

**The Representations and Functions of Youth and Young
People in Early Medieval English Literature**

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Abstract

While childhood and old age in Early Medieval England have already been studied, youth has received relatively little attention. This thesis aims to be the first (to my knowledge) study of youth in Early Medieval English literature. It explores how youth was represented in wisdom poetry (Chapter 2), hagiography (Chapter 3), and heroic verse (Chapter 4), and how it was employed: how did the descriptions of youth and young people contribute to the values in these texts? What themes did youth convey?

For the purposes of this thesis, youth is understood in two ways: as a ‘period of growth’, that is as a period of personal, intellectual, and moral development between childhood and adulthood, discussed in chapters 2-4, and as a period of ‘youthfulness’, which does not entail any development (but still conveys textual values) in the *Vita Bonifatii* and *The Wanderer* (Chapter 5). Chapter 1, instead, functions as an introduction to the thesis, including a literature review on youth in medieval studies, interpretations of the concept of the ‘ages of man’ in Early Medieval English sources, terminology relating to youth and young people in Old English and Latin dictionaries, and provides an overview of my aims and methodology.

In this way, I want to show that youth illustrated significant textual ideas: for instance, it conveyed Christian teachings in hagiography and heroic values in heroic poetry; but there were also important differences within the same genre, or even within the same text, which show that authors described and employed youth and young people according to their own purposes.

Therefore, this thesis demonstrates that youth was an important theme in Early Medieval English literature, which occurs in a variety of texts and conveys different values, and it might help to understand better Early Medieval English literary sources.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The word ‘youth’ derives from the Old English (OE) *geogub*.¹

The *Dictionary of Old English (DOE)* lists no less than eighteen senses for *geogub*, which attests to the importance and complexity of this theme in the OE corpus.² Nevertheless, while childhood and old age have already received scholarly attention, youth in Early Medieval English (EME) literature has so far not been the subject of a specific study.³ I intend to provide the first such study by analyzing the ways in which youth was represented and employed in selected EME literary sources.

For the purposes of this thesis, I focus on two definitions of youth: the first is youth as a ‘period of growth’, while the second meaning of *geogub* considered in this thesis (albeit to a lesser extent) is as the ‘quality or condition of being young: youthfulness’, which is more general than the definitions considered above.⁴

I focus on these two conceptualizations of youth because they appear to be more frequent compared to the other possible senses and are used to convey various literary themes. To demonstrate this, I examine each of my two interpretations of youth in turn:

¹ ‘[Y]outh’, in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, ed. by John Simpson and Edmund Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2021), henceforth *OED*

<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/232184?redirectedFrom=youth>> [accessed 1 August 2021].

² ‘[G]eogub’, in *Dictionary of Old English: A to I* online, ed. by Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey *et al.* (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018) <[HTTPS://DOE.UTORONTO.CA](https://doe.utoronto.ca)> [accessed 1 August 2021], henceforth *DOE*. These meanings are analyzed in section 1.2 below.

³ See Sally Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Sutton: Stroud, 1999) and Thijs Porck, *Old Age in Early Medieval England: A Cultural History* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2019).

⁴ ‘[G]eogub; sense B’, in *DOE*. These and other meanings of *geogub* are discussed in section 1.2.

in the next three chapters (2, 3 and 4), I investigate a wide variety of texts, from the eighth to the eleventh centuries, both in OE and Latin, ranging from wisdom poetry to saints' lives and heroic verse, all of which present youth as a period of growth, to determine how it was used to draw attention to different values, depending on the text. In Chapter 5, I instead consider works in which youth is understood as a period of 'youthfulness', to show that this also served to illustrate textual ideas. In this way, I hope to show some of the main ways in which youth was described and employed in EME literature, and to demonstrate that this was a complex and significant theme, whose consideration can lead us to a better understanding of literary texts.

This introduction is divided into six sections: I first provide a literature review (1.1) which evaluates how youth has hitherto been considered in medieval scholarship and which places my thesis within the current academic debate; I have already mentioned that this thesis is the first substantial study of youth in EME literature, and in this section I intend to show how it builds on and contributes to previous research.

This section is followed by a brief lexical study of the most common OE and Latin terms relating to youth and young people which occur in the texts discussed herein (1.2), to examine how authors referred to youth and young people in their works and how their terminology is interpreted and translated in this study. The definitions in the *DOE* (see below) show that youth was not understood in a vacuum, but in relation to other stages of the human life-course: childhood, adulthood, and old age.⁵ This is also made clear in the *topos* of the 'ages of man', which medieval authors derived from Classical philosophers, according to which the human lifespan was divided into different stages corresponding to the various periods of human history and the cycles of nature. I consider different representations of this scheme as it occurs in EME texts, occasionally, when sources are

⁵ '[G]eogup; sense A.1', in *DOE*.

available, comparing them, to determine how authors conceptualized youth as part of human growth and how their interpretations of youth differ from previous ones (1.3).

Although medieval authors, most of whom were clergymen, derived their conceptions of youth from a variety of sources, including the Bible and (possibly) Classical philosophers, a major influence seems to have been the Church Fathers, who placed the complex Roman and Late Antique interpretations of youth within a Christian framework and employed them to convey Christian teachings. It is thus important to analyze the main depictions and uses of youth in patristic writings to understand how these descriptions influenced EME authors and were adapted for their own textual purposes (1.4).

While the aforementioned sections all touch, more or less, on the methodology of this analysis, this needs to be further clarified in a separate section (1.5), which also provides an outline of the thesis, to show how the following chapters relate to the purpose of the work and reflect my approach to the study of youth in EME literature. In my Conclusion (1.6) I provide a summary of the main ideas of this Introduction and connect them with the argument and themes of Chapter 2.

1.1 *Literature Review*

Modern scholarship on human growth in the Middle Ages is traditionally thought to have begun with Ariès's controversial assertion that '[i]n medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist', which current criticism considers untenable.⁶ Indeed, later

⁶ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. from the French by Robert Baldick; With a New Introduction by Adam Phillips (London: Pimlico, 1996), p. 125. For a criticism of Ariès, see Crawford, *Childhood*, p. xi and P. J. P. Goldberg, Felicity Riddy and Mike Tyler, 'Introduction: After Ariès', in *Youth in the Middle Ages*, ed. by P. J. P. Goldberg and Felicity Riddy (York: York Medieval Press, 2004), pp. 1-10 (pp. 1-3).

scholars demonstrated that medieval people did have a concept of childhood; and it soon became clear that they had a concept of youth as well.

Youth in OE literature was first considered within the field of historical linguistics by Bäck (1934), who provides a thorough semantic analysis in which he examines the OE synonyms for ‘child’, ‘boy’ and ‘girl’.⁷ However, his methodology presents some significant problems. Firstly, although he recognizes that OE had several different words for young people, he does not focus on youth specifically, but he considers youth in relation to childhood, a tendency which is still evident in modern scholarship (see below).⁸ Secondly, since his approach is exclusively linguistic, he is not concerned with the portrayals of youth and young people in literary sources, hence he does not examine how EME authors themselves engaged with these classifications. However, if one is aware of these limitations, his study is a useful linguistic guide for a textual study of youth in EME literature.

The first volume of *A History of Young People in the West*, titled *Ancient and Medieval Rites of Passage*, which appeared in 1997, first drew attention to youth in past

⁷ Hilding Bäck, *The Synonyms for ‘Child’, ‘Boy’, ‘Girl’ in Old English: An Etymological-Semasiological Investigation*, Lund Studies in English, II (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerups Förlag, 1934).

⁸ See for instance Edward James, ‘Childhood and Youth in the Early Middle Ages’, in *Youth in the Middle Ages*, ed. by P. J. P. Goldberg and Felicity Riddy (York: York Medieval Press, 2004), pp. 11-23 and Winfried Rudolf, ‘Anglo-Saxon Preaching on Children’, in *Childhood and Adolescence in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, ed. by Susan Irvine and Winfried Rudolf (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2018), pp. 48-70; Stacy S. Klein, ‘Parenting and Childhood in *The Fortunes of Men*’, in *ibid.*, pp. 95-119; Joyce Hill, ‘Childhood in the Lives of Anglo-Saxon Saints’, in *ibid.*, pp. 139-61.

societies.⁹ Its editors, Levi and Schmitt, recognized that youth is ‘a social and cultural construct’, hence that one should not consider youth from a modern perspective but within its appropriate historical context, and they also emphasized its ‘liminal’ value as a period between childhood and adulthood.¹⁰ They also pointed out that young people had greater agency than children, so that their appearances in the historical record are often more meaningful, and they are also easier to analyze for the scholar.¹¹ I intend to take these considerations — the socio-cultural value of youth, its liminality and the greater agency of young people — into account in my own analysis. However, this volume considers youth from Classical Antiquity to the Early Modern period and thus does not specifically focus on how youth was understood in the Middle Ages, and it does not include youth in Early Medieval England.

As I previously mentioned, there has hitherto not been a study of youth in EME culture. Youth has been discussed in a few articles about specific texts, such as the poems *Guthlac A* and *Beowulf*; in both cases, scholars were more concerned with whether the characters’ youthful behaviour undermined their spiritual and heroic qualities, respectively, rather than with the purposes of their descriptions within the poems.¹²

⁹ *Ancient and Medieval Rites of Passage*, ed. by Giovanni Levi and Jean-Claude Schmitt, trans. by Camille Naish, *A History of Young People in the West*, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), I.

¹⁰ Giovanni Levi and Jean-Claude Schmitt, ‘Introduction’, in *Rites of Passage*, ed. by Levi and Schmitt, pp. 1-11 (pp. 1-2, 5, 7-8).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 10.

