

Charles University in Prague

Faculty of Education

BACHELOR'S THESIS

2012

Jana Smejkalová

Charles University in Prague

Faculty of Education

Department of the English Language and Literature

BACHELOR'S THESIS

**Religious Dualism in Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Pagan and Christian
Motifs in Selected Old English Poems**

Author: Jana Smejkalová

Supervisor: PhDr. Petr Chalupský, Ph.D.

2012

Abstract

This bachelor's thesis focuses on Christian and pagan motifs in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Central texts for the analysis of these motifs include three Old English poems: *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*. The objective of the thesis is to illustrate various features of Christian mythology in the context of their historical and social background in selected Old English works, and to compare their composition, genre and the role of a Christian hero.

Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá křesťanskými a pohanskými motivy v anglosaské poezii. Hlavní texty pro analýzu těchto motivů tvoří tři staroanglické básně: *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Seafarer* a *The Wanderer*. Cíl práce je ukázat různé prvky pohanské a křesťanské mytologie v jejich historickém a společenském kontextu ve vybraných staroanglických pracích a porovnat jejich kompozici, žánr a roli křesťanského hrdiny.

Key words: Anglo-Saxon poetics, Christian and pagan themes, conversion

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor PhDr. Petr Chalupský, Ph.D., for his gracious help and support in the writing of this thesis and especially his patience with me as I struggled to find a focus for my various ideas. Most of all I appreciate his willingness to dedicate some of his extra time helping me bring this project to a close.

Declaration

I hereby declare that I have elaborated this thesis individually and that all the sources that were used are listed on the Works Cited page. No other sources were used.

Prague 2012

Jana Smejkalová

.....

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
1 Theoretical part.....	4
1.1 Introduction to the Anglo-Saxon Society.....	4
1.2 The Codices.....	5
1.3 The Historical Background	6
1.4 The Conversion to Christianity	8
1.5 The Transmission of the Old English Poetry	9
1.6 The Philological Research Related to the Old English Poems.....	12
1.7 The Form of the Old English Poems.....	13
2 Practical part	15
2.1 The Dream of the Rood.....	15
2.1.1 Genre and Narration.....	15
2.1.2 Blending of the Christian and Germanic Mythology	16
2.1.3 Moral Message	18
2.2 The Seafarer	20
2.2.1 Genre and Narration.....	20
2.2.2 Typical Old English Motifs and Poetic Devices	21
2.2.3 Blending of the Christian and Pagan Elements.....	23
2.3 The Wanderer.....	25
2.3.1 Genre and Themes.....	25
2.3.2 Heathen Motifs with Christian Conclusion.....	26
Conclusion	29
Works cited	33

Introduction

This bachelor's thesis focuses on the pagan and Christian motifs in selected Old English poems. The objective of the thesis is to illustrate different features of Christian and pagan mythology in the context of their historical and social background in selected Old English works, and to compare their narration, genre and the role of a Christian hero. Central texts for this analysis include three poems: *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*. There are various translations of the poems from the West Saxon dialect. For the purposes of this thesis I have chosen the translations by Kevin Crossley-Holland, appearing in the publication *The Anglo-Saxon World*, mainly for the reason of consistency in the style of the translation. The selected poems represent the overlapping religious sentimentalities in the Anglo-Saxon poetry. This dualism in literature reflects the dualism of the two contemporaneous cultures in Anglo-Saxon society: the Germanic pagan culture and the Christian culture. This thesis traces the features of both mythologies and presents their literary demonstrations in the selected poems.

The theoretical part examines the historical background of the Anglo-Saxon period. The main emphasis is on the establishment of Christianity and its influence on the heroic society of the Germanic tribes in England. It follows the assimilation process of the two cultures. The theoretical part also presents the four great collections of the Old English poetry and exemplifies the complex process of the transmission of literary works and describes the gradually advancing influence of Christianity on the Anglo-Saxon culture; literature in particular.

The practical part depicts the pagan and Christian motifs employed in the selected Old English poems. Within three sections of the practical part, the three poems will be analyzed with regard to their genre and their narration. However, the main concern of the practical part is the description of the heroic and Christian themes and motifs developed in the poems. This section of the thesis also illustrates the characteristics of the Old English poetry hero and identifies the shared theme of the narrator who is a pagan at the beginning of the poem, but as the story develops, undergoes significant changes and by the end of the poem becomes a Christian. The

process of “baptism” of the pagan characters is analogical to the progress of the newly Christianized Anglo-Saxon society.

1 Theoretical part

1.1 Introduction to the Anglo-Saxon Society

The Anglo-Saxon society achieved extraordinary cultural accomplishments. The Anglo-Saxons were the most sophisticated pre-Conquest people in Europe; they produced poems, illuminated manuscripts, jewellery and other artefacts of great value. English jewellery, tapestry and stone-carvings were famous even in other countries of the contemporaneous Western Europe (Mitchell, 183-184). The Anglo-Saxon England was mostly an agricultural land and the farmer was considered to have the most important secular occupation because “the farmer feeds us all” (Mitchell, 197). The Germanic people came in England from three powerful nations of the Germans: the Saxons, “who appear to have come from the low country south of Denmark and east of Holland, the Holstein. The Angles appear to have lived in modern Jutland and the neighbouring islands before they appeared in Britain, while the Jutes, whose origin is the most obscure of the three, perhaps came from the country east of the lower Rhine (Daiches, 4). England consisted of small kingdoms in different parts of the country, it was not a country united by a single monarch yet. There were Saxon kingdoms (in the south and southwest), Anglian kingdoms (in the east, north and midlands) and the Jutish kingdom in the southeast. The culture differences between the groups were relatively little and their language was essentially the same (Daiches, 4).

The Germanic tribes arriving to England in the fifth and sixth centuries brought with them a code of values typical for heroic society. The most appreciated bond was the one between a lord and his retainers, often causing a conflict between a man’s loyalty to his lord and to his kin. They stressed physical and moral courage, loyalty and vengeance. They believed that fate governed a man’s life; one could only choose how one reacted to one’s destiny. These beliefs are illustrated in the Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry which is mostly concerned with the male society of lord and warrior. The life of a lord and warrior was centred in the hall where the lord had his throne and the whole tribe enjoyed feasts there; the description of the hall life can be found in the heroic poetry. The poets describe the lord as their protector who cherished his warriors and gave them gifts, for example in the poet’s praise of Hrothgar in

Beowulf. Life of the Anglo-Saxons was very communal and amongst the biggest fears was exile or loneliness, as depicted in the poem *The Wanderer*. A historical account of the Anglo-Saxon period is captured in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (King Alfred is credited with its organization) which records important events of that time, such as the accession of kings, the occurrence of plagues, battles, sighting of comets and other events until the twelfth century. The Anglo-Saxons came to England as pagans but their barbaric perspective and their Germanic identity was altered by a transforming experience which was the conversion to Christianity. Within two hundred years since their arrival to England, the Anglo-Saxons had become Christians (Crossley-Holland, 10-11).

