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# Violence, Christianity, And The Anglo-Saxon Charms

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Violence, Christianity, and the Anglo-Saxon Charms

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BY

Laurajan G. Gallardo

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FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in English: Literary Studies

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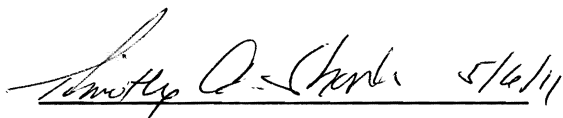
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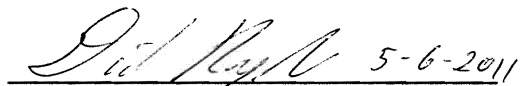
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## **Abstract**

The thesis focuses on violence reinterpreted through the Anglo-Saxon charms that exhibit a fusion of Christian and pagan elements. In order to comprehend the impact of this fusion, I provide ecclesiastical and social histories of the Anglo-Saxons, stressing upon the interconnectedness of both—an essential concept in understanding the Anglo-Saxon view of the world. This interconnectedness is seen in the Anglo-Saxon perception of magic, which in their understanding was synonymous to science or religion. I provide a brief introduction on magical practices and beliefs that applied to the charms, shedding light on how they were expected to work. In the third chapter of the thesis, I include seven Old English charms of my own translation, categorizing them into three groups: 1. Charms that require violent acts for their efficacy; 2. Charms that remedy a violent act; 3. Charms that protect against violence. I analyze each of the charms, providing a Christian and pagan understanding for each one. Each section concludes with a statement about how violence was reinterpreted in the charms. Based on the chronology of the manuscripts in which the charms were found, I argue that the charms increasingly become more prayer-like, moving from being pagan chants superimposed with Christian references to incantations more like prayers.

### **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Attorney Leandro Gallardo, and my parents, Leo and Susan Gallardo. Without their encouragement and belief in my abilities, this work would not have been possible.

### **Acknowledgements**

My greatest thanks go to my director, Dr. Tim Shonk for all the knowledge he has imparted throughout the course of this work, from translating to understanding the literature and culture of Anglo-Saxon England. I also thank my readers, Dr. David Raybin and Dr. Julie Campbell, for all the help they have provided in completing this project.



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## Chapter One: The Charms in the Anglo-Saxon Cultural Context

A charm is a practice, usually believed to be magical, used in response to an ailment or to a problematic situation. A charm may take the form of a recipe or an incantation which may be accompanied by a physical token inscribed with an incantation. Our knowledge of Anglo-Saxon charms comes from surviving magico-medical manuscripts as well as some liturgical manuscripts dated from the tenth to the twelfth centuries. These texts display the types of remedies and rituals practiced during the Anglo-Saxon era. Upon closer analysis, these charms exhibit a peculiar quality in that they reflect the fusion of Christian and pagan beliefs. To comprehend this fusion, one must be cognizant of the social and ecclesiastical histories that surround these charms, which, in Anglo-Saxon society, are not necessarily distinguished as two separate events.

In studying Anglo-Saxon society, one finds it difficult to discern religious and cultural practices from each other, and the paganism that is often ascribed to the Anglo-Saxons is hard to define because of the nature of the evidence we are left to interpret. Our knowledge of Anglo-Saxon religion before the conversion, as well as the nature of their Christian practice is limited. An oral people, the Anglo-Saxons relied on their *scops* to preserve their histories and myths, and, being largely illiterate, they left us with few written records. And though there have been numerous studies elucidating the existence of both pagan and Christian qualities in Old English literature, we must remember that any surviving literature that refers to the paganism of the Anglo-Saxons was either written or transcribed after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. Additionally, these works were likely produced in monasteries, the centers of learning

during the time. Most of the writing produced about Anglo-Saxon paganism was then written within a Christian framework. As Sally Crawford notes: “the very concept of the written word was intimately connected to Christianity, and so most Anglo-Saxon writing was created with the consciousness that a document in some way expressed God's work in a Christian world” (154).

The lack of written historical evidence about the pagan practices of the Anglo-Saxons devoid of Christian framing suggests the Church's refusal to preserve a record of pagan rituals practiced in England. However, using other sources, we may infer that certain cultural practices may have been brought to England by migrating Germanic tribes, and that similar pagan practices may have endured until the conversion. Tacitus in his *Germania* allows his readers descriptions of the lands, laws, general physiognomy, and cultural traits common to the Germanic tribes. Apart from detailing the Germanic practices and attitudes towards ferocity, Tacitus also includes information about some of the religious rituals he observed some tribes practice. He notes that the Germans worshipped a variety of deities, including such Roman gods as Mercury, Hercules, and Mars. Tacitus adds that he also observed the Suevi tribe, who offered sacrifices to the Egyptian goddess Isis (713). These deities named by Tacitus are most likely not the actual deities worshipped by the Germanic tribes, but are Roman correspondences to Teutonic gods. Tacitus emphasizes that although the Germans worshipped deities, they did not “consider it consistent with the grandeur of celestial beings to confine gods within walls, or to liken them in the form of any human countenance” (713). Any resemblances between the Roman gods and the Teutonic deities would be extremely basic and dependent on their general qualities. Following this line of thought, the attributes

embodied by Hercules—his physical strength and his prowess—are also embodied by the Teutonic Ðunaras (more commonly known as Thor). Mars translates to Teiwaz (Tyr), and Mercury to Wodanaz (Odin).

Various types of evidence suggest that the belief in Teutonic deities existed in Anglo-Saxon England. J.S. Ryan has assembled evidence that demonstrates that the Scandinavian Woden was continually recognized in Anglo-Saxon England, perhaps not as a god or the primary object of their worship, but as a being of power and traditional import. Ryan presents that the evidence supporting his assertion is not limited only to the histories of Bede and Tacitus, but also includes place-names, genealogies, and other references in Old English literature. He most especially relies on the images of carrion-birds and wolves, prominent among many of the Old English battle scenes in such works as *The Battle of Maldon*, *Judith*, and *Elene*, which he sees as being associated to Woden, the god of war, who was frequently accompanied by two ravens and two wolves. Ryan also discusses Woden's connection with cremation as evidence of pagan worship, which Ryan constructs from interpreting Woden's edict of cremating the dead as a sacrificial offering to him.

Henry Mayr-Harting suggests that the most important, non-literary evidence for paganism in Anglo-Saxon England are in the 40-50 surviving place-names (24). Among these place-names are *hearh*, from which Harrow is derived, meaning hill-sanctuary; *leah* meaning grove or sacred wood; and *weoh*, meaning idol, shrine, or temple. Weoley (Worcestershire) is derived from both words, and means shrine in the grove. Some of the place-names also indicate a connection to a particular pagan deity such as Tuesley (the grove of Tiw or Tyr) and Thursley (the grave of Thor). The Anglo-Saxons revered

mounds and barrows as sacred sites, using them as places of worship and offering for certain deities. We can infer, based on the linguistic evidence for the endurance of the names of the landforms coupled with Tacitus's observation of the Germans' worship of non-human deities, that these mounds, hills, and groves were regarded as temple-like monuments. Each deity had his own landform allotted to him and his worship. Other linguistic remnants of Anglo-Saxon paganism are found in the names of the days: Tuesday from Tiw or Tyr, Wednesday from Woden, Thursday from Thor, and Friday from Frig.

In the charms, references to Odin and other mythological deities are few and sometimes require additional interpretation. In the following excerpt from the metrical charm "For a Swarm of Bees," we see a reference to *sigewif*, which can be translated as war-women or victorious women:

Sitte ge, sigewif, sigað to eorþan!

Næfre ge, wilde, to wuda fleogan.

Beo ge swa gemindige mines godes,

swa bið manna gehwilc metes and eþeles. (Cockayne vol.1 385)

(Rest ye, war-women, sink to the earth!

Never will you, wild [women], fly to the woods.

Be you as respectful to my goods

as is every man to [his] food and home.)<sup>1</sup>

To prevent bees from swarming on the property, the charm instructs the chanter to take dirt, cast it onto the bees, and utter the above-mentioned lines. In the charm, the bees are

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<sup>1</sup> All translations from Old English to Modern English are my own.

likened to the *sigewif*, wild, war-like women who are victorious in battle. The Valkyries, Odin's war maidens, come to mind as a corresponding image—their spears and swords comparable to the bees' stingers. If read in this manner, this particular Anglo-Saxon charm vilifies the pagan references of the Valkyries by associating them with disorder and disregard. Additionally, in using this pagan image as the source of affliction, the Church is able to accept the usage of the charm within the Christian practice.

Perhaps the most frequently cited charm that demonstrates the coexistence of pagan and Christian elements is the “Nine Herb Charm:”

Das IX magon wið nygon attrum. Wyrn com snican; toslat he  
man; ða geman Woden IX wuldortanas, sloh ða þa næddran, þæt  
heo on IX tofleah.

(Cockayne vol.3 53-55)

(These nine [herbs] have strength against nine poisons. [A] Worm came creeping; he tore a man in two; then Woden took the nine glory-branches, then slew the worm so that it broke into nine parts).

This charm claims two things: (1) that the nine herbs taken by Woden have the ability to counteract many types of poisons, and (2) that poisons and diseases are caused by worms. Much like the charm “For a Swarm of Bees,” the pagan source, in this case, the *wyrn*, is believed to be the root of evil and disease. In vilifying the worm, the charm becomes usable within the Christian context.

A recipe for a salve that uses the healing properties of these nine herbs is included at the end of the same charm:

Wyr̥c slypan of wætere and of axsan, genim finol, wyl on þære  
 slyppan and beþe mid æggemongc, þonne he þa sealfe on do, ge ær  
 ge æfter. Sing þæt galdor on æcre þara wyrta III ær he hy wyrce,  
 and on þone æppel ealswa; ond singe þon men in þone muð and in  
 þa earan buta and on ða wunde þæt ilce gealdor, ær he þa sealfe on  
 do.

(Work a paste of water and of ash, take the fennel, boil in the paste  
 and warm in the mixture before, after, and when he puts the salve  
 on. Sing the charm on each of the herbs three times before he  
 works it, and on the apple as well; and sing into the mouth of the  
 man and in both his ears and on the wound that same charm, before  
 he puts the salve on it.)

Emphasized in this recipe are the times when the charm must be sung and the body parts that the singer of the charm must target. These points are underscored because they are believed to contribute to the charm's efficacy.

This type of superstition in the charms depicts another trait that Tacitus observes in the Germanic people, and which he connects with the practices of augury and divination popular among those peoples. Tacitus notes that the priests of the Germanic tribes used twigs in which they found certain meanings, much like runes. One's fate can be determined by the fall of the twigs or their position relative to other twigs. The Germanic people also relied on the flight of birds or the behavior of horses to foretell the fate of a man or a battle. The translation of the superstitious quality of the charms into other cultural practices suggests an interconnectedness between the magico-religious

practices and other traditions.

To fully comprehend the charms, one must understand the culture that produced them and its values. Violence greatly affected the culture of the Germans and was widespread, as evidenced by Tacitus's descriptions. He notes that all the Germanic peoples “have fierce blue eyes, red hair, huge frames—fit only for a sudden exertion [...]. They are less able to bear laborious work” (710). Much of Tacitus's description of the Germans focuses upon their battle tactics and their peculiar attitudes towards fighting. For instance, Tacitus writes that the German women and children were required to be present during battles. Their presence served two purposes: to provide encouragement and support to the men in battle and to serve as witnesses to the bravery of the warriors (Tacitus 712).

The Germans took their battle culture seriously. Germanic kings relied upon the wealth they acquired through pillaging and looting the towns of opposing tribes to continuously reward their loyal warriors, and, Tacitus adds, abandoning one's shield was considered “the basest of crimes” as it proved one's disloyalty and treason (712). In addition, Tacitus observes that during times of prolonged peace, many noble Germanic youths actively sought out tribes that were at war. He comments that the Germans wanted to appear fierce and fearless, and that they “actually think it tame and stupid to acquire by the sweat of toil what they might win by their blood” (716).

The Anglo-Saxon heroic tradition and notions of kingship are deeply rooted in their mythology. Their gods were viewed not only as religious deities but also as ancestors from whom traditions were taken and preserved. Mayr-Harting notes that the warrior elements of society we are familiar with stem from a combination of *nobilitas*, the mystique of descent from the gods, and *virtus*, victory in war (18). In order for the



kings, or *bretwaldas*, more aptly translated as “powerful dispensers,” to ensure their position and dominion over their people, they had to attract the best warriors to protect their lands from wars or invading peoples. Keeping their warriors pleased meant rewarding them with treasures and, during the late Anglo-Saxon period, land. In comparison to their folklore, Woden rewarded his retainers with victory in their battles,<sup>2</sup> as well as feasting and glory in the halls of Valhalla.

Based on the depictions of the Germanic tribes by Tacitus, the Anglo-Saxons would have been perceived by those outsiders who read *Germania*, as a fierce, ferocious, and superstitious people who held fealty and personal honor in high regard. These perceptions would have been passed on to the Christians, who sought to convert these peoples. We are offered a glimpse of an outsider's perception of the Anglo-Saxons in the letter from Pope Gregory to King Æthelbert, the first of the Anglo-Saxon kings to convert, dated the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 601, in which Gregory pleads for the king to

protect that grace which you have received from Heaven with a concerned mind, hasten to extend the Christian faith among the races subject to you, redouble your righteous enthusiasm in their conversion, hunt down the worship of idols, and overturn the building of temples, by encouraging the morality of your subjects with your great purity of life, by terrifying them, by flattering them, by correcting them and by showing them the example of good deeds. (qtd. in Church 164)

In this excerpt of the missive, Gregory stresses two practices that he believes are pagan:

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<sup>2</sup> Ryan notes that traditional characterizations of Woden include him as giving victory as his greatest reward to his best warriors (400).

the worshipping of idols and the building of temples. These elements and other more detailed practices are also mentioned in another letter from Gregory addressed to Abbott Mellitus dated 17<sup>th</sup> of June 601, wherein the Pope instructs Mellitus and his missionaries on how to behave when faced with the problem of pagan temples:

I have, upon mature deliberation on the affair of the English, determined upon, viz., that the temples of the idols in that nation ought not to be destroyed; but let the idols that are in them be destroyed; let holy water be made and sprinkled in the said temples, let altars be erected, and relics placed. For if those temples are well built, it is requisite that they be converted from the worship of devils to the service of the true God; that the nation, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may remove error from their hearts, and knowing and adoring the true God, may the more familiarity resort to the places to which they have been accustomed. And because they have been used to slaughter many oxen in the sacrifices to devils, some solemnity must be exchanged for them on this account, as that on the day of the dedication, or the nativities of the holy martyrs, whose relics are there deposited, they may build themselves huts of the boughs of tree, about those churches which have been turned to that use from temples, and celebrate the solemnity with religious feasting, and no more offer beasts to the Devil, but kill cattle to the praise of God in their eating, and return thanks to the Giver of all things for their

sustenance; to the end that, whilst some gratifications are outwardly permitted them, that they may the more easily consent to the inward consolations of the grace of God. For there is no doubt that it is impossible to efface every thing at once from their obdurate minds. (Bede 52-53)

In comparison to the earlier epistle, here, Gregory's description of pagan practices is more detailed, accompanied by specific instructions that demonstrate his understanding of the dangers of mere subjugation of the people and the importance of the social acceptance of new norms. From his explanation of maintaining as many of the original structures and customs of the people as possible in order to introduce more peaceably new practices, Gregory exhibits his understanding of the notion that the permeance of Christianity for England required a familiarity with the convertees' culture and a willing concession (on the part of the converter) to bend to their ways in order to curry favor slowly and to inspire loyalty among the pagans.

S.D. Church believes that these letters by the Pope offer only weak and ambiguous forms of the evidence of paganism in Anglo-Saxon England. Church asserts that, in both of Gregory's letters, the pope draws his depictions of pagan practices from those listed in the Bible, and that in the letter to Mellitus and his missionaries, a condensed form of the story of the conversion of the Israelites by Moses and Aaron provides the blueprint for the missive. Church draws parallels between the letter to Æthelbert and the description of Constantine the Great as recorded in Roman history. He adds that addressing of Æthelbert as *rex Anglorum* also indicates the pope's lack of knowledge about the political state of England during the time (164-65).