¹² Youth in *Guthlac A* is briefly examined in Alaric Hall, ‘Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity: Tradition, Innovation, and Saint Guthlac’, in *Images of Medieval Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson*, ed. by Debra Higgs Strickland, *Visualising the Middle Ages*, I (Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 207-35 (pp. 210-213); I provide a discussion of the article, and a fuller discussion of youth in the Guthlac legend, in section 2.2. On youth in *Beowulf*, see for instance, Dongill Lee, ‘A Study on *Geogoð* in Old English Poetry: *Beowulf* 535-538’, *The Journal of*

Therefore, although these articles demonstrate that scholars were aware that there were descriptions of young characters in EME literature, they did not treat youth as a literary theme. It was only with Sally Crawford's *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (1999) that youth in Early Medieval England was first explicitly recognized as an object of study. Crawford briefly discusses youth in a concluding chapter devoted to 'adolescence', understood as a 'transitional period between childhood and adulthood'.¹³ In it, she demonstrated that 'a category of 'youth' existed, not perfectly defined but recognized', but her focus on childhood prevents her from exploring it in depth.¹⁴

Although medieval youth gained more attention in later scholarship, EME youth continued to be considered either very briefly, or to be omitted entirely. For instance, *Youth in the Middle Ages*, edited by P. J. P. Goldberg and Felicity Riddy (2004), is a collection of essays which aims to present the first study of youth in different medieval cultures, from Viking to Jewish literature and Late Medieval England, but it does not include Early Medieval England.¹⁵

Medieval and Early Modern English Studies Association of Korea, 10(2) (2002)
 <[HTTP://ANTHONY.SOGANG.AC.KR/MESAK/MES102/DONGILLLEE.HTM](http://anthony.sogang.ac.kr/MESAK/MES102/DONGILLLEE.HTM)> [accessed 1 August 2021]; Kemp Malone, 'Young Beowulf', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 36(1) (Jan. 1937), 21-3 <[HTTPS://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/27704216](https://www.jstor.org/stable/27704216)> [accessed 1 August 2021]; Norman E. Eliason, 'Beowulf's Inglorious Youth', *Studies in Philology*, 76(2) (Spring, 1979), 101-8
 <[HTTPS://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/PDF/4173999.PDF](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4173999.pdf)> [accessed 1 August 2021]; Raymond P. Tripp Jr, 'Did Beowulf Have an 'Inglorious Youth?''', *Studia Neophilologica*, 61(2) (Spring, 1989), 129-43. These are discussed in Chapter 4.

¹³ Crawford, *Childhood*, pp. 154-67 (p. 155).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁵ *Youth in the Middle Ages*, ed. by P. J. P. Goldberg and Felicity Riddy (York: York Medieval Press, 2004).

In the Introduction, written by Goldberg, Riddy and Mike Tyler, they list the main difficulties facing the researcher interested in medieval ‘childhood and youth’:

[i]n writing about childhood and youth in the medieval past, scholars have to confront the inevitable obstacles created both by the comparative paucity of sources and the inherent tendency of the evidence to reflect ideology rather than social practice or to privilege elites over common people and males over females.¹⁶

Some of these problems, like the paucity of the sources and the rare mentions of young women, also apply to youth in Early Medieval England. However, I should like to discuss briefly the second issue, that most of the sources tend ‘to reflect ideology rather than social practice [...]’. This concern reflects the aim of the book, which is to reconstruct how childhood and youth were understood in medieval society; yet, in addition to considering a different medieval culture which is not included in the collection, my purpose is also different, as I intend to examine how the representations and meanings of youth and young people functioned within and contributed to EME texts. As I am not concerned with the historicity of my sources (or lack thereof), the fact that most descriptions of youth and young people ‘reflect ideology’ is an advantage rather than a problem, as it seems to support my argument that youth was an important literary theme which served to convey textual ideas.

The fact that the authors describe the problems of ‘writing about childhood and youth’, rather than just youth, is also significant, as it shows that most scholars continue to study youth together with childhood and have not yet recognized that it could be used as a specific literary theme. This tendency is also exemplified by Edward James, who, in a later chapter on childhood and youth in the works of Gregory of Tours, claims that he ‘found it in practice impossible to write about youth without writing about childhood’.¹⁷

¹⁶ Goldberg, Riddy and Tyler, ‘Introduction’, in *ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁷ James, ‘Childhood and Youth’, p. 11.

I agree that some of the values attributed to youth can be better appreciated when contrasted with childhood, as seen in saints' lives for instance (see Chapter 3 herein); yet Jesch, in her chapter on the depictions of young people in the sagas and skaldic verse, successfully demonstrates that youth can also be studied on its own.¹⁸ Therefore, this volume also evidences the development of two different approaches to the study of medieval youth: as an 'extension' of childhood, and as a life-stage in its own right.

¹⁸ Judith Jesch, "Youth on the Prow": Three Young Kings in the Late Viking Age', in *ibid.*, pp. 123-39.

Youth in the Middle Ages seems to have led to greater scholarly interest in medieval youth, as it was followed by a collection of essays titled *Youth and Age in the Medieval North* (2008), including a chapter by Sánchez-Martí on human growth in OE literature.¹⁹ Drawing on a variety of texts, he examined how the concept of growth and different stages of maturation of men, including youth, were understood in EME literature. Although Sánchez-Martí does not focus specifically on youth, he nevertheless draws attention to some important depictions of youth and young people, showing that there is great potential for further research.²⁰ The rest of the volume presents studies on childhood, youth and old age in EME and (more often) Viking culture, again considering youth alongside other stages of human growth, although each is considered separately.²¹ This interdisciplinary, multicultural work could have been the basis for a study which finally focused on EME youth in its own right, but later scholarship has hitherto failed to build on the conclusions of Sánchez-Martí as well as Jesch's.

¹⁹ *Youth and Age in the Medieval North*, ed. by Shannon Lewis-Simpson, *The Northern World: Northern Europe and the Baltic c. 400-1700 AD: Peoples, Economies and Cultures*, 42 (Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2008); see Jordi Sánchez-Martí, 'Age Matters in Old English Literature', in *ibid.*, pp. 205-25.

²⁰ Sánchez-Martí, 'Age Matters', in *ibid.*, pp. 205-25.

²¹ See, for instance, Christina Lee, 'Forever Young: Child Burial in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Youth and Age*, ed. by Lewis-Simpson, pp. 17-36; Bernardine McGeehan, 'The Birth, Childhood and Adolescence of Early Icelandic Bishops', in *ibid.*, pp. 87-102; Carolyn Larrington, 'Awkward Adolescents: Male Maturation in Norse Literature', in *ibid.*, pp. 151-66; Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, 'Becoming 'Old', Old Age, Ageism and Taking Care of the Elderly in Iceland, c. 900-1200', in *ibid.*, pp. 227-42, among other studies.

This fact can be seen in *Childhood and Adolescence in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, edited by Susan Irvine and Winfried Rudolf (2018).²² As the title suggests, it reveals that critics have not yet overcome the tendency to consider youth in connection with childhood. The editors, unlike Crawford, never explain what they mean by ‘adolescence’, which now has very different connotations compared to the Early Middle Ages.²³ It is therefore difficult to determine how the contributors chose and engaged with their sources and examples. The essays in the volume consider various literary sources, but only the introduction, the first chapter by Crawford which covers interdisciplinary methodologies in the study of childhood and adolescence, and the last two chapters — a study of the narrative of *Daniel* by Anlezark and an overview of charters providing evidence of conflict between parents and children by Rabin — touch briefly on adolescence, but they do not define it.²⁴ The remaining nine chapters, such as Rudolf’s, Klein’s and Hill’s, are specifically concerned with childhood.²⁵

However, Porck and Soper’s edited collection of essays, *Early Medieval English Life Courses* (2022), which analyzes the impact of ideas of the life-course on EME

²² *Childhood and Adolescence in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, ed. by Susan Irvine and Winfried Rudolf (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

²³ I am referring to how the period of adolescence is, in modern times at least, usually limited to the teenage years (thirteen to nineteen), and teenagers are attributed specific behaviours and attitudes, while it was not necessarily so in the past; or at least, while Early Medieval authors like Bede talk about the hot-headedness and moodiness of young people (see 1.3), it cannot be assumed that our experience of adolescence was the same as those of young people living in Pre-Conquest England. On the issues of using the term ‘adolescence’, see also below.

²⁴ Susan Irvine and Winfried Rudolf, ‘Introduction’, in *Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. by Irvine and Rudolf, pp. 3-14; Sally Crawford, ‘Childhood and Adolescence: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Archaeological and Documentary Evidence’, in *ibid.*, pp. 15-31; Daniel Anlezark, ‘Of Boys and Men: Anglo-Saxon Adaptations of the Book of Daniel’, in *ibid.*, pp. 244-69; Rabin, ‘“Sharper Than a Serpent’s Tooth”’, in *ibid.*, pp. 270-90.

literature, art and society, seems to show that scholars are gradually overcoming their tendency to consider childhood and youth together.²⁶ The volume includes chapters on different life courses, like pregnancy and puberty, or on the life course as a whole, such as the discussion by Porck on the ages of man in Byrhtferth's *Tractatus de Quaternario*, Izdebska's overview of the vocabulary for different life-stages, and Jacqueline Fay's analysis of the life course in medical texts, among others.²⁷ In particular, Izdebska considers youth as a distinct life-stage from childhood and adulthood, and focuses on a range of terms pertaining to youth such as *geogub*, *geoguphad*, *geong*, *cniht*, *cnapa*, *mæden* and *mægþ*, while Elaine Flowers's chapter on puberty in EME religious writings is also partly about youth (although youth also extended beyond puberty), and Barber's contribution discusses the intellectual development of young monks in the works of Alcuin of York, hence these chapters demonstrate that scholars are beginning to view youth as a life-stage in its own right.²⁸

²⁵ Winfried Rudolf, 'Anglo-Saxon Preaching on Children', in *ibid.*, pp. 48-70; Stacy S. Klein, 'Parenting and Childhood in *The Fortunes of Men*', in *ibid.*, pp. 95-119; Joyce Hill, 'Childhood in the Lives of Anglo-Saxon Saints', in *ibid.*, pp. 139-61.

²⁶ Thijs Porck and Harriet Soper, 'Introduction: Conceptualizing the Life Course in Early Medieval England', in *Early Medieval English Life Courses*, ed. by Porck and Soper, *Explorations in Medieval Culture*, Volume 20 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2022), pp. 1-14 (p. 2).

²⁷ Caroline R. Batten, "'Lazarus, Come Forth': Pregnancy and Childbirth in the Life Course of Early Medieval English Women", in *ibid.*, pp. 140-58; Elaine Flowers, 'The Theology of Puberty in Early Medieval England', in *ibid.*, pp. 159-78; Jacqueline Fay, 'Treating Age in Medical Texts from Early Medieval England', in *ibid.*, pp. 117-39; Thijs Porck, 'The Ages of Man and the Ages of Woman in Early Medieval England: From Bede to Byrhtferth of Ramsey and the *Tractatus de Quaternario*', in *ibid.*, pp. 17-46; Daria Izdebska, 'Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens: A Study of Old English Vocabulary for Stages of Life', in *ibid.*, pp. 47-89.

²⁸ Darren Barber, 'Alcuin and the Student Life-Cycle', in *ibid.*, pp. 90-114; Flowers, 'Theology of Puberty', in *ibid.*, pp. 159, 161; Izdebska, 'Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens', in *ibid.*, pp. 58-68.

Lastly, it should also be noted that in recent years old age has also gained critical attention. Thijs Porck's *Old Age in Early Medieval England* (2019) is a well-researched study of the conceptualizations of old age in EME literature, archaeology and art which sheds much-needed light on how old age was understood in this period. Porck demonstrates the complexity and importance of old age in Early Medieval England, which further shows that the study of human growth in the Middle Ages, and EME literature in particular, is a rich and rewarding field.

