

Hana Videen
 Medieval Reading Group
 15 November 2012

Blood and the Anglo-Saxons:

Spiritual bodies, blood taboos and the significance of 'sawul-drior'

Blood, a substance belonging to both the physical and the spiritual bodies, is not easy to define. Anglo-Saxon medical texts discuss it straightforwardly enough, using only the term 'blod', not the poetic words of 'dreor' or 'swat'. The only times that 'swat' is used in Anglo-Saxon leechbooks refer to actual perspiration or sweat (not the kenning 'battle-sweat' meaning 'blood') or to the juice of a plant.¹ 'Blod', however, is mentioned frequently in Old English medical lore and is closely connected to the liver. *Bald's Leechbook*, copied down in the mid-tenth century, discusses blood in its section on liver diseases:

...sio [lifer] is blodes timber. 7 blodes hus. 7 fostor. þonne þara metta meltung biþ 7 þynnes þa becuþaþ on þa lifer þonne wendaþ hie hiora hiw 7 cerrað on blod. 7 þa unsefernessa þe þær beoþ hio awyrpþ ut 7 þæt clæne blod gesomnaþ 7 þurh feower ædra swiþost onsent to þære heortan 7 eac geond ealne þone lichoman oþ þa ytmestan limo.²

...the [liver] is the material of the blood, the blood's house and food. When there is digesting of meats, and they become thin in the liver, then they change their appearance and turn into blood. And where there are impurities, it [the liver] casts them out, and it gathers clean blood, and through four veins it quickly sends it to the heart and also all throughout the body as far as the outermost limbs.³

From this leechbook and others, it is clear that the Anglo-Saxons understood 'blod' to have a specific medical purpose: to transport the nutritional elements of food to all parts of the body. Blood here has a carefully defined corporeality; although it is

¹ See examples in *Bald's Leechbook I*, in *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England, Vol. II*, ed. by T. O. Cockayne (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865), pp. 1-157: 'swat' as perspiration in §26 and 'swat' as plant juice in §2.19.

² *Bald's Leechbook II*, in *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England, Vol. II*, ed. by T. O. Cockayne (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865), pp. 158-299, §17.

³ All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

implicated in discourses of health and wholeness, it does not appear to be metaphorical or spiritual.

The division of science and religion in Anglo-Saxon England did not exist the way it does for us today. One cannot simply divide concepts of blood into the secular and the religious. Karen Jolly says, ‘The scanty pictorial evidence we have relating to professional doctors, or leeches, suggests that this term referred to laymen’; that said, the manuscript of *Bald’s Leechbook* was copied down in a religious foundation.⁴ Anglo-Saxon leechbooks are a combination of scholarly classical concepts and native remedies. Many manuscripts were copied directly from Greek and Latin sources; however, Jolly says these ‘elite or intellectual’ manuscripts ‘show us something of the scholarly medical worldview of the times, but [...] were not practical guides for the everyday treatment of disease’.⁵ Other texts, like the *Lacnunga* and *Bald’s Leechbook*, offer a more ‘practical and instructional’ organizational system and reflect native, Anglo-Saxon lay practices as well as religious and classical learning.⁶ The truth is that even if manuscripts were copied down in the libraries and scriptoria of religious foundations, the people who produced them were not isolated from the world. Jolly says that these people would have ‘...interacted with their own culture, reflecting its needs and ideas in what they chose to read, copy, or write down, thus influencing popular practices by transmitting literate ideas’⁷; and, I suspect, these popular practices in turn influenced medical ideas of the literate.

It bears noting, therefore, how the literate religious population accepted or rejected the medical concepts described in the leechbooks; what Ælfric writes about blood in his *Sermo de Sacrificio in Die Pascae*, for instance, is of a completely

⁴ K. Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina, 1996), p. 103 and p. 1.

⁵ Jolly, *Popular Religion*, p. 105.

⁶ Jolly, *Popular Religion*, p. 106.

