severe punishment, was also recognized as opening pathways to growth both practical and spiritual; Christian sanctity was not always so closely associated with stability and establishment. The sources behind *The Hermit and the Outlaw* attest to this history, however faintly. As Richard Firth Green notes, the piece is derived from a tradition of Christian *fabliaux* typified by the French *Vie des Pères*; this, in turn, used as a model – though not so much a source – the late classical *Lives* of the Desert Fathers, which as we will see was extremely influential in formulating early North Atlantic ideas about asceticism and the usefulness

3 *'The Hermit and the Outlaw:* An Edition', lines 295-318. I am reproducing the editorial decisions of my source. Italics denote expasions of abbreviations found in the manuscript.

of transience.[4] The primary interest of this work is to examine how the concept of outlawry – of being outside the normally acceptable bounds of society – could be understood to benefit the individual and their community both practically and spiritually.

Defining Outlawry

While to the popular imagination the evocation of the 'outlaw' most readily conjures up images of the Robin Hood tales of the Late Middle Ages, outlawry as a legal concept is much older, and potentially pre-medieval. The ability to precisely define outlawry and identify it in the historical record is difficult, due to a number of factors. One is the dearth of legal documents for certain crucial times and places; others are problems with terminology and disagreement over just what, precisely, constitutes outlawry.[5] For these reasons, the history of examination of the topic is marked by competing definitions. The first to attempt one was F. Liebermann in 'Die Friedlosigkeit bei den Angelsachen', who understood outlawry (at least within Germanic societies) as the loss of the peace guaranteed to an individual by their ruler.[6] This conception was vigorously disputed by Julius Goebel, Jr. who saw it as insufficient to cover all forms of outlawry. He himself proposed three separate gradations: fleeing the jurisdiction, formal exile, and, finally, loss of peace.[7] Flowing from this effort was Goebel's insistence not to develop universalist theories of Germanic law divorced from either time or place.[8] Following his lead, more recent scholarship treats outlawry, like any other legal concept, as subject to change and therefore culturally specific. As a result, whereas more traditionalist or conceptual studies may depict outlawry as ancient or particularly Germanic or North European, medievalists increasingly view it as a practice which evolved throughout the Middle Ages in response to input from both secular Roman and ecclesiastical law.[9]

4 '*The Hermit and the Outlaw:* An Edition', pp. 139-143; and Tudor, 'The One That Got Away', p. 11.

5 For recent explorations of these issues, see van Houts, 'The Vocabulary of Exile and Outlawry', pp. 13-28; and Carella, 'The Earliest Expression for Outlawry in Anglo-Saxon Law', pp. 111-144.

6 Liebermann, 'Die Friedlosigkeit bei den Angelsachen', pp. 17-37.

7 Goebel, *Felony and Misdemeanor*, pp. 419-420 (note 289).

8 Goebel, *Felony and Misdemeanor*, pp. 14-16.

9 For examples of the more traditional characterization, see von Jhering, *L'Esprit du droit Romain*, pp. 282-284; and Agamben, *Homo sacer*, pp. 116-123. For newer viewpoints, see van Houts, 'The Vocabulary of Exile and Outlawry', pp. 13-28; Jones, *Outlawry in Medieval Literature*, pp. 18-19; and Carella, 'The Earliest Expression for Outlawry in Anglo-Saxon Law', pp. 111-144.

Labeling an individual from seventh-century Mercia an outlaw does not mean the same thing as describing someone from Cnut's England as such; the difficulty is compounded when one brings the legal concepts of other cultures, such as the Irish and the Icelanders, into play.

The inability of the modern term *outlaw* to distinguish between these historical and cultural variations is only one aspect of the word's problematic breadth. As Goebel recognized, outlawry can encompass a number of situations that have little in common – is the 'outlaw' in question a fugitive from justice, or an individual who has been formally banned? Has the guarantee of their personal safety been revoked, or a bounty placed on their head? Need they only leave the jurisdiction, or can they not feel safe anywhere? Has their property been forfeit? These are important distinctions – especially to the outlaw! – but ones that are not conveyed by the blanket term *outlawry*. The ways in which outlawry, as it was understood both then and now, converges and diverges with the concept of exile is especially tricky to delineate, as we shall see in Chapter 1. On top of all this is the fact that *outlaw* also exists as a label absent any actual legal concept. Take, for instance, the identity of the *fénnid* in Irish tradition. As far as can be surmised, historically and in most contexts, the *fénnid* can be understood as an Irish expression of the outlaw. The *fénnidi* were young men estranged from their societies who preyed upon the communities whose margins they prowled.[10] Yet the literary figure Finn MacCumaill and his men, though *fénnidi*, do not typically fit this description. They more frequently act as a roving militia in support, or in tandem, with regional kings and their forces. While they are often in conflict with the powers of the establishment, these disputes are depicted more as occurring between two institutionally legitimate groups rather than the law prosecuting known criminals.[11] Through the development of the Finn Cycle, the concept of the *fénnid* seems to have evolved beyond its historical roots.

Yet even the historical roots of the *fénnidi* are beyond the legal definition of outlawry. The real-life *fíana* (troops of *fénnidi*; sg. *fían*) were composed of aristocratic young men, who would normally return to their societies after a few years of roving.[12] There seems to have been nothing other than age that instigated their entrance into or exit from the *fían* – no crime, no time

10 Nagy, *The Wisdom of the Outlaw*, 43-45; and McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga*, and *Fíanna*', pp. 5-6.

11 The complex relationship between the *túath* and the *fían* is outlined at length in Nagy, *The Wisdom of the Outlaw*, pp. 41-79.

12 McCone, 'Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga*, and *Fíanna*', p. 13.

served, no royal pardon.[13] The depiction points to a broader understanding of outlawry than the strictly legal definition can provide. And as we will see, this dilemma arises not only when we consider early Irish society. Anglo-Saxon England and medieval Iceland, also, too, have traditions and practices that appear to be modeled after outlawry without in fact being such in legal or practical actuality. Much of this book is focused on these more ambiguous examples, which I will describe as *pseudo-outlawry*. Incidences of pseudo-outlawry are particularly useful for this project in that they demonstrate most clearly what concepts or associations come to adhere to the idea of outlawry beyond the legal definition. The most prevalent appears to be an outsider status understood more broadly than strict outlawry can convey. With regards to the *fíana*, it is a more expansive – and therefore more applicable – concept of liminality which is the crucial component of their pseudo-outlawry. As Joseph Nagy has outlined at length, the comprehensive marginality of the *fénnidi* allows them to act as complements to structured society. The *fíana* supply an outside perspective, and provide an appropriately disorganized space for the transitions necessary for a properly-functioning society to occur.[14] It is this unstable marginal existence that ties pseudo-outlawry to outlawry proper, and it is that quality moreover which pseudo-outlawry is attempting to capture in its imitation of legal outlawry.

Outlawry, Mobility, and the Middle Ages

The marginality of the outlaw goes hand-in-hand with their perceived instability. Operating at the boundaries, the outlaw has no set home. Pursuit, and the requirements of living off the land, make constant movement necessary. That mobility, in turn, was commonly taken to reflect the internal state of the outlaw – the turmoil of their life was indicative of the turmoil of their soul or mind. In movement, then, too, we have another broad concept, but one that is unified in the necessity of liminality in its definition. Movement requires a point A and a point B, and a space between them, however short. It is that in-between-ness, the uncertainty of transition from one state to another, that animates concern over mobility in both physical and abstract senses. Change may be necessary, but it is often uncomfortable

13 This is in contrast, again, to the Finn Cycle, where membership in a *fían* appears to be a lifetime appointment, and *fíana* can contain youths, adults, and the elderly, including members of the same family from several generations.

14 Nagy, *The Wisdom of the Outlaw*, pp. 78-79.

and undesired, especially to those content with the *status quo*. It is also uncertain. One may have a destination in mind, but what if one loses their way in the in-between, within that 'sphere of possibility'?[15] One could end up somewhere completely different, or *as* someone completely different. And those who reside in the boundary are lost, wandering in error or possessing an intolerable hybridity of identity or intent. Physical or mental liminality – crossing over boundaries, between bodies of land, switching from one identity to another, reevaluating one's belief – is therefore often depicted with suspicion. And figures who continually engage in movement, who exist, feel comfortable, and/or thrive in the liminal, are regarded with both revulsion and fascination. The list is large of individuals in the early Middle Ages who fit this description to one degree or another, but none embodied the idea of liminality more so than outlaws and those who sought to emulate them.