The Anglo-Saxons were also familiar with Germanic gods and they practised fertility rites and witchcraft. They buried grave-goods, such as knives, jewellery, weapons, combs and food with the dead which suggests that they believed in the afterlife. In some cases, a slave girl was buried alive to serve her dead master. The custom of burying goods with the dead did not cease even with the coming of Christianity. The Christian and the pagan features in the lives of the Anglo-Saxons were often strangely mingled (Mitchell, 194).

1.2 The Codices

The extant of Old English poetry is contained in four great collections or codices; The Cotton Vitellius A XV manuscript (or the *Beowulf* manuscript) in the British Museum, The Junius manuscript in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the Exeter Book in Exeter Cathedral and the Vercelli Book preserved in the cathedral at Vercelli in northern Italy. These four manuscripts account for most of the surviving Old English poetry and vast majority of it is Christian in content. The Bodleian manuscript was once owned by the Dutch scholar Francis Junius (1589-1677) who was the first editor of its four poems. All the four poems are on Christian topics, their titles are *Daniel*, *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Christ and Satan*. The Vercelli Book is also a Christian collection which contains the poem *The Dream of the Rood*, the lives of the saints *Andreas* and *Elene* (*Elene* is one of the four poems signed by the Cynewulf) and

other three short poems. The manuscript's way to Vercelli is unknown. The largest and most diverse manuscript is the Exeter Book, which was presented to Exeter Cathedral by Leofric, its first bishop, as a gift to the library. The Exeter collection contains religious poems and allegories, such as *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, lyrics and elegies; namely *The Ruin*, *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message* and also some riddles. The fourth codex is the British Library Cotton Vitellius. It was left to the nation by Sir John Cotton (1621-1701). A fire in 1731 destroyed some manuscripts, fortunately sparing some prose texts, part of the poem *Judith* and 3182 line-long *Beowulf* (Mitchell, 74).

The surviving poems can be classified matter into subcategories according to the subject: poems treating heroic themes (*Beowulf*), historic poems, biblical paraphrases and reworking of biblical topics (*Judith* or *Genesis*), lives of the saints (*Andreas* and *Elene*), other religious poems, such as *The Dream of the Rood* or allegorical poems *The Phoenix*, *The Panther* or *The Whale*, riddles and short elegies and lyrics, such as *The Wife's Lament*, *The Wanderer* or *The Seafarer* (Mitchell, 75).

1.3 The Historical Background

The surviving manuscripts are discussed in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* contains seven manuscripts compiled from different sets of annals from various sources extending from the Roman invasion until the year 892 (the last annal featured only in the Peterborough Chronicle extends until 1154). The differences between the surviving manuscripts are so great that it is preferred to speak of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles. Another source of knowledge of the history of England before the eighth century is provided in *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* by the Venerable Bede (672 – 735) (Mitchell 78). “The Ecclesiastical History itself is the most informative and graceful historical narrative produced in England until at least the twelfth century” (Campbell, 70). It captures the dramatic changes in the Anglo-Saxon society after the conversion. Venerable Bede wrote in Latin and was the first English historian in the modern sense (Crossley-Holland, 12).

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles move from merely recording to commenting on and judging participants. The annals tell of the Anglo-Saxon period, which lasted over 600 years, starting in 449 and ending with the Norman Conquest of 1066. It follows the Germanic tribes, one of which was to give their name to England (Engla lond). Originally, these tribes arrived in response to requests from the British for protection. Instead, they fought them and took possession of the land (Mitchell, 79).

One of the most significant events in the Anglo-Saxon period was the coming of Christianity (for the Romans it was the second coming of Christianity for they had already adopted it). At the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century much of the south of England was converted to Christianity thanks to the influence of Augustine and his followers. Aidan and Celtic monks were responsible for the evangelization of the north of England. The monks of the Northumbrian monasteries illustrated magnificent manuscripts, hammered out great stone crosses, sent out missionaries to other countries and composed the essential body of Christian verse, such as the first English visionary poem *The Dream of the Rood* (Crossley-Holland, 10). The coming of Roman and Celtic Christianity happened at the time of continuing warfare between the Saxons and the Celts, and of battles between the various kingdoms established by the invading tribes. However, the *Chronicles* fail to mention Synod of Whitby who managed to settle the differences between the Irish and Roman traditions. He was the one who calculated the date of Easter, and established the domination of the Roman tradition (Mitchell, 81).

The next chapter of the Anglo-Saxon history of England is the period of the Scandinavian incursions and the time of the reign of King Alfred. The first Norwegian raiders came in at the end of the eighth century and were soon followed by the Danes who caused the collapse of many kingdoms, such as Northumbria or Mercia. Their raids lasted until 851. The Norwegians moved from Scotland, across Ireland and in the tenth century they came to the west coast of England. The reign of King Alfred is composed in *The Chronicle* in its whole and it marks the beginning of the chronicler's use of the annal form to write history. Alfred came to the throne in 871 when the kingdom of Wessex was at defence against the Danes. Thanks to Alfred's great abilities a period of peace with the Danes was finally settled in 880

and the boundaries of Danelaw were established. The period of peace lasted only until 892 when the French army arrived and started another period of fighting. In 896 Alfred drove off the enemy. Not only was he a great war leader, but he also supported education. Alfred's merits earned him the epithet "the Great". Alfred's successors represent the era of the creation of the kingdom of England which culminated in the tenth century.

At the end of the tenth century the period of the Benedictine Revival started. During this period the devout Christian Edgar worked with Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury and other bishops on reforming the monasteries and creating new ones, establishing a common form of observance for all English monks and also training a new generation of ecclesiastical scholars and leaders. Edgar was succeeded by Edward who was succeeded by his half-brother Aethelred. Aethelred died in 1016. In 1042 Edward the Confessor, the second son of Aethelred came to the throne and soon after his death, William of Normandy, beating his enemies, became the king in 1066 which puts in effect "the obituary notice of Anglo-Saxon England" (Mitchell, 85-95).