⁷ Jolly, *Popular Religion*, pp. 104-105.

different nature. In this sermon Ælfric bases his arguments on anti-materialist Eucharistic treatises from ninth-century Francia, the works of Pascasius Radbertus and Ratramnus of Corbie.⁸ It is thought that this sermon was probably inspired by Gregory the Great's *Homily 22*, which concludes by explaining the significance of the Old Testament Passover for the Christian Eucharist.⁹ The central, doctrinal part of Ælfric's sermon draws heavily on the Ratramnus's *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini*, highlighting this treatise's main points and conclusions.¹⁰ Radbertus's *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini* is thought to be the source of Ælfric's two exempla, the first of which appears 'in virtually the same words' as Radbertus's treatise.¹¹

Ælfric stresses the difference between the material and spiritual bodies in his *Sermo de Sacrificio in Die Pascae*, arguing against the materiality of the Eucharist:

Se lichama soðlice ðe crist on ðrowode wæs geboren of Marian flæsce. mid blode. and mid banum. mid felle. and mid sinum. on menniscum limum. mid gesceadwisre sawle geliffæst. and his gastlica lichama ðe we husel hatað is of manegum cornum gegaderod buton blode. and bane. limleas. and sawulleas. and nis for ði nan ðing þæron to understandenne lichamlice. ac is eall gastliceto understandenne.¹²

The body in which Christ suffered truly was born of Mary's flesh, with blood and with bones, with skin and with sinews, with human limbs, quickened by a rational soul. And the spiritual body, which we call the Eucharist, is joined together from many grains, without blood and bone, limbless and soulless, and there is nothing therein, therefore, to be understood bodily, but all is to be understood spiritually.

The physical, material body is furnished with, among other things, blood and a soul, whereas the spiritual body is 'buton blode' ('without blood') and 'sawulleas' ('soulless'). It is interesting that in his explanation Ælfric groups the soul with material, corporeal elements – the bones, the hair, the sinews and the blood – while

⁸ M. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the Second Series*, EETS s.s. 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 487-489.

⁹ Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the Second Series*, p. 487.

¹⁰ Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the Second Series*, p. 488.

¹¹ Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the Second Series*, pp. 494-495.

¹² Ælfric, *Sermo de Sacrificio in Die Pascae*, in *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the Second Series*, ed. by M. Godden, EETS s.s. 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 150-160, ll. 130-136.

the more abstract, spiritual body lacks a soul. Leslie Lockett says, ‘The Old English word *sawol* signifies an entity that joins the body at the beginning of the life-span, leaves the body at death, and participates in the afterlife: this much is true throughout the corpus of Old English literature, in narrative as well as theological discourse.’¹³ However, in this particular homily the soul is presented as linked to rather than opposed to the body’s corporeality.

Perhaps it is because the spiritual body and blood of Christ, the Eucharist, is ‘sawulleas’ that it is still acceptable to consume Christ’s blood. Otherwise the Eucharist would present something of a conundrum, since the consumption of blood is expressly forbidden in several different parts of the Bible. In Leviticus 17 God says, ‘Homo quilibet de domo Israhel et de advenis qui peregrinantur inter eos si comederit sanguinem obfirmabo faciem meam contra animam illius et disperdam eam de populo suo’ (‘If any man whosoever of the house of Israel, and of the strangers that travel among them, eat blood, I will set my face against his soul, and will ruin him among his people’).¹⁴ God repeats his injunction again in Leviticus 19, ordering Moses, ‘Non comedetis cum sanguine’ (‘You shall not eat with blood’).¹⁵ Deuteronomy 12 and 15 both warn against consuming blood, with God commanding, ‘...super terram quasi aquam effundes’ (‘...you shall pour it out upon the earth as water’), and ‘...effundas in terram quasi aquam’ (‘...pour it out on the earth as water’).¹⁶ God blesses Noah and his sons in Genesis 9, saying, ‘Et omne quod movetur et vivit erit vobis in cibum quasi holera virentia tradidi vobis omnia excepto quod carnem cum sanguine non comedetis’ (‘And everything that moves and lives shall be food for you: just like the green vegetables, I have delivered them all to you –

¹³ L. Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), p. 19.

¹⁴ Latin Vulgate Bible, drbo.org (2001-2011), online, Leviticus 17:10.

¹⁵ Latin Vulgate Bible, Leviticus 19:26.