Though there are similarities between the so-called models and the letters, I believe that Church underestimates Gregory's conversion stratagem and rhetoric. The book of Leviticus is indeed filled with specific instructions by God to Moses and his brother for use in instructing the Israelites. There are exhaustive lists of appropriate offerings to God, such as untainted cattle and specific birds--turtledoves or young pigeons. Accompanying these God-worthy offerings are detailed instructions on how to prepare them for proper burning. The following excerpt from the ritual is typical of the preparation practices prescribed: the priest "shall cleave [the bird] with the wings thereof, but shall not divide it asunder: and the priest shall burn it upon the altar, upon the wood that is upon the fire: it is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, or a sweet savour unto the Lord" (Leviticus 1:16). In his missive, Gregory orders Mellitus to allow that some "solemnity [...] be exchanged" for the "slaughter [of] many oxen in the sacrifices to devils." The specificity in listing allowable animals to be sacrificed to God accompanied by instructions on how to perform those sacrifices supports Church's claim. In contrast, in the Biblical source, God instructs Moses to sprinkle anointed oil and blood around tabernacles and altars used for sacrifice, Gregory tells Mellitus to use holy water on the temples themselves and to erect altars and relics. In Leviticus, there is no mention of preserving the temples or destroying idols, nor is there an explanation provided on why Moses and Aaron allowed the Israelites their established practice of ritual sacrifice. Following God's will was enough rationale for Moses, Aaron, and their disciples. Gregory provides Mellitus with reasons why he thinks it permissible to allow some practices to survive, citing familiarity, trust, and the impossibility to permanently eradicate culturally

established rituals in such a short amount of time. In terms of Gregory's instructing Mellitus to preserve the "well-built" temples, Gregory demonstrates not only his practicality but also his understanding of the difficulty and danger of maintaining a subjugated society's forced and immediate deviance from their traditions.

By examining the language that Gregory employs in his letter to Æthelbert, one can see the attention he pays to the words he chooses to convey his message. Gregory addresses Æthelbert as *rex Anglorum*, drawing, as Church notes, from references to Constantine the Great. In referring to the Anglo-Saxon king as ruler of England, Gregory bolsters the king's ego and ingratiates himself and the missionaries in England to him and his people. Reading the missive to the king, one sees Gregory's understanding of how the Anglo-Saxons operated culturally, especially in his encouraging Æthelbert to spread the Christian faith by whatever means he saw fitting. In his letter to the Saxon king, Gregory first builds a sense of urgency when he encourages the king to "protect" his newly acquired grace, received upon his conversion, providing him with the specific means by which he can ensure his soul's salvation. In listing these tasks, Gregory uses the words *hunt*, *overturn*, and *terrify*, all of which are indicative of the aggressive heroic qualities of the Germanic peoples. Gregory's diction demonstrates his consciousness of the king's methods. The pope perhaps found it forgivable to allow conversion through force and violence if it ensured the loyalty of a powerful figure. Gregory ends his letter by flattering Æthelbert, noting that in his conversion, he follows the right path, one that enjoins him with the ability and right to "correct" the other pagan tribes.

In various Old English works, we see the juxtaposition of heroic and Christian elements. The heroic ideals held by the Anglo-Saxons characterize them as a warrior

society with constant encounters with violence. This aggression, boasting, bravery, and glory are clearly present in the depictions of the Christianized characters of Beowulf, Judith, Christ in *Dream of the Rood*, underscoring the importance of violence to the identity of the Anglo-Saxon people. Violence and dominance played a large role in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. It was the cause of their coming to England and the means by which they were converted. It is through the redefinition of violence into Christian tenets that the Anglo-Saxons were able to understand the new religion and incorporate it into their culture and daily practice.

Fraught with violence, the history of England's conversion to Christianity is a scintillating one, even if we are provided with only a meager number of literary accounts that are unreliable, perhaps even fictitious, since those works were written centuries after the fact. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* is certainly difficult to take as wholly truthful, not only because he writes it three centuries after the first Anglo-Saxon invasion, though he draws largely from Gildas's accounts written only a century after the initial invasion, but also because his opinions and interpretations of facts are colored by his Christian faith. Bede, writing history within a Christian framework, regularly inserts expositions on unfortunate events, such as plagues or defeats in battle, as punishments from God.

The relationship between the Anglo-Saxon tribes and violence stretches back to the early fifth century when Constantine drew out the Roman army from England. The violent Scots and Picts relentlessly attacked the native Britons, who were left defenseless by their Roman protectors and were inexperienced in warfare. Bede's descriptions of these attacks are filled with images of fear and violent rage. He vilifies the Scots and

Picts, calling them “the enemies,” who ravaged the Christian Britons with “hooked weapons, by which the cowardly defenders were dragged from the wall, and dashed against the ground” (19). Bede notes that many of the Britons, reduced to starvation, submitted themselves to their enemies as slaves in order to survive. Some of them turned to violent means, resorting to thievery and raging attacks upon the “enemies,” albeit unsuccessfully.

The Germanic Angles came into England by invitation of the Britons to aid in the expulsion of their oppressors. The Angles, however, soon turned against the Britons and revealed their true intentions. Bede describes the Angles as deceitful, noting that “they might thus appear to be fighting for their country, whilst their real intentions were to enslave it” (22). Under agreement with the Britons to reclaim and protect their lands in exchange for payment, the Angles called for reinforcements from their fellow Germans, the Jutes and the Saxons, exposing England to even more pagan invaders. The agreement fell through, as the Angles forged new alliances among the Saxons and Picts who raided the Britons. Thus did England fall into the pagan hands of the Germanic peoples. The term *Anglo-Saxon* refers to the tribes of Saxons, Jutes, Angles, and Picts who now held power in England. The Britons lay at the mercy of a much stronger foe by whom their buildings and homes were destroyed. Bede's accounts of the destruction wrought on the Britons also include the state of the Christian Church, a remnant of the Roman occupation. Bede writes that “the priests were everywhere slain before the altars. The prelates and the people, without any respect of persons, were destroyed with fire and sword” (23). Those who survived either hid in the wilderness or were forced into servitude.

Mayr-Harting notes that although the Britons would have likely been Christian, the chances of their religious practices surviving the invasions were slim, as most of the real strength of Christianity lay in the towns and buildings erected by the Romans and decimated by the Anglo-Saxons (32). He adds that a substantial amount of archaeological evidence points to a resurgence in pagan worship believed to have taken place during the fourth century. This evidence, coupled with the lack of organization among the Britons as a result of their defeat by the Anglo-Saxons, weakened their social identity as a people, and they most likely would have turned to adopting the practices of their depredators (Mayr-Harting 33).

Violence, instigated by desperation, may have contributed to the return to paganism. A reversion to pagan practices is depicted in the passage in *Beowulf* where the people turn to pagan rituals for succor against the violent rage of Grendel:

Monig oft gesæt

rice to rune;	ræd eahtedon
hwæt swiðferhðum	selest wære
wið færgryrum	to gefremmanne.
Hwilum hie geheton	æt hærgratfum
wigweorþunga,	wordum bædon
þæt him gastbona	geoce gefremede
wið þeodþreaum.	Swylc wæs þeaw hyra,
hæþenra hyht;	helle gemundon
in modsefan.	



*Beowulf* 171b-180a

(Many noblemen assembled, deliberating in counsel how it was best for the bravest men to afford protection against these horrors. [All the] while they summoned the Devil, with words, in their heathen temples with idol worship, urging the “Soul-Slayer” for help against the foreign distress. Such was their practice, their heathen hope.)

These lines follow the Creation song of the *scop* in the Hrothgar's meadhall, proclaiming the wonders of the Christian God and the curse of Cain and his descendants, one of whom is Grendel. The fear that results from the violence that Grendel wreaks upon the people propels them, even the noblemen, to try all known methods that would bring them succor.

This tacit reversion to pagan practices illustrates the impact that religion had on a newly-converted society. Primarily concerned with tangible physical threats, people preserved alternative methods that they would be able to employ in the event that a current practice was yielding less than desirable results. Susan D. Fuller postulates that the preservation of the Merseburg pagan charms provides evidence of reversion to paganism in times of duress. The Merseburg charms are two Germanic incantations dating from the ninth or tenth century. The first charm is an incantation meant for the liberation of prisoners:

Once the women [i.e., valkyries] were settling down here and there. / Some were fastening fetters, others were hindering the host, / Others were picking apart the fetters: / Escape the bonds of captivity, flee from the foe.

The second charm is a horse cure:

Phol and Wodan rode into the woods. / Then the lord's [i.e., Phol's]  
horse sprained its foot. / Then Sinhtgunt charmed it, as did Sunna,  
her sister, / Then Friia charmed it, as did Volla, her sister, / Then  
Wodan charmed it, as he was well able to do: / Be it bone sprain,  
be it blood sprain, be it limb sprain, / Bone to bone, blood to blood,  
/ limb to limb, thus be they joined together. (qtd. in Fuller 162).

Fuller focuses on the localization of these charms within the manuscript in which they were discovered and relates it to the localization of the manuscript itself and its historical significance. Fuller points out that the Latin prayer that follows these pagan charms is written in the same hand. Merseburg, during the tenth century, suffered attacks because of its border location. Fuller postulates that a frightened cleric may have had the charms dictated to him, which could have functioned as measures of defense against invading attacks. She concludes that the Merseburg charms, undeniably pagan, “not only demonstrate the survival of pagan oral tradition into the tenth century, they also illustrate man's propensity for returning to his original beliefs in times of extreme danger” (168).

Christianity returned to England with the missionaries sent by Pope Gregory, beginning with St. Augustine in 597. Landing in Kent, in the kingdom of Æthelbert, Augustine and his companions set out to convert the pagan Anglo-Saxons. Æthelbert was married to Bertha, daughter of the Catholic King of the Franks. Although Æthelbert did not convert immediately, according to Bede, lest he forsake the tradition that he long held with his people, he promised Augustine safety and freedom to practice and preach his

religion and situated him in Canterbury, the center of his dominion. This promise of security implies hostility to outsiders lingering among the people. Augustine and his disciples then began “applying themselves to frequent prayer, watching and fasting; preaching the word of life to as many as they could; despising all worldly things, as not belonging to them; receiving only their necessary food from those they taught; living themselves in all respects conformably to what they prescribed to others, and being always disposed to suffer any adversity, and even to die to that truth which they preached” (Bede 37). In living this simple life that they had prescribed for themselves, Augustine and his small Roman flock gained a small following in Kent and, more importantly, the admiration of Æthelbert and his subsequent conversion. His conversion encouraged more of his people to convert along with him.

Augustine's success prompted Pope Gregory's letter to the newly-converted king Æthelbert, encouraging him to protect his new-found faith by converting other kingdoms to Christianity. In the age of warring nations and undefined territories, security became the priority of the Anglo-Saxon kings. Fear often impelled the people to convert to Christianity. In this state of constant warring, it was not unusual for kings to waffle between religions. For instance, in 633, kings Osric and Eanfrid, convert kings, inherited kingdoms of their own. Upon their ascensions to their respective thrones, they both “renounced and lost the faith of the heavenly kingdom, and again delivered themselves up to be defiled by the abominations of their former idols” (Bede 103-4). N. J. Higham asserts that the reasoning for this reversion, though not documented in history, is clear: it distanced them from the regime of the Christian King Edwin, who was the great enemy of their house. Additionally, in Eanfrid's case, the reversion to paganism was a tactical move

in reviving the glory days of his ancestors' reigns. Religion became a way by which people differentiated kingdoms and their rulers, associating it with the power that each king wielded. Power and the concomitant threat of violence were among the means by which religion could be spread.

Additionally, Christianity had other political implications during the conversion. As in the marriage of Æthelbert and Bertha, conversion might ensure that peaceful alliances would ensue. In the case of the Angle Prince Peada, Elfreda was denied him by her father, the Northumbrian Christian king Oswy, unless he converted to the faith. This instance became a double-conversion in which king Oswy's son took Peada's sister as his wife, bringing with him more priests to convert the Angles. Bede adds that the peace was maintained by the clergy appointed in England. In 679, a great war ensued between kings Egfrid and Ethelred. Theodore, a bishop "relying on the Divine assistance," put the quarrel between the kings to rest, ensuring peace between them and their kingdoms for long time (Bede 198). Thus, through Christianity, the Anglo-Saxons were allowed periods of peace when religiously allied nations would put aside their differences in the name of one God.

The Anglo-Saxons may have converted to Christianity, but that did not mean that they abandoned the traditions and practices of their old culture, as evidenced by the ease with which some kings slipped back to their old pagan practices. In addition, since the pattern of the conversion usually dictated that the masses converted only after their ruler did, and by Bede's account some Anglo-Saxon monarchs allowed their people the freedom to choose the religion they practiced, we really cannot determine the exact extent to which Christianity permeated the Anglo-Saxon lifestyle. Violence was still rampant,

despite the Christian tenets of peace and compassion for others, as evidenced by the battling between the Christian kings Egfrid and Ethelred, and the Viking invasions beginning in the late eighth century kept the Anglo-Saxon kings and Christian monasteries occupied.

The first mention of Vikings in England in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* dates 787, the first victim of their brutality being an unassuming reeve. In the *Chronicle*, the Vikings are also referred to as the Danes, Northmen, and, not surprisingly, pirates, as they traveled in small, quick ships and their attacks were concentrated mainly on the sea coast of England. The *Chronicle* is rife with accounts of the violence wreaked by the Vikings on the Anglo-Saxons. In 836,<sup>3</sup> for example,

Her gefeaht Ecgbryht cyning wiþ .xxxv. sciphlæsta æt

Carrum, þær wearþ micel wæl geslægen, þa Denescan

ahton wælstowe gewald;

(Here fought king Echbryht against 35 pirates at

Charmouth, where a great number were slain, the Danes

secured victory in the battlefield; )

The period between the late eighth century and the early tenth century is riddled with accounts of the war-like Vikings and the outcomes of their battles with Anglo-Saxon kings. The Vikings were mobile attackers, who mostly looted monasteries for coins and other treasures, and then left. But there are instances recorded in the *Chronicle* of thralldom under these Danish armies. For the year 942, for instance, we are offered the account of King Edmund, who freed the Angles who had long been subjugated by the

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<sup>3</sup> Entered as 833 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

Norman Danes, *on hæþenra hæfteclommum lange þraga* (for a long period, [bound] in heathen fetters). Beginning in the early tenth century, just as the native Britons did with the Anglo-Saxon invaders, some kings tried to ward off the Vikings by paying them tribute. In 991, for instance, Archbishop Siric advised that 1000 pounds be given to the Vikings as tribute. Other kingdoms followed suit, some paying as high as 24,000 pounds in annual tribute.

The Viking invasions impacted the Anglo-Saxons in various ways. Apart from linguistic and artistic influences and the new trade relations forged with them, the Vikings also aided in the unification of the English people against an invading Other. Christianity benefited from this event in that it offered a reinterpretation of the invasions to promote the concept of the afterlife among the Anglo-Saxons.

*Sermo Lupi Ad Anglos* (The Sermon of the Wulf to the English), was a homily written by Wulfstan, the Archbishop of York, in 1014 during a time when, according to his title, the Danes were persecuting the English most severely. Interpreting the Viking invasions as omens of the apocalypse, Wulfstan begins his homily with a warning that the end of the world is nigh. Providing an exhaustive list of the crimes that he cites as further indicators of the apocalypse, Wulfstan urges the English to view these atrocities and misfortunes as punishments from God and look to him for forgiveness and redemption:

and gif we ænige bote gebidan scylan, þonne mote we þæs  
to God ernian bet þonne we ær þysan dydan. For þam mid  
miclan earnungan we geearnedan þa yrmða þe us on sittað,  
and mid swyþe micelan earnungan we þa bote motan æt  
God geræcan, gif hit sceal heonanforð godiende weorðan.

(And if we should experience any remedy, then we must earn it from God better than we did before. For with many desserts we earned the miseries that oppress us, and with very many desserts we then must attain remedy from God, if it should henceforth start improving.)