Therefore, a study of youth in EME literature is long overdue, as the topic has already been examined, to some extent, in other medieval cultures, while both childhood and old age in Early Medieval England have already been the subjects of book-length studies. Moreover, previous scholarship has also reached important conclusions about medieval youth, for instance that youth is a cultural construct.

As youth in EME literature is still a largely unexplored topic, it is useful to provide an overview of the terminology which contemporary authors used to refer to youth and young people in their texts, which is essential to understand how they described and interpreted these concepts. These terms are various and complex, reflecting the ambiguity and multifacetedness of these themes.

1.2 OE and Latin Terms Relating to Youth and Young People

Since both OE and Latin had a rich vocabulary to refer to youth and young people, this section focuses on only those terms which occur most frequently in the texts examined in this thesis: *geogub*, *cnihtad*, and words for young people such as *cnapa*, *cniht*, and *mægden*, as well as the Latin words *adolescentia* and *juventus*. Rarer terms, such as the phrase *geong mann*, are mentioned when relevant but are explained in more detail in the analysis of the individual texts. The following examination is based both on dictionaries,

like the *DOE*, Bosworth-Toller, the Lewis-Short Latin dictionary and the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (*DMLBS*), and also on Izdebska's lexical study on terms for the stages of life in OE, and on primary sources.²⁹ Etymologies and the semantic ranges of these terms are also considered. I first discuss OE terms, then Latin ones.

Before undertaking this analysis, the choice to examine both youth and young people, rather than just youth, needs to be explained. Although the texts analyzed in this thesis include various mentions of youth which have significant textual roles, many, if not all, of these literary works also provide depictions of young people, as will become clear from the examples provided in this introduction. Both are equally important, because the behaviours and qualities of young characters also convey ideas about youth, and contribute to a text's themes, meanings, and functions.

I begin by looking at the etymology and meanings of *geogub*. This derives from the Indoeuropean *juṃnti-* ('young'), through the Proto-Germanic **ju(w)unþi* and is cognate to the German *Jugend* and the Dutch and Frisian *jeugd*, which also mean 'youth'.³⁰ The etymology is therefore straightforward, in that the OE clearly retains the

²⁹ I employ both Lewis and Short's *Latin Dictionary* and the *DMLBS* as these deal with Latin terms in different sources, as the *DMLBS* specifically defines Latin terms included in writings either composed in Britain or by Britons between 540 and 1600, while Lewis and Short deal with earlier, Classical Latin. While the meanings these dictionaries provide are similar, as EME authors drew on Classical authors, Latin nevertheless changed and developed throughout the Middle Ages, as the *DMLBS* editors point out. It is therefore interesting to compare the definitions of terms such as *adolescentia* or *juventus* to determine if and how their meanings changed throughout the centuries, which I do below. See: *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, ed. by R. K. Ashdowne, D. R. Howlett & R. E. Latham <<http://www.dmlbs.ox.ac.uk/web/a-guide-for-users.html>> [accessed 21 February 2023].

³⁰ *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic*, ed. by Guus Kroonen (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 276; *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen H-P*, ed. by Wilhelm Braun, Gunhild Ginschel et al. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989), p. 51.

same meaning from the Indoeuropean and Proto-Germanic. However, it is more difficult to determine what is meant by *geogub* in OE. This is shown by the following senses of *geogub* in the *DOE*, which define it as ‘[...] the time prior to maturity or adulthood [...]’; ‘contrasted with childhood and/or maturity, old age’; and ‘specifically, with implication of immaturity, inexperience’.³¹ The ambiguity of youth, which is a recurring theme in this thesis, is implied by the fact that these senses do not provide a clear interpretation of what was meant by *geogub*: while all three definitions suggest that *geogub* was generally understood as a period of immaturity, it is not clarified how long *geogub* lasted. In particular, the first sense is rather vague: *geogub* seems to be understood merely as in opposition to maturity, hence it could also include infancy and childhood. This interpretation is supported by Izdebska’s linguistic study, in which she remarks that *geogub* is ‘an even broader and conceptually fuzzy field [than childhood]’, as it could include childhood, puberty, adolescence, early adulthood, and could even overlap with the period of infancy.³² Indeed, there are no clear age limits denoting how long this phase of *geogub* lasted, either in the *DOE* or in OE primary sources. Although EME authors might have been familiar with Isidore of Seville’s distinctions of the ‘ages of man’ (see 1.3 below), these were rarely, if ever, used in their works, and they do not repeat Isidore’s age distinctions in the texts analyzed in this thesis. Laws and the archaeological record also do not clearly tell us how old a ‘young person’ was supposed to be in Early Medieval England (see 1.2.1).

³¹ See ‘*geogub*’; senses A; A.1; B.2’, in *DOE*. See also ‘*youth*’ in *A Thesaurus of Old English*, ed. by Jane Roberts and Christian Kay with Lynne Grundy (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2017) <[HTTP://OLDENGLISHTHESAURUS.ARTS.GLA.AC.UK/CATEGORY/?ID=810](http://oldenglishtesaurus.arts.gla.ac.uk/category/?id=810)> [accessed 1 August 2021] (henceforth *TOE*), which includes a definition as a ‘period of immaturity’.

³² Izdebska, ‘Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens’, pp. 52, 58, 62.

The vagueness of youth is shown by the fact that many of the texts I consider, such as *Guthlac A* or *The Wanderer*, merely mention ‘*geogub*’, but do clarify what is meant by it nor collocate it in the life-cycle, that is, it is not clear whether ‘youth’ represents a separate life-stage in its own right or if it includes infancy, childhood or early adulthood; the readers or listeners do not even know how old the young characters are. Indeed, some texts, like *Beowulf*, do not mention the characters’ *geogub* at all and leave it implicit. However, given that these texts represent the majority of literary sources dealing with *geogub*, one must necessarily take this ambiguity into account in order to analyze this topic, as I intend to do. I aim to show that it is possible to analyze youth in EME literature despite the vagueness of the terms used to describe it, and that, while one might not gain a clear or certain understanding of what was meant by ‘youth’ or ‘young people’ in EME literature, it can nevertheless be determined how these themes were represented and employed in literary sources, in order to gain a better understanding of the texts themselves.

Indeed, other works analyzed in this thesis, such as the saints’ lives, clearly and explicitly position the saint’s youth between the saint’s childhood and adulthood, which may be alluded by the second sense reported in the *DOE*: ‘contrasted with childhood and/or maturity, old age’.³³ This definition seems to imply, in contrast to the previous sense of *geogub* as the period ‘prior to maturity’ which could include infancy, childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, that there was also a more specific and well-defined idea of youth in this period, of *geogub* as a specific life-stage. This interpretation is also found in the examples of the ‘ages of man’ (see next section) and suggests that youth could be understood in different ways, depending on the text or the author. Therefore,

³³ Hill, ‘Childhood’, p. 151.

there was not a single, clear-cut definition of *geogub*, but it entailed a certain degree of ambiguity.

Finally, I turn to the association of *geogub* with ‘immaturity’ and ‘inexperience’, described in the third sense in the *DOE*, which may imply that youth was considered negatively, as a period in which the individual lacked wisdom or skill, without any possibility of improvement. A negative depiction does seem to occur in some texts, like *Exodus*, in which those who are not yet able to fight effectively because of their *geoguðe* (‘youth’, l. 235a) are not allowed in the Hebrew army.³⁴

However, most texts analyzed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 repeatedly demonstrate that there were many other instances in which young people made mistakes or committed sins because of their inexperience, but they also learnt from and matured thanks to these, as shown by Saint Guthlac in the poem *Guthlac A* (see below and section 2.2). In some rarer cases, young characters did not make mistakes at all, but still gained necessary experience in their youth, like Wiglaf, who begins as a heroic youth and then gains experience in war and becomes a king. Indeed, it would seem that it was precisely this need for experience which was the main difference between a youth and an adult, rather than a matter of age, as authors often describe young characters growing into adults after maturing (like Beowulf), learning some important life lesson (like the young Saint Guthlac in Felix’s *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*), or overcoming some great trial (like the young Saint

³⁴ ‘*Exodus*’, in *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. by George Philip Krapp, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, I (London: Routledge; New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp. 91-106 (p. 97). However, these people might not have necessarily been youths: perhaps they were children, in which case the reference to their youth might have been meant in a more general sense, as ‘the time prior to maturity or adulthood’, which might also encompass childhood, rather than as the period between childhood and adulthood. See ‘[G]eogub; sense A’, in *DOE*. References to primary sources are given as in-text citations, followed by line numbers.

Chrysanthus).³⁵ This emphasis on learning, on maturing, is central to this idea of youth, but it does not seem to be conveyed in the above definitions, as none of the meanings provided by the *DOE* suggests that youth could be understood as a period of growth. On the contrary, I suggest that EME authors were very much aware that people learnt important teachings during their youth and used this to convey the themes central to their texts. For this reason, I chose to focus on a conception of youth which is not included in the more ambivalent definitions in the *DOE*, although these are still taken into account: I consider *geogub* as a ‘period of growth’. This interpretation is based on close textual analysis, and on the association between youth and maturing I just discussed, which is found in the texts analyzed in chapters 2-4.

Chapter 5 is instead concerned with another, more general definition of youth, as the ‘quality or condition of being young: youthfulness’.³⁶ This is also one of the definitions of *geogub* given in Bosworth-Toller, as ‘[...] the state of being young [...]’.³⁷ This can be difficult to define in more detail as it is not given specific connotations and is understood and employed in different ways, depending on the textual context. At first sight, this and the sense of *geogub* as a period of growth seem quite distinct: the former refers to a condition, whereas the latter indicates a process which occurs during a particular period of time. However, they might also be confusing. As they are considered separately in this thesis, it may be useful to provide an example of each to better show their differences.

³⁵ I discuss Saint Guthlac and Saint Chrysanthus in Chapter 3 (sections 3.1, 3.2 and 3.4) and Beowulf and Wiglaf in Chapter 4 (sections 4.1 and 4.2).

³⁶ ‘[G]eogub; sense B’, in *DOE*.

³⁷ ‘[G]eógub; sense I’, in Joseph Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, ed. by Thomas Northcote Toller, Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichý (Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014) <[HTTP://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/015463](http://bosworthtoller.com/015463)> [accessed 1 August 2021].

For instance, the *DOE* lists the following extract from the poem *Guthlac A* as an example of youth as ‘quality or condition of being young: youthfulness’:

God scop geoguðe ond gumena dream;
 ne magun þa æfteryld in þam ærestan
 blæde geberan, ac hy blissiað
 worulde wynnum, oððæt wintra rim
 gegæð in þa geoguðe, þæt se gæst lufað
 onsyn ond ætwist ylðran hades,
 ðe gemete monige geond middangeard
 þeowiað in þeawum. þeodum ywaþ
 wisdom weras, wlencu forleosað,
 siððan geoguðe geað gæst aflihð.