¹⁶ Latin Vulgate Bible, Deuteronomy 12:16 and 15:23.

save only that flesh with blood you shall not eat').¹⁷ This restriction against the consumption of blood is one that was of concern to the Anglo-Saxon religious. Fred Robinson points out that homilists like Ælfric and Wulfstan warn against the sin of blood consumption in both Latin and vernacular texts, especially in penitential writings, as does Bede in his theological works.¹⁸

Anxiety about the consumption of blood even appears in the law code of Alfred the Great.¹⁹ Alfred begins his *Domas* with a summary of Mosaic law (§§1-48). He concludes this summary in §49, in which he paraphrases a passage from the Bible, Acts 15. In this passage the apostles and ancients gather to decide upon the abridged set of laws to be prescribed for newly converted heathens, 'eos qui ex gentibus convertuntur ad Deum'²⁰, in order to avoid overwhelming them with too many restrictions. They end up writing a letter to send to Antioch which says: 'Ut abstineatis vos ab immolatis simulacrorum et sanguine suffocato et fornicatione a quibus custodientes vos bene agetis valete' ('You abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; if you keep yourself from these things, you shall do well – farewell').²¹ Alfred tells this story in the preface to his law code and records these same restrictions:

Ðæm Halgan Gaste wæs geþuht 7 us, þæt we nane byrðene on eow settan noldon, ofer þæt þe eow ned-þearf wæs to healdenne, þæt is þonne þæt ge forberen þæt ge deofol-gyld ne weorðien, ne blod ne þicgen, ne asmored, 7 from dærum geligerum. 7 þæt ge willen þæt oðre men eow ne don, ne doð ge þæt oðrum mannum.²²

¹⁷ Latin Vulgate Bible, Genesis 9:3-4.

¹⁸ F. C. Robinson, 'Lexicography and Literary Criticism: A Caveat', in *Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature*, ed. by J. L. Rosier (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 99-110, pp. 102-103.

¹⁹ Alfred the Great, *Ælfredes Domas*, in *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, ed. by B. Thorpe (London: The Commissioners on the Public Records of the United Kingdom, 1840), pp. 44-101.

²⁰ Latin Vulgate Bible, Acts 15:19.

²¹ Latin Vulgate Bible, Acts 15:29.

²² Alfred the Great, *Ælfredes Domas*, in *Ancient Laws*, p. 56, §49.

It seemed to the Holy Ghost and to us that we should set no burden on you more than was needed for you to bear. Now that is that you forbear from worshipping idols, and from tasting blood or things strangled, and from fornication; and that which you would not have other men do to you, do not do that to other men.

In the next section Alfred launches into ‘be ađum and be weddum’, ‘of oaths and of pledges’, and never refers to blood consumption again. However, it is notable that the king chose this particular biblical passage with which to preface his legal code, highlighting specifically the taboo against consuming blood.

Anyone who ignores God’s rule about abstaining from blood consumption is generally considered to be a monster. In the epic poem *Beowulf*, both Grendel and his mother eat human flesh and blood, something that is expressly forbidden in several different parts of the Bible, and something which Orchard says links them with the cursed antediluvian giants, from whom they may have descended.²³ Robinson points out that for the Anglo-Saxons, ‘...the mention of blood-drinking would probably have suggested a specific and horrifying sin, a sin which would match on a spiritual, theological level the physical horror of Grendel’s feast’.²⁴ Orchard observes that the poets who composed *Genesis A* and *Beowulf* both connect consuming blood to committing great sins.²⁵ In *Genesis A* God says to Noah and his sons, ‘Næfre ge mid blode beodgereordu | unarlice eowre þicgeað, | besmiten mid synne sawldreore’ (‘You shall never shamefully consume a table-feast with blood, soul-blood polluted with sin’).²⁶ The blood is linked directly to the soul in the word ‘sawldreore’, and consuming the physical embodiment of the soul results in being polluted or stained by

²³ A. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), p. 65.

²⁴ Robinson, ‘Lexicography’, p. 102.

²⁵ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 64.