To remind his audience of the urgency of this message, Wulfstan lists the types of violence that the *flotmen* or *sæmæn*, the Vikings, have inflicted upon the English people. He notes that *we him gylðað singallice, and hy ys hynað dæghwanlice. Hy hergiað and hy bærnað, rypað and reafiað and to scipe læðað* (we repay them perpetually, and they humiliate us daily. They ravage and they burn, rape and plunder and carry [those goods] to their ships). In emphasizing the violence of the behavior, he unifies the English tribes as one unit against the heathen Vikings. In Wulfstan's sermon, the Vikings are vilified, their violence characterized as the result for offending God, thus aligning the Vikings with evil. In comparison to other religious texts, Wulfstan's homily barely touches upon the concept of the afterlife, underscoring instead the understanding of misfortune as Divine punishment. Regaining God's grace meant atoning for one's past sins and living a modest Christian life. At the end of the sermon, Wulfstan calls his audience to *að and wed wærlice healdan, and syme getrywða habban us betweenan butan uncræftan* (hold [our] oaths and pledges warily, and some loyalty have among ourselves except in deceits), calling to attention those heroic values of boasting and loyalty with which the Anglo-Saxons would be familiar. He pleads that they apply those same ideals to their practice of Christianity, and perhaps, though this application, they may ingratiate themselves with God. He adds that *utan gelome understandan þone miclam dom þe we*

*ealle to sculon, and beorgan us georne wið þone weallendan bryne hellewites, and geearninan us þa mærþa and þa myrhða þe God hæfð gegearwod* (let us consider often the many judgments that we all must assume, and save us fully against the burning fire of hell-torment, and earn ourselves the glory and the joy that God has prepared). The punishment of the soul in hell is mentioned almost as an afterthought in comparison to the joy and glory that those who follow Christ attain, once again asserting the importance of superimposing heroic elements over Christian concepts in the acceptance of the religion.

The concepts of violence and the heroic ethos are intertwined. As seen in Wulfstan's interpretation of violence, a reintegration of the heroic ideals into Christian belief was also a result. In Old English religious literature, both violence and the heroic were reinterpreted in ways that appealed to the heroic values that the Anglo-Saxons upheld. Most typically, violence, aggression, and disloyalty were ascribed to evil entities, vilifying them. Satan, in his lament in the poem *Christ and Satan*, is depicted as a pariah of the heavens, hell being his eternal exile. Punished not only for his pride but also for his disloyalty to his lord, he is thrown out of his home and now lacks the protection and treasures from a lord protector. In this instance, the punishments for going against the heroic code translate to Christian concepts of good and evil.

In *Beowulf*, the heathen monster Grendel is vilified, characterized as a descendant of Cain. His violent attacks on Hrothgar's people unify the tribe as a unit, and it is only through righteous violence that this evil can be vanquished. Scholars have presented readings of Beowulf as Christ, citing such examples as his descent to Grendel's mother's lake as analogous to the Harrowing of Hell. Beowulf, despite his embodying of heroic



values suited for wartime, becomes a symbol for good and the wielder of power over evil. Thus, in this poem, violence has two purposes: to unify a people against one enemy and to eradicate that enemy.

In another instance, violence is seen in the decapitation of the curly-haired Holofernus, who in his lust, unwittingly takes into his tent the devout Christianized Judith. Judith, pleading to God to preserve her maidenhood, performs a righteous killing in her strong perseverance to live a holy life in the name of her faith. Knowing that she has good on her side, she takes on the warrior traits of loyalty to her religion as well as an aggressive spirit, lopping off Holofernus's head without fear. In this instance, violence becomes a means by which one defends the virtues preached by Christianity.

In these examples from Old English literature, it is apparent that though the heroic virtues of aggression, bravery, and desire for glory still exist, they are rooted now within the Christian framework that dictates whether or not acts of violence are righteous. In vilifying those characters who possess an overabundance of heroic characteristics, such as Satan and Grendel, the value of humility is emphasized and commended lest one's soul be damned in eternal exile in hell. However, righteous violence was still encouraged, especially when done in the name of the Christian God. This righteous violence is seen in the depiction of Beowulf as Christ-like and in Judith's desire to keep herself pure. Pagan elements, including the heroic ethos and violence, were admitted by the Church as long as they were rightly sanctioned. It is, therefore, not surprising that these same elements are apparent in the Anglo-Saxon charms, for it was necessary for Anglo-Saxon society to understand the power of God and other Christian concepts as reinterpretations of those traditional practices by which they had long lived.

Some of the “reinterpretations” of pagan beliefs are simply superimposed Christian elements meant to substitute for pagan deities, ideas, or concepts. The following charm proclaims itself a remedy for barren or less-fertile fields:

And bere sippan ða turf to circean, and mæssepreost asinge feower  
mæssan ofer þan turfon, and wende man þæt grene to ðan  
weofode, and sippan gebringe man þa turf þær he ær wæron ær  
sunnan setlgange. And hæbbe him gæworht, of cwicbeame, feower  
Cristes-mælo and awrite on ælcon ende, Mattheus and Marcus,  
Lucan and Johannes. (Cockayne, vol 1. 399)

(And then take the sods to church, and have a mass-priest sing four masses over the sods, and have the green part of the sods face the altar, and then, before the sun sets, take them back to where they previously were taken. And have the farmer make four crosses on a piece of aspen and write at each corner, Matthew and Mark, Luke and John.)

The charm proceeds to instruct the farmer to draw crosses on the soil and bless each cross with a *Paternoster*, followed by a prayer to God, Mary, and the Holy Spirit. However, the charm ends with a final pleading to the “eorþan modor,” the earthly mother, to guard the fields from any “lyblaca,” witchcraft or black magic.

In this land-remedy charm, the *mæssepreost* is specified instead of just a priest, perhaps because the distinction had to be made between Christian and pagan priests. The term can be translated as “mass-priest” or also “high-priest,” which renders the term ambiguous. However, the inscriptions to be written on the corners of the piece of aspen

are undoubtedly Christian. Why the Gospels are invoked to deal with problems of fertility is a strange matter. None of these Gospel writers are related to the land or production. Germanic paganism finds close connections to the reverence of nature, as indicated previously in their worship of the barrows and groves around them. The invocation of Teutonic deities of fertility, such as Freya and Freyr, would make more sense, especially when the *eorþan modor* is mentioned.

Another example of the sort of reinterpretation that the Church promoted is seen in the burial practices of the Anglo-Saxons. According to pagan practice, the Anglo-Saxons constructed burrows wherein they inhumed their dead, either burying the body whole or cremating it first before placing the ash in decorated urns, which were, in turn, interred. The Anglo-Saxons ignored the pre-existing Romano-British cemeteries, and the Church allowed their pagan practice to continue. In many instances, artifacts were buried with the dead, ranging from jewelry, such as brooches and beads, to weapons, like swords and spears. Included in those mounds are such toiletries as combs and bowls, and bones of dead animals, perhaps as food offerings for the deceased.

Sarah Semple traces the significance of the mounds to the Anglo-Saxon people throughout their history, concluding that the burrows were indicators of not only bodies, but also of treasures included in those bodies' inhumations. Apart from having this purpose, the mounds also signified an almost sacred agreement between the living and the dead to keep these places unharmed and holy. Stealing from these graves resulted in one being labeled a *thief*, which carried an extremely opprobrious meaning since only evil spirits, associated with greed and death, were believed to enter those mounds, much like the dragon in *Beowulf*, who dwelled in a barrow filled with treasures.

In late-Saxon England, as Semple notes, these barrows became sites of internment for criminals, perhaps because of the cultural association with evil that the Church promulgated. Archaeological evidence supports the fact that churches were built next to existing burial mounds in order for converted Anglo-Saxons to embrace the idea of being inhumed in a sacred Christian space. The burial of one's dead was a pagan cultural remnant that the Anglo-Saxons clung to even after the conversion, and the Church superimposed their tenets over these pagan beliefs as best as they could in order for them to be accepted and practiced.

## **Chapter Two: The Anglo-Saxon Charms, Magic, and Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England**

Our modern understanding of magic is incompatible with the Anglo-Saxon definition of magic. In the modern sense, magic most commonly refers to illusion or deception, largely regarded as frivolity, superstition, or a means of entertainment. Magic resides at the polar opposite of science, which is, as we believe, based on fact and experimentation, and, therefore, is closer to truth. In this regard, magic is, in modern eyes, hollow and false. However, magic, to the Anglo-Saxons, as with many primitive peoples, signified something very different. To these Germanic peoples, magic and science were one and the same. Anglo-Saxon magic covered a much wider range of practices than what our modern concept of magic does, including *wortcraft* (herbalism), *starcraft* (astrology), *leechcraft* (medicine and healing), midwifery, and divination.

The textual sources of the charms and magical practices of the Anglo-Saxons were written down, as mentioned in the previous chapter, after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. They suggest a perception of magic and charms that differs from our contemporary conceptions. As demonstrated earlier, the Anglo-Saxons understood religion in terms of governmental demonstrations of power and dominion. They also viewed religion as a means by which cultural connections with the mythological past and traditional practices are preserved. Some of the cultural connections that they practiced would be regarded as “magical” or even “pagan” by our modern definitions. Some modern scholars have perceived the charms as fossils of folklore and superstition, but the scribes who first recorded the charms would have been

Christian, and accurately preserving the charms as remnants of a pagan religion would have been counterproductive to their missionary work. Current scholarship on the charms exposes the deeper impact and meaning of the charms to Anglo-Saxon society. The charms preserve folklore and myth, but they also preserve cultural traditions and influences, linguistic art, and heroic ideals.

The texts in which the Anglo-Saxon charms have survived are medical manuscripts dated from the tenth to twelfth centuries, compiled by Reverend Oswald Cockayne between 1864-66 into the three volumes of *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England*. The first volume of the work contains the *Herbarium of Apuleius Platonius*, originating from Pre-Christian and Greek sources, along with a Latin translation of the *Herbarium of Dioscorides*, the source of which was a sixth or seventh century Greek text. Both herbariums list various plants, their habitats, and their healing properties, providing a table of contents for easy reference. Each entry offers various methods of preparation and administration of the plants as medicines. The healing properties of animals and animal parts are also included in this volume in the *Medicina de Quadrupedibus* by Sextus Placitus. Like the herbariums, each entry of the *Quadrupedibus* offers specific instructions on preparing an animal's carcass for harvesting, and in some cases, how it should be properly slain. Leechdoms and charms from various manuscript fly leaves are also included in this volume.

The second volume of Cockayne's compilation is comprised of the *Leechbook*, ascribed to Bald. This volume is further divided into three treatises on medicine. The first chapter tends to illnesses that manifest themselves on the outer part of the body, such as cuts, paralysis, and burns. Outward bodily diseases found in animals, such as swollen

horse legs, are also included in this chapter. The second chapter contains leechdoms that belong to all inward bodily disorders, such as illnesses of the maw and liver, and complications of the humours. The scribe of the first two chapters writes in a scientific tone, subscribing to a causal relationship between disease and remedy or between the source of the ailment and the corresponding action to counter that source. Cockayne notes that although the *Leechbook* was written in one hand, the last chapter, which acts as an summary of the previous treatises or an afterword, is “somewhat... monkish [in] character,” suggesting a possible attempt by the scribe to Christianize the text (xx).

The final volume of the collection contains the *Lacnunga*, a collection of prescriptions from British Library MS. Harley 585. The *Lacnunga*, as Godfrid Storms observes, in comparison to the more classically-based and systematically-organized *Leechbook*, contains more sections that are connected with magic than those that are not (18). Storms notes that although many of the remedies in the *Lacnunga* are similar to those found in the *Leechbook*, the *Lacungas*’ scribe lacks a sense of organization or thematic unity. Frequently, the scribe deviates from a theme, adding unexplained and unrelated remedies to a section. For instance, section 71 records a salve against lice; 72 a drink against lice; 73 a cure against melancholy; 74 a Latin charm against flying venom; and 75 and 76 an Old English charm against a sudden stitch; and then 77 reverts to the topic of lice (Storms 18). Based on this inconsistency and tangential style of writing, the scribe of the *Lacnunga* seems to have written for a different audience, one who may have considered magic and medico-science in the same regard.

Another section of this volume is headed *Prognostics*, which contains lunar forecasts, calendars, and meanings of dreams, and significant dates for certain leechdoms

to gain more efficacy. Included in this section is a list of *deriendlic dagas* or mischievous days, days wherein taking prescriptions was believed to be futile or when charms would prove useless to chant or perform. A catalog of favorable moon dates is also furnished by the recorder. This last volume has garnered much attention from many scholars because of its peculiar character. The intermingling of pagan and Christian elements is most evident in the *Lacnunga* and is the main topic of a study conducted by J. H. G. Grattan and Charles Singer, who explore the myriad sources of Anglo-Saxon magical practices. By looking at the cultural origins of the charms and other Anglo-Saxon magical practices, we see the abundance of influences and the richness of the magical culture of the Anglo-Saxons.

These magico-medicinal texts demonstrate that the Anglo-Saxon magical practices originated from varied sources. Most of the texts are translations of Latin works, many of which drew upon Pre-Christian or Greek writings. The *Prognostics* displays practices drawn from Byzantine beliefs in theurgy; furthermore, Grattan and Singer conclude that linguistic evidence found in some of the charms points to Celtic influence (64). While the charms and herbal recipes in these volumes are our main source for evidence for magical practices in Anglo-Saxon England, we must remember that the Anglo-Saxons may have continued practicing the pagan beliefs their tribes shared with other Germanic peoples. Teutonic influence is indicated in such charms as “Woden's Nine Herb Charm” and in beliefs that worms, elves, and dwarves are agents of disease and misfortune.

Tacitus noted the closeness of the Germanic peoples to nature and nature worship, which is similarly associated with primitive practices. Storms reasons that emotions were



integral in the world view of primitive man, holding as much stock as intellectual reasoning. In this line of thinking, people looked at an object as a part of a larger system, as part of a whole (Storms 35). Each object was regarded as an essential piece of the world that surrounded it. The Anglo-Saxons used magic as a means to understand and communicate with the world around them. This comprehension of magic stems from the Teutonic belief in animism. Storms asserts that “magic assumes the existence of an invisible, intangible, and impersonal power” (1). In the Anglo-Saxon belief system, however, this invisible power did not necessarily originate from one source. Animism, the belief in the existence and activity of spirits, dictates that every object has a spirit. Francis Peabody Magoun Jr. observes that the Anglo-Saxons, much like their North-Germanic brethren, possessed a developed understanding of the concept of *mana*, which he defines as “a force utterly distinct from mere physical power or strength, the possession of which assures success, good fortune, and the like to its possessor” (34). The *mana* in a man could be interpreted as his personal “good luck,” his “spirit,” his “life force,” or his “soul.” This *mana* could be passed on to other objects or to other people during life and, most especially, at the moment of death. Everything else around man also had *mana*—from the gods that he worshiped, to the plants he used in herbal remedies, to the streams and soil that composed the terrain around him.

Magoun notes that *mana* is referred to in the charms by various terms: *cræft*, *mægen*, and *miht* (35). All these words translate to the ordinary sense of strength or power, but within the context of the charms, they take on an entirely different meaning. The following charm is chanted against the theft of cattle:

Gyf hyt hwa gedo, ne gedige hit him næfre!

Binnan þrym nihtum cunne ic his *mihta*,

his *mægen*, and his *mundcræftas*. (Cockayne, vol. 1 384).

(If anyone does this, may it never profit him!

Within three nights I will know his might,

his strength, and the powers that protect him.)

The *mihta* and the *mægen* refer to the *mana* of the thief, not his physical strength. The thief's *mundcræftas* are the powers that aid him in fulfilling his crime. An advantage is granted the victim of the theft if he is able to gain knowledge of the thief's *mana*. Secrecy is essential for the thief to execute successfully his crime. It is what ensures that his *mundcræftas* continue to protect him. If the source of the perpetrator's *mundcræftas* is unknown, the victim of the theft cannot hope to retrieve his stolen cattle.

Secrecy in magic is another characteristic of Teutonic influence. This trait coincides with the use of runes among the Germanic peoples. Runes were symbols used to represent the spirits or *mana* of nature, the qualities of the gods, or the secrets of *wyrd* (which, for the purpose of this thesis, I translate as fate). The Germans engraved the runes on *runakeffle*, pieces of wood or stone used in the practice of divination or casting lots. Men communicated with the gods and the spirits of the world through runes, and they also were means of knowing the future or one's destiny. Runes were also used as talismans, placed in various weapons to invoke the powers or qualities upheld by specific gods. The Old English word *run* takes many meanings; it can refer to a mystery, a secret, or a letter. The verb *runian* means to whisper or to conspire. Tony Linsell notes that the abundance of the meanings of the word *run* “tends to support the view that the idea

represented by the rune symbol was of first importance and that the symbol and its name were of secondary importance” (53). The idea that the meaning preceded the symbol and name is supported by the Anglo-Saxon worship of barrows and also by the charms.