(God created youth and men’s joy;
 they cannot in their first strength [youth]
 produce fruit, but they rejoice
 in worldly happiness until a number of winters
 passes in youth so that the spirit loves
 the appearance and substance of a more mature condition
 which many throughout the earth properly serve in their customs; men display their]
 wisdom to the people, and abandon their pride,
 after their spirit drives away the foolishness of youth]; 495-504).³⁸

I think that youth in these lines might have a different interpretation. In Chapter 3 (section 3.2) I provide a more in-depth analysis of youth in *Guthlac A*, including these lines, to examine how youth relates to the other themes in the poem. In this introduction, it suffices to examine broadly how the term *geogub* is employed in this excerpt with regards to the two definitions outlined above. Concerning the first occurrence of *geoguð*, it is stated that it was created by God alongside human happiness; on its own, it thus seems a positive description of youth, but which does not entail any development.

However, then the poet explains that during the many years (‘winters’) of youth men develop wisdom and grow out of their youthful arrogance and immaturity. It is made clear that this was a long process that took place during one’s youth (as again suggested

³⁸ ‘*Guthlac I*’, in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by George Philip Krapp and Eliot van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, III (London: Routledge and Sons, 1936), pp. 49-72 (pp. 63-64). All translations, unless specified, are mine.

by the reference to the ‘many winters’). These occurrences of *geoguð*, then, more likely convey its interpretation as a period of growth, in which the young person gains wisdom and experience. As the rest of this passage emphasizes this conception of youth as a period of development, it can be argued that the first occurrence of *geoguð*, in which it is stated to be God’s creation and is juxtaposed with man’s joy, also refers to this same idea of youth, rather than youth as ‘youthfulness’, which is not mentioned in these lines. Understood in this way, this meaning of *geoguð* seems different from the definitions in the *DOE* which presented youth merely as a period of ‘immaturity’ or ‘inexperience’: according to the *Guthlac A*-poet, young people were expected to mature and eventually outgrow their youthful flaws.

This example also shows the ambiguity of *geogub* alluded to in the *DOE*. *Geogub* here only seems contrasted with adulthood through the reference to *weras* (‘men’); *wer* seems to have been specifically used for adult men, not boys or youths.³⁹ However, it is not stated whether youth corresponds to the stage between childhood or adulthood, or to a more general period of ‘immaturity’. Therefore, although I argue that youth is understood as a period of growth in these lines, there is much the poem does not tell us about how *geogub* was understood.

Concerning my other interpretation of *geogub*, as ‘the quality and condition of being young: youthfulness’, this can also have important textual functions. Consider the famous scene in *The Wanderer* in which the speaker remembers his lord:

Gemon he selesecgas/ ond sincþege,
hu hine on geoguðe/ his goldwine
wenede to wiste./ Wyn eal gedreas!

(He remembers the hall-men and the acceptance of treasure,
how in his youth/ his gold-friend [generous lord])

³⁹ ‘*Wer*’; sense II’, in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTP://BOSWORTH.FF.CUNI.CZ/035342](http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/035342)> [accessed 17 March 2023].

entertained at feast./ Joy perished entirely!).⁴⁰

As I argue in Chapter 5 (section 5.2), this youthful memory at first seems to represent the speaker's happiness and place in society which he has lost, but this is repeatedly re-interpreted throughout the poem and each time signifies his increasing wisdom, understood as the awareness of the unavoidable decay of the world and of the need to abandon one's personal sorrow to look towards God. In this case, youth does not seem to be presented as a period of growth, as the speaker's maturation occurs when he is an older man (see ll. 64-5); on the contrary, I believe that, when considered in the wider context of the poem, this description of youth refers to a specific period in the speaker's life which symbolizes his earlier attachment to earthly life and his ignorance of true wisdom, which he has now overcome, so that it conveys the speaker's maturation and clarifies the main theme of the poem. It should be noted that this representation of the speaker's youth is as vague as the mention in *Guthlac A*: the reader (or listener) does not learn how old the speaker is, or what is meant by *geogub* here (is it a period between childhood and adulthood? Or maybe early adulthood?). Hence, this analysis of *geogub*, like that of *Guthlac A*, also reflects the ambiguity or lack of information in the sources concerning *geogub*. However, *Guthlac A* and *The Wanderer* show that *geogub* was a complex term with different meanings, which authors understood and employed to convey different themes in different textual contexts.

In addition to the interpretations of *geogub* mentioned so far, the *DOE* also lists the following meanings: '[...] as a period of strength or vigour'; to describe '[...] eternal youth in heaven'; or in a collective sense, referring to groups of young people such as children, younger monks or nuns, 'untried troops' (in contrast to the *dugub*, the

⁴⁰ 'The Wanderer', in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, pp. 134-7 (pp. 134-5).

experienced troops), ‘[...] the young nobility’, ‘[...] (members of) the younger generation’, ‘the young of animals’, or even young plants, among others.⁴¹

Most of these meanings do not occur in the texts analyzed in this thesis, but I still discuss them briefly to examine the semantic range of *geogub*. It can be seen that this semantic range is quite broad, as *geogub* can have both ‘lay’ (in reference to young warriors) or ‘clerical’ meanings (in reference to young monks and nuns), can indeed refer to children (reinforcing its ambiguity and showing that *geogub* did not just describe young people), and even to animal and plants.⁴² The association between youth and strength is, for instance, exemplified by *Beowulf*, specifically l. 2111, part of what is commonly known as ‘Hrothgar’s sermon’, in which the King, at one point, ‘mourns for his youth (*gioguðe*)’, and, the next line clarifies, his ‘*hildeþrengo*’ (‘battle-strength’).⁴³ This occurrence shows that youth could be positive, not just ambivalent or negative, as it was described in the other senses of the *DOE*; however, it may also show the complexity of youth, as this positive view may seem in contrast with the idea of youth as a period of immaturity. Indeed, the example from *Exodus* mentioned above, in which the young soldiers were too young to join the Hebrew army, suggests that the immaturity and inexperience associated with *geogub* may also refer to physical development, or physical strength; more tellingly, in Ælfric’s ‘Septuagesima Sunday’, which provided one of the OE attestations of the ‘ages of man’, strength is not connected with *geogub*, but with *fulfremeda waestm* (‘full growth’; see next section). This association can also be seen in the sense of *geogub* as ‘untried troops’, which again is based on the connection between

⁴¹ see ‘[G]eogub’, senses B.1; B.1.a; B.3; C; C.1.a-e; C.2; C.3; D.1-1.a’, in *DOE*.

⁴² *Ibid.*, sense C.1.a.

⁴³ *Klaeber’s Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. Edited, with Introduction, Commentary, Appendices, Glossary, and Bibliography by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles; with a Foreword by Helen Damico, 4th edn (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

youth and inexperience. These examples show two different interpretations of youth: as ‘a period of strength’, but also, conversely, as a stage in which the individual is not fully physically developed. Thus, these meanings suggest that there was not one single interpretation of *geogub* in OE literature.

The collective meanings of *geogub* (for plants; children; young monks, nuns and so on) can be paralleled by similar collective interpretations of other age-terms such as *cild*, *mæden* or *fæmne*, and may simply indicate how the youthful characteristics of a single entity can be applied to a group; however, it is notable that *geogub* can also apply to animals and plants. Of course, this may be because youth was seen as a characteristic inherent to all living beings, not just humans, but I find it surprising that *cildhad* (‘childhood; infancy’) only seems to apply to human babies and children.⁴⁴ Lastly, as the meaning of ‘heavenly youth’ occurs in Chapter 3 (section 3.2), it is considered in the appropriate context, but here it suffices to say that it implies another positive interpretation of *geogub*, as a reward for the faithful.⁴⁵

The *TOE* lists many synonyms for *geogub*, such as *frumildo*, *geogubfeorh*, *geogubhād*, *geogubhādnēs*, and *geonglicnes*, to name a few, but of these only *geogubfeorh* occurs in one of the texts discussed in this thesis — *Beowulf* — and its meaning and function are considered in Chapter 4, which focuses on how youth conveys heroic values in the poem.⁴⁶ However, there is another OE term which deserves attention, but which is not considered as a synonym for *geogub* in the *TOE*: *cnihtad*. The *TOE*

⁴⁴ See ‘*child-hād*’, in *DOE*.

⁴⁵ *Geogub*, to denote ‘untried troops’ occurs for instance in *Beowulf* (see Chapter 4), whereas the idea of ‘eternal youth’, often found in the homiletic corpus, occurs in *Guthlac A* (Chapter 2, section 2.2). See also ‘[*G*]eógub’ in Bosworth-Toller.

⁴⁶ ‘*Youth*’, in *TOE*.

translates it as ‘boyhood’, a rather ambiguous term.⁴⁷ However, *cnihtad* is itself ambiguous: the *DOE* defines it as ‘boyhood; adolescence, youth’, hence it can have more than one interpretation.⁴⁸ It could also mean ‘[male] celibacy’, but this meaning seems rarer and does not occur in the texts I consider.⁴⁹

The complexity of *cnihtad* derives from its first element *cniht* (to which the suffix *-had* has been added). *Cniht*, according to an ‘older view’, may derive from the Indoeuropean root **ĝen-* (‘to beget’).⁵⁰ In this sense, *cniht* would thus be connected with the act of procreation, which is perhaps reflected in one of its meanings, ‘male newborn child’.⁵¹ Another theory is that *cniht* might, like the OE *cnapa* (see below) and the Old High German *kneht*, have originally meant ‘stake, stock, pin’, and only later have denoted a person. Bäck argues in favour of this interpretation, remarking on ‘the many similar sense developments ... where living beings, human beings as well as animals, are described by words primarily denoting inanimate things’.⁵² An example of this is the Swedish *stumpa* (‘little girl’), which may be derived from *stump* (‘stump’).⁵³ This change is first attested in the Proto-Germanic **knab/ppan*, from which OE *cnapa* comes from, meaning ‘knob, boy’.⁵⁴ According to Bäck, a similar development was seen with Old

⁴⁷ ‘[C]nihthād’, in *TOE*.

⁴⁸ ‘[C]niht-hād; sense 1’, in *DOE*.

⁴⁹ ‘[C]niht-hād; sense 2’, in *DOE*.