²⁶ *Genesis A*, in *Genesis A: A New Edition*, ed. by A. N. Doane (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 109-221, ll. 1518-1520.

sin. Orchard argues that the association between blood-drinking and sinning is made much more apparent here than in the biblical Book of Genesis.²⁷

In the Bible God explains why humans must never consume blood. God says in Deuteronomy 12, ‘Hoc solum cave ne sanguinem comedas sanguis enim eorum pro anima est et idcirco non debes animam comedere cum carnibus’ (‘Only take heed of this: do not eat the blood, for the blood is for the soul, and therefore you must not eat the soul with the flesh’).²⁸ In Leviticus 17 God explains the reason for this restriction: ‘Quia anima carnis in sanguine est et ego dedi illum vobis ut super altare in eo expietis pro animabus vestris et sanguis pro animae piaculo sit’ (‘Because the soul of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you, so that with it on the altar you may atone for your souls; and the blood may be for an expiation of the soul’).²⁹ If the soul is necessary for an ‘expiation’ for God, an atonement upon death, then losing your soul (in the form of blood) could result in damnation or, at the very least, God’s great displeasure.

The soul belongs to God after death, and if the soul’s medium, blood, is consumed, the one who consumes it is stealing from God and is thus a monster. Robinson explains why blood-drinking was considered ‘such a heinous offense’: ‘To imbibe the blood of any creature was worse than merely to kill it; to do so was to consume life itself, which is reserved properly to the Lord.’³⁰ Tertullian, Origen, Justin, Athenagoras and other early biblical commentators describe blood-drinking as a key characteristic of ‘corporeal demons descended from the evil giants’ who dwelt in the antediluvian world.³¹ Robinson points out that in the apocryphal Book of Enoch, these giants were responsible for the Flood, which God sent to punish them

²⁷ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 64.

²⁸ Latin Vulgate Bible, Deuteronomy 12:23.

²⁹ Latin Vulgate Bible, Leviticus 17:11.

³⁰ Robinson, ‘Lexicography’, p. 104.

³¹ Robinson, ‘Lexicography’, p. 104.

for violating his law against blood-drinking.³² The giants and their demon spawn ‘turned violently on mankind, devoured flesh, and drank the blood’, and, as Origen explains, ‘it is for this reason as much as for any other ... that human beings are strictly forbidden to consume it: blood is the food of demons’.³³

The monstrosity of the Mermedonians in the hagiographical poem *Andreas* is emphasised more by their consumption of human flesh than by any outward animosity towards the Christian God. Cannibals are, after all, significantly more frightening than run-of-the-mill pagans. The Mermedonians’ wickedness and their alliance with Satan are defined by their unfortunate eating habits:

Eal wæs þæt mearcland morðre bewunden,
feondes facne, folcstede gumena,
hæleða eðel. Næs þær hlafes wist
werum on þam wonge, ne wæteres drync
to bruconne, ah hie blod ond fel,
fira flæschoman, feorrancumenra,
ðegon geond þa þeode. Swelc wæs þeaw hira,
þæt hie æghwylcne ellðeodigra
dydan him to mose meteþearfendum,
þara þe þæt ealand utan sohte.³⁴

That marchland [i.e., Mermedonia] was all surrounded by wickedness, the fiend’s treachery, that land of men, the native land of warriors. There was no provision of bread for the men on that plain, nor a drink of water to enjoy, but throughout the land they ate blood and skin, the bodies of men, of those who had come from afar. Such was their custom that they, those lacking in meat, made into food every foreigner who sought that island from abroad.

Because of ‘the fiend’s treachery’ or the evildoings of Satan, these heathens consume humans killed for the express purpose of their own nourishment. The Mermedonians present an inversion both of the ritual of the Eucharist and of the conventions of hospitality.

³² Robinson, ‘Lexicography’, p. 104.

³³ Robinson, ‘Lexicography’, p. 104.

³⁴ *Andreas*, in *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, ed. by G. P. Krapp (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1906), pp. 1-73, ll. 19-28.

It is emphasised, however, that in Mermedonia there are not a lot of dietary options. There is neither bread to eat ('næs þær hlafes wist') nor water to drink ('ne wæteres drync') for the inhabitants. This is a change from a longer Latin version, *The Acts of Andrew and Matthew among the Cannibals (Casanatensis)*, that is thought to be a possible source because of certain shared details of the stories.³⁵ In *Casanatensis* the blood-drinking is not portrayed as something that is done out of necessity:

Devenit namque beati mathei in sortem provincie que dicitur mermedonia, in qua conmorabantur iniqui et pessimi viri, nichil aliud preter hominis carnem edebant, eosque sanguinibus bibebant. Habebantque clibanum in medio civitatis edificatum, insuper et lacus iusta eodem clibani. In quo lacu[s] homines interficiebant, ut sanguis illud ibi colligerent. Alioque lacu iusta ipsum lacum, in quo sanguis illud que in ipso priore laco spargentur, et quasi purgatus discurret, bibendum.³⁶

For the province that is called Mermedonia fell to St Matthew's lot, in which dwelt wicked and most evil men. They ate nothing except human flesh and also drank their blood. And they had an oven built in the centre of the city, and in addition a tank next to that same oven. They killed humans in the tank so that they could collect the blood there. And in another tank next to the same tank, in which the blood which will be sprinkled in that same first tank, and runs off as if made pure, [for(?)] drinking.

The passage continues with more grisly details about how the victims are imprisoned, have their eyes plucked out and are forced to partake of a poisoned draught which makes them lose their sanity. Not only is the Mermedonians' behaviour much more violent and malicious than that exhibited in the more circumspect Old English poem *Andreas*, more emphasis is put on their custom of blood-drinking. Nowhere in *Casanatensis* does it say that the Mermedonians had no other food or drink options; as far as we know, they simply enjoyed being cannibals. The description of the

³⁵ M. J. B. Allen and D. G. Calder, eds., *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry, Vol. I* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1976), p. 15.

³⁶ *Acta Andreae et Matthiae apud anthropophagos (Casanatensis)*, in *Die lateinischen Bearbeitungen der Acta Andreae et Matthiae apud anthropophagos*, ed. by F. Blatt (Gießen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1930), pp. 33-95, at p. 33, ll. 3-11.

storage tank and purification system is truly monstrous, depicting the cannibals as true connoisseurs of human blood.

Why does the Old English version of the story discard these details of blood consumption? Perhaps the poet thought the details were too horrific, given that the Mermedonians – at least some of the less wicked ones – were a people who would be redeemed in the end. After all, at the end of the poem the converted heathens are depicted as Andreas's devoted disciples:

...he ða menigeo geseah
hweorfan higebliðe fram helltrafum
þurh Andreas este lare
to fægeran gefean, þær næfre feondes ne bið,
gastes gramhydiges, gang on lande.³⁷

...he [Satan] beheld the multitude turning blithe-heartedly from hell-temples, through Andreas's gracious teaching, to happiness more fair, where neither fiend nor hostile spirit shall ever go in the land.

Later, when Andreas departs Mermedonia after converting the heathens, the poet-narrator says, 'þa ic lædan gefrægn leoda weorode | leofne lareow to lides stefnan, | mæcgas modgeomre' ('Then I heard that sad-minded men in a throng of people led their beloved teacher to the ship's prow').³⁸ The Mermedonians learn from Andreas's holy lessons, and they no longer worship heathen gods and drink human blood. It is possible that the poet thought that presenting them in a less monstrous way at the beginning of the poem would make this transformation more palatable to the audience. Perhaps it is more acceptable to become a holy saint's loyal disciple if you come from a cannibalistic background with few dietary options, not equipped with advanced blood tanks and filters and a penchant for violence; or perhaps as a reader one is not supposed to be distracted by gory details such as these.

³⁷ *Andreas*, ll. 1690b-1694.

³⁸ *Andreas*, ll. 1706-1708a.

Another blood-drinker, Grendel, never gives up his unsavoury dietary habits; he does not stop eating humans until the hero Beowulf kills him. Grendel breaks the blood-drinking taboo with relish and never repents; consequently, he seems a more monstrous monster than the Mermedonian cannibals. The poem *Beowulf* says, ‘...fifelcynnes eard | wonsæli wer weardode hwile, | siþðan him scyppen forscrifen hæfde | in Caines cynne...’ (‘...the unlucky man occupied the land of monsters for awhile, after the Creator had condemned him among the race of Cain...’).³⁹ Grendel, descended from Cain, falls irrevocably into the category of ‘monster’; his story ends not in his conversion and repentance but in his death.