Certainty and specificity were of little consequence to the Anglo-Saxon mind. Secrecy gave magic its power. The idea that a charm would work gave the charm its efficacy. Its mystery contributed to its allure and prevalence. Storms offers that when one performed acts of magic, “a certain part of the process can be seen, but the words used to accompany the ritual will generally be kept a secret” (2). He observes that this practice is maintained in the Eddic poems wherein Oðinn reveals that he knows certain charms, but refuses to describe the charm's particularities or the logic by which they work. Secrecy and generality may explain why some charms include gibberish incantations. In the “Charm Against a Worm,” we encounter such a phrase:

Wið ðon þe mon oððe nyten wurm gedrince, gyf hyt sy  
wæpnedcynnes, sing ðis leoð in þæt swiðre eare þe her æfter  
awriten is; git hit sy wifcynnes, sing in þæt wynstre eare: *Gonomil  
orgomil marbumil, marbsairamum tofeð tengo, docuillo biran  
cuiðær, cæfmiil scuiht cuillo scuiht, cuib duill marbsiramum.*

(Cockayne, vol 3 p.11)

(If a man or beast drink a worm, if it be of the male sex, sing this  
song in the right ear, that is written hereafter; if it be of the female  
sex, sing it in the left ear: *Gonomil orgomil marbumil,  
marbsairamum tofeð tengo, docuillo biran cuiðær, cæfmiil scuiht  
cuillo scuiht, cuib duill marbsiramum*)

The italicized script indicates the gibberish that the charm prescribes as a song or chant to accompany the actions necessary to execute successfully the charm. Like the runes, the gibberish phrase acts as a symbol, coming secondary to the idea that lies behind it. It did not matter that the words were incomprehensible to the chanter or the victim. The belief that the lyrics' end was to heal the oppressed was assurance enough. The *mana* invoked would heal the affliction.

The existence of *mana* and its transferability became the pagan explanations for health or disease, victory or defeat, prosperity or misfortune. The remedies prescribed to an ailment, consequently, are causal and logical solutions. The charm against *blæce*, skin irritations or leprosy, is an example:

Genim gose smero and nīpewearde elenan and haran-sprecel,  
 bisceopwyr̥t and hegrifan; þa feower wyr̥ta cnuwa tosomme wel,  
 awring, do þær on ealdre sapan cucler fulne. Gif þu hæbbe lytel  
 eles, meng wīþ swīþe and on niht alyþre. Scearpa þone sweoran  
 ofer sunnan setlgange, geot swigende þæt blod on yrnende wæter,  
 spiw þriwa æfter, cweþ þonne: Hafa þu þas unhæle, and gewit  
 awayg mid. (Cockayne vol. 2 p.77)

(Take goose fat and the lower parts of the elecampane and viper's  
 bugloss, bishopwort and goose grass; pound the four worts together  
 well, squeeze them out, add to it a spoonful of old soap. If you have  
 a little oil, mix it thoroughly and lather at night. Scarify the neck  
 during the sunset, pour the blood silently onto the running water,  
 spit thrice afterwards, and say thus: Have thou this ill-health, and

depart with it)

The charm includes a preparation of a salve from an assembly of herbs mixed with fats. These instructions are followed by steps depicting the necessary scarification of the victim's neck by the leech, drawing and collecting the blood to be poured silently onto running water. After spitting thrice, a verbal incantation seals the charm. It is important to note here that the blood is disposed specifically in running water. John Wachter notes that water was perceived to “provide a focus for some sort of spirit which represented the power and movement of water, which was often endowed with healing properties” (qtd. in Griffiths 48). Water evoked cleanliness and purification; its *mana* would evoke the same qualities. The immersion of a tainted object in the water washed it and rendered it renewed. Storms explains that “the water from a stream is clearer and fresher than that of a pool, and its murmuring sound evokes the impression that it is alive, active, and quickening, that nymphs and elves are living in the water” (74). The disease of the victim, transferred onto his blood, would be carried away by the *mana* of the water, which is directly addressed in the ending incantation. For the Anglo-Saxon, this treatment of the disease as being transferable from tainted blood to clean water is as logical as modern medical treatments are to us. They regarded charms as powerful solutions that corresponded to and utilized the belief system that they held as truth.

Charm studies have come far from regarding the charms as mere frivolities or superstition, and we are increasingly moving closer to understanding the complex world view of the Anglo-Saxons. The concept that seems to permeate their culture is interconnectedness. We see this interconnectedness in the Anglo-Saxon perception of religion, government, mythology, and magic. John Leyerle demonstrates that this

interconnectedness is also indicative of how Old English literature operated, defining it in the context of the dominant art form: interlacing. The Anglo-Saxons seemed to understand the world and themselves as connected to their past, mythological or historical, and their present. It would be foolish to assume that the charms they performed were nothing else but folklore or superstitions.

Felix Grendon published his analysis of the charms in 1909. Prior to his work, translation of the charms was the major concern among scholars. In his research, Grendon supplies general characteristics of the charms. He selects one hundred and forty-six charms, neglecting those found in herbologies. Grendon notes ten general qualities that Anglo-Saxon charms may possess:

1. Narrative Introduction
2. Appeal to a Superior Spirit
3. Writing or Pronouncing of Potent Letters or Names
4. Methods of Dealing with Disease-Demons
5. Boast of Power by the Exorcist
6. Ceremonial Directions to Patients and Exorcist
7. Singing of Incantations
8. Statement of Time for Performance of Rite
9. Sympathy and Association of Ideas
10. Minor Superstition Practices

In his discussions of each of these characteristics, Grendon provides points of similarities with Hindi, Teutonic, or other Indo-European charms, exposing some of the unique qualities of the charms such as gibberish, the association of names with the objects

denoted, and the connection of the charms to German mythology. Grendon further categorizes the selected charms into five groups:

1. Exorcisms
2. Herbal Remedies
3. Disease-transferring Charms
4. Amulet Charms
5. Charm Remedies.

In each category, Grendon attempts to exact a specific formula for each of the classifications, using those characteristics previously presented as criteria.

While Grendon presents common characteristics and categorizes the charms in the attempt to discover a general formula, he only addresses topically the method of thinking or the process by which the Anglo-Saxons believed their charms worked. He never questions the translations or interpretations of the charms, opting to regard them as relics of a forgotten past, the superstitious practices of a primitive people. Grendon focuses on the pagan aspects of the charms, regarding any Christian element as superficial and easily disregarded. However, Grendon's work moved scholars to question the treatment of charms as categories and the linguistic accuracy of previous translations.

As early as 1911, such scholars as A. R. Skemp critiqued Grendon's approach to the charms, asserting that alternative interpretations must be considered to replace and explain some of Grendon's conclusions, which Skemp felt were forced or mistranslated. Skemp also proposed an alternative approach to understanding the charms, recommending his own translations of certain obscure key words and rearrangements of lines to reveal other meanings. Though Skemp's research furthered charm studies by

questioning the sources themselves before analyzing the charms, Skemp continued to view the charms as cultural peculiarities that stand alone, were mainly superstition, and were unrelated to any other facet of Anglo-Saxon culture.

In 1993, M. L. Cameron demonstrated that most of the Anglo-Saxon charms are not wholly rooted in superstition and indeed have modern medicinal merit. Cameron's work concentrates mostly on herbal charms and finding connections with the healing properties of plants. He asserts, though, that some charms, especially those found in the *Lacnunga*, are based on folklore (47). Cameron's work proves the effectiveness of many herbal charms, mostly found in the herbariums, which were of Greek origin. His work, published as an article on medicine, is limited by our modern denotation of medicine and its polar relationship with magico-medicinal practices. Dismissing those charms found in the *Lacnunga* as based on folklore reveals an undeveloped understanding of the culture's perception of their form of medicine.

Charm studies in the past thirty years has increasingly moved away from focusing on the charms as fragments of pagan practices with superimposed Christian tenets, and the bulk of Grendon's classifications has been ignored. Though such scholars as Karen Louise Jolly, Judith Vaughan-Sterling, and L. M. C. Weston still analyze the charms in categories, they do not limit themselves to exacting a formula that applies to all the charms, nor do they approach their categories as rigidly or as generally as Grendon did. Current scholars aim to explore the ways in which the charms fit into the culture and belief system of the Anglo-Saxon people.

Vaughan-Sterling concentrates on metrical charms, urging an analysis that juxtaposes them to Anglo-Saxon poetry. She believes that the charms were much more



embedded in the culture than just being pagan practices carried over by tradition. She asserts that the metrical charms and Old English poetry share elements that suggest that they worked under the same system. These elements include

1. A belief in the supernatural
2. References to the mythological past
3. References to a Christian history
4. Allusions to legendary people or place names
5. Allusions to war-like society

Vaughan-Sterling also lists the linguistic similarities of the metrical charms and poetry, namely alliteration, rhyme, metricity, formulaic language, and the use of rhetoric.

Because of these similarities, Vaughan-Sterling asserts that the speech of both magic and poetry are exclusive—they employ words and terms that are not used in daily conversation, and thus emphasize their sanctity. She concludes that “poetry [aims] to satisfy and entertain the reader or listener, magic [tries] to enlist the aid of powerful forces through persuasion and exhortation—and both ritual magic and poetry employ similar rhetorical techniques to attain their ends” (200). Vaughan-Sterling's view of the similarities of poetry and magic displays the interconnectedness of the charms with the literature of the Anglo-Saxons, which they regarded as preservers of their history, tradition, and culture. But Vaughan-Sterling fails to fully explain the permeance of the Anglo-Saxon culture in the charms or to explain the coexistence of both pagan and Christian elements.

The performative aspect of the charms is the focal topic of Lori Ann Garner's analysis. Like Vaughan-Sterling, Garner likens the charms to poetry, but concentrates on

the prompts to sing or speak certain incantations in the charms, asserting that these elements are poetry in performance. Thus, a performance-based analysis is necessary to fully comprehend the scope and function of the charms in Anglo-Saxon society. Garner believes that applying this method of analysis breaks down the binaries that critics in the past have constructed in viewing the charms as literary products. These binaries—living ritual vs static text; Christian vs pagan; poetry vs science; verbal vs non-verbal—reduce and hinder our understanding of the charms and their place in society (Garner 21). Garner asserts that some passages that scholars have deemed “gibberish” are, in actuality, shorthand forms of more elaborate rituals. Taking mythological elements of some charms, she concludes that the charms function as translators of supernatural elements into the human world. While I agree with Garner on the importance of viewing the charms as performance that leads to the deconstruction of the stringent binaries that cloud our modern understanding of the charms, I believe that her conclusions that the charms are translators of the supernatural and the gibberish as symbols of elaborate rituals are misconceived, based on a lack of understanding of the concepts of magic and the world view of the Anglo-Saxons. Magic was not only poetry; it was also medicine, science, and tradition.

While Vaughan-Sterling and Garner explore the similarities between charms and poetry and their implications about Anglo-Saxon culture, Weston seeks to examine another element often forgotten—gender. In her analysis, Weston establishes the normative tone of charms as being male. She notes that among all of the known charms, a woman's voice is heard in only five. These charms, dealing with fertility and childbirth, help define the perception of power allowed to women at the time. Her work investigates

these “childbirth charms” in light of women as powerful and ambiguous beings. Weston establishes the idea of women as ambiguous beings, teetering between the human and the supernatural world because of their menstrual cycles which connect them with the moon and their ability to carry and produce human life. Seen in this light, the woman chanting the “childbirth charms” takes charge for her own healing. The chanter recognizes and believes in her power to defy human boundaries and invoke supernatural powers. The “childbirth charms” not only imply that *mana* was able to heal and strengthen, but also that women were still believed to have possession of chthonic knowledge, the ancient notion that females had the innate ability to reconcile opposites. Weston's work is remarkable in that she prods at the meaning of the pagan elements of the charms, exposing the importance of women to Anglo-Saxon pagan practices before the conversion. However, Weston fails to explain why the patriarchal Church allowed these charms that celebrated the power of the female to be practiced.

Other types of “word magic” have also garnered current scholarly interest. Curses function like the charms but are more characteristic of dark magic than that of the healing or protective purposes of the charms. Brenda Danet and Bryna Bogoch investigate the curses found in Anglo-Saxon legal documents, concluding that they are “a type of oral residue and evidence of growing awareness of the performative potential of writing” (132). Danet and Bogoch explore the perception of the written word in a largely oral society. During the conversion of England, missionaries and members of the clergy brought with them the writing system. Danet and Bogoch note that curses were attached to the end of the manuscripts that the religious brought with them to protect those documents. It became a natural step to include such curses in legal documents to ensure

that they continued to hold power. Danet and Bogoch classify the legal curses into four categories:

1. Serious warning curses
2. serious voodoo curses
3. ludic warning curses
4. ludic categorical curses.

Since these legal curses originated from a Christian practice, most of them invoke the Christian punishment of damnation:

Se þe þise quide wenden wille: Wende god his ansene from him on  
domisday.

*He who wishes to turn against this agreement: May God turn his  
face away from him on Judgment Day* [Will of Bishop Æthelmer,  
1047-70 A.D. qtd. In Danet and Bogoch 140]

A more severe punishment is invoked in the following curse:

Gif he þonne hwa do, God hine fordo ge mid sawle ge mid  
lichoman ge her ge on þan to feondan. Buton io hit self on oþer  
wænde.

*If he does so (alter the will), may God destroy both his soul and his  
body, both here and in the future. Unless I myself change it (the  
will).* [Will of Bishop Ælfsige, 955-958 A.D. Qtd in Danet and  
Bogoch 141]

In this curse, especially emphasized in the final line, man wields the power to call upon God's wrath and direct his actions. Just as in the charms, in which belief and

manipulation of *mana* are essential to attain the victim's goal, faith in God and his power bind man to keep his promise to hold true to an agreement. Danet and Bogoch agree that the charms work as a type of “verbal control” that was used by the Church in order to control the behavior of the community, translated into secular agreements. In their study, Danet and Bogoch conclude that these curses work to enhance the authority of the legal documents in an increasingly literate society.

Danet and Bogoch's work displays the influence that Christianity had on Anglo-Saxon law, but they do not reinforce the interconnectedness that was prevalent in Anglo-Saxon culture. While the influence of Christianity on Anglo-Saxon religion as exhibited in the charms has been a topic that scholars have raised and discussed in the past, as noted earlier, these scholars have regarded the Christian coloring of the Charms as superficial. This may well be the case for some charms, such as the following used to recover lost animals:

Gif feoh sy undernumen, gif it sy hors, sing on his feteran oþþe on  
his bridele. Gif hit sy oðer feoh, sing on þæt fotspor and ontend  
þreo candela and dryp on þæt hofræc þæt wex þriwa. Ne mæg hit  
þe nan mann forhelan. Gif hit sy innorf, sing þu hit on feower  
healfa ðin and sing ærest uprihte hit: And Petur, Pol, Patric, Pilip,  
Marie, Brigit, Felic: in nomine dei et chiric qui querit inuenit.  
(Cockayne vol 1, 393)

(If beasts are stolen, if it be a horse, sing this on his fetters or over  
his bridle. If it be another beast, sing this over its hoof-tracks and  
light three candles and drip the wax over those tracks three times.

No man may hide them. If it be (other) goods, sing this on your  
four sides and sing first, looking upwards: “Peter, Paul, Patrick,  
Philip, Mary, Bridget, Felicity. In the name of the Lord and the  
Church: He who seeks shall find.”)

The last two lines of the charm—which include a list of holy figures, an invocation of God's name, and a Biblical passage—could easily have been added at the end of the charm to validate its usage within the Christian faith. Though we may interpret these lines as replacements for a pagan chant, the similarity to the conventions of Christian prayers cannot be ignored. The superimposing of Christian elements over a pagan charm seems to validate its usage in a Christian society.