These (often unspoken) associations color considerations not just of outlawry but of mobility more generally. Medieval authorities frequently inveighed against the mobile life as a type of spiritual rootlessness, and attempted to promote sedentariness, and, by extension, stability. It is easy to conclude from such sources that the Middle Ages saw no benefit whatsoever in movement or travel, and it happens therefore that modern scholars sometimes confuse the existence of the outlaw with the existence of the mass of medieval travelers as a whole. Lewis Mumford, for example, describes the outlaw's plight as a loss of identity borne out of displacement:

> The unattached individual during the Middle Ages was one condemned either to excommunication or exile: close to death. To exist one had to belong to an association – a household, manor, monastery, or guild. There was no security except through group protection and no freedom that did not recognize the constant obligation of a corporate life. One lived and died in the identifiable style of one's class and one's corporation.[16]

Tim Cresswell takes Mumford's observation and applies it to all those in motion in the Middle Ages. 'For all but a small minority', he claims, 'to be mobile in the Middle Ages was to be without place, both socially and geographically'.[17] Yet it is not hard to imagine medieval individuals or groups

15 Massey, *For Space*, p. 10. I am taking the term 'in-between-ness' from Seigworth and Gregg, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', p. 1.

16 Mumford, *The City in History*, p. 269.

17 Cresswell, *On the Move*, p. 11.

who retained their places in life's corporation while being on the move: a roving court, a clerk on church business, a pilgrim.

The discrepancy between the reputation of mobility and its reality in both medieval and modern writing, and the tension that engenders, is a primary topic of this book. On one hand, a state of mobility is seen as dangerous and its practitioners disreputable. On the other, mobility is also associated with progress.[18] This is especially the case today, but even in the Middle Ages one can find acknowledgements that liminality is desirable, and even that a certain personal adaptability and willingness to take risks is needed in both a healthy society and a well-adjusted person. This is the logic underlying acts of pseudo-outlawry, that they make certain talents attainable or transformations possible to those who would otherwise miss out in their current physical or mental stasis. Nevertheless, modern scholars often deploy the dichotomy of the sedentary (and therefore stagnant) Middle Ages and the mobile (and therefore dynamic) modern era. This can be seen in how medieval transience, as it is perceived, is often taken to reflect discarded or discredited philosophies. Leslie Dale Feldman sees rootedness as a necessary consequence of feudalism, as it 'was based on personal ties of hierarchy, land ownership, and status and loyalty was to people based on their placed [sic] in the Chain of Being. In such a society, movement was not encouraged because loyalty was based on who you were and who you affiliated yourself with'.[19] Zygmunt Bauman, in contrast, sees immobility as crucial to security in the premodern world, as

> the available means of production and security [...] reacted badly to an extension of their social space. By their very nature, they could only be operated in a small group, on a relatively confined territory. They were also geared to a relatively stable setting, where points of reference, the other partners in the solid network of solidary relations, stay fixed over a protracted stretch of time – a period long enough to learn their mutual rights and duties, develop obligations, be put to the effectivity and reliability tests.[20]

All of these interpretations posit a fundamental difference between the medieval and modern world, often with the implication that the modern represents improvement. Of course, this view of the medieval era is as

18 Cresswell, *On the Move*, p. 37.

19 Feldman, *Freedom as Motion*, p. 40.

20 Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters*, p. 39. See also Tim Cresswell, *On the Move*, pp. 10-12.

old as the concept of the Three Ages itself, when Antiquity was declared reborn and the intermediate period held up as the antithesis to the others.[21] These assumptions underlie much discussion of medieval travel, sometimes explicitly, as when Jean Verdon writes, 'le Moyen Âge semble un temps de stagnation entre l'Antiquité et ses arpenteurs du monde, mythiques comme Ulysse ou réels comme les Phéniciens, et la Renaissance avec les grandes découvertes'[22] ('The Middle Ages appears [to have been] a time of stagnation between Antiquity and its world explorers, mythic like Ulysses or actual like the Phoenicians, and the Renaissance with its great discoveries'). There is some variation among the sources as to the significance of medieval immobility – did it demonstrate a reliance on hierarchy, the value of predictability, or simply 'stagnation'? – but in all cases, it is assumed to be detrimental.

Verdon's immediate comment after his verdict on the Middle Ages as 'un temps de stagnation' is 'Pourtant, le Moyen Age est un monde qui n'arrête pas de bouger'[23] ('However, the Middle Ages was a world which never ceased movement'). Because of course people moved in the Middle Ages, for commerce, governance, diplomacy, pilgrimage, and any number of other reasons. In some cases, scholars make further distinctions. Feldman acknowledges the travel that occurred and singles out the pilgrimage for special consideration, as 'pilgrimages, like the city, were equalizing. They brought together all strata of society and helped break down the static feudal social system'.[24] Given that Feldman sees immobility as the lynchpin to feudalism, and given the extent of pilgrimage in the Middle Ages, this is no small exception. Yet Feldman dismisses the pilgrimage as 'uncreative', as it had a set destination and no detours were countenanced. Under such strictures, there is no chance to work creatively, challenge assumptions, or make merry with chaos, as Geoffrey Chaucer and his pilgrims can attest.

The reputation of the Anglo-Saxons has particularly suffered under this misapprehension. A depiction of the Anglo-Saxons as fruitlessly stationary must, by necessity, ignore historical realities, not least of which is their famous immigration to Britain. This is an identity which some commentators feel they never fully gave up.[25] Moreover, after this mass migration, the

21 This construction goes all the way back to Leonardo Bruni in 1442, but has been remarkably resilient. Hankins, Introduction, pp. xvii-xviii. A good examination of its most current permutations can be seen in Davis, 'Time Behind the Veil', pp. 105-122.

22 Verdon, *Voyager au Moyen Age*, p. 15.

23 Verdon, *Voyager au Moyen Age*, p. 15.

24 Feldman, *Freedom as Motion*, p. 44.

25 Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 8-32.

Anglo-Saxons fostered strong ties and engaged in busy traffic between their kingdoms and other polities, so much so that one Irish writer stereotyped them as the 'Saxon snámhach' ('seafaring Saxons').[26] The most extensive activity lay across the English Channel, as it was the Continent's older, more established, and more materially rich cultures to which Anglo-Saxon England most often turned for goods, ideas on governance, and guidance in religion. Anglo-Saxon pilgrims visited Rome and beyond, churchmen went for investiture and to obtain relics, texts and art for their houses of worship, and kings retired there to monasteries after their reigns. Basing his tally on extant sources, Stephen Matthews counts 179 known journeys to Rome between the conversion and 1066.[27] There were doubtless more, and this is to only one destination. Cultural contacts with Carolingian France, for example, are known to have been extensive;[28] the archaeologists M.O.H. Carver and Stéphane Lebecq argue that the variety of artifacts found in monuments such as the Sutton Hoo ship burial were only achievable with an extensive mercantile network that connected England with cultures from the Mediterranean to the Baltic.[29]

Despite this, however, scholars quite frequently describe the Anglo-Saxons as categorically tied to place. Many forms of travel occur in a great number of Old English texts. Certain pieces and genres, however, garner greater attention from experts than others. This is due to a whole host of issues, and its effects are not limited to a consideration of mobility. John M. Hill, for example, has identified a similar dynamic at work in the analysis of Anglo-Saxon warrior ethics, wherein broad observations of the sources 'often stay unpacked and literarily abstract in our presentations of them'. As a result,

26 'Two Middle-Irish Poems', pp. 112-113; and *Genealogical Tracts I*, p. 24. Ó Raithbheartaigh, the translator of the second piece, follows Meyer in translating *snámhach* as 'floating', but *The Dictionary of the Irish Language* records several metaphorical meanings of the word that derive from its association with water, both complimentary ('buoyant') and derogatory ('creeping', 'cunning'). Given this, it is unlikely that the poet intended *snámhach* to be neutral, especially since the *Saxon snámhach* are also credited with *dúire* ('obstinacy') in the same line. That a reputation for voyaging should lend itself equally well to both positive and negative connotations is a crucial observation of this project, one that we can see arising already in our primary works. 'snámhach', *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, p. 552; also supplemented in *The Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*.

27 Matthews, *The Road to Rome*, pp. 61-71.

28 The definitive work on English activity in this sphere is Levison, *England and the Continent*.

29 Carver, 'Pre-Viking Traffic in the North Sea', pp. 117-119; and Lebecq, 'Communication and Exchange in Northwest Europe', pp. 170-179. See also Carver, 'Four Windows on Early Britain', pp. 1-24.