Grendel, one of Cain’s race, has been condemned by God; it is, therefore, more acceptable to see him mercilessly tearing bodies to shreds and feasting upon human blood and flesh. The *Beowulf*-poet certainly paints the picture of Grendel’s appetite for blood and violence in horrifically graphic terms. Upon grabbing the sleeping warrior Hondscio, Grendel ‘...slat unwearnum, | bat banlocan, blod edrum dranc, | synsnædum swealh; sona hæfde | unlyfigendes eal gefeormod, | fet ond folma’ (‘...tore suddenly, bit the bone-joints, drank blood in streams, swallowed sinful morsels; had soon eaten the un-living one all up, feet and hands’).⁴⁰ Grendel’s mother is not actually seen eating her victim, but she inflicts terrible violence upon his body, as Beowulf and his men discover when they find Æschere’s bloody head discarded on the mere-side cliff: ‘...Æscheres | on þam holmclife hafelan metton. | Flod blode weol – folc to sægon – | hatan heolfre’ (‘...they met with Æschere’s head on the waterside cliff. The flood was welling with blood – the people saw it – hot gore’).⁴¹ Violence and bloodshed, however, is commonplace in the adventures of an epic hero;

³⁹ *Beowulf*, in *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, 4th ed., ed. by R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 3-109, ll. 104b-107a.

⁴⁰ *Beowulf*, ll. 741b-745a.

⁴¹ *Beowulf*, ll. 1420b-1423a.

it is the *consumption* of blood that makes these scenes truly disturbing. The blood welling in the water is above all a reminder of the Grendel-kin's horrifically cannibalistic tendencies.

The blood-drinking of the Grendel-kin and the Mermedonians is not simply revolting and cannibalistic – it is a sin against God, a theft from the Lord, and I believe this is because of blood's important connection to the soul, a substance which links a person's physical and spiritual bodies. It was certainly a matter worthy of discussion in Anglo-Saxon times. The religious were concerned about the differentiation between the physical and the spiritual bodies, as is evidenced by Ælfric's homily, but it seems as though blood was an area of overlap. 'Blod' may be a medical term for a substance found in the liver, but in Old English poetry it carries much greater meaning and significance.

The biblical rationalization of why blood is the breakfast of monsters, demons and the damned in general does not, however, explain the exact nature of the relationship between blood and soul for the Anglo-Saxons. Blood does not *equal* the soul, but blood does have a unique relationship with the soul in human beings. While Robinson quotes Ælfric as someone who believed 'blood was identical with the soul', Mary Clayton argues for more 'sophisticated' views of the blood-soul relationship.⁴² Clayton points out the disparity in the meaning of the quotations which Robinson cites from Ælfric's *Letter to Wulfgeat* and the prose *Solomon and Saturn*. To support his argument that Anglo-Saxons believed blood and the soul were equivalent, Robinson quotes Ælfric's *Letter to Wulfgeat*: 'Ic wylle ofgan æt ðe his blodes gyte, |

⁴² Robinson, 'Lexicography', p. 103; M. Clayton, 'Blood and the Soul in Ælfric', *Notes and Queries* 54 (2007), 365-367, p. 365.

þæt is sawul' ('I will require from you the shedding of his blood, that is the soul').⁴³

Robinson also quotes from the prose *Solomon and Saturn*, providing the answer to the question of where a soul lives while the body is asleep: 'on ðam brægene, oððe on ðære heortan, oððe on ða blode' ('in the brain, or in the heart, or in the blood').⁴⁴

Clayton argues that while the lines from Ælfric's *Letter* by themselves 'seem to equate soul and blood', the lines from *Solomon and Saturn* indicate that blood is a place where the soul may *reside* and not the soul itself.⁴⁵ She determines that in the passage from Ælfric's *Letter*, '...blood is interpreted as the soul, not equated with it'.⁴⁶

Yet blood is clearly more than an 'interpretation' or metaphor for the soul. It is true that blood does not equal the soul (if that is, in fact, what Robinson is arguing), but blood *is*, perhaps, where body and soul overlap, the physical substance formed from the material world touching the spiritual. Leslie Lockett calls attention to Ælfric's *Sermo de Sacrificio in Die Pascae*, stating that the Platonic concept of an incorporeal soul was 'slow to catch on' in England.⁴⁷ In the late ninth century, the time of King Alfred's court's scholarly work in the translation of Latin texts into the vernacular, Lockett claims that 'a much looser understanding of incorporeality was still applied to the soul'.⁴⁸ A century later the concept of the purely incorporeal soul had still failed to stick. Lockett argues that Ælfric's battle against materialism offers proof that certain 'misperceptions' about the Eucharist and the soul were current among his audience.⁴⁹ She writes:

⁴³ Quoted by Clayton from *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. by B. Assmann, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 3, reprinted with a supplementary introduction by P. Clemoes (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), p. 12, ll. 302-303.