As early as the late seventh century, laws against pagan practices, that is, magic, have been recorded in religious manuscripts. “The Penitential of Theodore,” the archbishop of Canterbury from 668-690, provides examples of rituals that were frowned upon by the Church and the interpretations that the clergy applied towards these practices. Section fifteen of “The Penitential” is headed “Of the Worship of Idols” and offers a short list of these pagan practices:

1. He who sacrifices to demons in trivial matters shall do penance for one year; but he who [does so] in serious matters shall do penance for ten years.
2. If any woman puts her daughter upon a roof or into an oven for the cure of a fever, she shall do penance for seven years.
3. He who causes grains to be burned where a man has died, for the health of the living and of the house, shall do penance for five years.
4. If a woman performs diabolical incantations or divinations, she shall do

penance for one year... Of this matter is it said in the canon: he who celebrates auguries, omens from birds, or dreams, or any divinations according to the custom of the heathen, or introduces such people into his house, in seeking out any trick of the magicians—when these become penitents, if they belong to the clergy they shall be cast out; but if they are secular persons they shall do penance for five years (“Penitential of Theodore” 198).

The same entries are repeated in other handbooks of penance well into the late Saxon era, such as the “Confessional of Egbert”, which denotes that the Christianized Anglo-Saxons continued to perform these rituals that the Church deemed “pagan,” and the practice of superimposing Christian elements onto these rituals may have been ineffective.

The second and third entries of the section reappear in later writings, but are not accompanied by any sort of explanation as to why or exactly how those rituals were effective. We can hypothesize that the ideas of transference and exorcism ascribed to sympathetic magic may have been at work in these rituals. The first entry in the *Penitential* refers to demon sacrifice, but the terms *serious* and *trivial* are ill-defined, lacking any sort of demarcation. Additionally, the word *demon* is ambiguous and, aside from referring to Satan, it could very well refer to the *mana* that the Anglo-Saxons believed existed in all things, vilified through the Christian lens. The word *demon* stems from the Greek word *daimon*, or spirit, without regard to its moral character. This same ambiguity is seen in the fourth entry of the section, in reference to the “diabolical incantations or divinations.” What makes these incantations diabolical? That they are invoked in the name of demons or that they are incantations made to the demons?

To explain this ambiguity, I turn to Jolly's work explaining the Late Anglo-Saxon

Christian perception of magic. Jolly draws her sources from the sermons of Ælfric, the prolific Benedictine monk who, in turn, based his philosophy on the writings of Augustine (Jolly, “Anglo-Saxon Charms” 283). According to Augustine, magic was in direct opposition to miracles. Miracles, the work of God and those who believed in Him, are a sign of God's power. The devil, whom Augustine aligned with magic, could imitate God's signs and could even heal afflictions, but only if he had himself inflicted the injuries he aims to heal (“Anglo-Saxon Charms” 282-3). In this explanation, magic, stripped of all its merit and power, is rendered hollow and illusory. *Mana* is reinterpreted as tricks of the devil, a mere shade in comparison to the “true leech”-- God himself (“Anglo-Saxon Charms” 285). Therefore, the ambiguity of the laws found in the *Penitential* is dependent upon the consciousness of those who are engaged in the ritual. If they perform the chant or the divination relying on *mana* or other magical beliefs, they are engaging in works of the devil. If they invoke the power of God, his saints, or other holy Christian figures, they become intercessors to miracles; their magic reinterpreted as prayers.

Jolly has also studied the Elf Charms found in the *Leechbook* and the *Lacnunga*. She observes that elves, dwarves, and other supernatural beings were believed to be the source of many afflictions. Her readings of the Elf Charms challenge the interpretations made by such scholars as Storms and Grendon, who base their understanding on the rigid dichotomy of pagan vs. Christian. In one instance, Jolly presents her reading of the popular charm “*Wið Færstice*” (Against a Sudden Stitch) that scholars have traditionally classified as pagan. Jolly asserts that this charm (which will be discussed further in the following chapter), despite the lack of overt Christian references, embodied the idea of



“counter[ing] evil spiritual agencies with stronger spiritual power” that could be compared to the “victory of monks over evil temptations or Christian kings against pagan monarchs” (*Popular Religion* 140). Jolly believes that the possible interpretation of the charm in this light ensured its survival into the Christian *Leechbooks* and in the popular practice of Late Saxon England.

Jolly's work concentrates on the overt signs of paganism in the charms. The vilification of pagan elements is the focus of her work and propels her understanding of the Anglo-Saxon culture that other scholars fail to comprehend. However, Jolly neglects to look at the pagan elements that are so imbued within the Anglo-Saxon culture and so hidden in the charms, which is the topic of my study. My approach to analyzing the charms follows in the same vein as Jolly's research in that I believe that the charms are neither strictly Christian or strictly pagan, but possess their own distinct quality that requires a dual interpretation that would have satisfied both pagan and Christian requirements. However, I also support that the idea of interconnectedness aided in the preservation of these charms into Christianized Anglo-Saxon society. The Anglo-Saxons must have viewed the charms as more than just prayers or pagan traditions.

My study focuses on the violence that the pagan Anglo-Saxons held in high regard as defining of their culture, preserving their history, and allowing them to connect with their mythological traditions. As emphasized in the Chapter One, violence was perceived as a legitimate means by which Christianity could be spread, despite the Christian tenets of passivity, patience, and compassion. Bede forwards evidence of the clergy quickly quelling violence among Christian Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, which may have contributed to the dissolution of the warrior culture and their dependence on war

and pillaging. Despite this, remnants of the warrior culture continued to permeate the charms. The following chapter considers charms that display the heroic qualities idealized by the Anglo-Saxon culture and juxtaposes them with the Christian tenets that preached otherwise. Violence in the charms was regarded as permissible by the Church as long as it was reinterpreted within the Christian framework. The charms that I analyze could be interpreted in a way that conformed with the Anglo-Saxon heroic culture, but also possessed Christian significance. Moreover, the continual practice of these Christian/pagan hybrid charms and the expectation of their efficacy and power denote that the charms were deeply understood and revered by the Anglo-Saxons for their various connections to different facets of their culture.

### Chapter Three: Christianity, Violence, and the Anglo-Saxon Charms

When Augustine and his followers arrived in England in 597, they publicly demonstrated the values of humility, passivity, and compassion, “applying themselves to frequent prayer, watching and fasting; preaching the word of life to as many as they could; despising all worldly things, as not belonging to them; receiving only their necessary food from those they taught; living themselves in all respects comfortable to what they prescribed to others, and being always disposed to suffer any adversity” (Bede 36-37). Their behavior impressed King Ælfric so much that he allowed the conversion and practice of Christianity in his kingdom, later converting to the faith himself. Because warring between tribes was still a frequent occurrence, violence was necessary in assuring the security of one's territories and people. At this early stage of the conversion period, it seems that the Church depended on violence to spread their religion among other Anglo-Saxon tribes, hoping that a converted monarch would propagate the religion along with his dominion. In late-Saxon times, the Christian view on violence changed. Literature from the tenth century onwards indicates that the heroic qualities idealized by the Anglo-Saxons became reinterpreted to fit the Christian worldview.

Violence, though rampant among the Anglo-Saxon Christians, was condemned by such clergymen as Wulfstan. In his *Sermo Lupi Ad Anglos* written during the early eleventh century, Wulfstan interprets the Viking invasions as punishments from God for the atrocious actions that the Anglo-Saxons have continued to practice. He critiques the practices of the Anglo-Saxons, noting the following sins that, in his Christian viewpoint, have led to the suffering of the Anglo-Saxons under the Viking attacks:

her syndan mannslogan and mægslagan and mæsserbanan and  
 mynsterhatan; and her syndan mansworan and morþorwyrhtan.  
 And her syndan myltestran and bearnmyrðran and fule forlegene  
 horingas manege. And her syndan wiccan and wælcyrrian, and her  
 syndan ryperas and reaferas...(ln 129-133)

(Here are the man-slayers and kinsmen-slayers and priest-slayers  
 and monastery-persecutors; and here are perjurers and murderers.  
 And here are harlots and child-killers and vile, adulterous  
 fornicators many, and here are witches and sorceresses, and here  
 are robbers and reavers...)

Wulfstan explains that the people's lack of shame for these sins, as well as their refusal to atone for them, has incurred the wrath of God. Violence begets violence in Wulfstan's sermon, and he reasons that if the people “don swa us þearf is, gebugan to rihte and be suman dæle, unriht forlætan and betan swyþe georne” (do what is needed from [them], submit to the law, and in some measure forsake injustice and atone for such [sins] earnestly), then God will reward them with peace (ln 153-54). Though the people to whom Wulfstan preaches are capable of performing acts of violence, Wulfstan establishes that the violence they are experiencing at the hands of the Vikings results from their own condemnable actions.

The Church reinterpreted the fear from the Vikings in order to motivate the Anglo-Saxon Christians to tend to what the Church deemed was more important than their earthly lives—their souls. Reinterpreting the physical violence they experienced as punishment from God was one way in which the Anglo-Saxons could incorporate such

Christian tenets as passivity and humility into their lives. In exchange for this behavior, despite the violence they might incur physically, their souls would be rewarded eternal glory in the afterlife.

Reinterpretations of the Anglo-Saxon heroic ideals are seen in various Old English poems. *The Dream of the Rood*, as Bruce Mitchell asserts, is the central document for understanding paradoxes of the Christian and Pagan conflicts (256). This work fuses the values upheld by the Church with the heroic qualities upheld by the Anglo-Saxons, reframing those ideals within a Christian mindset. In this poem, Christ is depicted as embodying aggression, bravery, and stoicism in contrast to the Cross that stands for moderation, patience, and humility. The Cross tells the dreamer of the importance of the soul, assuring him that “bereð beacna selest/ ac ðurh ða rode sceal rice gesecan/ of eorðwege æghwylc sawl” (each soul carries the best beacon, but through the cross, [it] shall seek out the kingdom away from the earthly path) (ln 119-20). The poem undercuts the value of earthly life, and the Cross promises that if one embodies the Christian qualities that he bears, then one’s soul is assured a place in the kingdom of heaven.

In the poem *Soul and Body*, the relationship between the corporeal and the spirit is underscored even more. The poem opens with a warning: “Huru, ðæs behofaþ hæleþa æghwylc/ þæt he his sawle sið sylfa bewitige,/ hu þæt bið deoplic þonne se deað cymeð,/ asundrað þa sibbe þa þe ær somud wæron,/ lic ond sawle!” (Certainly, this behooves every man/ that he himself consider his soul’s journey,/ how fundamental it is that when death comes,/ [it] separates the relationship that was previously joined/soul and body!) (ln 1-5a). This poem shifts the concern from mortal life to life after death, concentrating

on the nourishment of the soul as the primary purpose of man's life on earth.

The Church used violent imagery to depict hell as a hateful place of punishment for disloyalty to God in an attempt to refocus the Anglo-Saxon's priorities to enriching the soul. The punishment of Satan and his followers in *Satan in Hell (Genesis B)* can be understood in terms of the punishment of a disloyal warrior to his lord. God, the ring-giver, casts out Satan and those who chose to turn against heaven and throws them to a perpetually dark pit where "fyr edneowe [...] forst fyrnum cald: symble fyr oððe gar" (fire [was constantly] renewed [...] frost intensely cold: [there was] constant fire or else a storm of spears) (ln 314-16). This description would have incited fear among the Anglo-Saxons for whom the darkness signified the supernatural, the uncertain, and the unexplainable. As with the imagery in *Beowulf*, with the meadhall as the sole source of light and, thus, protection, the bright heaven became a consolation for the Anglo-Saxons.

Hell was also depicted as a place where those who were violent against God were exiled. In *Satan's Lament (Christ and Satan)*, Satan describes his punishment thus:

Forðon, ic sceal hean and earm	hweorfan ðy widor,
wadan wræclastas,	wuldre benemed,
duguðum bedeled,	nænigne dream agan
uppe mid ænglum. (ln 119-122a)	

(Therefore, I must, poor and miserable, wander widely  
[and] traverse the paths of exile, deprived of glory,  
stripped of power, possessing none of the joys  
of heaven among the angels)

Re-working violence as offensive to God and punishable by exile may have moved some people to reconsider their sinful actions, but as evidenced by Wulfstan's homily, it was still pervasive throughout the period.

Violence was reinterpreted in many Old English Christian works. Finding violence in the charms, however, is a difficult task, not only because the Church condemned violence, as in the sermon of Wulfstan, but also because the charms themselves were subjected to the scrutiny of the Church laws. Because the charms were considered pagan, their practice was banned, as seen in the laws discussed in Chapter Two. The charms' survival and recording in manuscripts by clerics may indicate a reinterpretation of the charm's pagan elements, including any heroic qualities, to fit the Christian worldview. Another possibility for their survival may have been that the Church recognized the charms' legitimate medicinal values.

Though each of the seven charms I will discuss contains an act or reference to violence, the extent to which pagan elements melded with Christian elements differ. For Charms 1, 2 and 5, the pagan elements overshadow any Christian references. Of these charms, only one, Charm 1, comes from the *Leechbook*, a compilation of English leeches mainly from Latin sources. Written in Winchester in the tenth century, these leeches provided the *leech* or doctor with everyday remedies and recipes for common ailments. Charms 2 and 5 come from the *Medicina de Quadrupedibus* of *Sextus Placitus* and the *Lacnunga*, respectively. Both works are Old English version of the Latin titles found in a collection of medicinal tracts available in four manuscripts: three from the eleventh century, and one from the twelfth century. These Latin medicinal works originate in Pre-Christian and Greek sources. Among the charms I have selected to analyze for this work,

Charms 1, 2, and 5 display the least number of Christian references, most of which are topical.

The remaining charms, Charms 3, 4, 6, and 7, come from eleventh-century manuscripts of more Christian significance, and the amount of Christian reference as well as the fusion of Christian elements with the pagan elements is much greater than in Charms 1, 2, and 5. Charm 6 comes from MS. CCCC 391, also known as *St. Wulfstan's Portiforium*, which was produced in Worcester, written in Latin and English. The *Portiforium* includes calendars of holy days, Gallic Psalters, hymns, and devotional prayers. Charms 3, 4, and 7 are found in the margins of MS. CCCC 41, *The History of Bede in the Anglo-Saxon Version*. In this manuscript are masses for saints, holy days, and Latin prayers. Though Charms 3, 4, 6, and 7 contain more Christian references than do Charms 1, 2, and 5, Charms 6 and 7 stand out in that they are more like prayers than charms.

Based on the manuscript sources, it seems that the Church's attitudes towards the charms evolved from a mere superimposition of Christian phrases on pagan charms, such as in the *Leechbook*, to a Christianization that involved the saturation of Christian references and metaphors fully fused with pagan concepts that would resonate among the people. The ramifications of this change in attitudes will be further discussed in the concluding chapter of this work.

#### **A. Charms that Require a Violent Act**

The most obvious form of violence, aggressive violence, is present in very few of the charms, and the violence in those charms is directed towards animals. While numerous charms require parts of animals in recipes, only a few charms include specific



directions on harvesting or preparing an animal for a recipe. Of the four that I have discovered, the two treated in this chapter are the longest ones and are accompanied by more steps than just taking an animal's tail or stabbing its side. In the following charms, the violent act of slaying, stabbing, or wounding an animal is required in order for the charm to be effective:

Charm 1: A Charm for Swollen Eyes

Wiþ afpollenum eagem, genim cucune hrefn, ado þa eagan of, and eft, cucune gebring on wætre. And do þa eagan þam men on sweoran þe him þearf sie. He biþ sona hal. Wyrce gode eage sealfe. Nim celeponian and bisceop wyrta, wermod, wudu merc, wudu bindes leaf. Do ealra emfela cnuwa wel do on hunig and on win, and on æren fæt oððe on cyoeren. Do twæde þæs wines, and þriddan dæl þæs huniges, do þæt se wæta mæge furþum ofer yrnan þa wyrta. Læt standan VII nigt and wreoh mid brede. Aseoh þurh clænne claf, ðone drenc do eft on þæt ilce fæt nytta swa þe þearf sie. Se mon se him gedep ymb XXX nihta foxes gelyndes dæl on þa eagan he biþ ece hal (Cockayne, vol 2, 307).