> [M]ost readers treat the elements of the heroic code [...] as abstract, common denominators that inevitably generate, somehow all on their own, the often disturbing violence we encounter in these narratives. We then rationalize violence in these worlds as almost ineluctable, as simply dictating heroic life frozen out of time and place.[30]

A similar process is at work in describing Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards movement, wherein the depiction of the practice in several high-profile works has dominated commentary and that commentary, in turn, has been applied to the whole of the corpus. This is especially the case with elegiac works such as *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, which command an outsized portion of attention relative to their representation. Yet their focus is on only a particular type of journey, exile, which does not treat mobility in a favorable light. Nevertheless, scholars examining the elegies often reflect their subjects' attitudes toward the practice. Jennifer Neville has described the depiction of travel in Anglo-Saxon poetry as 'unrelentingly negative'.[31] Elsewhere, the circumstances those abroad are assumed to require 'amelioration',[32] as a wayfaring existence must indicate 'suffering'.[33] At times these generalizations on movement dovetail with those on heroics that Hill decries, as the common understanding of the concept of *comitatus* is used as a justification for negative feelings on uprootedness. Reliance on the reciprocal lord-thane relationship as a local source of prestige is felt to have severely compromised the Anglo-Saxon's confidence while abroad. As Frank Bessai puts it, 'When the warrior, dedicated to the ideals of the comitatus, becomes separated from his troop, he lacks as a rule, the subjective resources of ordinary individualism, and his desire to return to the security of the group dominates all'.[34] Gwendolyn Morgan echoes these sentiments when she observes that the Anglo-Saxon 'received his identity from his place in society and the esteem of its members'. Therefore, 'exile or homelessness was the worst imaginable fate in Anglo-Saxon society, for it deprived the individual of his sense of self'.[35]

As assessments of mobility as depicted in the elegies, these observations are appropriate. Yet they risk conflating all movement away from society

30 Hill, *The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic*, pp. 1-3.

31 Neville, '"None Shall Pass"', pp. 203-204.

32 Greenfield and Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, p. 284.

33 Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, p. 31.

34 Bessai, 'Comitatus and Exile in Old English Poetry', p. 139.

35 Morgan, 'Essential Loss', p. 17. See also Greenfield, 'The Exile-Wanderer in Anglo-Saxon Poetry', p. 3.

with only those types which are compelled or otherwise unwanted. This is an easy mistake to make. That an attachment to home and subsequent revulsion of the foreign should be one of the most prominent qualities of the Anglo-Saxons is due to the high profile of the elegies in modern scholarship and the array of exiles in the extant poems.[36] This prevalence can lead one to defensible conclusions about the priorities of Anglo-Saxon literature or society as a whole. For example, Anita R. Riedinger looks at the literary evidence and concludes, 'This omnipresent tension between what is – a separation from home – and what is desired – a return to home – enhances the subliminal drama of much Old English poetry'.[37] This would be difficult to refute, but only because she qualifies it with 'much'. The depiction of exile cannot fully articulate the Anglo-Saxons' opinions on all movement since other types of travel with divergent depictions are also present in the corpus – there one can also find the missionaries Andreas and Elene, soldiers abroad as in *The Fight at Finnsburg*, professional travelers such as the speaker of *Widsith*, and adventurers like Beowulf. Their activities point to a wider experience and understanding of mobility in Anglo-Saxon England.

Moreover, as this project will demonstrate, the particulars of many exiles are not as negative as they may at first seem, and even real sufferings can be taken positively. It is important to stress that scholars' focus on the danger and discomfort of the mobile life in the material is a problem of emphasis, not of fact. Land travel was slow and arduous, as the Roman road system fell into disrepair.[38] The sea was quicker, but held its own dangers. Unlike the Mediterranean, the shallow waters of the North Sea made sailing along the coast hazardous, which forced travelers to set out on the open ocean and navigate by dead-reckoning. Despite the fact that necessity made North Atlantic seafarers better at it, this type of sailing was inherently dangerous. Harsh weather, too, made sailing in winter even more perilous, so much so that travel generally stopped in the colder months, especially further north, where the encroachment of sea ice created additional hazards and had the capacity to freeze ports.[39] Nevertheless, as Jonathan M. Wooding notes, 'the will and ability of mariners to sail over long distances, through

36 Riedinger, '"Home" in Old English Poetry', p. 52.

37 Riedinger, '"Home" in Old English Poetry', p. 53.

38 Stenton, 'The Road System of Medieval England', pp. 1-4; and Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, pp. 22-24.

39 Marcus, 'The Norse Traffic with Iceland', p. 412; Carver, 'Pre-Viking Traffic in the North Sea', pp. 119-122; McGrail, *Ancient Boats in N.W. Europe*, pp. 258-274; Wooding, *Communication and Commerce along the Western Sealanes*, pp. 7 and 16-18; and Byock, *Viking Age Iceland*, p. 266.

forbidding conditions, is easily underestimated' by modern observers,[40] and evidence that travel was difficult is not evidence that it was done only reluctantly. Indeed, in many early medieval conceptions of abandoning one's place, hardship was precisely the point of the exercise. To enrich the home community, spread ideas, and save the soul, a degree of sacrifice was most often assumed. After all, without risk there was no reward, without adversity nothing earned, and without punishment no true penance.

The overall attitude towards mobility as presented in the sources, then, is an active ambivalence that often references good and bad in the same breath. Identifying the particulars of this conception of mobility is the primary goal of this project, to trace the opposing forces which led those in the North Atlantic to both value and distrust mobility in equal terms, whether engaging in it themselves or considering its effects upon their existence. Opinions of movement are often expressed in depictions of outlaws and other figures moving across boundaries, which reflect the same ambivalence – are they a benefit to their communities, or a threat? The danger of travel was inextricable from the perception of the traveler, as Simone Pinet observes:

> The idea of travel itself entailed a sort of marginalization, or at least the risk of marginalization, as the traveler abandoned the community to engage in a reality plagued with the new, another word for the different [...] Those who engaged in travel were suspicious, for they would willingly expose themselves to the dangers inherent therein.[41]

Mobility was therefore a double hazard, as a separation from home placed one in danger yet also made one a danger in the minds of others. Yet aside from pursuing complete self-sufficiency and isolation, it was necessary for a society to have its members who faced the liminal and engaged with the outside world. Just as there had to be individuals who took the risk and went abroad, so did the society itself have to chance the destabilizing effects of movement. Outlaws and those like them were the most potent and reliable sources of such instability. This may be why modern scholars often associate them with the entirety of medieval travelers, since they so clearly display the qualities of movement; it also explains the ambivalence with which outlaws are treated in the sources.

40 Wooding, *Communication and Commerce along the Western Sealanes*, p. 16.
41 Pinet, *Archipelagoes*, p. xxiii. See also Coote, 'Journeys to the Edge', p. 60.

Transgression and Conduct

Whatever reservations may exist about mobility, its sheer necessity and omnipresence make it a cornerstone of nearly all societies. Throughout the history of English culture, the extent to which the experience of movement is assumed to be universally understood can be seen in its language. In English and Latin, the imagery of transition from place to place dominates symbolism of the abstract – Michael J. Reddy maintains that the diffuseness of the idea and its possible variations cannot allow a full accounting.[42] Examples of what he has termed the 'conduit metaphor' are scattered throughout language. Ideas are *conveyed*, judgments *borne*, motions *carried*. The mind can *wander*, be *led astray*, its inspirations be*come* manifest. We can feel *moved*. This is the *way* we speak, and it is more difficult to avoid *resorting* to one of these constructions than to simply *stumble* upon one. If one *turns* to Latin one finds even further examples and even more extensive influence. The list is even larger when we include words like, well, *influence* (from *fluere*, 'to flow'), that are derived from Latin verbs of motion. There are *err* and *error* (from *errare*, 'to stray'); *deviate* and *devious* (both from *de viam*, '[to move] from the way'); *converge* and *diverge* (from *vergere*, 'to turn'); and *excite* and *incite* (from *ciere*, 'to set in motion'). The verb *vertere* ('to turn') gives us the means to discuss both the *convert* and the *pervert*, who have the capacity to *revert*, *divert*, *avert*, *invert*, or *subvert* our thoughts. *Venire* ('to come') allows us to speak of the *provenance* of society's *conventions*. *Gradior* ('to step') through its declensions expresses in English acts of communion (*congress*) and provocation (*transgression*), advancement (*progress*) and devolution (*regression*). Of course, both *advancement* and *devolution* also suggest motion, as the implications of *advance* in modern English are obvious and the root of *devolution* is the Latin verb *volvere* ('to roll'). *Portare* ('to carry') allows one to *comport*, *report*, or *support* what's *important*. *Ferre* (also 'to carry') enables the expression of such basic notions as to *transfer*, *confer*, *defer*, *refer*, *infer*, *differ*, *interfere*, *offer*, *prefer*, or *suffer*; its anomalous supine form *latum* bequeaths such unexpected but crucial concepts of communication as *translate* (literally 'to carry across') and *relate* ('to carry back'). If one *induces*, *adduces* or *deduces*, he or she expresses a mental process by conceiving it as a matter of *ducere* ('to lead').