1.4 The Conversion to Christianity

Christianity came to England from two sources; from Rome and from Ireland. The goal of both of the missions was not to eradicate the native culture and replace it but to work with the Anglo-Saxon culture and try to assimilate it to the Christian religion. Pope Gregory sent Augustine from Rome in 596/597. Aidan arrived in 634 bringing Celtic Christianity from Iona. When Augustine arrived in Kent in the south of England, he found out that King Aethelred, king of Kent, had a Christian Frankish wife Bertha. The king was soon baptized too and not long after Augustine established his bishopric seat of in Canterbury. "The conversion of the king by the missionaries was vital; other conversions, their means of living and perhaps even their lives, depended on it. The clarion call was to join the warrior band of the King of Kings and to dwell with Him in Heaven, where in the words of *The Dream of the Rood*, the Lord's warrior-band is set to the feast" (Mitchell, 225). However, the

permanent establishment of Christianity throughout England turned out to be a complex task which also required the intervention of Celtic monasteries from Ireland and Scotland. The differences between the Celtic tradition and the Roman Church were not resolved until 663/664 by Synod of Whitby. The expansion of English Christianity was not continuous and experienced certain serious setbacks during the first century of the development, such as the defeat and death of the Christian Edwin, king of Northumbria by the doings of the pagan king of Mercia, named Penda in 632. The death of the Christian king caused the ceasing of the influence of the Christian Church in Northumbria until its re-establishment by Aidan and his followers from Iona. "If even the external ecclesiastical organization was thus unstable in the early centuries, it is not difficult to see how the traces of pagan thought in varying kinds of relation to Christianity persisted for some time after the nominal conversion of the English" (Daiches, 6).

The conversion and especially the vision of the afterlife must have brought some comfort to the men and women of that time. They experienced a strange blend of Christianity and paganism which combined the idea of the pagan courage and pride with the new Christian hope. This blend is reflected in the Anglo-Saxon literature. The heroic warrior gradually became the Christian warrior as the power of the Church in England increased (Mitchell, 224-227). The fusing of the heroic with the Christian is apparent not only in literature, but also in society, law, burial customs, charms and jewellery; as seen in the Benty Grange helmet, "which bears the pagan boar image and the Christian cross" (Mitchell, 227). Some features of the pre-Christian Germanic animism were preserved long into the period of the Christian tradition.

1.5 The Transmission of the Old English Poetry

The Germanic tribes used the alliterative verse for poetry which was created and transmitted orally. As a great amount of poetry and story-telling was meant for performances and a majority of the transmission was by word of mouth, a mass record of poetry has been lost. One cannot be sure whether the originally orally

composed poems were memorized for a later performance or whether they were flexibly transformed depending on the enthusiasm of the audience. Occasionally such poetry survived, “through such chances as getting written into a book of monsters, or into an edifying poetic miscellany given to a cathedral, or into a pious book of readings taken on a journey to Rome and left in an Italian cathedral city just beyond the Alps, or into an illustrated collection of Biblical verse” (Pulsiano, Treharne, 56). The surviving poetry in the manuscripts is not marked as verse but it is written across the page in the same manner as prose. None of the poems in the manuscripts were titled. All of the titles and the layout of Old English verse are editorial.

A vast majority of the written Old English poetry survived in a single copy. Some are known only from an early modern transcript due to the fire of 1731 which destroyed some of the British Library Cotton manuscripts. There are only a few cases of the survival of Old English poems in multiple copies. The most straightforward example of the complex transmission process is probably best demonstrated on the poem *The Dream of the Rood*. A part of the poem (the part narrated by the cross) was found carved in runes on the Ruthwell Cross, which is a stone monument named after the town in south-west Scotland, where it now survives. Its origin is dated probably to the middle of the eighth century. “Some two centuries later, the full text of *The Dream of the Rood* as we know it was written into the Vercelli Book, the religious miscellany on parchment, perhaps written at Canterbury in the late tenth century, which would be abandoned sometime later in the town of Vercelli” (Pulsiano, Treharne, 56).

It is possible that the author of the Vercelli Book saw the poetic scripture upon the Ruthwell Cross and decided to extend this idea in a longer poem. A more likely explanation is that the creator of the Ruthwell Cross used the most corresponding part of the poem. Interesting is that the same work was known by two transmitters of verse working in opposite parts of Anglo-Saxon world and divided by two centuries. Both versions of the text (on the Ruthwell Cross and in the Vercelli Book) are astonishingly different in wording. “The intervening transmission cannot now be recaptured, but the case demonstrates that some poems, at least, had a long complicated transmission history now lost to us” (Pulsiano, Treharne, 57). Few other

poems survived in two versions, such as the poem *Soul and Body* found in the Exeter Book and the Vercelli Book; or the poem *Azarias* in the Exeter Book and as part of the poem *Daniel* in the Junius manuscript. Some other works survive in multiple copies, notably *Bede's Death Song* (Pulsiano, Treharne, 57).

The preserved poems are written in the late West Saxon dialect. The collected editions of these poems are dated from about 1000 AD. The individual poems cannot be dated by their language because they have been copied into a different dialect (the late West Saxon dialect) than the one originally written in. Throughout the eighth century religious poetry flourished in Northumbria in northern England, most of which survived in the transcriptions in the West Saxon dialect dated from the late tenth century. There are rare preserved original versions of the poems in the Northumbrian dialect providing a chance to compare the Northumbrian and West Saxon texts. This shows that the “vocabulary of praise which the earlier scop had applied to his lord now being applied to God, and gives some indication of how heroic style could be adapted to biblical subjects” (Daiches, 14).

The method of copying texts by hand provided the transcribers with the opportunities to make mistakes while transcribing, omit parts of the poems or add extra lines. A straightforward example of the alterations of the texts performed by the transcribers is the poem *Genesis* in the Junius manuscript. It is a poem nearly three thousand lines long. The manuscript is imperfect and there are gaps in it but it contains an interpolated passage, over six hundred lines long, which differs in language and in style from the rest of the poem. To distinguish these two parts of the poem, the interpolation is generally known as *Genesis B* and the body of the poems is known as *Genesis A* (Daiches, 15). “*Genesis A*, which is far the larger work, lacks the higher imaginative quality of *Genesis B*, but the versification shows a fine technical ease and the adaptation of the conventions of the heroic poetry to biblical narrative is done with real skill” (Daiches, 15). Another vivid demonstration of the adaptation of the religious verse to the heroic poetry is the poem *Exodus*, also in the Junius manuscript. The mixing of the two cultures is also apparent in the the “baptism” of the Germanic alliterative verse through its use for Christian subject matters and themes (Mitchell, 288).

1.6 The Philological Research Related to the Old English Poems

The identification of the pagan and Christian elements in the poems has been one of the concerns of philology in the nineteenth and the twentieth century. One searched “for the remains of poetry in the ancient Germanic tradition and of features of Anglo-Saxon paganism which lie half-buried beneath the later Christian layer. This preoccupation, too, started with Jacob Grimm, who expressed his ideas, for example, in the introduction to his 1840 edition of *Andreas* and *Elene*, two obviously Christian poems. For Grimm, Anglo-Saxon poetry was rooted in paganism, but then the pagan element died due to the influence of Christianity. For a long time, scholars were often biased in favour of the supposedly old, mythical, pagan Germanic features, dating back to an indefinite past, and many regarded the Christian elements as later, monkish additions and even corruptions, which had weakened and eventually destroyed the Germanic spirit and its poetry. A practical consequence of this attitude was that poems like *Beowulf* or the elegies *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* were often dissected into an original part or original parts, which allegedly represented the pagan Germanic core, and later Christian additions and interpolations” (Pulsiano, Treharne, 465). The theories regarding the origin of the Old English poems differ. Nowadays, the conception of the later Christian additions has been less favored. The preferred view assumes that “the Christian elements are integral parts of the poems; they point to the fact that most of the poetry as we have it is preserved in manuscripts written around 1000, probably by monks or clerics, and that much of the poetry, such as *Beowulf* and the elegies, was probably also composed by Christian poets, who, however, looked back at their past and who also used the inherited poetic conventions, even introducing them into Biblical poetry and saint’s lives” (Pulsiano, Treharne, 465). The assumption that the poem *The Dream of the Rood* and both elegies were composed (not just edited) by a Christian monk working with pre-Christian devices appears plausible. A great deal of the conducted researches has ended on a speculative note, though, and one will probably never learn the true origin of the Old English works. However, both interpretations of the authorship of the Old

English poems correspond with the image of a slowly changing society of the newly Christianized Anglo-Saxon England.