(For swollen eyes, take a live raven<sup>4</sup>, remove his eyes, and afterwards, offer him to the water, alive. And put the eyes upon the victim's neck. He will soon be whole. Work a good eye salve. Take swallow-wort and bishop-wort, wormwood, wood march, [and] woodbind leaves. Pound equal quantities of each and place in

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4 Cockayne translates *hrefn* as crab (*hæfern*) perhaps because of *eft*, which he translates as “again”

honey, then in wine, and into a brass or copper container. Place in the wine two of three parts, and the third part of the honey, so the mixture may run over the worts. Let this stand for seven nights and cover with a plank. Strain the drink through a clean cloth, then return it to the vessel. Use as often need be. The man who puts on his eyes the fat of a fox for thirty nights will always be whole.)

#### Charm 2: The Drawing of a Brock

Sum fyperfete nyten as þæt we nemnað *taxonem*, þæt ys broc on englisc. Gefof þæt deor and him þonne of cwicum þa teþ of ado þa þe he mæste hæbbe, and þus cweð: “On naman þæs ælmihtigan godes, ic þe ofsela, and þe þine teþ of abeate.” And þonne hy syððan on linenum hrægle bewind and on golde oþþe on seolfre, bewyrc þæt hio ne mægen þinum lice. Æthrinan hafa mid þe, ðonne, ne sceþþeð þe, ne tungol, ne hagol, ne strang storm, ne yfel man, ne wolberendes awiht, ne þe æniges yfeles onhrine dereþ. Oððe gyf þe hwæt yfeles bið hraþe hyt byð torhten, swa wæs Abdias gyrdels þær witegan. Nim þonne þone swyþran fot þone furðran ðissum wordum and þus cweþ: “On naman þæs lifigendan godes, ic þe nime to læcedome.” Þonne on swa hwylcum geflite oððe gefeohte swa ðu bift sigefæst, and þu þæt gedigest gif þu þone fot mid þe hafast. (Cockayne, vol 1, p 327)

(There is a four-footed creature that we refer to as *taxonem*, which is brock in English. Catch the deer and take the biggest of his teeth

those which he has while he is alive, and say thus: “In the name of the Almighty God<sup>5</sup>, I slay thee, and strike thine teeth off thee.” And then wind them around a piece of linen and work them in gold or in silver, so that they may not touch your body. Have them with you, then never shall star, nor hail, nor strong storm, nor evil man, nor any evil attack scathe you, nor any evil touch you. Rather, it will quickly be destroyed, just as the girdle of the wise man Obadiah's. Then take the back right foot [of the brock] and with these words say thus: “In the name of the living God, I proclaim thee a leechdom.” Then you will overcome whatever dispute or argument if you have the foot with thee.)

In both charms, the animals are subjected to physical acts of violence, as both have to be kept alive while extracting their eyes or teeth. In both instances, the animals are also being sacrificed, and their killing is legitimized through this ritual offering. In Charm 1, the *hrefn* (raven) is *gebring* (offered) to the water, while in Charm 2 the brock is first consecrated by uttering “In the name of the Almighty God, I slay thee...” and then killed.

In the pagan Anglo-Saxon culture, animals were perceived to have *mana* and were believed to be integral parts of the world that surrounded man. As noted earlier, those who were privy to the magical secrets of the world were able to divine information from the horses or the flight of birds. Tania Dickinson explains that images of such animals as

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5 Cockayne refrains from translating the two references to God in this charm, leaving ellipses in their places, and noting that “there is no need to imitate the irreverence of the text” (327). His refusal to associate God with these charms illustrates the modern Christian perception of the charms as pagan-influenced magic, different from the late-Saxon Christian perception of the charms as necessary in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity.

predatory birds, fish, and serpents found on shields “seem to involve references to monstrous, underworld embodiments of evil or death and to the gods or sorcerers who can defeat or offer salvation from them” (160). These animals represent aggression and victory over an opponent, and the males who used or were buried with these shields “would have stood out in their local communit[ies],” perhaps as notable warriors (145).

Based in Teutonic mythology, some animals held symbolic significance for the culture. Both the deer and raven appear in the myths of Odin and his pantheon. The image of the deer nibbling on the roots of *Yggdrasill* (the world tree) for nourishment and healing is repeatedly mentioned in the myths. The raven was believed to be a symbol of wisdom, good health, and fortune. It was also regarded as a beast of battle, one that feeds upon the spoils of war. Odin was believed to have two ravens, *Huginn* (Thought) and *Muninn* (Memory), which were released every morning to search for wisdom.

Many of the same animal images recur in Christian art and iconography. Jane Hawkes explains that the images of birds, fishes, and snakes “were the most malleable of animal icons, passing happily between pagan and Christian usages” (qtd. in Dickinson 160). This malleability may explain the connection of Satan with dragons, worms, and serpents, which were perceived to be the cause of many illnesses and misfortunes (at the expense of disregarding the significance of the serpent as a symbol of fertility and cyclical nature). Other such connections include the bird as one of the physical manifestations of the Holy Ghost or the fish as symbolic of the endurance of the Christian faith despite prosecution by the majority.

The important aspect that these charms highlight, however, is the necessary sacrificial step after the infliction of violence upon the animal. In Genesis, God assigns

Adam as name-giver and keeper of Eden: “the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (2:15). Lynn White Jr., among many other biblical scholars, interprets the Creation story to mean that “God had planned all of nonhuman nature explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creating had any purpose but to serve man's purpose” (qtd. in Preece and Fraser 246). Rod Preece and David Fraser note that this reading of the story underestimates the complexity of the perception of animals in the Christian tradition (246). The need to legitimize the violence inflicted upon the animals through consecration or offering is present in both the charms, a confirmation of this complex relationship among God, man, and animal.

J. Lineham emphasizes the role of sacrifice in Christianity, asserting that “Christianity was recruited among nations to whom the conception of sacrifice was among the deepest of religious ideas, and the ceremony of sacrifice among the sincerest forms of worship” (95). In mass, the bread and the wine are regularly sacrificed as offerings to God, undergoing transmutation into the body and blood of Christ. To instigate this transmutation, the priest recites a set of pre-ordained phrases that solemnize the ritual and legitimize the transformation. In Charm 1, this solemnization is seen in the offering of the raven to the water. In Charm 2, it is seen in the invocation of God and the proclamation of the brock's foot as a holy object. As transformed and sacred objects, the eyes of the raven and the foot and teeth of the brock become legitimate Christian objects that act as protective talismans. Of course, the ultimate sacrifice in Christianity is that of Christ. The violent acts executed in these charms are validated by the step of sacrificial offering, justifying them as righteous actions done in the name of the Christian God. Likewise, the pagan practice of sympathetic magic (such as restoring a man's sight by

taking an animal's eyes) was preserved in the charms, along with the symbolic references that the animals stood for, ensuring their continual validity and practice in Anglo-Saxon society.

## **B. Charms that Compensate for Acts of Violence**

In the charms, violence is present not only as an agent of efficacy but also as the reason for using the charms. Charms that act as remedies for wounds, cuts, and abrasions are plentiful. However, most of them are recipes that simply involve making ointments or pastes. Additionally, the causes of those injuries are never specified in the charms. For instance, under the *Herbarium's* heading *betonica* or bishop-wort, the third item listed as a curable ailment is “a man's broken head.” Under the heading “waybread,” the sixth item listed is “in case a man is badly wounded.” In both instances, the specific causes of the broken head or the wounds are not identified. However, charms that work to compensate a victim of indirect violence are recorded. Theft, though not necessarily an act of graphic or physical violence, is a form of violence that results in the injury of a person through the violation of his property. The following are charms to recover lost cattle:

### **Charm 3: Charm to Find Lost Cattle**

Ne forstolen ne forholen nanuht, þæs ðe ic age, þe ma ðemihte  
 Herod urne drihten. Ic gepohte sancte Eadelenan, and ic gepohte  
 Crist on rode ahangen; swa ic þence þis feoh to findanne, næs to  
 oðfeorrganne, and to witanne, næs to oðwyrceanne, and to lufianne,  
 næs to oðlædanne. Garmund, godes ðegen, find þæt feoh and fere  
 þæt feoh and hafa þæt feoh, and heald þæt feoh, and fere ham þæt  
 feoh, þæt he næfre næbbe landes, þæt he hit oðlæde, ne foldan, þæt

hit oðferie, ne husa, þæt he hit oðhealde. Gif hyt hwa gedo,ne  
gedige hit him næfre! Binnan þrym nihtum, cunne ic his mihta, his  
mægen and his mihta and his mundcræftas. Eall he weornige, swa  
fyre wudu weornie, swa breðel seo swa þystel, se ðe ðis feoh  
oðfergean þence oððe ðis orf oðehtian ðence. Amen. (Cockayne,  
Vol I, p385).

(Neither stolen nor concealed be any of my possessions, more than  
Herod could [find] our Lord. I remembered Saint Helen, and I  
remembered Christ hanged on the cross; so I think to find these  
beasts, not to have them go far, and to know how to love them and  
not do them harm, not to lead them away. Garmund, God's thane,  
find those beasts and bring [me] those beasts, and have those  
beasts, and hold those beasts, and bring those beasts home, [so] that  
he, the thief, [may] never have land that he may flee to, nor a house  
that he may hold them. If one does this [theft], never let him  
profit! Within three nights I will know his might, his power, and his  
abilities, and the powers that protect him. [May] he be destroyed  
just as fire burns wood, as weak as the thistle, he who wishes to  
steal these beasts or [he who] desires to drive away [these beasts].  
Amen.)

#### Charm 4: A Charm to Recover Cattle

Ðis man sceal cweðan ðonne his ceapa hwilcne man forstolenne.  
Cwyð ær he ænig oþer word cwede: “Bethlehem hattæ seo burh ðe

Crist on geboren wes seo is gemærsod ofer ealne middangeard.

Swa ðeos dæd wyrþe for mannum.” Mære per crucem Christi ab oriente reducat and in west and cweð: “crux Christi ab occidente reducat.” And in suþ, and cweð þriwa: “crux Christi ameridie reducat.” And in norð and cweð: “crux Christi abscondita sunt et muenta est.” Iudeas crist ahengon gebidon him dæda þa wyrstan hælton. Þæt hi forhelan ne mihton. Swa næfre ðeos dæd forholen ne wyrþe per crucem Christi. (Cockayne, Vol 1, p 391-92)

(This man must say this when a man has stolen any one of his cattle. Say [this] before he speaks any other word: “Bethlehem was the name of the city where Christ was born. It is glorified all throughout earth. So may this deed be monstrous to men.” [Then turn three times] to the East and say [this] three times: [“May the cross of Christ bring it back from the east”] And to the west and say: [“May the cross of Christ bring it back from the west”] and to the south and say three times: [“May the cross of Christ bring it back from the south”] and to the north and say, [“the cross of Christ was hidden and has been found”] The Jews hanged Christ and did unto him the worst deeds. They concealed what they could not conceal. So never may this deed be ever concealed by the Cross of Christ.)

As noted in the first chapter, theft was an especially opprobrious crime among the Anglo-Saxons. Stealing undercut one's right to peaceably own property and was, therefore, an



act of violence. The desire for retribution and the punishment of the thief as seen in Charm 3 validates this perception of theft as a violent deed that warrants vengeance. The punishment desired by the victim is to have the thief “be destroyed, just as fire burns wood.” This punishment is preserved in the charm, validated by the tenuous association with Christian figures. While both Charms 3 and 4 include Christian references, their connections to the nature of the crime or the punishment for the theft are either weak or questionable, raising the notion that the Christian elements were only superimposed to allow their practice to be allowed by the Church.

The pagan elements in Charm 3 seem to outnumber the Christian elements. The way in which *mana* was understood and the power that it holds as seen in Charm 3 has already been discussed in Chapter Two. The chanter of the charm *gebohte* Christ on the Cross and Saint Helen (mother to Constantine), but what he remembers or how he remembers the connection between the figures and the actions he proposes to treat his cattle is uncertain. Instead, the chanter invokes the aid of Garmund, whom he describes as God's thane. Garmund, in *Beowulf*, is the famed uncle of Offa. In the poem, Offa's greatness in battle and his abilities as a warrior are showcased, but no other information is given about Garmund, apart from that he was “niðe cræftig” (skilled in war) (*Beowulf* In 1962). The recognition of historical figures as defining elements of the culture is a practice that is associated with the pagan Anglo-Saxons. Just as the Anglo-Saxons recognized Odin to be their ancestor, such persons as Garmund and Beowulf were recognized as figures who upheld the heroic tradition of their mythological past. In Charm 3, Garmund is Christianized by labeling him as a servant of God, allowing the retrieval of the cattle to be interpreted as the work of God through his servant, yet

simultaneously understood in terms of Garamund's abilities.

As with Charm 3, the connections between the Christian references and the theft in Charm 4 are tenuous. In Charm 4, the first Christian reference is to Bethlehem's fame, which the chanter juxtaposes to the atrocity of the theft. In doing so, the chanter attempts to establish a connection between the wide-known knowledge of the holiness of Bethlehem and the perception of the theft. The last Christian reference, which is much clearer, involves the failed Jews' concealment of Christ as the Messiah and the chanter's wish that the thief fail in his endeavor to conceal the property he stole. These two Christian references have no incidences of theft to tie them with the charm. However, the concept of knowing the perpetrator is similar to the invocation of knowing his *mana*. Adding Christian references to the concept of knowing may have allowed the charm's practice to continue among the people, since they would be able to understand the pagan concept within the Christian metaphors.

While Charm 4 lacks mention of any punishment for the theft, Charm 3 and Charm 4 share similar characteristics in structure and in composition. Both charms begin with a declaration of the purpose of the charm followed by a Christian reference. Both charms also include an invocation to at least one holy figure. In Charm 3, the chanter calls upon Christ, Saint Helen, and the Christianized Garmund. In Charm 4, the chanter repeatedly calls upon the aid of Jesus. Both charms end with a phrase that seals the charm's efficacy. Charm 3 ends with an "Amen," while Charm 4 ends with *per crucem Christi* (by the Cross of Christ), similar to performing the sign of the cross. All these characteristics are seen in Christian prayers. Both charms include a prayer-like phrase that invokes the power of God to work through the charm. In Charm 4 this is seen when

the chanter utters “May the cross of Christ bring them back,” and in the final part when the chanter utters “So never may this deed be ever concealed.” In Charm 3, this invocation is seen in the last part of the charm when the chanter utters “May he be destroyed as fire burns wood.” Additionally, Charm 4 requires the chanter to utter the same phrase while changing direction. Ritualistic repetition is a characteristic that is also present in prayers, as indicated by the structure of such prayers as the rosary or the *Angelus*. The modification of the charms to mirror the structure of prayers may have contributed to their legitimacy in the Church's eyes. Redirecting the focus of the power of the charm as coming from God and sealing those charms with Christian phrases reinforce this redirection of power.

In these two charms, the Christian references and metaphors attempt to dilute the violence that the charms respond to. In Charm 3, though there is a curse-like punishment that seals the charm, the chanter is prompted to feel the compassion invoked upon the remembrance of Christ's suffering on the cross. Despite the cursing of the thief, the charm ends with a Christian “amen.” In Charm 4, the image of Christ's Crucifixion recurs throughout the charm, subsuming the theft that the charm seeks to remedy. Instead of focusing on the theft, the violence done unto Christ during his Crucifixion becomes the focal point of the charm and a key element to finding the lost cattle. In these charms against theft, the image of violence done to Christ during his crucifixion is mentioned multiple times, overshadowing the passive violent act of theft that the charm is supposed to remedy. In the following charm, however, violence is perceived to cause the pain that the charm is believed to have the ability to cure.

## Charm 5: Against a Sudden Stitch

Feferfuige and seo reade netele, ðe þurh ærn inwyxð, and wegbrade. Wyll  
in buteran:

Hlude wæran hy, la hlude, ða hy ofer þone hleaw ridan.

Wæran anmode, ða hy over land ridan.

Scyld ðu ðe nu, þu ðysne nið genesan mote.

Ut lytel spere, gif her inne sie!

Stod under linde, under leohtum scylde,

þær ða mihtigan wif hira mægen beræddon

and hy gyllende garas sændan.

Ic him oðerne eft wille sændan.

Fleogende flanne forane togeanes.

Ut, lytel spere. Gif it her inne sy!

Sæt smið, sloh seax lytel,

... iserna wund swiðe.

Ut, lytel spere, gif her inne sy!

Syx smiðas sætan, wælspera worhtan.

Ut, spere, næs in, spere!

Gif her inne sy isenes dæl

hægtessan geweorc, hit sceal gemyltan.