Out of this myriad of motion-derived terms are two which I single out for special usage and consideration in this project: *transgression* and *conduct*. I have already alluded to the import of transgression above in outlining

42 Reddy, 'The Conduit Metaphor', p. 177.

the perceived threat of outlaws to communities, but the modern connotation of the word reflects this bias also: meaning literally 'to step across', *transgression* immediately conveys to the English speaker a disregard for convention and/or a breach of protocol. As we shall see, this extended meaning has an extensive pedigree, as boundary-crossing has long been tied to less concrete types of waywardness. This is especially the case when boundaries mark the frontier between separate, possibly hostile, cultures, as the surviving phrases 'beyond the pale' or 'off the reservation' attest. The importance of transgression as a concept has been raised by geographer Tim Cresswell – who explores the intersection of actual and abstract notions of 'place', as in 'knowing one's place' – to examine the assumptions that attach to locations and the consequences for rethinking those assumptions. In such instances the paradoxical nature of movement comes to the fore. 'Mobility', Cresswell observes, 'is connected to civilization, progress, and freedom as well as deviance and destitution'.[43] It is also related to power, as to wield the fruits of travel is to be able to shape a society. Outside interaction brings with it exotic goods and esoteric knowledge, which the elites within a society control. As Mary W. Helms observes, 'places, peoples, creatures, and material items from the world "outside" [...] can be used directly and concretely to regulate and operate the world "inside"'.[44] The ability to move between is therefore an opportunity to accrue power, and the mover, like the exotica he or she carries, becomes imbued with a certain cachet.[45] Or as Kathy Lavezzo puts it, 'geographic margins had a certain social authority'.[46] These broad ideas are akin to Pierre Bourdieu's systems of capital, which figure in this project and were extremely influential to Cresswell's thinking.[47]

Those on the move, as transgressors, are catalysts for societal change, both good and bad. Interest in outsiders is primarily concerned with separating them into these two broad categories, but as we have seen, it is impossible to completely extricate the desirable aspects of mobility from its downside.[48] Hence, every 'good' traveler – a diplomat, a soldier, a missionary – retains the potential for disruption, just as every 'bad' – a fugitive, an invader, a vagrant – holds some allure. All of these figures, on account of their movements, are change agents, capable of transforming their destinations,

43 Cresswell, *On the Move*, p. 37.

44 Helms, *Ulysses' Sail*, p. 49.

45 Helms, *Ulysses' Sail*, p. 79.

46 Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, p. 7.

47 See pp. 47-50.

48 Peter Suedfeld makes this observation about communities' ordeals more broadly in 'Reactions to Societal Trauma: Distress and/or Eustress', pp. 849-861.

their societies, and themselves in fundamental ways. The most instructive examples, however, are the outlaws, figures who never venture far from the boundary, both geographically and in terms of behavior. The power inherent to mobility touches all those in early medieval literature who choose it, no matter what their particular circumstances or the approval or opprobrium they attract – yet it is in the figure of the outlaw that these issues are thrown into greatest relief. These liminal beings combine both the positive and negative attributes in such a way as to make maintaining the binary between beneficial and detrimental movement impossible. Within outlawry and the tropes it inspired, we find such paradoxes as the exile whose independence allows him to be a hero, the criminal who converts his estrangement from society into the solitude of hermitage, and the warrior whose superhuman abilities make him both a monster and a savior. The danger and allure of such figures have been extensively studied not just by Cresswell and Bourdieu, but also by scholars such as Victor Turner and Gloria Anzaldúa, who all speak to the dual nature ascribed to those on the borders – characterizing both sides, but never fully part of both.[49] The dynamic has been examined in Irish literature as well, particularly by Nagy,[50] and post-colonial theory has also done its part to untangle the complicated feelings surrounding those on the frontier. William Scott Green argues that a society's consideration of those on its borders 'can reshape the [...] society's picture of itself, expose its points of vulnerability, and spark in it awareness of, or reflection about, the possibility or the reality of otherness within'.[51] By complicating the dichotomies of inside/outside or self/other, these scholars introduce a way to understand the position of the outsider in society. If those beyond the border offer an uncomfortable potential through their difference, then the border-dweller represents that potential made actual, and motion across (transgression) the process by which that change was effected. No matter what the reality or the reason for movement, the mover has become exoticized through association with other cultures. Association with him or her in turn risks both improving and/or tainting the self – too easy an acceptance of the traveler allows the foreign element greater opportunity to alter what makes that society distinct; too stringent a safeguard keeps out the best of other cultures that could strengthen the home community. Yet with the acknowledgement that it is often difficult

49 Turner, *The Ritual Process*; and Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera*.

50 Liminality is primarily where the outlaw receives his wisdom in *Wisdom of the Outlaw*. See also Nagy, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients*, pp. 287-323.

51 Green, 'Otherness Within', p. 50.

to discern the value or threat inherent in any given outsider, and that most offer at best a combination of these two, the challenge for those considering them in our medieval sources is how to determine the quality of a mover or of an act of motion.

The means by which medieval works indicated the worthiness of acts of mobility is through depicting the movers' *conduct*. In *conduct*, too, one can see the ability of motion to convey both a physical and an abstract sense. The word, in modern English, means not just one's method of travel but (even more commonly) one's behavior, and it is in both senses that I employ it here. It is a word not present in the early medieval North Atlantic – adopted from Latin via French, its presence in the language is not attested until the Middle English period.[52] Nevertheless, as a metaphor it is heir to an association present among the Anglo-Saxons and their neighbors at that time expressed in words tasked with the same function. The Latin *via*, Old English *weg*, Old Norse *vegr,* and Old Irish *dul* are all equivalent to the Modern English *conduct* in how they relate to both movement and behavior.[53] In the works which are featured here, the metaphor operates through stories of journeys which symbolize the moral health of the traveler. Good movement represents good conduct, while disastrous actions indicate poor judgment or disobedience towards God. While the basic principle appears simple, ethical living is often anything but. Consequently, the metaphor of conduct, as shall be seen, appears in numerous permutations in early medieval literature, most of which explore the complications inherent to choosing the right path. The value of this in assessing transgressors is apparent. By judging the conduct of such difficult figures, one better learns how to pursue moral living and distinguish worthy companions. And all this is accomplished through a consideration of movement.

The North Atlantic Sea of Islands

Academic consideration of movement across space is currently undergoing a re-evaluation, an activity that has recently intersected with the new fields of island and archipelagic studies.[54] This has obvious implications for the

52 'conduct, n.1'. *OED Online*.

53 'via', *A Latin Dictionary*, p. 1984; 'weg', *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. 1183; 'vegr', Cleasby, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, pp. 689-690; and 'dul', *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, pp. 444-446.

54 Massey, *For Space*, pp. 9-15; The Spaces of Democracy and the Democracy of Space Network, 'What are the consequences of the "spatial turn"', pp. 579-586; and Pugh, 'Island Movements', pp. 12-14.

literatures of the North Sea, which were shaped by their geographical reality as a collection of landmasses surrounded by water. Islands and island groupings are seen as fruitful settings for spatial theory due to the multiple forms of liminality they explicitly display. There is, for example, the shore, which gives the immediate impression of a hard dichotomy between the land and the water but then troubles this division with its mutability. According to Jane Ledwell, it is 'a place of uncertainty and instability [...] visibly a movable, shifting space, geologically and morphologically changeable due to shifting dunes, eroding cliffs, vicissitudes of wind and weather, and changing tides'.[55] The changeable environment influences behavior, as 'island boundaries invite transgression; inspire restlessness; demand to be breached; impel islanders "to explore and even to escape into the unknown"'.[56] Spurred on to such acts, island inhabitants have a ready site upon which to make their move: the sea. Movement and liminality are certainly possible without the ocean – this work will consider many such examples – but in its expanse, volatility, and alterity, the sea is a liminal space with enormous metaphorical and narrative potential. The waters, the space between the islands and the site of transition, are comprised '*of* connections' rather than united, like the land, '*by* connections' – connectivity, in other words, is the ocean's very being rather than subsidiary to it.[57] Archipelagos, therefore, which offer both abundance and variation of shore and sea, are 'in the midst of *in-between-ness*'.[58] As such, they are the perfect environment to observe the effect of the liminal.