⁵⁰ Bäck, *Synonyms*, pp. 110-111.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 113. This meaning is listed by Bäck, but is not included in the *DOE*.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 111. Bäck attributes this theory to F. A. Wood, ‘Germanic Etymologies’, in *Medieval Philology* 2(4) (Apr. 1905): 471-76 (p. 474)

<<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/epdf/10.1086/386656>> [accessed 12 March 2023].

However, Bäck does not include the name of the article in his citation, and I have not been able to find it.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic*, ed. by Kroonen, pp. 294-5.

Swedish *knækker* and Middle High German *knacken*.⁵⁵ Other cognates are the Old High German *kneht* or Old Frisian *knecht*, *kniucht* (see below).⁵⁶ It is not clear how or why this development occurred; this original inanimate sense has clearly been lost in OE.

The ambiguity of *cniht* derives from the fact that it could mean either ‘male child’, ‘boy’ or ‘young man’, besides ‘schoolboy, student’, ‘bachelor’, and could also refer to a man, husband, servant or a retainer, ‘disciple or follower’ (in glosses), or to a ‘knight’ or a ‘soldier’, although these senses are rarer.⁵⁷ Its semantic range was therefore quite broad: it may be that it came to mean ‘servant’ because most servants at the time were young; likewise, schoolboys were also young.⁵⁸ The meaning of ‘servant’ could also apply to a ‘servant of God’, or, interestingly, a ‘servant of the devil’.⁵⁹ With regards to its meanings of ‘knight’ or ‘soldier’, Bäck admits that there is not a clear explanation, but this development may have happened, according to Stenton, because the *cniht* was ‘essentially the retainer of some greater man’.⁶⁰ Similarly, it could mean ‘member of a guild (of knights or young noblemen)’, although the *DOE* clarifies that a *cniht* could be a ‘junior member’, hence there was still an association with youth.⁶¹ Finally, it could also

⁵⁵ Bäck, *Synonyms*, p. 110.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁵⁷ ‘[C]niht; senses 1; 1.a.i; 1.f; 1.g; 1.h; 2; 2.c; 3’, in *DOE*. See also ‘*cniht*’, in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, which provides the same meanings:

<[HTTP://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/006460](http://bosworthtoller.com/006460)> [accessed 1 August 2021], and Izdebska, ‘Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens’, p. 62.

⁵⁸ Bäck, *Synonyms*, p. 121.

⁵⁹ Bäck, *Synonyms*, pp. 123-4. For examples of *cnihtas* as ‘servants of the devil’, see for instance *LS I*, p. 74 (the life of ‘Saint Basilius, Bishop’), in which Ælfric describes how a *cniht* pledges himself to the devil to woo a young woman, and has to be freed from sin by the saint.

⁶⁰ Bäck, *Synonyms*, p. 126; Frank Merry Stenton, *The First Century of English Feudalism 1066-1166. Being the Ford Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford in Hilary Term 1929*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 132ff.

⁶¹ ‘[C]niht; sense 3.c’, in *DOE*; Bäck, *Synonyms*, pp. 131-2.

refer to the ‘Three Youths’ (mentioned in the poems *Daniel* and *Azarias*, for instance), or to ‘the children of Christ; Christ’s flock’.⁶² This latter sense may be a broader application of the sense ‘child’, which could refer to boys and girls.⁶³

What is most confusing is that *cniht* originally meant both ‘boy’ and ‘youth’, although the first meaning was predominant; for instance, in the OE *Orosius*, translated from Latin in the time of King Alfred (r. 871-99), nine-year-old Hannibal is described as a *cniht*, and, according to Crawford, he would likely still have been considered a child.⁶⁴ Additionally, it could also refer to a man, although in one of the examples, Ælfric’s *Life of Saint Agatha*, it seems to refer to a man in a general sense, without any specific reference to age (to describe a man who is crushed by a wall).⁶⁵ As far as the meanings of *cniht* are concerned, they seem to be the same as the cognates mentioned above: Old Swedish *knækker*, Middle High German *knacken*, Old High German *kneht* and Old Frisian *knecht*, *kniucht*, which can mean ‘lad’, ‘servant’, or ‘soldier’, but *cniht* seems to have had a broader semantic range as it could refer to a servant of God, a servant of the devil, or to the Three Youths; therefore, it may be suggested that *cniht* had, or acquired, religious connotations which its cognates lacked.⁶⁶

After 950, the term *cnapa* (related to New Norwegian and New Swedish *knabbe*, ‘knob, clump; small thick-set person or animal’, Old Frisian *knap(p)a*, ‘boy’, Old

⁶² ‘[C]niht; sense 1.e’, in *DOE*.

⁶³ ‘[C]niht; sense 4’, in *DOE*.

⁶⁴ *The Old English Orosius*, ed. by Janet Bately, S. S. 06 (London: Published for the Early English Text Society by Oxford University Press, 1980), book IV, ch. viii, p. 99. See Bäck, *Synonyms*, pp. 113, 117; Crawford, *Childhood*, p. 156.

⁶⁵ *LS* I, p. 206.

⁶⁶ ‘[K]night’, in *OED*

<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/104025?rskey=NwUNa6&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 1 March 2023].

Swedish and Old Dutch *knapo*, ‘boy’, Old High German *knabo*, *knappo*, ‘boy’) and deriving from Proto-Germanic **knab/ppan* (‘knob, boy’) was introduced, and perhaps underwent the same development of *cniht*, from inanimate object to person; from around 1000 it became used in the sense of ‘boy’, while *cniht* began to refer to a youth.⁶⁷ It is unknown why this happened. Perhaps it was necessary to have a word to denote older boys or young men, and *cniht* came to be used for this purpose, whereas *cnapa* came into use to denote boys. Nevertheless, Bäck is careful to note that the difference between the two meanings of *cniht* (‘boy’ and ‘youth’) was never absolute, and it could occasionally mean ‘boy’ even in later sources.⁶⁸ Like *cniht*, *cnapa* could also mean ‘servant’ and by extension, ‘servant of God’, which was probably due to the fact that most servants were young, and it could be an affectionate address for a young person, but it could also mean ‘son’.⁶⁹ More confusingly, the *DOE* states that *cnapa* could also mean ‘youth’ or ‘young man’ (although these senses are not found in Bäck), but as in the case of *cniht*, it is not clear when it should be translated in this way rather than as ‘boy’.⁷⁰ The development of *cnapa*, or rather its variant *cnafa*, is also worth mentioning, because it has given rise to the Modern English ‘knave’: this first meant ‘a male attendant, page, or other servant’, clearly derived from the meaning of *cnapa* of ‘servant’ and was contrasted with the

⁶⁷ Bäck, *Synonyms*, p. 139. For the etymology, Bäck suggests that it could have originally meant ‘pfahl, stock, shift’ like *cniht*. See *ibid.*, p. 110. *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic*, ed. by Kroonen, pp. 294-5. Bäck is the only source I found which reports the semantic change of *cniht* from ‘boy’ to ‘youth’. See also ‘knave’, in *OED* <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/103934?rskey=mK1OUG&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 1 March 2023].

⁶⁸ Bäck, *Synonyms*, pp. 140, 182. For a discussion of the term *cniht*, see *ibid.*, pp. 110-39 and for a discussion of the term *cnapa* *ibid.*, pp. 139-45. Crawford also observes that there was no clear-cut distinction between *cnapa* and *cniht*; see Crawford, *Childhood*, pp. 51, 156-7.

⁶⁹ ‘[C]napa; 1.a; 1.b’, in *DOE*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*; sense 1.

higher-status ‘knight’; there therefore seems to have been a narrowing in the meaning of ‘knave’, because the meaning of ‘boy’ was lost.⁷¹ But then, it acquired a negative meaning, referring to ‘[a] dishonest unprincipled man; a cunning unscrupulous rogue; a villain [...]’, the first attestation of which occurs in the thirteenth century.⁷² Perhaps this change from ‘servant’ to ‘villain’ occurred because of the negative connotations of a man of low status, but it cannot be determined.

Coming back to *cniht*, it might thus be difficult to determine whether it means ‘youth’ rather than ‘boy’ in a specific example; see for instance my discussion of the verb *cnihtwesan* in line 535b in *Beowulf* (section 4.1).⁷³ Occasionally, the textual context might provide a clue: for example, in Ælfric’s ‘Passion of Chrysanthus and His Wife Daria’ (section 2.3), Chrysanthus is first called a *cnapa* when he discovers Christianity, then a *cniht* when he undergoes several temptations, and finally a *wer* when he attains sanctity. As *wer* in OE meant ‘adult man’, I suggest that Ælfric meant to describe different stages of Chrysanthus’s physical (and spiritual) growth, so that in this instance *cnapa* should be translated as ‘boy’, *cniht* as ‘youth’ and *wer* as ‘[adult] man’.⁷⁴ Moreover,

⁷¹ ‘[K]nave; sense 2’, in *OED*

<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/103934?rskey=mK1OUG&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>>
> [accessed 1 March 2023].

⁷² ‘[K]nave; sense 3’, in *ibid.*

⁷³ Bäck, *Synonyms*, p. 113.

⁷⁴ ‘Wer. II’, in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* <[HTTP://BOSWORTH.FF.CUNI.CZ/035342](http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/035342)> [accessed 1 August 2021]. The ‘Passion of Chrysanthus and His Wife Daria’ is included in *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints: Being a Set of Sermons on Saints’ Days Formerly Observed by the English Church. Edited from Manuscript Julius E.VII in the Cottonian Collection, with Various Other Manuscripts*, ed. and trans. by Walter W. Skeat, S. S. 94 & 114, 2 vols (London: Published for the Early English Text Society by N. Trübner & Co., 1881-1900), II, pp. 378-99, henceforth *LS*, followed by volume and page number.

Ælfric writes in the late tenth century, when, according to Bäck, *cniht* had (mostly) lost the sense of ‘boy’, hence it seems more likely that it meant ‘youth’.⁷⁵

It should also be noted that the description of a character as ‘young’ might be relative: it might depend on the perspective of an older character, or even the narrator, who only see them (the character) as younger than themselves, regardless of how young or old they are. For instance, when Beowulf defeats Grendel both Hrothgar and Waltheow mention his youth (see ll. 1217a, 1843a), but, since they are much older than him, it is not clear whether Beowulf is a ‘youth’ (as in the maturing phase of *geogub*) or a young adult (although I suggest the latter, given that he recalls his youth in the past; see ll. 2183b-9, Chapter 4). Another example is the *cildgeong* in *Maxims I* (see Chapter 2), who I argue is the same *geong mann* introduced at the beginning of the maxim, who is being described affectionately by the poet. It might therefore be difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether a character is actually young; all that can be done is to take the description of their youth at face value.