Gif ðu wære on fell scoten, oððe wære on flæsc scoten,

oððe wære on blod scoten, oððe wære on ban scoten,

oððe wære on lið scoten, næfre ne sy ðin lif atæsed.

Gif hit wære esa gescot, oððe hit wære ylfa gescot,  
 oððe hit wære hægtessan gescot, nu ic will ðin helpan.  
 Þis ðe to bote esa gescotes, ðis ðe to bote ylfa gescotes,  
 ðis ðe to bote hægtessan gescotes. Ic ðin wille helpan.  
 Fleoh þær on fyrgen, seo þa flane sense.  
 Heafde hal westu. Helpe ðin drihten.

Nim þonne þæt seax, ado on wætan. (Cockayne Vol 3, p 53)

([Assemble] feverfew, and the red nettle that grows all around the house,  
 and a plantain. Boil in butter:

Loud were they, oh loud, when they rode over the hill.  
 Fierce were they, when they rode over the land.  
 Now, shield thyself, that you may survive this affliction.  
 Out, little spear, if herein be thou. 5  
 I stood underneath the linden tree, a light shield beneath,  
 where the victory women produced their power  
 and they sent their yelling spears.  
 I will send another back to them—  
 A flying dart in response to theirs. 10  
 Out, little spear, if herein be thou.  
 The smith sat, forged a little knife,  
 ... with very sore iron.  
 Out little spear, if herein be thou!  
 Six smiths sat, war-spears they wrought. 15

Out, spear, not in, spear!

If herein be of iron,

work of witches, it shall melt.

If you were shot in the skin, or were shot in the flesh,

or were shot in the blood, or were shot in the bone, 20

or were shot in the limb, may your life never wear out!

If it were shot from the gods, or if it were shot from elves,

or if it were shot from witches, now I will help thee.

This is relief for shot of gods, this a relief for shot of elves,

This for shot of witches. I will help thee. 25

Flee there to the mountain, you who sent the spear!

[May] your head be uninjured. The Lord help you.)

Then take the dagger, cast it out in the water.

A “stitch” is a “prick or a sharp, sudden local pain like that produced by a thrust of a pointed weapon” (OED). Though the affliction that the charm works to remedy may not be caused by a stab, the pain the victim experiences is likened to a product of violent actions. The chanter of the charm seems to understand the pain as inflicted by a thrust of a spear. He repeats the same phrase, “Out, spear not in” in lines 5, 11, 14, and 16. The source of the spear is uncertain, but the possibilities are listed in lines 22-23: “If it were shot from the gods, or if it were shot from elves, or if it were shot from witches.” In any case, the pain is believed to be caused by an invisible spear, and the metaphor of battle is extended so the victim is perceived as one who is under attack and in need of shielding in order to survive the onslaught.

In Charm 5, violence is vilified, blamed on the gods, witches, or elves. Lines 2-4 invoke the fearful image of battle. The “loud” and “fierce” adversaries that the victim is supposed to survive may recall images of the Vikings who wreaked terror among the Anglo-Saxons. The chanter of the charm introduces himself in line 6, where he describes himself as standing under the linden tree, ready to defend the victim of the stitch by throwing a reciprocal dart at the *sigewif*. Even a source of the pain, the spear, has pagan resonance. The *sigewif*, the victory women, who dwell under the linden tree, throwing “yelling spears” (ln 5-8) refer to the Valkyries,<sup>6</sup> the cupbearers of Odin who were believed to be the choosers of death in battle. Their “spears” signify their choice to claim the victim of the pain. The chanter of the charm stands between the Valkyries and the victim, able to draw the spear out from the victim's body, in effect overcoming the affliction.

The victim, an afflicted warrior, is protected by the charm chanter and his magical knowledge. But the addition of the phrase, “The Lord help you” in line 27 creates an additional understanding of the charm that lumps the pagan elements together as the source of fear, violence, and the affliction. The chanter, who aligns himself with the Christian Lord, is able to protect the victim from these pagan sources of violence not only because he possesses knowledge of their workings, but also because he trusts to bless the victim with the ultimate power that can overcome any of these sources. The short phrase invoking God, included at the end of the chant, renders all pagan concepts of *mana* or sympathetic magic under the influence and sanction of the Christian Lord.

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6 The Nine Valkyries are named “Warrior,” “Might,” “Kin of the Gods,” “Wrecker of Plans,” “Shield Bearer,” “Shrieking,” “Host Fetter,” “Screaming,” and “Spear Bearer.” (Crossley-Holland 63).

### C. Protection Charms

The Anglo-Saxons lived through violent times with the constant threat of wars and invasions. Susan Fuller's suggestion on the function of the Merseberg charms (discussed in Chapter One) indicates that peace and safety were great concerns that warranted the usage of whatever means of protection was available to the culture, no matter how far they deviated from an established religion's aegis. Wulfstan's Christian interpretation of violence as punishment from God and his recommendation to tend to the state of one's soul by embodying the Christian qualities of passivity, humility, and compassion may explain the overt prayer-like qualities that the following charms display.

#### Charm 6: A Prose Charm of Protection Against Conspiracy

Gyf ðe ðynce þæt ðine fynd þwyrlice ymbe þe ðrydian, ðonne gang  
þu on gelimplicere stowe and þe ða halgan rode to gescyldnesses  
geciig, and asete þe aðenedum earmum and cwæð þus ærest:

Ave, alma crux, que mundi pretium portasti, que vexilla  
regis eterni ferebas; in te enim Christus triumphavit, in te et  
ego miser peccator, famulus tuus, nomine--; sancta crux,  
omnes in nos insurgentes vincamus per...

Sing ðonne þas salmas oð ende: Domini deus meus in te speravi;  
Usque quo domine; Exaudi, domine; III Kyrrieleison. Pater noster.  
(MS CCCC 391 via Griffiths 203)

(If it seems to you that your fiends deliberate perversely against  
you, then go to a fitting holy place and call upon the holy Cross to  
protect you, and set yourself with your arms stretched out and say



this first:

Hail, sustaining Cross, that carried the ransom of the world,  
and that bears the banners of the eternal king; as through  
thee, Christ, was triumphant, and through you may I also,  
wretched sinner, your servant, by name--; O Holy Cross, let  
us overcome those rushing against us...

Sing then these psalms throughout until the end: Domine deus  
meus (Ps. 7); Usque quo domine (Ps. 12); Exaudi domine (Ps.16);  
thrice the Kyrie, the Lord's Prayer.) (Latin translation is taken from  
Griffiths 203).

#### Charm 7: A Journey Charm of Protection

Ic me on þisse gyrde beluce and on godes helde bebeode wið þane  
sara stice, wið þane sara slege, wið þane grymma gryre, wið þane  
micela egða þe bið eghwam lað, and wið eal þæt lað þe in to land  
fare. Sygegealdor ic begale, sigegyrd ic me wege, wordsige and  
worsige. Se me dege. Ne me mere ne gemyrre, ne me maga ne  
geswence, ne me næfre minum feore forht ne gewurpe, ac gehæle  
me ælmihtig and sunu and frofre gast, ealles wuldres wyrðig  
dryhten, swa swa ic gehyrde heofna scyppende. Abrame and Isace  
and swilce men, Moyses and Iacob, and Dauit and Iosep and Evan  
and Annan and Elizabet, Saharie and ec Marie, modur Cristes, and  
eac þæ gebroþru, Petrus and Paulus, and eac þusend þinra engla  
clipige ic me to are wið eallum feondum. Hi me ferion and friþion

and mine fore nerion, eal me gehealdon, me gewealdon, worces  
 stirende. Si me wuldres hyht, hand ofer heafod haligra hrof,  
 sigerofra sceote, soðfæstra engla. Biddu ealle bliðu mode þæt me  
 beo hand ofer heafod Matheus helm, Marcus byrne, leoht, lifes rof,  
 Lucos min swurd, scearp and scirecg, scyld Iohannes, wuldre  
 gewlitegod wigar Serafhin. Forð ic gefare. Frind ic gemete, eall  
 engla blæd, eadiges lare. Bidde ic nu sigeres god godes miltse,  
 siðfæt godne, smylte and ligte windas on wereþum. Windas gefran,  
 circinde wæter simbli gehalede wið eallum feondum. Freond ic  
 gemete wið, þæt ic on þæs ælmihtgian frið wunian mote, belocun  
 wið þam laþan, se me lyfes eht, on engla blæd gestapelod, and inna  
 halre hand heofna rices þa hwile þe ic on þis life wunian mote.  
 Amen. (Cockayne, Vol.1 389).

(I preserve myself with this rod and commend myself in God's  
 protection against the stabs of wounds, against the pains of murder,  
 against the grim violence, against the many terrors that are loathe  
 to each person, and against all the evil that comes into the land. A  
 victory-bringing charm I enchant, a victory rod I carry with me, for  
 power in word and power in deed. Let it avail me. [May] no  
 nightmare disturb me, nor my maw afflict me, nor ever should I  
 fear for my life, but let the Almighty God and the Son and the  
 consoling Spirit heal me, the Lord worthy of all glory, just as I  
 heard, the Creator of the Heavens. Abraham and Isaac and such

men, Moses and Jacob, and David and Joseph and Eve and Adam and Elizabeth, Sara and Mary as well, the mother of Christ, and all the brothers, Peter and Paul, and also a thousand of your angels I call upon to aid me against all [my] enemies. Let them carry and guide me and defend me, in all things guard me [and] direct me, guiding my work. Let there be hope for my glory, hand over [my] head, a holy roof, a victory-roof of steadfast angels. I bid all of them with a happy heart that there be a hand over my head, Matthew my helmet, Mark my armor, light, noble of life. Luke, my sword, sharp and keen-edge, my shield, John, a wonderful, radiant spear Seraphim. I go forth. [May] I meet friends, all the splendor of the angels, the blessed ones' guidance. I now bid the God of victory for good favor, a good journey, calm and easy winds on the coasts. Winds I have learned of, the roaring water that constantly protects me from all my enemies. [May] I meet with friends that I may stay in the Almighty's guidance, safe from the loathed one, who seeks my life, secure among the splendor of the angels, and in the holy hand of the kingdom of heaven as long as I remain in this life. Amen.)

Charm 7 is designed to be chanted before one sets out to a journey. The chanter fortifies himself upon a *gyrde*, which can be translated as a rod or a sword, while entrusting his protection to the Christian God. The chanter notes that he will recite a *sigegealdor* (a victory-bringing charm) to sanctify his *gyrde*, transforming it into a

*sigegyrð* (victory rod/ victory sword). This *sigegyrð* has the ability to prevent the carrier from being wounded, murdered, or physically attacked by *feondum*, his enemies. Alfred Keiser observes that the word *feond* was frequently used interchangeably with *deofol* (devil) and *hæðen* (heathen) (94, 97). In choosing this word to convey the traveler's attackers and source of consternation during a journey, the chanter of the charm may associate heathenism or paganism with violence, in effect allying the Christian God and his sanctified *gyrde* with protection and safety.

The *gyrde* has the magical power to prevent nightmares or stomachaches, as long as the carrier keeps it with him during his travels. In Christian terms, the charm is a legitimate prayer because it invokes the power of multiple Christian figures. The chanter names such Old Testament figures as David, Jacob, Moses, and Abraham. New Testament figures such as Christ and his disciples are also named in the charm. In the final sentence of the charm, the chanter asks that God allow him to grace his journey's path with friends, safe from Satan, the malicious "loathed one," who continuously seeks the life of the chanter. Thus the charm aligns Satan with the various violent acts that the chanter seeks protection from.

While the chanter seems to entrust his protection to God and other Christian figures, the imagery created in the depiction of the figures is reminiscent of the Anglo-Saxon heroic culture. The chanter calls upon the Gospels to aid in his protection. Matthew becomes his helmet, Mark his armor, Luke his sword, and John his shield. The *gyrde* that the chanter enchants is essentially a weapon that is able to inflict violence, deemed sanctionable by the Church because it has been blessed by a prayer.

Charm 6, a charm used to protect one against conspiracy, asks the “victim” to go to a *gelimplicere stowe* (a fitting holy place) and call upon the *halgan rode* (the holy cross) for protection. The *stowe*, in Christian terms, refers to a Church or an altar, but its ambiguity allows the interpretation that the ritual may have been performed at a barrow, mound, or sacred hill, in accordance with pagan practice. If this is the case, the rood that the charm calls upon for invocation may refer to either one or both of the following pagan concepts. The first concept is one that involves women as religious specialists. John Blair notes that in early Anglo-Saxon culture, women were bestowed a “special female responsibility for moral and spiritual education” (174). Certain women were blessed with chthonic knowledge which was responsible for their wisdom and their magic. These women wore cross pendants and were buried with cross-marked urns (Blair 174). In the pagan understanding, invoking the cross meant invoking the power associated with that object, believed to be the source of magic and power before the conversion to Christianity.

A second pagan interpretation involves a mythological connection. The weapon of the thunder-god Thor was *Mjolnir*, a hammer constructed by the dwarves, which had the power to summon lightning and thunder. This hammer had a short handle, which made it resemble a cross. As Jacob Grimm asserts, the hammer functioned not only as a weapon, but also as a “divine tool [that] was considered sacred, brides and bodies of the dead were consecrated with it. [...] Men blessed with the sign on the hammer as Christians did with the sign of the cross, and a stroke of lightning was long regarded in the Mid[dle] Ages as a happy initiatory omen to any undertaking” (180-81). Invoking *Mjolnir* and the might associated with the hammer coincides with the concepts of aggression and retribution that

were popular within the culture.

However, the additional listing of the holy cross's abilities marks it as a Christian emblem: this is the cross that bore Christ, the cross that bears the banners of the God (as in the heavily ornamented cross in *Dream of the Rood*), and the cross that will share the burden of the charm's chanter. Additionally, the charm is sealed with a number of Christian psalms and prayers to be recited in a particular order and number. Adding this requirement as necessary for the charm's efficacy reinforces the notion that it is by trusting in the power of the Christian cross that the charm will protect its chanter.

The two protection charms shield the chanter from experiencing violence by constantly reminding him to associate protection with the Christian God. In Charm 7, though images of battle pervade the charm and the *gyrde* that fortifies the chanter is essentially a weapon, the violence that the chanter may inflict upon possible attackers becomes sanctioned by God because his holy power has been invoked. In Charm 6, while the image of the cross signifies many pagan references and concepts, the psalms and association of the cross to Christ's Rood move the chanter to believe that the Christian cross had more power and abilities than any pagan associations with the cross that he may have previously believed in.

The Anglo-Saxons understood their charms through various means. While they ascribed most of the charms' workings to their magical and religious traditions, some references found in the charms are mythological, cultural, and genealogical in nature. This interconnectedness that the Anglo-Saxons embodied in understanding the world around them became a formidable foe that the Church had to comprehend in order for the people to fully convert to Christianity in belief and in practice. These Violence Charms

illustrate the ways in which the Church dealt with the pagan aspects of the charms in order for them to be legitimately practiced in society. The charms were understood by the Anglo-Saxons as relics of their culture, mythological past, and pagan religion. If the people were to continue practicing the charms within the Christian context, the violence in the charms had to be reinterpreted in a way that was understandable for them in their culture, but also matched the tenets taught by the Church.

## Chapter Four: The Evolution of the Charms

Some pagan aspects of the charms have been reinterpreted to fit within a Christian framework. Evidence suggests that over time, the charms have morphed into prayer-like incantations. As seen in the previous chapter, charms 1, 2, and 5 are more overtly pagan in comparison to charms 3, 4, 6, and 7. Based on the chronology of the manuscripts in which the charms are published, the Anglo-Saxons seem to have been moving towards an eradication of most pagan elements and a modification of charms to contain characteristics common in prayers.

The more pagan charms, charms 1, 2, and 5, are entries in magico-medical manuscripts published between the late tenth century and the early eleventh century. Charm 1, “A Charm for Swollen Eyes,” entered the third book of the *Leechbook*, is found in the Royal 12. D. XVII manuscript. The *Leechbook* is comprised of three books, the first two more similar in content and in structure than the third. Richard Scott Nokes compares the contents of all three books of the *Leechbook*, concluding that the manuscript was produced in four steps:

1. Compilation and organization of leechdoms
2. Transcription of books 1 and 2
3. Transmission of books 1 and 2
4. The transcription of Royal 12. D. XVII manuscript

Nokes argues that books 1 and 2 were written during the late ninth century by two scribes who worked simultaneously in transcribing the collected charms, which were later separated into two parts (books 1 and 2), allowing for the corruption of the texts in such



forms as additions, omissions, (either intentional or not) and scribal errors (Nokes 52).