The core conceptual understanding of the archipelago, as Pinet frames it, is 'unity in diversity', as islands, conceptually at least, neatly circumscribe populations by their coastlines, while the close collection of these insular worlds encourages fellow-feeling and a shared experience within a wider system.[59] The paradox can be seen operating in the common comparison of the island of Britain as a garden, which Lynn Staley observes can be either walled or accessible to those outside, depending on the predilections of the author.[60] Yet it is always enclosed, as the medieval inhabitants of the North

55 Ledwell, 'Afraid of Heights, Not Edges', p. 4. See also Beer, 'Island Bounds', p. 33.

56 Hay, 'A Phenomenology of Islands', p. 23. Included is Hay's quotation of Anderson, 'Norfolk Island', p. 47.

57 Steinberg, 'Of Other Seas', pp. 157-158. See also Massey's description of space as 'a product of interrelations'. *For Space*, p. 10.

58 Seigworth and Gregg, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', p. 1. See also Stratford, 'Envisioning the Archipelago', p. 114, in applying this idea to island studies.

59 See Pinet, *Archipelagoes*, pp. 67-70, with the quote on p. 69.

60 Staley, *The Island Garden*, pp. 15-51.

Atlantic often traced their identities along the same lines as their natural boundaries. As a practical matter, Ireland was never unified politically in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, its potential – and perhaps rightness – as such was reflected in the aspirational title of *ard rí*, the high-king of Ireland, who was meant to rule over the entire island.[61] Though men in the medieval era were named *ard rí*, their overlordship remained more theoretical than actual, as was the supposed hegemony of legendary *aird ríg* such as Conn Cétchathach or Niall Noígíallach. A similar impulse to declare an island empire can be seen in the *bretwalda* ('ruler of Britain' or 'wide-ruler'), the term which the A text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* applies to Bede's list of early Anglo-Saxon kings whose power extended to all or most of Britain.[62] Ethnicity was often defined by the contours of the island as well. Despite their political disunity, the Irish had separate terms for outsiders from within Ireland and those from without: *ambue* and *deorad*, and *cú glas* and *muirchuirthe*, respectively.[63] Icelanders understood themselves as culturally distinct from the rest of the Norse world, their independent streak preserved by the remote island which served as the refuge of Norwegian nobility unwilling to live under the confines of a king. This identity, moreover, preemptively discounted the contribution of other ethnicities, such as the Irish and other Celts.[64]

Yet the 'boundedness' of islands, as Patrick V. Kirch notes, can too often be mistaken for 'closure'.[65] As James L. Smith puts it another way, 'The ocean participates in the dual reinforcement and disregard of insularity'.[66] While the island's envelopment by the sea implies integrity, an archipelagic setting emphasizes connectivity as 'a maritime network of unceasing interaction, shared experience, and cultural interchange'.[67] It was a region segmented

61 For a considered take on the early Irish conception of themselves as a single people despite political fragmentation, see Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and Kingship in Pre-Norman Ireland', pp. 1-35.

62 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, pp. 148-151; and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS A*, p. 42. For the significance of this term, see John, '"Orbis Britanniae" and the Anglo-Saxon Kings', pp. 6-13; Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*', pp. 99-129; Fanning, 'Bede, Imperium, and the Bretwaldas', pp. 1-26; and Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, p. 62.

63 Charles-Edwards, 'The Social Background to Irish *Peregrinatio*', pp. 97-100. See also Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, pp. 5-6. For the potential significance of *cú glas* specifically, see Siewers, 'Desert Islands', pp. 44-48.

64 O'Donoghue, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, pp. 20-21.

65 Kirch, 'Introduction', p. 2. See also Rainbird, 'Islands Out of Time', pp. 216-234.

66 Smith, 'Brendan Meets Columbus', p. 528.

67 Cohen, describing the work of Cunliffe (see note 83). 'Introduction: Infinite Realms', p. 4; see also Clark, 'The Ballad Dance of the Faeroese', p. 288.

by numerous natural, political and ethnic boundaries that distinguished itself through its borders' eminent superability and the easy exchange of all its cultures. Comprehending this paradox requires acknowledging the potential for boundaries to empower precisely because of their delimiting ability. As Roland Greene describes it,

> Islands make possible the observation of their own constructedness, and the constructedness of other measures of the world, because they enforce a certain clarity: they have definable borders, they are conceptually autonomous from the world at large, and they encourage attention to the conditions of indigeneity and importation.[68]

Greene's short explanation points to several means by which an island existence shapes perception. There is, as we've seen, the illusion of autonomy conferred by an encompassing ocean boundary. The sea may in fact be easy to cross, but in circumscribing a landmass it makes it easy to conceive of the island as separate and different – both by its inhabitants and outsiders. This is due to the reality of that boundary, which is 'definable' in a way most man-made borders are not. Offa may have dug a dyke to separate the Mercians from the Britons, but even a prominent marker such as this could be easily violated. In time Anglo-Saxons were settling on the western side of the Dyke; meanwhile no one was building houses upon the sea.[69] And so while islands encourage one towards dichotomous thinking – inside vs. outside, native vs. foreign – they also subvert most of the standards by which these conditions are determined. When the Irish categorized foreigners by a simple set of criteria – from inside Ireland or without? – they called into question whether further specificity held any meaningful distinction. An island perspective 'counters the totalities of institutions and regimes' by revealing the artifice that perpetuates them by disguising their 'constructedness'.[70] Meanwhile, island living punctuates that critique by demonstrating the superability of the ultimate barrier, the sea, through travel. Insular thinking is anything but.

The worldview fostered by life on an island within the archipelago of the North Atlantic was therefore one that welcomed outside influence in

68 Greene, 'Island Logic', p. 140.

69 Estes makes the same observation in *Anglo-Saxon Literary Landscapes*, p. 35. For Anglo-Saxon settlement west of the Dyke, see Manley, '*Cledemutha:* A Late Saxon Burh in North Wales', pp. 13-46; and Hill, 'Mercians: The Dwellers on the Boundary', pp. 173-182.

70 Greene, 'Island Logic', p. 138.

part because it was skeptical of any absolute claim of what the 'outside' was.[71] Islands, since they were unconnected to any land, could only be approached, and so every island culture in the North Atlantic maintained a narrative of their advent.[72] In all cases they had supplanted people who were there before;[73] why then should they think any differently of even later arrivals? And if approach was natural, what difficulty was it to leave and cross another meaningless boundary? What of the other invisible boundaries that governed behavior and custom but could just as easily be transgressed?[74] Of course, every action had its consequences, positive and negative, but in understanding the ineffectiveness of limits, those of the North Atlantic instead dealt with managing the effects of mobility rather than fearing them. The treatment of transient figures in their literature is simply a facet of this openness and pragmatism.

The idea of early medieval cultures, and Anglo-Saxon England in particular, as being open to the outside world works against the frequent characterization of this time and place as provincial and inward-looking. Fabienne Michelet, for example, sees a pervasive fear of invasion as a defining trait of Anglo-Saxon society, which she claims saw the world in binary terms of 'inside/outside'.[75] Neville argues that the Anglo-Saxons consistently denigrated foreigners, depicting them almost always as invaders.[76] This assessment is too harsh – Nicholas Howe, in contrast, makes precisely the

71 For a brief history of the North Sea as an archipelago, see Hiatt, 'From Pliny to Brexit', pp. 511-526.

72 The definitive account of the Anglo-Saxon migrations for them was Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, pp. 46-53; for the Irish, see *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, pp. 1-135; for the Icelanders, see the *Landnámabók*. The British, too, are characterized as interlopers in the later *History of the Kings of Britain* by Geoffrey of Monmouth (pp. 6-31).

73 The Anglo-Saxons displaced the British, which is well-known. The Icelanders recorded evidence of Irish monks on their island prior to their coming, although whether there was direct contact varies according to the sources. *Landnámabók*, pp. 31-32; and Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók*, p. 5. As for the Irish themselves, their history *Lebor Gabála Érenn* lives up to its name, *The Book of the Taking of Ireland*. The work records successive waves of people battling the island's inhabitants and claiming it as their own, culminating in the arrival of the Sons of Míl, the ancestors of the Irish. The entire work ranges over vols. 34, 35, 39, 41 and 44 of the *Irish Texts Society* series, with a new introduction by John Carey in the 1993 edition which gives useful background (pp. 1-20). See also Rees and Rees, *Celtic Heritage*, pp. 95-117. The British, too, are depicted as wresting the island away from a race of giants in Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, pp. 26-29.