Another concern for the experts in the field of philology is the modern presentation of the translated text. Their pursuits include: “the emendation of scribal mistakes or of mechanical loss of text in the manuscripts, such as the *Beowulf*-manuscript. A more ambitious aim is the restoration of the original text (...) Textual criticism is, however, not confined to the correction of mistakes and the filling in of gaps” (Pulsiano, Treharne, 464). The editors of the Old English texts must also decide about the modern line division, “word-division, punctuation, capitalization (which is connected with the identification of proper names) and so forth; this involves knowledge of Old English metrics, syntax, morphology, word-formation, historical background and so on” (Pulsiano, Treharne, 464). The process of translating and editing the Old English poems is very complex and demands knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon historical context. The complexity of the task is probably the reason why there are various versions of translations as each editor deals with the text from a different perspective.

1.7 The Form of the Old English Poems

The Anglo-Saxon poems were meant for oral performance. They relied on rhythm not rhyme. They were to be read out loud so that the strong rhythm of the Old English poetry would become apparent. The characteristic feature of the poetry was alliteration, accompanied by the metrical patterning of stressed and unstressed syllables. The number of syllables in a line can differ but there are always only four stressed syllables in one line of the Old English poems. The stressed syllables draw attention to the emphasized words and help organize the way the audience hears the poem. Occasionally, the verse employs different kinds of sound patterns, such as repetition, rhythmic variation and rarely rhymes (Pulsiano, Treharne, 95). “A typical line of Old English poetry has a very strong break in the middle (called a caesura) with the two half lines connected by alliteration” (Forsyth, 13). The half-line was the metrical unit, the line was the alliterative unit and the verse paragraph was the poetic

unit which has been destroyed by the modern punctuation. The poems are enriched by the use of poetic vocabulary, appropriate references to Germanic legends, understatements, negative statements and the apo koinou constructions (Pulsiano, Treharne, 461).

Another impressive feature of the Anglo-Saxon poetry is “its spare and direct use of language to create vivid descriptions” (Forsyth, 13) as seen in the use of the compound words in *The Wanderer*. The lord of the wanderer is described as his “gold-friend” (line 22). The poet uses “two words put together that suggest that this friendly lord is in the habit of giving gold to his followers and that that is why the wanderer liked him; his thoughts are his “thought-hoard” (line 14), suggesting in two words the idea that thought are valuable like a hoard of treasure” (Forsyth, 13). The juxtaposition of the suggested words and the ideas implicated by the compound words enhance the poetic effect. The compound words which were frequently repeated by the Old English poets are the so called “kennings”. They were primarily created for the sake of variation in the poems to offer “striking new ideas and comparisons” (Forsyth, 14). However, after the over-use of the ready-made kennings, these compounds lost their aspect of originality. The Old English poets were also influenced by the popular genre of the riddle.

2 Practical part

2.1 The Dream of the Rood

2.1.1 Genre and Narration

The Dream of the Rood is one of the earliest thoroughly religious poems of Old English Poetry. *The Dream of the Rood* is one of the most celebrated Old English poems, mostly for its blending of the Christian and Germanic heroic mythology. It belongs to the Christian collection, the Vercelli Book, and a passage of the poem in runes is featured on the Ruthwell Cross. Despite the fact that it is a religious poem, it does not represent a typical case of a Christian poem. Even though it does follow the story of Christ's Crucifixion, it is presented from an unusual perspective, from the point of view of the Cross which Jesus died on. Moreover it contains certain references to paganism. *The Dream of the Rood* is an example of the genre of the dream poem featuring the motif of a dream or a vision. "I will describe the best of dreams which I dreamed in the middle of the night" (lines 1-2). The title of the poem is editorial; a more fitting one would probably be "*A Vision of the Rood*" as the Cross does not dream. In addition to the genre of the dream vision, the poem contains certain elements of the form of the riddle and is enriched by the use of the device of the prosopopoeia (when expressing the physical pain of Christ through the image of the suffering of the Cross) and personification (Mitchell, 332).

The content of the poem is divided into three parts. The poem employs the "I saw" and "I am" technique (Mitchell, 331). "The poem takes the form of a monologue within a monologue – a dreamer tells of a vision in which he hears Christ's Cross speak" (Mitchell, 332). The opening is narrated by a human character, who calls himself a sinner and is most likely to be a pagan: "and I was stained by sin, stricken by guilt" (lines 13-14). The narrator of the second part is the Cross. It recounts the process of the Crucifixion from its own unique perspective and describes how an ordinary tree was transformed into the glorified Cross. The final part is narrated by the first speaker again. He is no longer a sinner, has gone through repentance and redemption and awaits salvation.

An effective impression on the reader is achieved by the use of the first person narration which is further developed in the poem as it presents a double first person narration, one voice belonging to the human narrator and the second one to the Cross. Through this device the reader can relate to the characters and their story more easily. Especially the development of the human character, who is originally a sinner but after his vision undergoes a major change of heart and leaves his life of sin to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, is a motif that the readers can identify with. Even the Cross is not left without a sin of its own. It participates in the Crucifixion. The Cross does not prevent its Lord's death, does not fight for Him. Instead, it obeys Jesus and ultimately allows His death: "I dared not bow or break there against my Lord's wish" (lines 36-37). As a result of these actions the Cross becomes a part of Jesus' sacrifice: "They insulted us both together" (line 50) and also receives the gift of salvation. "The crucifixion is always the sacrifice at the centre of Christian thought, and the cross is always both the instrument of the torture and the means of salvation" (Pulsiano, Treharne, 230). The adoration of the Cross and the centrality of the crucifixion, which belong to the most significant features of the modern Christian belief, were clearly essential even to the belief of the early Anglo-Saxon Christians.