⁴⁴ Quoted by Robinson from *The Dialogue of Solomon and Saturnus*, ed. J. M. Kemble (London: The Ælfric Society, 1948), p. 188.

⁴⁵ Clayton, 'Blood and the Soul', p. 365.

⁴⁶ Clayton, 'Blood and the Soul', p. 367.

⁴⁷ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 312.

⁴⁸ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 312.

⁴⁹ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 379.

A handful of learned Anglo-Saxon discourses on psychology espouse a bipartite anthropology and understand the soul to be a unitary soul, and late in the Anglo-Saxon era, Ælfric of Eynsham employed the Old English word *sawol* to signify the rational, incorporeal, and unitary soul that his Christian Latin authorities called *anima*. Yet in most Old English literature – especially poetry, in which the diction is less constrained by the language of Latin source texts – the word *sawol* signified not a unitary soul but only that part of the human being that participated in the afterlife.⁵⁰

Even if Ælfric's sermons discuss 'sawol' as a completely abstract phenomenon, Old English poetry does not necessarily follow in the same vein. If Ælfric equates 'sawol' and 'anima', it is by no means the only way Anglo-Saxons perceived this aspect of a human being. The soul was the part of a person that participated in the afterlife, but Ælfric was clearly worried that people thought it was something more, something spiritual which could be materially represented by the body in the substance of blood. He argues for an abstract yet real 'spiritual' body of Christ again in his *Dominica in Media Quadragesime (Mid-Lent Sunday)* homily: 'On ðam halgan husle we ðicgað cristes lichaman. se hlaf is soðlice his lichama gastlice. ðeah ðe se ungelæreda þæs gelyfan ne cunne' ('In the holy Eucharist we eat Christ's body; the bread is truly his body spiritually, though an unlearned person cannot believe it').⁵¹ Ælfric's series of *Catholic Homilies* is thought to have been intended for uneducated laypersons.⁵² If Ælfric was concerned enough about materialism to attack it in his writings and encourage a more 'spiritual' sense of the Eucharist in his lay congregation, incorporeality must have been a significant issue in Anglo-Saxon religious belief.

The fact that Ælfric's belief in an incorporeal soul was not held by the Anglo-Saxon population at large is indicated by the lack of writing on this subject among

⁵⁰ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 17.

⁵¹ Ælfric, *Dominica in Media Quadragesime (CH II.12)* in *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. by M. Godden, EETS, s.s. 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 110-120, at p. 116, ll. 212-214.

⁵² Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 402.

other homilists. Lockett says, ‘...outside the writings of Ælfric, the idea that the soul was truly incorporeal, indivisible, and non-localized has left little impression on Old English literature’.⁵³ The word ‘sawul-drior’, which is found in Old English poems such as *Genesis A* and *Beowulf*, specifically links the words for ‘soul’ and ‘blood’. ‘Sawul-drior’ is sometimes translated as ‘life-blood’, but ‘sawul’ clearly means ‘soul’; the word remains practically identical in Modern English. Lockett explains that even though Anglo-Saxons frequently depicted the soul and the body as separate (even opposing) entities, this did not mean that the soul was truly incorporeal: ‘...the soul was distinguished from the flesh of the human body but not from bodily substance altogether’.⁵⁴ Blood and the soul are not the same, but blood can represent the soul physically, and the soul is not an entirely bodiless entity.

Every soul is tied to a particular body, making each soul individually unique; so too is blood tied to individual bodies in Old English literature, in both poetic and medical texts. The blood represents an individual, and so a treatment which involves that blood is also a treatment of that individual body as a whole. Wilfrid Bonser discusses the importance of personal treatments and individuality in Old English medical remedies or, as he calls it, ‘magic’. He writes:

The personal factor is very strong in magic, whether the thing used is blood or spittle, or merely a footprint or article of clothing. The important point is that it must be individual, as representing the actual man or woman of which it is a part or to whom it alone belongs. It may be used to aid the person concerned, as in prescriptions, or to his detriment, as in witchcraft.⁵⁵

Some remedies in *Bald’s Leechbook*, for instance, metonymically use the blood of the ailing individual as part of the cure.