Other terms for young men in OE are more straightforward: *se geonga*, *esne*, *hyse*, among others, can all mean ‘youth’ or ‘servant’, but are not mentioned in the texts analyzed in this thesis.⁷⁶ *Geong mann*, instead, refers to the young ‘person’ described in *Maxims I* (Chapter 2), often understood as a young man (l. 45a).⁷⁷ Yet *mann* can refer to ‘a human being of either sex’, which introduces the interesting hypothesis that the poet’s maxim about youth (see below) could apply to either a young man or a young woman.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Bäck, *Synonyms*, pp. 113, 117.

⁷⁶ Bäck, *Synonyms*, pp. 113, 117 and ‘*geong*; senses I.A.1.b.I; I.A.1.b.III’, ‘*esne*; senses 1; 1.a; 1.b; 2’, ‘*hyse*; senses 1; 2’, in *DOE*.

⁷⁷ See, for instance, Bradley’s translation: ‘*Maxims I*’, in S. A. J. Bradley, ed. and trans., *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Everyman, 1995), pp. 344-50 (p. 347).

⁷⁸ ‘[*M*]ann; sense I’, in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTP://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/022348](http://bosworthtoller.com/022348)> [accessed 1 August 2021]. See also Chapter 2.

Indeed, the young people who appear in this thesis, with the possible exception of the young person in *Maxims I* and Daria in Chapter 3, are male. This is partly because, as Izdebska notes, young women are rarely represented in EME literature, especially in poetry; but also because it is often difficult to determine whether their youth is significant or not.⁷⁹ In OE, a young woman is called either a *mæden* (also spelled *mægden*) or a *fæmne*, especially in the case of young female saints: Basilissa, Agnes, Daria and Euphrosyne are all *mæden*, although the Virgin Mary, Eugenia, Cecilia and Margaret are described as both *mæden* and *fæmne*. Daria, the only young woman analyzed in this thesis, is a *mæden*, and in the same passion Ælfric also describes five *mæden* who tempt young Chrysanthus.⁸⁰

Both *mæden* and *fæmne* can refer to young women and virgins, although *fæmne* also seems to have been used for adult women in the earlier period.⁸¹ The etymology of

⁷⁹ Izdebska, 'Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens', p. 63.

⁸⁰ For instance, Ælfric calls Mary a *mæden* in his 'Sermon on the Beginning of Creation', in *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church. The First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric. In the Original Anglo-Saxon, with an English Version*, ed. and trans. by Benjamin Thorpe, 2 vols (London: Printed for the Ælfric Society, 1844-46), I (1844), p. 24 and in the homily 'The Nativity of the Lord', in *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church. The First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric. In the Original Anglo-Saxon, with an English Version*, ed. and trans. by Benjamin Thorpe, 2 vols (London: Printed for the Ælfric Society, 1844-46), II (1846), p. 4.

Eugenia, Basilissa, and Agnes are all mentioned in the first volume of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints: Ælfric's Lives of Saints. Being a Set of Sermons on Saints' Days Formerly Observed by the English Church, Edited from Manuscript Julius E VII in the Cottonian Collection, With Various Readings from Other Manuscripts*, Walter W. Skeat, EETS S. S. 76 & 82, 2 vols (London: Published for the Early English Text Society by N. Trübner & Co., 1881-1900), I, while Daria, Euphrosyne and Cecilia are mentioned in *LS 2*. For Margaret, see *The Old English Lives of Saint Margaret*, ed. by Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis (Cambridge: University Press, 1994). See also Ælfric's works for more examples of young female saints.

⁸¹ Bäck, *Synonyms*, p. 187.

fæmne is complex: Bäck reports Grimm's suggestion that 'some Germanic dialects' borrowed the Latin *femina* (as it also happened in the Old Icelandic *feiminn*). Similar words in other Germanic languages, such as Old Saxon *femea* or *fadmia*, are clearly related to *fæmne*, although Bäck does not say that they come from Latin. He then adds that Grimm also suggested that *feiminn* (and hence *fæmne*) was connected with Old Icelandic *fâm* ('milk'), so that *fæmne* would mean 'milkmaid'.⁸² Another interpretation is that *fæmne* means 'shepardess', from the Indoeuropean root **poi-* ('to tend cattle'), however Bäck rejects this theory as he notes that in the oldest OE texts *fæmne* means 'woman' or 'wife'; for the same reason, I would also reject the meaning of 'milkmaid'.⁸³ He then suggests that the Indoeuropean root **poi-* can also mean 'to protect, take care of', from which he develops the (in my view) rather convoluted theory that *fæmne* was 'a feminine formation to a masculine subst[antive] formed on the verb in this sense, meaning 'protector', *fæmne* thus meaning 'protectress', from which sense 'mistress of the house, consort, wife' was developed'.⁸⁴ Yet, I see no reason to accept this theory, as the main meanings of *fæmne*, as Bäck himself notes above, are 'woman', 'girl, maiden' and 'virgin'.⁸⁵ De Vaan instead does not mention the root **poi-*, but suggests that *femina* comes from Pre-Indoeuropean **d^heh₁-mh₂-* meaning '(the one) nursing, breastfeeding', clearly feminine roles, but which have also not come down to the OE *fæmne*.⁸⁶ I agree with Bäck that *fæmne* comes from *femina*, given that they both mean 'woman', but it

⁸² Bäck, *Synonyms*, p. 184; *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* (Germany: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1831), p. 72, cited in Bäck, *Synonyms*, p. 184.

⁸³ Bäck, *Synonyms*, p. 186.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ '[F]æmne', in *DOE*.

⁸⁶ *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the Other Italic Languages*, ed. by Michiel de Vaan (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2008), p. 210.

should be determined why this borrowing was necessary and what are the differences between the two terms.

Before doing so, however, I need to analyze briefly the etymology of *mægden*, which is more straightforward: it comes from Pre-Germanic **mazað-īn*, from Indoeuropean **mag^uhot-īn*, diminutive of the Indoeuropean **mag^uhót* which led to Pre-Germanic **mazaþ-* ('girl, maiden'), also found in Gothic *magaps*, Old Frisian *maged*, *megith*, Old Saxon *magath*, Old High German *magad*.⁸⁷ The *OED* editors state that cognates mean 'maid, virgin'.⁸⁸ Bäck adds that *mægden* is a 'feminine formation' to Indoeuropean **mak^uú* ('boy, young man'), which led to the OE *magu* ('son').⁸⁹ *Mægden* has two main meanings: it can mean 'girl, maiden', or 'virgin', which often overlapped; other senses are 'female child' (to denote newborns, in contrast to a male child), 'female servant' or 'servant of God' (likely following the same development of *cniht* and *cnapa*, that is, that a servant was often young), perhaps by extension 'nun', and it could also refer to the Virgin Mary and the Church personified (more rarely).⁹⁰ Overall, it seems to have the same meanings as its cognates, but unlike them, as in the case of *cniht* and *cnapa*, it has also acquired religious meanings such as 'servant of God' (perhaps a broadening of its meaning 'servant') or the reference to the Virgin Mary and the Church (which might instead be a broadening derived from its connotations of virginity).

Coming back to the meanings of *fæmne*, it should be noted that another term for woman in OE was *wif*; however, according to Bosworth-Toller and Izdebska, this seems

⁸⁷ Bäck, *Synonyms*, p. 200.

⁸⁸ '[M]aiden', in *OED*

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/112442?rskey=ehOSV0&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>
[accessed 1 March 2023].

⁸⁹ Bäck, *Synonyms*, p. 200.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

to have been used only for adult women, and did not denote virgins — likely because a girl became a woman when she married and had intercourse, hence, an adult woman (or at least a lay one) was not expected to be a virgin.⁹¹ However, according to the *DOE*, the main meaning of *fæmne* was indeed ‘virgin’, and most of its meanings related to virginity, for instance ‘virgin; unmarried/ chaste young woman’, ‘woman living in a permanent state of virginity’, or in reference to the Virgin Mary, to emphasize purity with adjectives such as *clæne* or *unmæle*, and is used for Christ, nuns, virgins and martyrs.⁹² Like *cniht*, it could also be applied to groups of virgins, and the expression *fæmnena mynster/ gesamnung* denoted a convent.⁹³ It thus seems that the main virtue of a *fæmne* was her virginity; for this reason, it is interesting that the Latin *femina*, according to both the *DMLBS* and Lewis and Short dictionaries, did not mean ‘virgin’, hence this may have been a specific meaning which *fæmne* acquired after it had been borrowed into OE.⁹⁴ Although the sense ‘virgin’ seems more prevalent, it should also be noted that *fæmne* could also mean ‘woman’ (which may be because *femina* means ‘woman’ in Latin), especially in the oldest examples, and could also be used for specific depictions of women such as the *virago*, or to mean ‘mainly woman’.⁹⁵

⁹¹ ‘[W]if’, in Bosworth-Toller <https://bosworthtoller.com/35587> [accessed 1 February 2023]. On female growth in Early Medieval England, see Crawford, *Childhood*, pp. 166-7; Izdebska, ‘Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens’, p. 62.

⁹² ‘[F]æmne; senses 1, 1.a; 1.a.i; 1.b; 1.b.1; 1.b.1.a; 1.b.i.d; 1.b.ii; 1.b.iv, in *DOE*. See also sense 1.b.1.b in *ibid*.

⁹³ *Ibid*; senses .b.ii.a; 1.b.v.

⁹⁴ See ‘*femina*’ in *DMLBS* <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/femina> [accessed 1 March 2023] and in *A Latin Dictionary*, ed. and trans. by Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (henceforth *A Latin Dictionary*) <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/femina> [accessed 1 March 2023].

⁹⁵ Bäck, *Synonyms*, p. 187; ‘*fæmne*; senses 2; 2.a.i; 2.a.ii’, in *DOE*.

According to Bäck, *fæmne* was the usual word for ‘virgin’ before 1000, but afterwards *mæden*, which until then denoted only girls, became more often used to describe chaste women.⁹⁶ He does not explain why this change happened; it may be that *mæden* could have been more closely connected with youth and thus virginity, compared to *fæmne*, but this is no more than a supposition and cannot be proven. This change seems to have persisted into modern times: while *mæden* has come down to Modern English as ‘maiden’, *fæmne* has been lost, being replaced by ‘woman’ and ‘virgin’.⁹⁷ ‘Maiden’ now predominantly means ‘virgin’ or ‘unmarried woman’, whereas the meaning of ‘girl’ has become obsolete.⁹⁸

Bäck notes that, with regards to *fæmne*, the sense of ‘woman’ could still be found throughout the OE period; but it is often difficult to distinguish whether an occurrence of *fæmne* refers to a ‘girl’, a ‘chaste woman’ or a ‘virgin’, especially in the case of female saints.⁹⁹ This last observation also applies to *mæden*.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, hagiographers and homilists seem more concerned with the virginal status of these young women rather than their age, as their youth seem only implicitly referred to in their descriptions as *mæden* or *fæmne*.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 203. For a discussion on the meanings of *fæmne* see Bäck, *Synonyms*, pp. 184-99; for a discussion on the meanings of *mæden*, see *ibid.*, pp. 199-213. See also Izdebska, ‘Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens’, pp. 62-63.