Omissions are apparent in comparing chapters ii of both books. Chapter ii of book 1 offers twenty-six remedies for various afflictions of the eye. In contrast, chapter ii of book 3 offers only six. Some of the potages in book 1 are repeated in book 3 such as those with *hunig*, honey or *gebærneð sealt*, burned salt (Cockayne 31, 309). Charm 1, however, is unique to book 3. The actual manuscript in which Charm 1 is found was written during the early tenth century by a scribe who added book 3 to the two, earlier, corrupted texts, following the organizational headings of books 1 and 2 (Nokes 51).

Nokes posits that the *Leechbook* was produced during the “intellectual climate of the Alfredian Renaissance,” a period when educational reforms were executed in order to improve legislation of the kingdom (54). During this time, there was an increase in interest in Classical texts, which explains the translations of the many Greek and Latin medicinal texts to Old English. Charm 2 (The Drawing of a Brock) and Charm 5 (Against a Sudden Stitch) are taken from magico-medical works of Classical origins. Charm 2 is found in the *Medicina de Quadrupedibus de Sextus Placitus*, part of the *Apuleius Complex*, a collection of herbologies originating in Pre-Christian Greek sources. While the *Apuleius Complex* is found in four manuscripts, it is found alongside the *Lacnunga*, wherein charm 5 is recorded in only one manuscript, MS Harley 585. Maria D’Aronco suggests that both the *Apuleius Complex* and the *Lacnunga* were Latin texts translated to Old English before the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, since the earliest manuscript was dated at 1000 (qtd. in Meaney “Medical Elements” 43).

Both Nokes and Audrey Meaney agree that the audience for and perception of the charms found in these magico-medical texts are different from those of charms 3, 4, 6,

and 7. Nokes contends that because of the multiple emendations and re-transcriptions of the charms in the *Leechbook*, that particular book was produced for the Anglo-Saxon leech to use in confidence (74). The constant editing done to the texts contributed to their authoritative and empirical quality, which the leech would have found to be time-saving and effective.

Despite passing laws against pagan practices, the Church regarded leechdom to be separate from magical or pagan rituals. Meaney notes that “medicine as an academic discipline came to England with Christianity” (“Practice” 221), the practitioners deemed “medics” or leeches. Meaney points out that although the exact class and status of the leech have not been determined, the mention of leeches is prominent throughout Old English texts. She observes that leeches were said to have executed surgeries, performed charms, and even attended such royal ceremonies as King Alfred’s wedding in 868 (“Practice” 222). Though it is not clear whether or not leeches were laymen or clerics, they “operated openly and with the collusion of the Church” (Nokes 74). If the charms found in the *Leechbook* were used by clerics, then a connection between the Church and the evolution of the charms to be more prayer-like can be contended.

In contrast, charms 3, 4, 6, and 7 are found in liturgical manuscripts produced during the eleventh century. Charm 6, “A Prose Charm of Protection Against Conspiracy,” is written as an entry in MS CCCC 391, also known as *Portiforium Of Wulfstan II*. Produced in Worcester between 1060 and 1070, the *Portiforium* was a breviary containing masses, canticles, holy dates, prayers, or hymns compiled for daily use by a member of the clergy (“Portiforium Oswaldi”) Charm 6 is entered as a devotion, following a series of prayers and confessions.

Charm 3 “Charm to Find Lost Cattle,” charm 4 “Charm to Recover Cattle,” and charm 7 “A Journey Charm of Protection” are entered in the margins of MS CCCC 41, also known as *The History of Bede in the Anglo-Saxon Version*. Sharon Rowley dates the production of the manuscript at the first half of the eleventh century, the work of two scribes copying an Old English translation of Bede. During the mid-eleventh century, a different scribe wrote along the margins, adding homilies and charms to the text (Rowley 495). Thomas A. Bredehoft’s work focuses on analyzing the marginal additions by the scribe and its implications on the perception of space during the eleventh century, agreeing with S.L. Keefer’s assertion that the marginalia “may mark an early move towards the liturgical compendium-making that seems the hallmark of the late eleventh century” (qtd. in Bredehoft 721).

Based on the chronology and primary audience of the manuscripts, the charms served different purposes, moving from being treated as medicinal remedies to being integrated into religious books and rituals. In terms of similarities, even the more overtly pagan charms list commonalities with prayers, as discussed in chapter three. However, in the charms from the eleventh century, the distinctly pagan elements that characterize the incantations as charms are overshadowed by the abundance of prayer-like characteristics.

During the late tenth to the early eleventh centuries, Ælfric the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Wulfstan, the Archbishop of York began a series of religious reforms through their homilies. Karen Louise Jolly notes that both Ælfric and Wulfstan differed from their predecessors, who focused on reforming monasteries, because they aimed to elicit change among the secular clergy through new laws, canons, and homilies (*Popular Religion* 77). Wulfstan, in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, perceived paganism and heathenism

to incur the wrath of God. Jolly observes that, in his homilies, Wulfstan “stated things as black and white, us versus them, good versus evil, and Christian versus pagan” (Jolly 79). In contrast, Ælfric’s homilies were concerned with the lay population’s comprehension of Christianity, so he “balanced very carefully the need to communicate in a language people could understand and that priests could transmit” (Jolly 78). Ælfric concentrated on mediating the religion to the laypeople and the secular clergy, drawing on Anglo-Saxon concepts to further their understanding of Christianity. In the following excerpt from one of his homilies, he uses the analogies to explain the creation of earth to his Anglo-Saxon audience:

Now we cannot examine how out of that dirt he made flesh and blood, bones and skin, hair and nails. Men see often that out of one little kernel comes a great tree, but we can see in that kernel neither root, nor rind, nor boughs, nor leaves; but the same God who draws from forth the kernel tree, and fruits, and leaves, likewise may from dust raise flesh and bones, sinews and hair (qtd. in Jolly *Popular Religion* 80).

In this passage, Ælfric draws similarities to the power of God with the *mana* that causes the tree to grow. The use of analogies is present in Charm 4 when knowledge of Bethlehem’s glory is compared to the knowledge of the theft’s identity and in charm 3 when the search for the cattle is compared to the search for Jesus by Herod. Charms 6 and 7 differ from 3 and 4 in that the fusion of the pagan and the Christian elements is less awkward

Charms 6 and 7 do not rely on analogies or concepts from the pagan elements that would resonate with the Anglo-Saxons. To illustrate the similarities between these charms and prayers, I offer the following translations of Old English prayers:

### The Lord's Prayer III

Fæder manncynnes,      frofres ic þe bidde,  
halig drihten,      þu ðe on heofonum eart.  
þæt sy gehalgod,      hygecræftum fæst,  
þin nama nu ða,      neriende Crist,  
5      in urum ferhðlocan      fæste gestaðelod.  
Cume nu to mannum,      mihta wealdend,  
þin rice to us,      rihtwis dema,  
and ðin geleafa      in lifdæge  
on urum mode      mære þurhwunige.  
10      And þin willa mid us      weorðe gelæsted  
on eardunge      eorðan rices,  
swa hluttur is      in heofonwuldre,  
wynnum gewlitegod      a to worulde forð.  
Syle us nu to dæge,      drihten gumena,  
15      heofena heahcyning,      hlaf urne,  
þone ðu onsendest      sawlum to hæle  
on middaneard      manna cynnes;  
þæt is se clæna      Crist, drihten god.  
Forgyf us, gumena weard,      gyltas and synna,

- 20      and ure leahtras alet,      lices wunda  
          and mandæda,      swa we mildum wið ðe,  
          ælmihtigum gode,      oft abyrged,  
          swa swa we forlætað      leahtras on eorþan  
          þam þe wið us      oft agyltað,
- 25      and him womdæde      witan ne þencað  
          for earnunge      ecan lifes.  
          Ne læd þu us to wite      in wean sorge  
          ne in costunge,      Crist nerigende,  
          þy læs we arlease      ealra þinra mildsa
- 30      þurh feondscipe      fremde weorðan.  
          And wið yfele gefreo      us eac nu ða  
          feonda gehwylces;      we in ferhðlocan,  
          þeoden engla,      ðanc and wuldor,  
          soð sigedrihten,      secgað georne,
- 35      þæs ðe þu us milde      mihtum alysdest  
          fram hæftnyde      hellewites.  
          Weorðe þæt.  
          (Father of mankind, I pray for protection,  
          Holy Lord, you who are of heaven.  
          Let it be holy, steadfast in wisdom,  
          Your name now, Savior Christ,
- 5      In our bodies, firmly established.

Come now, for mankind, mighty Lord,  
Thy kingdom to us, righteous ruler,  
And your faith during [our] lifetime  
remain great in our hearts.

10 And your will for us be done  
To the living in the kingdoms of earth,  
As bright as the glories of heaven,  
Beautifully adorned forever.  
Give us now today, holy Lord,

15 High-king of Heaven, our bread,  
That you sent forth to earth  
To save the souls of mankind;  
He who is chaste, Christ, Lord God.  
Forgive us, holy Lord, our faults and sins,

20 And all our vices, [the] sores of our bodies,  
And crimes, for we against you,  
Almighty god, often offended,  
Just as we neglected sins in earth  
That against us often [were] committed,

25 And of them, the crimes, [let us] think not,  
For reward in eternal life.  
Lead us not to know sorrow in punishment  
Nor to tribulation, Christ Savior,

Lest we dishonor all your favors  
 30 Through hatred, to become estranged [from you].  
 And free us now against each and every  
 Evil of the devil; we in [our] bodies,  
 King of the angels, thank and glorify,  
 Just Lord of Victory, speak eagerly,  
 35 That you free us with [your] merciful might  
 From the bondage of hell-torment.  
 So be it.)

### Psalm 53

On þinum þam haligan naman, gedo me halne, god;  
 alys me from laðum þurh þin leofe mægen.  
 God, min gebed gearuwe gehyre,  
 and earum onfoh min agen word.  
 5 Forþam me fremde oft facne gestodon,  
 sohtan mine sawle swiðe strange,  
 and na heom god setton gleawne on gesyhðe.  
 Efne me þonne god gleawe fultumeð,  
 Is andfengea ece drihten  
 10 Sawle minre; he me swican ne wile.  
 Afyr me fæcne yfel feonda minra,  
 And hi soðfæst toweorp syððan wide.  
 Ic ðe lustum lace cweme,



And naman þinne niode swylce

15 Geara andette, forðon ic hine goodne wat.

Forþon þu me alysdest, lifes ealdor,

Or earfoðum eallum symble,

Ealle mine fynd eagum ofersawe.

(In your holy name, make me whole, God;

free me from harm through your pleasing power.

God, my prayer hear entirely,

and at this time, receive my own word.

5 Because often unfriendly crimes attacked me

[they] sought my soul very persistently,

and into it placed no good, wisely to see.

Indeed! Help me then, wise God,

The eternal lord is the defender

10 Of my soul; he will not betray me.

The vile evil of my enemies frightens me,

And afterwards they cast out truth afar.

I then, willing, comply with strife,

And your name, repeat again,

15 At this time praise, because I know that goodness.

Because you free me, Lord of life,

From all torments forever,

Neglect all my enemies with your eyes.)

Prayers and Charms share similarities in structure, function, and language. From the examples presented in this chapter, as well as in previous chapters, charms are chanted to invoke the aid of a higher power. Similarly, prayers are directed to holy figures for succor. Though prayers may be composed and personalized by the supplicant, there are set prayers that are said in specific holy rituals (mass, rosaries, litanies) uttered to attain certain ends. For instance, during mass, “The Lord’s Prayer” and the “Ave Maria” are prayed at certain points when God and Mary, respectively, are celebrated. During confession, a priest prescribes a set of prayers that the supplicant must complete in order for his sins to be absolved, which suggests that absolution is dependent on the successful recitation of the exact prayer prescribed by the priest. The efficacy of a charm also relies on the successful execution of the exact steps listed in the charm, be it chanting a phrase, turning towards a specific direction, or mixing ingredients to create a salve.

Apart from these similarities, the two prayers translated above and charms 6 and 7 also share the following major characteristics:

Trait	Lord’s Prayer	Psalm 53	Charm 6	Charm 7
Acknowledgement of Human Weakness	“Forgive us, holy Lord, our faults and sins, And all our vices, [the] sores of our bodies” (ln 19-20)	“Often unfriendly crimes attacked me [they] sought my soul very persistently” (ln5-6)	“If it seems to you that your foes deliberate perversely against you... call upon the holy Cross to protect you”	“I preserve myself with this rod and commend myself in God’s protection”
Glorification of God	“[You who] are holy, steadfast in wisdom” (ln 3); “Mighty Lord” (ln 6); “Just Lord of	“Wise God”( ln 8); “Lord of/ Life”( ln 16)	“Hail sustaining Cross, that carried the ransom of the world”	“Lord worthy of all glory;”

	Victory” (ln 34)			
Invocation of Power or ability	“free us with your merciful might from the bondage of hell” (ln 35-36)	“free me from harm through your pleasing power”( ln 2)	“as through thee, Christ was triumphant, and through you may I also [be triumphant]”	“a thousand of your angels I call upon to aid me against all my enemies”
Closing line that restates the power of God	“King of the angels... Amen” (ln 33-37)	“Because you free me, lord of life...Sow over all my enemies with your eyes” (ln 16-19)	End of the “the Lord’s Prayer”	“May I stay in the Almighty’s guidance... as long as I remain in this life. Amen”

*While I list these similarities, I do not provide all points of comparison, nor do I provide all the phrases/lines that fall under each topic heading.*

To be able to invoke the power of God, one must be humble, have the need for intercession by God, whose name and power had to constantly be praised, usually in the form of epithets. Closing the prayer or charm with a phrase or holy line that repeated the invocation and glorification of God was necessary to ensure its efficacy. The similarities listed above indicate that during the eleventh century, charms were almost indistinguishable from prayers. The similarities also suggest a movement towards the reform of Wulfstan, who, in contrast to Ælfric’s reforms to create an understanding of Christianity through Anglo-Saxon concepts, wished to eradicate all forms of paganism operating within the Christian framework.

This view is supported by the prohibition of certain pagan practices such as the worship of idols, sacrifices to demons, and the practice of divination. (Some of these laws are discussed in Chapter Two.) These earlier laws were published in the “Penitential of Theodore” between 668-690. However rigorous the punishments these laws recommended, the same types of laws appeared in such late Saxon Penance tracts as “The

Confessional of Egbert”, dated between 950-1000, which hints at either the failure of the Church to strictly enforce their recommended punishments or the inexorable connection those practices had with the Anglo-Saxons.

Most of the pagan rituals that the Church condemned in the laws published in Penance Books were related to women practicing magic or divination, or were aligned with sacrificial offerings and sympathetic magic. The suppression of such pagan concepts, especially during the early period of the conversion, suggests a sort of anxiety in the coexistence of these practices alongside Christian rituals. In practices that involved magical women, for instance, the idea of the female as possessing divine-like qualities or being privy to the secrets of nature would clash with the patriarchal structure of Christian theology.

L. M. C. Weston asserts that in all the charms, the male is recognized as the normative voice, be it as the scribe or the medic or leech executing a remedy (280). The only exceptions to this assertion are the five metrical charms found in the *Lacnunga*. In her analysis of the charms’ prose and formulas, Weston concludes that the charms were understood in terms of negotiations being made by the women, who were long believed to have occupied a special place, teetering between the boundaries of life and death. In the metrical childbirth charms, the woman “takes responsibility for her own healing; she speaks words no one else can speak for her” (291). Weston concludes that since these metrical charms were oral chants, their recording in the *Lacnunga* signified the “[appropriation] and [segregation] within male writing and male classification of knowledge in hierarchal systems” (291).

In the evolution of charms from being pagan medical incantations superimposed with Christian references to prayer-like chants with superficial pagan references, we see the progressive movement of the Church in its desire to effect the Anglo-Saxon understanding of Christianity. Rewriting the charms to fit the Christian framework would have made it easier for the Church to absorb them into their practices, severing the reliance of the Anglo-Saxons upon pagan charms and folklore. Freed from this reliance, the Church would be able to indoctrinate their converts in the faith as they saw appropriate.

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