2.1.2 Blending of the Christian and Germanic Mythology

The theme of the biblical Christ's Crucifixion represents a dominant part of the poem. However, as well as the obvious Christian features, the poem contains certain pagan references. "Then the young warrior, God Almighty, stripped Himself, firm and unflinching. He climbed upon the cross, brave before many, to redeem mankind" (lines 45-57). Jesus Christ is depicted here as a typical Anglo-Saxon warrior who is getting ready for the last battle where he paradoxically wins by letting his enemies crucify him. His great courage, loyalty and strong will are the attributes of a typical Anglo-Saxon hero. Through the duality of the portrayal of Christ's character (as a Germanic hero and the Christian Saviour) the message of the salvation is delivered to the Anglo-Saxon audience in a way appropriate to the contemporaneous society. Christ is presented as a Germanic warrior and, as the hero of the story, would be expected to be the speaker of the poem. He is, however, silent throughout the whole

text and his message is brought forth by the Cross through its account of the crucifixion (Čermák, 8). Christ remains silent, while the Cross tells of the action of the poem and delivers the message of redemption and salvation. Through the means of his silence Christ is presented as unapproachable, as God rather than a man. The demonstration of Christ's humanity could be found in the "character" of the Cross.

The Cross is a symbol representing the Christian church and Christ himself, as seen at the end of the poem when the dreamer prays directly to the Cross and asks for help and salvation. In the poem the Cross is attributed with the qualities of an Anglo-Saxon hero. It proves to be a loyal servant by the paradoxical act of letting its Master be crucified. "I could have felled all my foes, yet I stood firm" (lines 38-39) Instead of defending Christ, the Cross decides to obey Him. Both Jesus Christ and the Cross are given the qualities of an Old English poetry hero, qualities that the Germanic tribes admired and appreciated. This can be explained as an attempt to introduce Jesus as an ideal ruler to the Angles and Saxons who were raised on the Germanic heroic code (Čermák, 8). "I saw the Lord of Mankind hasten with such courage to climb upon me" (lines 34-35). This passage shows Christ as the warrior who faces his fate with courage and as a fulfilment of his duty in order to save mankind: "He climbed upon the cross, brave before many, to redeem mankind" (lines 41-42). The image of the preparation for the crucifixion shows Christ as courageous and determined to fulfil His destiny, even if it means certain death.

Although Christ is the hero and the Saviour, the poet's main focus is the Cross. Once Christ submits to his destiny and becomes a passive character, the Cross assumes the position of the active character. The poem also develops the paradox of the Cross which "once destined for the execution of outlaws, is now adorned with gold, silver and jewels" (Mitchell, 331). The act of crucifixion and the ultimate sacrifice of Christ for all the mankind is the highpoint of Christian faith, making the cross "both the instrument of the torture and the means of salvation" (Pulsiano, Treharne, 230). The adoration of a cross was not a completely new custom for the Anglo-Saxons. Even the pre-Christians worshiped crosses. The Celtic people built stone crosses to commemorate victories or the deaths of their great leaders. The adoration of the

crosses within the pagan tradition blended into the period of the worship of the Christian Cross.

An example of the contrast between the Germanic and Christian tradition in the poem could be seen in Christ's silence throughout the poem. A typical pagan hero (as depicted in *Beowulf*) would boast about his victories and accomplishments. Christ, on the other hand, bears his journey towards his greatest achievement in silence. Another contrast between the two doctrines is demonstrated in the reaction to the participation of the Cross in its Lord's death. The pagan Anglo-Saxons would perceive it as one of the greatest crimes, while the Christians celebrate and praise the Cross.

Even the choice of certain words refers to pagan terminology. The poet uses heroic terminology whilst describing the act of crucifixion. The Cross says: "The warriors left me standing there, stained in blood; sorely was I wounded by the sharpness of spear-shafts" (lines 65-67). The words "warrior" and "spear-shafts" are rather associated with the heroic pre-Christian terminology. The adaptation of the familiar terms could have been the means of bringing the new Christian message closer to the Anglo-Saxon community.

2.1.3 Moral Message

The poem holds a Christian theological and moral message which is hidden in the monologue of the Cross. "Now I command you, my loved man, to describe your vision to all men; tell them with words this is the tree of glory on which the Son of God suffered once for the many sins committed by mankind and for Adam's wickedness long ago" (lines 100-106). The Cross invites the readers to follow its example, repent and seek a chance to redeem themselves and, above all, share the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven with others. The dreamer, as well as the reader, should fear the Judgement Day. "No-one then will be unafraid as to what words the Lord will utter" (lines 115-116). One hopes for the understanding of the Cross in regard to one's sins and one's sufferings, as the Cross has experienced both: "They drove dark nails into me; dire wounds are there to see, the gaping gashes of

malice” (lines 48-49). The reader expects the suffering Cross to be sympathetic for it shares the sinful aspects of the humankind, thus becoming the object that one relates to when praying for one’s forgiveness and salvation. “In the context of the poem the personified and now-glorified cross offers itself, the unwilling instrument of Christ’s agony and death, as the example that salvation is possible for everyone” (Grasso, 32).

The origin of the Cross as an ordinary tree is never forgotten in the text as if to make it easier for the reader to identify with it: “I remember the morning a long time ago that I was felled at the edge of the forest and severed from my roots” (lines 28-30). There was nothing extraordinary about the Cross until its encounter with Christ. The Cross was saved by the Lord and the reader should now follow its example to reach salvation as well: “But no-one need be numbed by fear who has carried the best of all signs in his breast; each soul that has longings to live with the Lord must search for a kingdom far beyond the frontiers of this world.” (lines 122-126) The impact and message of the poem, however, “are not of the didactic type, aimed at correcting heretical thought. Rather, the poem presupposes belief in the tenets of faith, Christ’s salvific death and resurrection. Its aim appears to be to reinforce faith and to evoke an interior conversion, an individual response to the theological concepts which define Christian faith” (Grasso, 23). The reader is encouraged to search for the inner conversion. He who believes in God and who bears the symbol of the cross (“the best of all signs”) close to his heart, does not need to fear God and shall live in a hopeful expectation of the Judgment Day.

The Dream of the Rood is an extraordinary poem transcending the frame of typical biblical poetry while still capturing some of the typical features of Anglo-Saxon poetry. It portrays the act of Christ’s Crucifixion from a new unique perspective and deals with the popular cult of the Cross in an innovative way and, at the same time, manages to send a theological message to the reader.

2.2 The Seafarer

2.2.1 Genre and Narration

The Seafarer is an Old English elegy from the Exeter Book. It is one of the best known Anglo-Saxon poems, partly due to the modern translation by Ezra Pound. *The Seafarer*, together with *The Wanderer*, belongs to the group of Old English poems in which the rare mood of lyrical elegy predominates (Daiches 19). The account of the poem is presented in a direct first-person narration. The initial part compares the life at the sea to the life on the land, the first one being a noble one in comparison to the latter plain and dubious one. The second part introduces a religious twist and the life on the land is contrasted with Heaven. This religious part bears a Christian message and its narration is relatively less vivid. *The Seafarer* has been described as a Christian reworking of originally a Germanic pagan poem: "There is ample evidence for the text's corruption, it would not be inappropriate or iconoclastic to suggest that we ought to reconsider those earlier theories that suggested two poems or even two or more speakers. Rather than suggesting a common sequence, we may be dealing here with a shared theme, namely that of the transience of the secular world, and this could explain, for instance, why two poems, very different to one another, have been merged into one" (Sobecki 137-138). The pagan core of the poem is concluded with a conventional religious sentiment (Daiches 20).

