

Lenka Klasnová

The Motives of Separation and Solitude in Old English Lyrical Poetry
(ÚALK, FF UK, Praha 2012, 51 pp.)

Supervisor's review

More specific than its title suggests, the thesis undertakes to provide an overview and analysis of the situation of an isolated individual as developed in four Old English elegies. The focus of the thesis and the selected material form a mutually supportive construction. From the entire elegiac group, notoriously problematic in terms of clear generic definition, the author chose the three texts that have long been established as the canonical core of the group (*The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wife's Lament*) and that, at the same time, make the experience of isolation central to their poetic statement. To this, the author added the more liminal *Wulf and Eadwacer*, which has allowed her to productively engage with the issues of gender and its role in producing two distinct types of an elegiac monologue. In this way, Lenka Klasnová constituted a fairly representative sample which allows her to state her conclusions with assurance (though the representativeness does not go quite as far as to warrant the title – a subtitle might clarify matters). It might be argued that the four selected texts form more of a continuum with *The Seafarer* on one end and *Wulf and Eadwacer* on the other, rather than the two pairs of male/female elegies that emerge as a result of the analysis; however, this is more a question of emphasis and the author does not suppress the differences within the groups proposed in favour of the indisputable similarities, on which she focuses.

On the whole, the author tackles the limitations inevitably imposed by the selected material remarkably well. The elegies are among the most closely studied Old English poems and the thesis thus consists in large part in a competent and critical overview of existing scholarship on the subject, yet it succeeds in providing some independent insights especially as regards the gender aspect of the four poetic monologues and the central characteristics of their portrayal of isolation.

While I emphatically do not wish in any way to challenge the author's decision either as to the material selected for analysis or its emphasis - both being legitimate and productive - I would like to pose two supplementary questions that might be addressed in the defence:

- 1) What does she think about the often proposed pairing of *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message*? Would it influence her interpretation of the former text in any way?
- 2) While the differences between the male and the female elegies are clearly formulated, what would be her reading of the group as a continuum? Is it, in her eyes, a valid concept?

Conclusion: I recommend the thesis for defence with the preliminary mark EXCELLENT (výborně).

Prague, 17 June 201ě

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