74 Gillian Beer, for example, explores how the unboundedness of islands calls into question the divide between human and animal. 'Island Bounds', pp. 32-42.

75 Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest*, pp. 23-24.

76 Neville, '"None Shall Pass"', pp. 203-204.

opposite argument, claiming that the Anglo-Saxons held a 'generously expansive view' of foreigners, seeing as the majority of their literary heroes were nonnative.[77] Staley similarly identifies within Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* a spirit of openness directly related to the multicultural environment of seventh-century Britain.[78] The diversity of the region was, after all, its reality. The Anglo-Saxons, like all North Sea peoples, were well-acclimated to the archipelago's challenges and had early on developed the means by which to traverse its waters; they all knew the character of the Atlantic littoral and this commonality made exchange between its inhabitants all the easier.

Epeli Hau'ofa, in considering challenges facing the indigenous cultures of modern Oceania, encourages them to think of their world not as 'islands in the sea' but as 'a sea of islands'. The distinction between the two, as Hau'ofa sees it, is in whether one imagines the ocean as preventing or facilitating connections with the outside world. Those who live lives dominated by land – the 'continental peoples' in Hau'ofa terminology, who imposed a rigid colonial mindset upon the Pacific – imagine the sea to be an obstacle. But the people of Oceania (Hau'ofa's preferred term) know better:

> The world of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves. People raised in this environment were at home with the sea. They played in it as soon as they could walk steadily, they worked in it, they fought on it. They developed great skills for navigating their waters, and the spirit to traverse even the few gaps that separated their island groups.
> Theirs was a large world in which peoples and cultures moved and mingled unhindered by boundaries of the kind erected much later by imperial powers. From one island to another they sailed to trade and marry, thereby expanding social networks for greater flow of wealth. They travelled to visit relatives in a wide variety of natural and cultural surroundings, to quench their thirst for adventure, and even to fight and dominate.[79]

Although it is separated from the postcolonial context in which Hau'ofa offers his remarks, I would suggest that the early medieval North Atlantic would benefit too from being thought of as 'a sea of islands', an archipelago

77 Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 77.

78 Staley, *The Island Garden*, pp. 19-20.

79 Hau'ofa, 'Our Sea of Islands', 7-8. See also Hau'ofa, 'The Ocean in Us', pp. 403-406. For a similar argument focused on the Caribbean, see Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, pp. 1-4.

whose geography expanded rather than restricted opportunity.[80] Those of the region and period recognized it as such,[81] and geographers and historians corroborate them. For the people of the North Atlantic, as Carver puts it, the sea was 'a thoroughfare rather than an obstacle'.[82] Barry Cunliffe declines to understand civilization in this region terrestrially but rather sees the Atlantic basin as its organizing center, with the various shorelines of North America, Europe, and North Africa arranged at its extremes, somewhat similar in concept to the modern Pacific Rim.[83] In the Atlantic region arranged around the North Sea, one can see the people of the early Middle Ages utilizing its sealanes in ways that appear counterintuitive but only for those bound to land-based solutions to dilemmas of travel. Take, for example, the proposed route taken by emissaries of the allied Norse settlements of Dublin and York in the tenth century – not around the Orkneys and Hebrides or around the entirety of southern Britain, but rather more directly up the inlets of the Firths of Clyde and Forth, with only a twenty-mile portage between their inland extremities.[84] As Barbara E. Crawford notes, such a route, which transitions several times from land to sea with apparent ease and evinces no distinction between them, is unlikely to occur 'to the average land-based historian'. Yet she reminds her audience that 'the kings of Dublin were really sea kings', their realms centered upon the water they controlled rather than the land.[85] Reorienting one's perspective to see the ocean as primary, touching upon every one of the disparate island cultures of the North Atlantic, one comes closer to appreciating the region's surroundings as its people saw it, with the sea as a conduit rather than an obstacle. Doing so makes it all the easier to treat any one of these societies, Anglo-Saxon England included, as deeply involved in the cultures nearby rather than isolated by its coastline.[86]

Since commonality between the cultures was borne out of movement among them, it is not surprising that one of the things shared was a literary

80 Matthew Boyd Goldie has already brought Hau'ofa into conversation with premodern literature, with certain caveats. 'Island Theory: The Antipodes', pp. 7-11.

81 Bede, *De natura rerum liber*, pp. 276; and Pseudo-Augustine, *De ordine creaturarum liber*, p. 936. At the time the latter was published, the work was thought to be that of Isidore of Seville; now it is attributed to the anonymous Irish Pseudo-Augustine. See Hudson, 'Prologue', pp. 5-6.

82 Carver, 'Pre-Viking Traffic in the North Sea', p. 119. See also Terrell, 'Islands in the River of Time', p. 11.

83 See Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean*, pp. 19-63, especially the maps on pp. 20 and 35.

84 Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin*, I, p. 22; Woolf, however, objects, although she suggests another route which combines land and sea as well. *From Pictland to Alba, 789-1070*, p. 110.

85 Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, p. 26.

86 Studies which do this include Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*; Frank, 'North Sea Soundings in *Andreas*', pp. 1-11; and Carver, 'Four Windows on Early Britain', pp. 1-24.

preoccupation with the same. For this reason, while the Anglo-Saxons garner the greatest attention in this project, the perspectives of the Irish and the Icelanders represent a crucial component, each appearing periodically throughout and receiving a chapter that examines an aspect of their approach to movement, outlawry, and liminality. In considering early medieval England's relation with the outside world, the inclusion of these two cultures is a natural expansion on the topic. The Anglo-Saxon era featured a great deal of interaction with both. The Irish were early on the scene, leading evangelization efforts in Northumbria in the sixth century and settling Dál Riata to its north. Their influence persisted until the Viking Age.[87] As for the Norse, their explorations in the eighth through tenth centuries that led them to settle Iceland also inaugurated their invasion of England, which culminated in its inclusion in Cnut's brief North Sea empire. Anglo-Saxons also traveled to Ireland and Iceland. The English monastery of Mayo in Ireland is well-known, the result of the Anglo-Saxon desire for Irish learning.[88] Travel to Iceland was less frequent, but still occurred.[89] The Irish and the Norse had extensive interaction as well, and so the opportunity for cultural influence between the three cultures was ample.[90]

As we will see, the three groups also shared the same attitude towards mobility: a healthy appreciation for its benefits as well as respect for its dangers. Additionally, many works among them display a casual attitude towards travel and the cosmopolitanism that accompanies it that quietly signals the ubiquity of the practice in the region. Bede's history of the English is a chronicle of their constant dialogue with the British and the Irish, and of settlement of the latter in England, and of the English in Ireland.[91] Bede reports these moments as history, but does not consider them to be remarkable in and of themselves, as they were common occurrences and

87 Fenn, 'Irish Sea Influence on the English Church', pp. 80-84; Hughes, 'Evidence for Contacts between the Churches of the Irish and the English from the Synod of Whitby to the Viking Age', pp. 49-67; and Kelly, 'Irish Influence in England after the Synod of Whitby', pp. 35-47.

88 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, pp. 346-349.

89 Examples include an English bishop, Bjarnvarð Vilráðsson, mentioned in *Hungrvaka* (pp. 6-7), and Bjǫrn the Englishman from *Landnámabók* (p. 178). There is also a prescription in *Grágás* for the division of the goods of deceased foreigners that singles out the English, which means that at some point someone had a dead Anglo-Saxon on their hands. See *Grágás*, p. 229; and Gelsinger, *Icelandic Enterprise*, pp. 131 and 255 (note 36).

90 *The Impact of the Scandinavian Invasions on the Celtic-Speaking Peoples c. 800-1100 A.D.*; Sawyer, 'The Vikings and the Irish Sea', pp. 86-92; Gísli Sigurðsson, *Gaelic Influence in Iceland*; Hudson, 'The Viking and the Irishman', pp. 257-267; and Etchingham, 'North Wales, Ireland and the Isles', pp. 145-187.

91 Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, pp. 116-117, 218-229, 268-277, 294-315 and 346-349.

easily accomplished. Even more nonchalant are the Icelanders, who often treat sailing from their remote homeland and getting along with foreigners as if it were a quick jaunt to the neighbors.[92] Both they and the Irish depict sailing off into nowhere as an advised risk rather than dangerously reckless.[93] These were people at home with traveling, and with the complications such engagements with the liminal entailed.