The Seafarer takes form of a monologue of an old sailor who contemplates the loneliness, sorrows and hardships of a life at sea while at the same time aware of its magnetism and fascination. "Some critics take it to be a dialogue, in which the old sailor urges the hardships of the seafaring life against the arguments of an eager young man anxious to take to the sea and attracted by the difficulties, and the poem can indeed be read in this way; but the fluctuating moods of the poem seem more impressive if taken as the alternation of weariness and fascination in the same person" (Daiches 19-20). Both versions of reading of the poem are possible. This thesis will be interpreting the poem based on the assumption that there is only one narrator: the seafarer.

2.2.2 Typical Old English Motifs and Poetic Devices

The poem *The Seafarer* has been described as a Christian reworking of a Germanic pagan poem, whose original dominant motif was the motif of loneliness and the transience of life. The poem was probably rewritten by a Christian poet in order to add a theological message. The final version of the poem could be read as an “allegory based on the familiar conception that life on earth is a pilgrimage towards Heaven and that those who live it are exiles from Heaven” (Mitchell, 310). This poem draws inspiration from the traditional Anglo-Saxon subjects such as wandering, exiles, and daring seafarers. After developing these typically pre-Christian subjects, the poet ultimately reaches a rather general Christian truth. The seafarer enveloped by the overwhelming solitude spends his winter nights reflecting on Christian values.

Another frequent motif in the poem is the description of nature, the winter scenes in particular. The nature and the religious belief were still connected in the minds of the Anglo-Saxons. The pre-Christians saw gods in the nature movements and were deeply impressed by such views as of the rising sun or the changing of the seasons. In *The Seafarer* the beginning of spring is captured very poetically: “The groves burst with blossom, towns become fair, meadows grow green; the world revives” (lines 49-50). “And the cuckoo, too, harbinger of summer, sings” (lines 54-55). These lyrical images enrich the melancholic moods of the elegy.

The motif of the harsh winter voyage brings forth the concern of the seafarer’s own safety. The seafarer consoles himself with the thought that the uncertainty of one’s journey’s outcome is shared by every human being, no matter which position or station in life they may occupy (Sobecki 129). The poem provides the reader with vivid descriptions of the dangerous discomforts that the seafarer must endure. “My feet were afflicted by cold, fettered in frost, frozen chains; there I sighed about the sorrows seething round my heart; a hunger within tore at the mind of the sea-weary man” (lines 8-12). He suffers from cold and hunger and the wild winter waves do not allow him to rest in the night. “But notwithstanding the discouraging words in which the old sailor paints these perils and woes, the young man feels that intense longing for the sea which is so deeply rooted in the Germanic nature” (Ferrell 203). The

seafarer seems to be tied to the sea through a passionate bond stronger than any temptation of the life ashore.

A characteristic Anglo-Saxon feature in the poem can be found in the paradoxical attitude of the seafarer toward the exile. On the one hand, he seeks it, on the other hand, he dreads it. A typical Anglo-Saxon warrior dreaded the separation from his lord and his kinsmen. Another reference to the pagan traditions could be demonstrated on “an allusion to the old custom of burning dead bodies upon the funeral pile” (Ferrell 203). There are rare allusions to the war-life in the poem, namely the use of the word “sword’s edge” (line 71) meaning war here. A large portion of the poem is devoted to the description of the sea and the poet of *The Seafarer* comes up with various synonyms for the frequent image of the sea, such as “the whale’s domain” (line 61), as well as for the ship, e.g. “ships are homes of sadness” (line 5).

The poet explores the excruciating hardships of life at sea which cause the seafarer to long for the joys of those dwelling on the land. However, when on the land, the seafarer yearns for the sea again. The poet deals with the troubles of living on earth from the point of view of an experienced traveller. He realizes the transience of life: “this host has perished, joys have passed away, weaklings thrive and hold sway in the world (...) the earth’s flower ages and withers as now does every man throughout this middle-world: old age comes visiting, his face grows pale, grey-haired he mourns, he knows his former friends, the sons of princes, have been placed in the earth” (lines 87-93). The seafarer comments on the short-lived nature of things, possessions and human beings in the earthly Kingdom. The poet is troubled by the vision of the temporal state of things and by the transience of life when he sees everything around him perish. In contrast to the the transience of life, there is the seafarer’s symbolic journey towards the eternal bliss (Crossley-Holland, 48).

2.2.3 Blending of the Christian and Pagan Elements.

The Seafarer is a typical demonstration of the gradual blending of the pagan Anglo-Saxon culture with the new Christian culture. There are elements of both, suggesting that the original poem was composed by a pre-Christian poet and later reworked by a Christian one. The seafarer possesses the attributes of a heroic warrior who is distinguished from the other typical pagan heroes due to his knowledge of Christian faith (Mitchell, 310). The narrator provides the reader with a stirring picture of the hardships and sufferings, however: "Blessed is the humble man: mercy comes to him from heaven" (lines 109-110). The Christian message in the poem implies that those who suffer on Earth will be rewarded in Heaven (Pulsiano, Therame, 257). The seafarer is a character in a permanent exile and the religious reading offers an interpretation of his pilgrimage as the means of achieving the eternal life. The story could be understood as an allegory of life as a journey over a rough sea towards the harbour of Heaven (Mitchell, 44).

The seafarer's attitude towards the sea life is ambiguous in many aspects. First, it is illustrated as a life full of hardships and sorrows, yet as the poem develops, the sea life is glorified in contrast with the life on the land and the seafarer longs for the exile at sea. He seems to have chosen the path of exile voluntarily. The wish for voluntary exile is expressed in the Bible, in Mathew 19:29: "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life." Matthew calls for the Christian life of asceticism and promotes the idea to leave everything that is secular behind and through this action draw near towards the everlasting life in Christ. The religious reading of the poem suggests that the seafarer chooses the voluntary exile for the sake of Christ's love (Sobecki 131).