⁹⁷ ‘[M]aiden’, in *OED*.

⁹⁸ Ibid., senses 1; 2; 4.

⁹⁹ Bäck, *Synonyms*, pp. 187, 190, 191. See ‘*fæmne*’ in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* <[HTTP://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/9946](http://bosworthtoller.com/9946)> [accessed 1 August 2021] and ‘*mæden*’ <[HTTP://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/022045](http://bosworthtoller.com/022045)> in *ibid* [accessed 1 August 2021]; ‘*fæmne*’; senses 1; 2’, in *DOE*.

¹⁰⁰ Bäck, *Synonyms*, p. 201.

For instance, Ælfric introduces Saint Eugenia by remarking how she *ðurh mægðhad mærlíce þeah and þurh martyrdom þisne middaneard oferswað* ('through [her] virginity flourished magnificently, and through [her] martyrdom conquered this middle-earth').¹⁰¹ Eugenia is called a *uirgo* ('virgin'), *mæden* and *fæmne* as well as *cniht* when she dresses as a man, but Ælfric clearly states (in the quotation above) that she did not become a saint because of her youth, but because of her virginity. It thus seems that her virginity was her main virtue, and her youthfulness was only meant to describe her, but was not otherwise important in the text.

Therefore, in this instance *mæden* and *fæmne* seem more likely, given Ælfric's concern with her virginity, to refer to her as a virgin. The only clear indication that Eugenia is young comes from the masculine term *cniht*, as its meaning of 'bachelor, unmarried male' was much rarer (according to the *DOE*, it only appears in Wulfstan's *Institutes of Polity*, a legal text).¹⁰² This occurrence of *cniht*, then, shows that there was a clear difference between terms for young men and women in OE, because terms for young men (which lack the strong connotations of virginity attached to *mæden* and *fæmne*) were not ambiguous in the way feminine words were.

¹⁰¹ *LS I*, p. 24. It is telling that the terms *mæ(g)denhad* and *fæmnhad* both mean 'virginity' rather than 'youth', suggesting that *mæden* and *fæmne* should also be taken to refer primarily to virgins rather than young women; compare these with *cnihtþad*, which most often means 'youth', but its meaning of 'celibacy' is secondary (see above). *fæmnan-hád* in Bosworth-Toller <[HTTP://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/9945](http://bosworthtoller.com/9945)> [accessed 1 August 2021] and *mægden-hád* in *ibid.* <[HTTP://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/22048](http://bosworthtoller.com/22048)> [accessed 1 August 2021].

¹⁰² '[C]niht; sense 1.g', in *DOE* and 'cniht' in Bosworth-Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* <[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/6460](https://bosworthtoller.com/6460)> [accessed 1 August 2021]. See Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, 'Institutes of Polity (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Junius 121)', in *Die Institues of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical: Ein Werk Erzbischof Wulfstans von York, Herausgegeben von Karl Jost* (Bern: Franke, 1959), pp. 39-164 (2.1.1.188, p. 130).

Another complex depiction of a female saint is Æthelthryth, who is also called a *mæden*, despite being married twice.¹⁰³ It is not clear how old she is in the period covered by her brief *vita*, but Ælfric describes the preservation of her virginity as a miracle.¹⁰⁴ Overall, in the lives of many female saints, their youth seems incidental rather than significant. This conclusion also seems to apply to the eponymous heroine in the poem *Juliana*, who is called a *fæmne* (32a), but she is also *geong* (35a).¹⁰⁵ An exception to this tendency is represented by Daria, in Chapter 3, who embraces Christianity and learns important spiritual lessons as a young woman, thus providing Christian teachings to the audience as well as representing an example of faithfulness.

The OE terms for youth and young people, then, show that the OE term *geogub* had various connotations and could be used in different ways depending on the intentions of the author, although these instances were also ambiguous and do not reveal much information regarding how *geogub* was understood; EME authors also had a rich vocabulary to refer to young men and women, as well as gender neutral terms, although words for young women tend to be rarer and (perhaps for this reason) more ambiguous.

But authors, especially hagiographers, also wrote in Latin, which introduced another array of words, such as *adolescentia* and *juventus* to denote youth, while *adolescens* and *juvenis* described young men and *puella* and *virgo* referred to young women.¹⁰⁶ This thesis analyses three Latin texts: Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, the *Passio*

¹⁰³ *LS* I, p. 433.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ 'Juliana', in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, pp. 113-33 (p. 114).

¹⁰⁶ '[A]dolescentia' in *DMLBS* <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/ADOLESCENTIA](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/adolescentia)> [accessed 1 August 2021]. For 'adolescens', see 'adolescere; sense 2b' in *ibid.* <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/ADOLESCERE](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/adolescere)> [accessed 1 August 2021]. '[J]uventus; 2' <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/JUVENTUS](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/juventus)> [accessed 1 August 2021] in *ibid.* and 'juvenis' in *ibid.* <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/JUVENIS](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/juvenis)> [accessed 1 August 2021] in

Chrisanthi et Dariae (Ælfric's source for his 'Passion of Chrysanthus and His Wife Daria', all in Chapter 3) and Willibald's *Vita Bonifatii* (in Chapter 5), which employ the terms *adolescentia*, *juventus*, and *juvenis* (the latter is discussed in Chapter 3); as the term *uirgo* only occurs in the Ælfric's 'Passion of Chrysanthus and His Wife Daria' (in the rubric) and in his Latin source *Passio Chrisanthi et Dariae*, it is considered in Chapter 3 (section 3.3).

I now focus on *adolescentia* and *juventus*, as these words occur more often in the Latin texts and the attestations of the 'ages of man' below. Both *adolescentia* and *juventus* mean 'youth' and therefore seem synonymous; however, a closer analysis reveals that their meanings are often different. *Adolescentia* is connected with the verb *adolescere*, meaning 'to grow', hence it more properly indicates 'a period of growth'. *Adolescere* itself derives from the verb *alere* 'to grow up' plus the suffix *ad-*, which is the inchoative form of the verb *alere*, 'to nourish'; therefore, it may have originally been used to refer to someone who 'was still being nourished' or 'had to be nourished', hence was still growing.¹⁰⁷ The Lewis-Short dictionary translates *adulescentia* (another spelling of *adolescentia*) as 'the age of the *adulescens*, the time between the age of the *puer* and *juvenis*, i. e. from the 15th to the 30th year, the time of youth, youth'.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, the

ibid. *Puella* ('virgin, young woman') in ibid. <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/PUELLA](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/puella)> [accessed 1 August 2021] could be used as a synonym for *virgo*, but it does not occur in this thesis.

¹⁰⁷ '[A]*adolescere*; 1', in ibid. <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/ADOLESCERE](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/adolescere)> [accessed 18 January 2023]. *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language. Dealing with the origin of words and their sense development thus illustrating the history of civilization and culture*, ed. by Dr Ernest Klein (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1966-1967), Volume I: A-K, p. 27.

¹⁰⁸ '[A]*dulescentia*', in *A Latin Dictionary* <<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=adolescentia&la=la#lexicon>> [accessed 18 February 2023].

Lewis-Short dictionary defines *adulescens* as ‘growing up; not yet come to full growth [...]’, emphasizing that *adulescentia* was seen as a period of growth.¹⁰⁹ Note that the age limits provided by the editors concerning *adulescentia* (between the ages of 15 and 30 years) seem based on Isidore’s division of the ‘ages of man’ (the period between *pueritia* and *juventus*; see section 1.3). It is not clear why these age limits are not included in the *DMLBS*, as age limits are mentioned in the case of *juventus* (see below). Instead, the *DMLBS* merely defines *adulescentia* as ‘youth’, without providing any further information, although I found that *adulescentia* was indeed interpreted as a period of growth in some of the EME sources written in Latin, as shown in the following chapters.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, *adulescentia* seems to have a specific meaning, unlike *geogub*, as it is clearly connected with growth. A vivid description of *adulescentia* occurs in the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, in which the hagiographer Felix tells how, upon becoming a young man (specifically, when his ‘*adulescentiae vires*’ increased), Saint Guthlac, hitherto a pious and obedient child, took up arms and fought against his ‘enemies’ for nine years, until, after subduing them, he experienced a spiritual conversion and finally returned on the path to sainthood.¹¹¹ Thus, it can be seen that Felix employs Latin to illustrate the same idea of youth as a period of development conveyed by the *Guthlac A*-poet above, as Guthlac’s youth allows him to grow both personally and spiritually. Perhaps Felix has been influenced by similar interpretations of youth by the earlier Church Fathers, who wrote in Latin (which I will explore in section 1.4). In this sense, then, *adulescentia* can

¹⁰⁹ ‘[A]dulescens; sense A’, in *A Latin Dictionary* <<https://logeion.uchicago.edu/adulescens>> [accessed 18 February 2018]. See also *ibid.*, sense B.

¹¹⁰ ‘[A]dulescentia’, in *DMLBS* <<https://logeion.uchicago.edu/adulescentia>> [accessed 18 February 2023].

¹¹¹ *Felix’s Life of Saint Guthlac. Introduction, Text, Translation and Notes*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), pp. 80-2.

be considered synonymous with the meaning of *geogub* as a period of development. Moreover, Felix does not precisely state how old Guthlac is, hence this occurrence of *adolescentia* is also ambiguous; however, it is less so than *geogub*, as the saint's life makes clear that Guthlac's *adolescentia* occurred between his childhood and adulthood, hence, in line with its etymology, it was understood as a period of growth. Yet, despite these similarities, there is an obvious difference between *geogub* and *adolescentia*: while the former could also apply to infancy, childhood and early adulthood, *adolescentia* seems to have mostly referred to youth. This means that it is easier to determine whether a character is actually young in Latin texts compared to OE ones.

Concerning *juventus*, it derives from *iuvenis* ('young man'), which comes from Pre-Indoeuropean **h₂iu-h₁en-* ('which possesses vital force'; cf. Sanskrit *yúvan-*, 'young').¹¹² The *DMLBS* defines *juventus* as 'youth; the state of being young' and denotes the period between twenty-two and forty-two years of age; it seems that the meaning of this term did not change much from Classical times, as in the Lewis-Short dictionary it specifically refers to 'the age of youth (from the twentieth to the fortieth year)', which again follows Isidore.¹¹³ However, considering the etymology above, it seems that *juventus* denoted youth as a period of strength, which seems to distinguish it from the meaning of *adolescentia* as a period of growth, in which, supposedly, the young person still did not have adult strength. Indeed, in Isidore's division, and indeed in the Latin attestations of the *topos* of the 'ages of man' (for which see section 1.3), *juventus* seems to correspond more closely to maturity, to adulthood, rather than to a period of

¹¹² *Etymological Dictionary of Latin*, ed. by de Vaan, p. 317.