Yet an effort to bring Irish and Icelandic examples to bear on this project faces two complications that bear some mention. The first is that the Anglo-Saxons, the Irish, and the Norse were not the only important actors in the early medieval North Atlantic. Also present and active were the indigenous Picts and British, as well as visitors and collaborators from the Christian Latin south. We know as well that many of them had their own forms of outlawry and involvement with the liminal.[94] What of them? Any work examining the movement of people in this region at this time would have to take these groups into account. However, something other than just location and period makes the outlaw literatures of Anglo-Saxons, Irish, and Icelanders comparable: their position in regard to the introduction of Christianity at the time of their creation. As Richard Fletcher has noted, conversion to Christianity in Western Europe entailed far more than the acceptance of a new creed:

> The conversion of 'barbarian' Europe to Christianity brought Roman and Mediterranean customs and values and habits of thought to the newcomers who were the legatees of the Roman empire. These included, for example, literacy and books and the Latin language with all that it opened up; Roman notions about law, authority, property and government; the habits of living in towns and using coin for exchange; Mediterranean tastes in food, drink and costume; new architectural and artistic conventions. The Germanic[95] successor-states which emerged from the wreckage of the empire [...] accepted Christianity and in so doing embraced a cultural totality which was *Romanitas*, 'Roman-ness'.[96]

92 Nearly every saga has an example of this, but one of the more extreme can be found in *Laxadæla saga*, where Óláf Peacock travels easily to both Norway and Ireland. At the latter destination, he lands precisely where the King of Ireland happens to be traveling, is revealed to be his grandson, and is offered the crown. *Laxadæla saga*, pp. 50-60.

93 See, for example, *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, p. 12; and *Grœnlendinga saga*, pp. 246 and 248-249.

94 *Ancient Laws and Institutes of Wales*, p. 595; and Jenkins, 'Crime and Tort & the Three Columns of the Law', pp. 9 and 15-19.

95 And Celtic, I would add.

96 Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, p. 2.

Christianization meant a complete renovation of nearly every aspect of life for those who adopted it, an upheaval as great as any other that was symbolized through the restless body of the outlaw. There is, after all, no better example of how extensive and potentially traumatic the changes introduced by foreign contact could be than these societies' efforts to conform to the standards of early medieval Christianity. It is not surprising, therefore, that the natives resorted to metaphors of motion in describing these innovations. This is especially the case with writing.[97] Consider Aldhelm's *aenigmata* for a pen:

> Pergo per albentes directo tramite campos
> Candentique uiae uestigia caerula linquo
> Lucida nigratis fuscans anfractibus arua.
> Nec satis est unum per campos pandere callem,
> Semita quin potius milleno tramite tendit,
> Quae non errantes ad caeli culmina uexit.[98]
>
> I proceed on straight paths through white fields and leave cerulean marks along the spotless track, blackness darkening the bright rolling countryside. It is not enough for one to lay down a path through the fields, a trail that instead stretches into innumerable paths, which carry to heaven at the end if they do not wander.

In the view of a native Anglo-Saxon trained in the conventions and with the tools of Latin learning, the treacherousness of such practices remains in mind, and he conceptualizes it through the risky behavior that brought such novelties to his culture in the first place – the movement of bodies, objects, and ideas through space.[99] Note too its metaphor of conduct, wherein the way one traverses the page is juxtaposed with the way one walks a path, and then both are revealed to be comparable to the acts that either win or lose one a place in heaven.

Those in the North Atlantic understood the stakes of their integration into Christian culture, and conveyed its dangers by relating them to the

97 The ways in which the newly-Christian Irish negotiated their transition from oral to written authority is one of the major concerns of Nagy, *Conversing with Angels and Ancients*. See particularly pp. 1-22, 40-44, 135-137 and 199-208. For the Anglo-Saxons, see Rupp, 'The Anxiety of Writing', p. 262.

98 Aldhelm, *Aenigmata LIX*, p. 455, lines 3-8. See also Aldhelm, *De virginitate*, p. 320.

99 See also Muirchú maccu Macthéni, *Vita Patricii*, pp. 62-63; and Alcuin, *Versus de sanctis Euboricensis ecclesiae*, p. 198.

hazards of mobility. That they were not dazzled by progress is perhaps why their societies did not emerge from this radical reorganization fully 'Roman'; no matter how much of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian culture they absorbed, they carried over much of their indigenous practices and values into their new existences. The works of the Anglo-Saxons, Irish, and Icelanders are products of this process – the result of Germanic and Celtic peoples who learned the conventions and harnessed the resources of *Romanitas* and who now employed them for their own cultural ends. In all three cultures after a few generations the tools of literacy were used to preserve elements of traditional learning as well as put a local imprint upon Christian concepts and stories. These contributions appeared most often in vernacular languages which were themselves innovations, modified for use in the written form. Virtually all the works featured here are representatives of this synthesis. The others in the North Atlantic participated in this process, but had different experiences, or their literatures took different paths. The British converted much earlier than the appearance of their first vernacular works; they had been a part of the Roman Empire, and for this reason had a different relationship to *Romanitas*. The Picts, more simply, left virtually nothing by which to judge them.[100] In the Anglo-Saxons, Irish, and Icelanders, however, we have three cultures which arose in much the same environment, reacting to much the same circumstances.

Considering cultural interaction and literature in the context of the archipelago has been done for other island societies, particularly in the modern era, but there has been little discussion of this dynamic in the North Sea. One major exception has been the work of J.G.A. Pocock, a New Zealander, who has conceptualized the multi-ethnic reality of early modern Britain and Ireland by referring to their region as the Atlantic Archipelago, in contrast to the term 'British Isles', which occasions resistance in some quarters.[101] Only a few followed Pocock's lead, however. There is John Kerrigan's *Archipelagic English*, which extended Pocock's interest into the literary realm of seventeenth-century England; more ambitious, at least in terms of time span, is Richard S. Tompson's *The Atlantic Archipelago*. These scholars' invocation of the archipelago, as here, is meant to emphasize the cultural diversity and interconnectivity found in the area; where they

100 Clancy, 'Scottish Literature before Scottish Literature', p. 16.

101 Pocock, 'British History: A Plea for a New Subject', pp. 29-30. He applies this frame in considering British history in the subsequent essays in the same book, *A Discovery of Islands*. On the problems with 'Britain' in a medieval context, see Ingham, 'The Trouble with Britain', pp. 484-496.

perhaps err, at least from the perspective of a medievalist, is in their use of the modern borders of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland to determine the boundaries of their archipelago. After all, as Matthew Boyd Goldie and Sebastian Sobecki point out, 'geographical considerations of the archipelago are distinguishable from political, ethnographic, and other lines of inquiry'.[102] In these works on early modern Britain, the other side of the English Channel is not considered part of the archipelago, nor any of the islands further north. This suits their periodization, but not one wherein England was ruled by Danish kings or held extensive lands in France.[103] The artificiality of political boundaries is apparent in Tompson's work, which in adhering to this standard must include the Hebrides, Orkneys, and Shetland Isles in its history. Yet the Faeroe Islands are excluded, despite everything they share in history and culture with the (technically) Scottish territories. The only mentions of any of these islands in the book, after all, are in reference to their isolation or possession by the Norse; there is no discussion of them as participants in British history or contributors to its culture, and as a result they appear inconsequential.[104] A geographical term implies a geographical reality, one which may not conform to national boundaries but just so happens to fit the purposes of this work well. By considering the entire range of the North Atlantic, we can better see the implications of movement in the literatures of the region.

This is a lot of discussion of islands for a work that claims to be looking at something larger – after all, liminality, mobility, and outlawry exist in the absence of an archipelago. However, the setting of the North Atlantic, at least on the macro scale, is that of the archipelago. And even elsewhere, the idea of the island has a metaphorical power that extends beyond the literal, just as mobility can so easily represent both the physical and the abstract. John Edward Terrell examines this in his attempt to define 'island':

102 Goldie and Sobecki, 'Editors' Introduction: Our Seas of Islands', p. 473.

103 Though as Goldie and Sobecki also point out, in describing the region as an archipelago, we are not reflecting medieval terminology, and, perhaps, conceptualization. 'Editors' Introduction: Our Seas of Islands', pp. 472 and 475. Of course, the geographical reality encompassed by that term remains. For one example of a medieval characterization of the region and its unity – though not one without ulterior motive – see Sobecki, 'Introduction: Edgar's Archipelago', pp. 1-30.