The depicted distresses of the seafarer seem to hold another connection to the Bible. The author of Psalm 107 talks of sailors: "Then they cry to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper, the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided to their desired heaven." In the final part of the poem, the seafarer seems to have come to an understanding that it is God who alters the state of all things on Earth: "He

established the mighty plains, the face of the earth and the sky above” (lines 105-106). The Christian conclusion of *The Seafarer* offers the image of a Christian traveller in search of the everlasting life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

2.3 The Wanderer

2.3.1 Genre and Themes

The Wanderer is an Old English elegy found in the Exeter Book. *The Wanderer*, similarly as *The Seafarer*, is a literary demonstration of the blending of the two contemporaneous cultures in the Anglo-Saxon society. It is probably a Christian reworking of a heathen poem that originally treated the popular Anglo-Saxon motif of loneliness in exile (Mitchell, 310). A dominant element in the poem is the elegiac and obscure mood which is concluded with a theological message (Daiches 20). The state of the wanderer's soul and the atmosphere of sadness and despair are reflected in the corresponding images of nature and his surroundings: "Sorrow upon sorrow attend the man who must send time and again his weary heart over the frozen waves." (lines 56-58) and in the image of: "dark waves surging around him" (line 46) The melancholic tone mingles with the motifs of regret and self-pity.

The Wanderer takes the form of a dramatic monologue. The lamenting poet develops the theme of a solitary man who had been cast out from his beloved society. The wanderer had once been happy in the service of his dear lord but after the death of his lord he must search for a new one: "I sought far and wide for a treasure giver, for a man who would welcome me into his mead-hall." (lines 25-27) On his journey the wanderer alternates "between sleep, in which he dreams that he is back in the warm hall with the lord he has lost, and awake, when he sees the seabirds on the water amidst the driving snow and sleet" (Mitchell, 295). In his dreams and thoughts the wanderer laments over his loss: "A man who lacks advice for a long while from his beloved lord understands this, that when sorrow and sleep together hold the wretched wanderer in their grip, it seems that he clasps and kisses his lord, and lays hands and head upon his lord's knee" (lines 37 – 41). The wanderer's sadness and despair can be understood only by such a person who had to go through the same sorrows and hardships. For the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon society there was no bigger fear than the one of the loss of one's lord and mead hall. As shown in *The Wanderer* the covenant with a lord was essential and having no lord proves detrimental to one's existence. The wanderer's loneliness is overwhelming: "Time and again at the day's

dawning I must mourn all my afflictions alone” (lines 8-9). The fact that he has to go through the dreariness of life alone makes his exile almost unbearable.

The Wanderer also treats the theme of fate. The pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons believed that it was fate that governed a man’s life: “Nothing is ever easy in the kingdom of earth, the world beneath the heavens is in the hands of fate” (lines 106-107). The wanderer does not want to submit to his fate of an outcast and tries to fight against it. The wanderer’s resistance portrays him as a courageous character worthy of typical heroic qualities. However, the wanderer does not gain power over his fate and: “he must follow the paths of exile: fate is inflexible” (line 5), thus admitting that fate does have the upper hand in a man’s life.

Another significant theme treated in the poem is the theme of the transience of the human life. The wanderer contemplates about the temporality of things: “Here possessions are fleeting, here friends are fleeting, here man is fleeting, here kinsman is fleeting, the whole world becomes a wilderness” (lines 108-110). The loss of his lord and his fellow warriors ultimately meant the loss of the comforts of the mead hall. The wanderer did not wish to give up his earthly pleasures and he did not bear this loss quietly: “Where has the horse gone? Where the man? Where the giver of gold? Where the feasting place? And where the pleasures of the hall? (lines 92-93) The wanderer’s ruminations on transience bring forth these thoughts: “How that time has passed away, darkened under the shadow of night as if it had never been. Where the loved warriors were, there now stands a wall of wondrous height, carved with serpent forms” (lines 95-98). The only comfort for the wanderer seems to be found in religious belief presented in the short application at the end of the poem.

2.3.2 Heathen Motifs with Christian Conclusion

The wanderer is a typical pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon character forced by the circumstances to live outside of the typical warrior environment. Gradually, his heroic perspective ceases. His laments over the loss of the mead hall are eventually comforted when he finds the only true hall: the Kingdom of Heaven: “Brave is the man who holds to his belief; nor shall he ever show the sorrow in his heart before he

knows how he can cope to heal it” (lines 112-114). In his ultimate confession the wanderer expresses his belief: “It is best to seek mercy and comfort from the Father in heaven” (lines 114-115). He no longer longs for the mead hall as for the only place where he could live a full life. The wanderer’s earthly desires are replaced by higher ones that follow the Christian doctrine.

The Germanic tribes considered the death in a battlefield to be a glorious and a desired one: “The savage ash-spears have claimed all the warriors – a glorious fate!” (lines 99-100). They believed it to be disgrace to survive after a warrior’s lord died in a battle. The narrator of the poem lost his leader in a battle, thus from a warrior he became a wanderer in search a new lord. The motif of a wanderer in exile is also featured in the Bible, in Hebrews 11: 13-16: “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them”. Analogically to the text from the Bible, the wanderer does eventually find a new lord, although he is not an earthly one as the wanderer had originally hoped for. Instead, the wanderer’s journey led him toward the companionship of the Lord of Heaven.

The core of the poem is intertwined with pagan motifs. The Christian twist is presented only at the end of the poem, “where the final few lines enact a religious application to the foregoing text in such a way that the elegiac portrayal of hardship is transformed explicitly into the religious mood of suffering and endurance. In *The Wanderer* this application occupies only one and one-half metrical lines, yet its purpose in a religious reading of the poem is clear; the interpretation it initiates for the preceding 113 lines and one-half metrical lines of the poem would seem inescapable” (Pulsiano, Treharne, 256.) The poem is concluded with a gnomic utterance: “It is best for a man to seek mercy and comfort from the Father in heaven, the safe home that awaits us” (lines 114-115). The wanderer finds comfort and solace

within himself in his inner belief in God and his concerns regarding the transience of the human life are replaced by the new hope brought by the Christian message (Pulsiano, Treharne, 310). The wanderer no longer laments over his loss. Even though his exile is an involuntary one, he eventually finds peace in his destiny and accepts the Christian faith as the means of his redemption and ultimate salvation.

Conclusion

The three Old English poems *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* illustrate the dualism of the pagan and Christian motifs in the Anglo-Saxon poetry which reflects the contemporaneous situation of the newly Christianized Anglo-Saxon society. The selected compositions, as well as the majority of the preserved Old English poetry, operate within a religious context to various degrees (Pulsiano, Treharne, 213). There are many analogies within the discussed works. The protagonists of the selected poems possess some of the typical qualities of the pagan Anglo-Saxon warriors. *The Dream of the Rood* presents not only Jesus Christ, but also the Cross, as the Anglo-Saxon hero. Both are loyal and courageous. The seafarer and the wanderer are both attributed with the qualities of an Anglo-Saxon hero, the wanderer in particular, as he had once been a warrior. The characters in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* and the human narrator of *The Dream of the Rood* were all most probably pagan sinners at the beginning of their narrations. Within the stories, however, their pagan perspectives were confronted with the new Christian view of life and by the end of the poems they became true Christians. The progress of their individual acceptance of faith is analogical to the gradual assimilation of the Christian belief to the heroic society.