In *Bald’s Leechbook* the cure for swellings accompanied by fever reads:

⁵³ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 23.

⁵⁴ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 23.

⁵⁵ W. Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study in History, Psychology, and Folklore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 221.

Eft wiþ onfealle genim æt fruman hæslenne sticcan oþþe ellenne writ
þinne naman on asleah þry sceanpan on gefylle mid þy blode þone
naman weorp ofer eaxe oþþe betweoh þeoh on yrnende wæter 7 stand
ofer þone man þa sceanpan aslea 7 þæt eall swiginde gedo.⁵⁶

Again against swellings, first take a stick of hazel or elder, write your name on it, cut three scarifications into it, fill the name with the blood, throw it over your shoulder or between your thighs into flowing water and stand over the man. Cut the scarifications, and do all that silently.

The blood is needed to identify the individual who is sick. The fact that the blood fills the name of the person written on the stick makes it even clearer that blood is an essential part of the individual's identity. Bonser says, '...the writing of the name and filling the writing with the blood of the sufferer made the matter a personal one for him'.⁵⁷ Whatever benefits the different steps of the remedy are supposed to provide, it is important that while not treating the actual physical body of the patient, the patient's blood is treated outside the body. The blood forms the physical link to the patient, the bond that connects the treatment to the individual.

Blood is thus an essential element of a person's identity, a concept familiar to us today in people's blood-types and (for some) their corresponding horoscopes. In Anglo-Saxon England it appears that an individual's blood served as a kind of identifier, something which could be used to the benefit or detriment of that individual depending on whether it was used for remedy or curse. Blood, intrinsic to one's individuality, marks one as unique among human beings – not unlike the soul.

⁵⁶ *Bald's Leechbook I*, §39.5.

⁵⁷ Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 238.

Primary Sources

Acta Andreae et Matthiae apud anthropophagos (Casanatensis), in *Die lateinischen Bearbeitungen der Acta Andreae et Matthiae apud anthropophagos*, ed. by Franz Blatt (Gießen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1930), pp. 33-95

Alfred the Great, *Ælfredes Domas*, in *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, ed. by Benjamin Thorpe (London: The Commissioners on the Public Records of the United Kingdom, 1840), pp. 44-101

Ælfric, *Letter to Wulfgeat*, in *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. by B. Assmann, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 3, reprinted with a supplementary introduction by P. Clemoes (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964)

—, *Dominica in Media Quadragesime*, Homily II.12, in *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. by Malcolm Godden, EETS, s.s. 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 110-120

—, *Sermo de Sacrificio in Die Pascae*, Homily II.15, in *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the Second Series*, ed. by Malcolm Godden, EETS s.s. 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 150-160

Andreas, in *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, ed. by Kenneth R. Brooks (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 1-55

Bald's Leechbook, Book I, in *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England, Vol. 2*, ed. by Thomas Oswald Cockayne (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865), pp. 1-157

Bald's Leechbook, Book II, in *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England, Vol. 2*, ed. by Thomas Oswald Cockayne (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865), pp. 158-299

Beowulf, in *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 4th ed., ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2008), pp. 3-109

Genesis A, in *Genesis A: A New Edition*, ed. by A. N. Doane (Madison, Wisconsin: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 109-221

Latin Vulgate Bible, drbo.org (2001-2011), online at <http://www.drbo.org/index.htm>

Solomon and Saturn, in *The Dialogue of Solomon and Saturnus*, ed. J. M. Kemble (London: The Ælfric Society, 1948)

Secondary Sources

Allen, Michael J. B., and Daniel G. Calder, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1976)

Bonser, Wilfrid, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study in History, Psychology, and Folklore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963)

Clayton, Mary, 'Blood and the Soul in Ælfric', *Notes and Queries* 54 (2007), 365-36

Godden, Malcolm, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, EETS s.s. 18 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

Jolly, Karen Louise, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996)

Lockett, Leslie, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011)

Orchard, Andy, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995)

Robinson, Fred C., 'Lexicography and Literary Criticism: A Caveat', in *Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature*, ed. by James L. Rosier (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), pp. 88-110