104 Tompson, *The Atlantic Archipelago*, pp. 20, 62 and 101-102. In contrast, see Grohse, 'From Asset in War to Assest in Diplomacy', pp. 255-268, for an account of the importance of the Orkneys in the medieval history of Norway. For their literary historical importance, see Clancy, 'Scottish Literature before Scottish Literature', pp. 17-18 and 21-22. See also Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English*, p. 43, for a brief description of the cultural disunity and shifting national borders of the Isles in the early modern era.

> Stepping back from the kinds of islands that most of us know, biogeographers like to say in a more inclusive way that islands are what they are because they are living spaces (habitats) of any size that are surrounded by decisive shifts in habitat – shifts so basic that few species of plants and animals can survive for long in more than one of these habitats.
> I favor this more inclusive definition for an obvious reason. When defined in this fashion, islands are everywhere, not just out there in the deep blue sea. For example, depending on the particular kind of creature and its biological needs, berry bushes in a cow pasture are islands; so too, are cow pastures beside an interstate; cornfields great and small; and so on.[105]

Islands are regions of any size surrounded by liminal space where existence to those in the center is intolerable or inconceivable. They include not only land bound by the sea, but the wild areas between settlements, environments like the fens that make normal modes of living impossible, and ethnic enclaves in a sea of homogeneity. And what of those rare creatures – paradoxical animals such as the 'land-fish' that E.G. Stanley equates with Grendel, an archetypal exile of Old English verse – that can thrive in the liminal, unneedful of the elements so 'basic' to the others to survive?[106] These are those like the outlaws, who reveal the potential of the liminal, and are monstrous because of it.

Texts and Dates

Given the breadth and ubiquity of concepts such as movement and liminality, it would be impossible to attempt to consider every instance of outlawry or liminality in medieval North Atlantic literature. Instead, each chapter examines an expression of outlawry or pseudo-outlawry in literature, each building upon the other to create a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of transgression and conduct in the region. They also move roughly chronologically, placing a consideration of the indigenous Irish phenomena of *ailithre* and *immrama* early in the sequence and continuing into Anglo-Saxon and then Icelandic practice and literature, concluding with the Norman Conquest, which inaugurated changes throughout the archipelago in the

105 Terrell, 'Islands in the River of Time', p. 7. See also Beer, 'Island Bounds', p. 33; as well as Sarah Harlan-Haughey's description of outlaw spaces as 'ecotonic', 'transitional … between one biome and another'. *The Ecology of the English Outlaw in Medieval Literature*, p. 12.
106 Stanley, 'A Very Land-Fish, Languagelesse, a Monster', p. 86.

subsequent centuries. Such a structure prompts the question of how the project dates this material, however, since much of it is subject to scholarly disagreement over its proper placement in the timeline. Most Irish works exist only in manuscripts centuries younger than what their contents are thought to be – yet estimates as to the actual age of the compositions can vary widely.[107] Icelandic works are more easily dateable, yet they are primarily concerned with the past, and their value as historical documents is dubious.[108] As for Anglo-Saxon works, most could be plausibly dated from anytime between the seventh and eleventh centuries. Within this time frame were a number of occurrences which one would expect to affect attitudes towards movement, especially abroad – the waxing and waning influence of Rome, Irish involvement, further encroachment upon the British kingdoms, the advent of the Vikings and Cnut's reign – and so where a piece may fall along this timeline is potentially a very important matter.

This project's response to this issue is to, for the most part, take the path of least resistance; that is to say, to accept the most commonly-held opinions on the date of works that play an important part in its analyses. For most of the material, then, this suggests an early date. The Irish *immrama* are usually taken as quite early, from around the sixth or seventh century.[109] Most of the important Anglo-Saxon works covered here, too, are usually taken as relatively old, with the Guthlac material rather early (eighth century).[110] Short pieces such as *The Whale* normally present too little information to be dated effectively. It could be relatively late, as its *terminus ante quem* is the compilation of its manuscript, the Exeter Book, in the tenth century; however, the date of its composition could also be extremely early, as its closest analogue, a Latin *Physiologus*, is from the fourth century.[111] Given the poem's subject matter, it is often thought to be connected with the longer work *The Phoenix* and therefore given an eighth-century date.[112] This leaves *Beowulf*, whose dating is an issue that continues to spark debate; at the very

107 See, for example, the varying estimates given for the *immrama* and the *Táin Bó Cualnge* in Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland*, pp. 175-176 and 211.

108 O'Donoghue, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, pp. 36-47; and Jón Karl Helgason, 'Continuity? The Icelandic Sagas in Post-Medieval Times', pp. 75-78.

109 Thrall, 'Clerical Sea Pilgrimages and the *Imrama*', pp. 16-17.

110 Bertram Colgrave, Introduction, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, pp. 15-19; Jane Roberts, Introduction, *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*, pp. 70-71. See also Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter*, p. 400.

111 *Physiologus latinus*, pp. 7-8.

112 Krapp and Dobbie, Introduction, *ASPR* 3, pp. xxxv-xxxvi and li; and Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter*, pp. 402-404.

least it can support an early composition.[113] Much of this project, then, leans towards the earliest centuries for its material and for the worldviews it describes – it examines early practices such as the Irish *ailithre* and delves into issues such as succession in the Heptarchy and relates them to the literature. The Christian concepts and works it engages were similarly present in the North Atlantic at an early time. For these reasons, it could be said that an early date is favored, and that the Anglo-Saxon tradition this project examines is pre-Alfredian.

Yet at the same time, this work's conclusions could conceivably apply to the later Anglo-Saxon era. First, there is the obvious point that whenever the sources were composed, they continued to be copied and enjoyed in later centuries. Yet it should also be noted that there is little indication that Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards mobility or the foreign changed despite all of the many forces that would seem to shape them. Surely this is largely due to lack of evidence – seventh- and eleventh-century England were different in myriad ways. The Danish invasions are an instructive example.[114] The Viking incursions were the basis for Dorothy Whitelock's rejection of a late date for *Beowulf*, as she reasoned that no Anglo-Saxon audience could countenance such positive depictions of the Danes after raiders from that kingdom had devastated Britain.[115] Yet this specific argument has already been countered,[116] and, more generally, a strained relationship with a single people does not preclude good relations with others and a favorable view of cultural exchange overall. In the aftermath of the invasions King Alfred noted how once 'mon utanbordes wisdom & lare hider on lond sohte'[117] ('men from abroad sought out teaching and learning in this land'), and his biographer boasted that he had recreated such a world.[118] Even more to the point, Alfred's court is known to have attracted one Norse individual, Ohthere of northern Norway.[119] The Anglo-Saxon ruling class of the incipient Viking Age therefore either held no animus towards the Norse or else they

113 Important considerations of *Beowulf*'s date – representing a variety of conclusions – include *The Dating of Beowulf*; Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*; Dumville, 'Beowulf Come Lately: Some Notes on the Paleography of the Nowell Codex', pp. 49-63; and Lapidge, 'The Archetype of *Beowulf*', pp. 5-42.

114 For an examination of the Danish incursions' possible effects upon Anglo-Saxon literature and society, see Foot, 'Remembering, Forgetting and Inventing', pp. 185-200.

115 Whitelock, *The Audience of* Beowulf, pp. 24-25.

116 Murray, 'Beowulf, the Danish Invasions, and Royal Genealogy', pp. 101-111.

117 *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, p. 2.

118 Asser, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, pp. 61-63.

119 Murray, 'Beowulf, the Danish Invasions, and Royal Genealogy', pp. 105-106; and *The Old English Orosius*, pp. 14-16.

were sophisticated enough to delineate between those from Denmark and those from the Norwegian coast. The Danish invasions also precipitated the unification of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms into the territory of England, an event which led in turn to their political hegemony in Britain. As they wielded more power than ever before in their dealings with others both within their island and without, one may expect them to express greater confidence towards the outside world rather than less.[120] Similar inconclusive arguments over the effect of Viking raids on the character of early Irish literature can also be seen.[121] For this reason, although more precision as to the actual date of the works is to be desired, there is little to prevent the conclusions here from being treated as continuous through Anglo-Saxon history. The ability of North Atlantic cultures to countenance boundary-crossing impacts even our attempts to date their literature.

120 An excellent examination of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom's successful and assured wielding of political power in the post-Viking age is Sharp's study of Alfred's grandson's diplomacy in 'England, Europe, and the Celtic World: King Æthelstan's Foreign Policy', pp. 197-220.

121 See the attempt to determine the effects of the Viking raids on the *immrama* by Hughes, 'The Changing Theory and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage', pp. 143-151; and the reply of Oskamp in *The Voyage of Máel Dúin*, pp. 16-19.