The Wanderer and *The Seafarer* share the theme of searching and wandering. Both poems present the motif of exile. For the wanderer the exile serves as his punishment for not fulfilling his duties, in contrast to the seafarer, whose exile seems to be voluntary. Even though they each originally searched for a different thing, they both come to the same conclusion and find their peace in the Christian faith. The narrator of *The Dream of the Rood* also accepts the Christian doctrine, although he does it through different means than the narrators of the elegies. The dreamer decides to follow the example of the Cross and sets on a metaphorical mission towards his salvation: "Then I prayed to the cross, eager and light-hearted, although I was alone with my own poor company. My soul longed for a journey, great yearnings always tugged at me. Now my hope in this life is that I can turn to that tree of victory alone and more often than any other man and honour it fully" (lines 126-133). The

dreamer's journey is merely a symbolic one. He does not cross seas or lands, but he does surpass the limits of the life of sin and follows the Cross to the Promised Land.

The motif of fate is frequent in the Old English poems. "Pagan reminiscences were detected not only in entire texts, but even in single words. An extensive discussion evolved, for example, about the word *wyrd* "fate, fortune, destiny, providence etc.", which was often interpreted as a pagan term, but most scholars are much more cautious about its meaning today and also admit a Christian interpretation" (Pulsiano, Treharne, 465). The pagan Anglo-Saxons were convinced that fate had the decisive power over one's life. The seafarer submits to his fate, whereas the wanderer tries to fight against his fate of an outcast but inevitably fails. *The Dream of the Rood* also features the motif of fate, although inexplicitly. Jesus fulfills his destiny by dying on the Cross and the Cross fulfills its own destiny by obeying Christ.

A significant motif of the discussed poems is the transience of human life, of relationships and of one's earthly possessions. The seafarer gives up his possessions voluntarily and as a true believer sets upon a path of an ascetic Christian. The wanderer is on the other hand rather reluctant to turn away from the earthly pleasures, lamenting: "Where has the horse gone? Where the man? Where the giver of gold? Where the feasting place? And where the pleasures of the hall?" (lines 92-93). The wanderer is realistically presented with his desires and longings which are eventually replaced by more noble ones within the Christian faith. The human narrator of *The Dream of the Rood* does not lament over a loss of friends and states: "I have not many friends of influence on earth; they journeyed on from the joys of this world to find the King of Glory, they live in heaven with the High Father, dwell in splendour" (133-139). Compared to the wanderer, the dreamer does not ask where his friends are. The reason is simple: he knows where they are.

Another frequent feature in the religious poetry is a fear of God. *The Dream* and both elegies work with this motif in a similar manner. First, the authors suggest that one should live in fear of God and of the Judgment Day, as seen in *The Dream of the Rood*: "No-one then will be unafraid as to what words the Lord will utter" (lines 115-116). However, by the end of the poems, they offer comfort: "But no-one need be numbed by fear who has carried the best of all signs in his breast; each soul that has

longings to live with the Lord must search for a kingdom far beyond the frontiers of this world” (lines 122-126). The seafarer also first claims that the person who is not fearing God is a fool and states: “Great is the fear of God” (line 105), while at the end *The Seafarer* presents the promise of a merciful God: “Blessed is the humble man: mercy comes to him from heaven” (lines 109-110).

The identification of the pagan and Christian elements in the poems has been one of the concerns of philology in the nineteenth and the twentieth century. Scholars had to sift through a great deal of biased interpretations. For some time the poems were analyzed with a focus on the Germanic features, the mythical and pagan elements. Often the Christian elements were pushed to the side, identified as weakening the spirit of those Germanic features. Thus poems like *Beowulf*, *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* were taken apart, leaving the Germanic heart and the Christian additions (Pulsiano, Treharne, 465). Nowadays, the conception of the later Christian additions has been less favored. The preferred view assumes that the Christian elements are inherently important to understanding the authorship and purpose of the pieces (Pulsiano, Treharne, 465). The assumption that the poem *The Dream of the Rood* and both elegies were composed (not only edited) by a Christian monk working with pre-Christian devices appears plausible. Most of the research has not come up with any clear distinctions, however it can be said that both interpretations of the poems, Germanic theme focused and Christian-based, correspond with the image of a slowly changing society in a newly Christian Anglo-Saxon England. Similar to the interpretation of the works and the delineation between Germanic themes and Christian themes is the concern of critics for the presentation of the texts of the poems themselves. Scholars must struggle with the loss of portions of the texts, the interpretation of mistakes and the massive problem of how to apply modern line division. While a cultural and political knowledge is needed to differentiate between the Germanic focus and the Christian elements, knowledge of Old English written style, from syntax to word-formation, is necessary for and makes the job of translation exceedingly complex.

Despite the diversity in the choice of words, the themes and motifs described in the selected poems remain the same. They always contain pagan and Christian elements. The origin of the religious dualism can be traced back to the time of the arrival of the first Christian missionaries in England. The missions coming to England from Rome and Iona were instructed not to eradicate and replace the existing culture of the pagan Anglo-Saxon society, but to merely assimilate the native culture to the Christian ideals. As a result, the Anglo-Saxons experienced a period of coexistence of two conflicting religious sentimentalities. The dualism of the cultures and mythologies reflected in their everyday life and a vivid picture of it is provided in the Old English poetic works of the Anglo-Saxon period in England.

Works cited

Primary sources:

The Dream of the Rood, The Seafarer, The Wanderer as published in

Crossley-Holland, Kevin. *The Anglo-Saxon World. An Anthology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Secondary sources:

Crossley-Holland, Kevin. *The Anglo-Saxon World. An Anthology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Čermák, Jan. *Sen o kříži*. Praha: Jitro, 2005.

Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature. Volume I*. Kalkota: Supernova Publishers & Distributors Pvt. Ltd, 1950.

Forsyth, V. L. *Lectures in English Literature to 1750*. Praha: Karolinum, 2008.

Mitchell, Bruce. *An Invitation to the Old English and Anglo-Saxon England*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995.

Pulsiano, Phillip, Treharne, Elaine. *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2008.

The Holy Bible. New International Version. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2004.

Electronic sources:

Ferrell, C., C. *The Old Germanic Life in the Anglo-Saxon "Wanderer" and "Seafarer"* Modern Language Notes, 9.7 (1894); 201-204. The Johns Hopkins University. 26 February 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2919022>>

Grasso, Anthony, R. *Theology and Structure in the "The Dream of the Rood"*. Religion & Literature 23.2 (1991); 23-38 26 February 2012 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40059473>>

Sobecki, Sebastian, I. *The Interpretation of The Seafarer - a Re-examination of the Pilgrimage Theory*. *Neophilologus* 92:1 (2008); 127-39. 26. February 2012.
<<http://www.springerlink.com/content/rl966727157x42q0/?MUD=MP>>