¹¹³ '[J]uventus; sense I', in *A Latin Dictionary*

<<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=juventus&la=la#lexicon>> [accessed 18

February 2023]; '*juventus*', in *DMLBS* <<https://logeion.uchicago.edu/juventus>> [accessed 18 March 2023].

development (see below). Hence, despite its translation as ‘youth’, its meaning is not as relevant to this thesis as that of *adolescentia* is (concerning its interpretation as a period of development), or at least only in the divisions of the ‘ages of man’ (see section 1.3) in which it helps to denote and clarify the limits and meaning of *adolescentia*, as most of this thesis is concerned with the interpretation of youth as a ‘period of growth’. It is not altogether clear how different it is from *geogup*, due to the latter’s ambiguity: it may be suggested that a possible difference was that *juventus* was predominantly used for adults in their prime, while *geogup* could also refer to younger people.

However, Anglo-Latin authors also understood youth as a condition of ‘youthfulness’ (which is also not mentioned in the Latin dictionaries), like Willibald in his *Vita Bonifatii* (examined in Chapter 5, section 5.1), in which he describes how Boniface’s studies

contra infestas diabolicae suggestionis persecutiones, quae tenerum sepe apud mortales iuventutis florem ceum nebulosae quadam caecitatis caligine obtegere solent, mirabiliter protexere, ita ut etiam propter indesinentem diuturnae sollicitudinis eius curam et sempiternam sanctarum legum examinationem inlecebrosa in eo adulescentiae incentiva et carnalium desideriorum impetus primum inpingentes domino Deo auxiliante, maxima ex parte sedavere.¹¹⁴

(had wonderfully protected [Boniface] against the harmful attacks of the incitement of the devil, which often envelop mortals in the tender flower of youth with darkness as if it were a cloudy blindness, so that also because of the unceasing, constant solicitude of his with the care and eternal examination of the holy laws [Boniface] at first sedated the seductive temptations of youth and the attacks of carnal desire towards him in the greatest part).

Willibald does not seem to represent youth as a period of growth in this excerpt: on the contrary, he provides a negative generalization of youth by emphasizing its immorality and vulnerability to sin (especially lust), and clearly sets Boniface apart from other youths

¹¹⁴ ‘*Vita Bonifatii Auctore Willibaldo*’, ed. by Wilhelm Levison, in *Vitae Sancti Bonifatii Archiepiscopi Moguntini, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in Usum Scholarum Separatim Editi* 57, pp. 1-58, available at: <[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/TA79JVCD](https://tinyurl.com/ta79jvcd)> [accessed 1 August 2021], p. 8.

for his faith and studiousness. The aim of this depiction, in my view, was to demonstrate the consequences of un-Christian behaviour and to further emphasize the virtuousness of young Boniface, in order to encourage Willibald's clerical audience to follow Boniface's example and diligently study the Bible to avoid falling into sin. In other words, Willibald's description shows how even *adolescentia* and *juventus* (he uses both terms) could be understood as a period of 'youthfulness', but have important textual functions nonetheless. Also note that Willibald here uses both *adolescentia* and *juventus* seemingly as synonymous, perhaps precisely because he is not concerned with the meaning of *adolescentia* as 'a period of growth' in particular; in other words, he does not need to separate between *adolescentia* and *juventus*, although he does not make it clear what ages they referred to. Given that in this instance they occur together, it may be supposed that they overlapped (but this is no more than a supposition), although the occurrence of this episode between Boniface's childhood and adulthood helps to gain a better understanding of youth, as it happens in other saints' lives analyzed in this thesis.

Therefore, based on the limited number of Latin examples provided here, it would seem that Latin terms for youth and young men tend to be more straightforward compared to the OE, although they could have the same interpretations and textual functions.

Before looking at the next section on laws and archaeology, I should like to explain briefly my translation choices. It should be made clearer that these terms (*geogub*, *cniht*, *mægden*, *adolescentia*, and so on) are not easy to define, no more than terms like 'youth', 'young man' and 'young woman' can be simply defined in Modern English, as Izdebska notes.¹¹⁵ That is because it is not clear how long the phase of *geogub* lasted, or how old a *cniht* or *mægden* were supposed to be, as it not explicitly stated in the sources. Indeed, in texts such as *Guthlac A*, although I provide an interpretation regarding what

¹¹⁵ Izdebska, 'Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens', p. 47.

the poet means by *geogub*, this cannot be determined with certainty, because it is not stated, hence I focus on how *geogub* is represented and employed, as the poet provides little information otherwise. In particular, I provide two interpretations of youth, derived from close textual analysis, which apply to both the OE and Latin texts: as a ‘period of growth’ between childhood and adulthood (seen in the texts analyzed in chs. 2-4) and as ‘youthfulness’ (in ch. 5). Focusing on these two conceptualizations allows me to determine how the depictions and uses of youth and young characters contribute to the purpose of the texts, and in this way I also aim to gain a better understanding of these literary works.

However, the fact that modern terms are also fuzzy and unclear further complicates this endeavour, as there is not a generally accepted definition of ‘youth’ in Modern English either, and it is not always clear how old a ‘young person’ is; in other words, it is difficult to determine how, and if, Modern English terms correspond to OE and Latin terms, and vice versa. Indeed, taking as example the definitions of ‘youth’ in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it can be seen that some senses are almost identical to those mentioned in the *DOE* and Bosworth-Toller, and are similar to the two conceptions analyzed in this thesis: ‘the fact or state of being young; youngness’, and ‘[t]he time when one is young; the early part or period of life; more specifically, the period from puberty till the attainment of full growth, between childhood and adult age’.¹¹⁶ This is interesting, as, on the one hand, it shows that the meanings of youth have not much changed in the last one thousand years; but on the other, it reveals that it is still not clear what is meant by ‘youth’ as, just like in the *DOE*, there are no age limits.

¹¹⁶ ‘[Y]outh; sense 1.a; 2.a’, in *OED*

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/232184?redirectedFrom=youth#eid> [accessed 1 March 2023].

For the purpose of this thesis, I translate *geogub* as ‘youth’, because the *DOE* and *Izdebska* both refer to it in this way, despite the fact that it could be longer than youth is usually assumed to be, including infancy, childhood and early adulthood. Regarding the Latin term *adolescentia* or *juventus*, the translation issues are more complex. Concerning the former, although some translate it as ‘adolescence’, I would render it again as ‘youth’ (in agreement with the *DMLBS*), because I find the term ‘adolescence’ ambiguous, as it may also have modern connotations that do not necessarily apply to EME culture (see footnote n° 23 herein). It is true that, by translating *adolescentia* as ‘youth’, it can be confused with *juventus*, but the two terms occur together either in the divisions of the ‘ages of man’ (section 1.3), wherein it is made clear that there is often a difference between them and they tend to refer to two different life-stages (*juventus* being more properly adulthood), or in the *Vita Bonifatii* (see excerpt above), in which it seems to be used synonymously with *juventus*. In all other instances, *adolescentia* occurs on its own. The fact that I chose to translate both *geogub* and *adolescentia* in the same way might also be useful because it helps to highlight the similarities between them: indeed, I argue that, despite the fact that *geogub* could also be interpreted as a longer period than *adolescentia* (at least as it was defined by Isidore of Seville; see section 1.3), both could be understood and employed in the same way, either as a ‘period of growth’ or as a period of ‘youthfulness’.

I also suggest that Guthlac, Beowulf, Chrysanthus and Daria, the *geong mann* of *Maxims I*, Boniface and the Wanderer are all either in the period of their *geogub* or their *adolescentia*, depending on the language of the text. I refer to them as ‘young men’ (or ‘young woman’, in the case of Daria), or ‘youths’, because I feel that these terms might specifically refer to people who are ‘young’, hence in the stage of their youth.¹¹⁷ Of

¹¹⁷ ‘[Y]oung; A.1’, in *OED* [accessed 19 January 2023].

course, as I mentioned, there is no consensus regarding how these modern terms should be understood. An alternative may be to refer to these characters as ‘boy’ or ‘girl’, but this might entail even more ambiguity, because in Modern English a boy and a girl can also be children.¹¹⁸ Although *geogub* could also refer to childhood (I found no evidence that *adolescentia* might, however), it is my understanding that characters like Chrysanthus, Guthlac or Beowulf are older than children, as their childhood is described separately from their youth: Chrysanthus, for instance, is presented first as a *cnapa* and then as a *cniht*, which I translate as ‘boy’ and ‘youth’, respectively, and suggest that they refer to different stages of growth. Yet, there is some ambivalence in certain cases, for instance with regards to the *geong mann* in *Maxims I*, which I discuss in the next chapter. Referring to the young characters in this thesis as ‘adolescents’ or even ‘teenagers’ might also have been problematic because an adolescent or a teenager is usually thought of as someone between the ages of thirteen and nineteen, and it is not clear how long *geogub* lasted; it might well have been longer, while *adolescentia*, according to Isidore (see section 1.3), lasted from ages fourteen to twenty-eight, hence it had a different length than modern adolescence.¹¹⁹

Sometimes the ambiguity does not depend on the characters’ age: for instance, Daria is described as a *mæden*, which, as mentioned above, can mean either ‘young woman’ or ‘virgin’. Given that Daria is described as a *virgo* (‘virgin’) in the Latin source and in the rubric in the OE adaptation, the latter meaning might be preferred, but it might also be that Daria was a young woman, especially because she is a companion and a foil to Chrysanthus who is a *cniht*; in other words, both meanings might be applicable. Therefore, while I endeavour to translate these terms as best as I can, it must be recognized

¹¹⁸ ‘[B]oy; 3.A’ and ‘[G]irl; 2; 3.A’, in *ibid.* [accessed 19 January 2023].

¹¹⁹ ‘[T]eenager’, in *ibid.* [accessed 19 January 2023].

that there often is not a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ choice, and it is necessary to take the ambiguity entailed by these words into consideration, as it is not explicitly stated how they should be interpreted.

This study has briefly treated meanings and connotations of those OE and Latin words for youth and young people which occur most often in this thesis, to appreciate how authors referred to them and what questions their vocabulary raises. It has been shown that while OE terms can be ambiguous, especially those referring to young women, Latin ones are more specific but equally complex. As such, both OE and Latin terms for youth and young people need to be considered within their textual contexts, as I intend to do in the next chapters.

After looking at the linguistic terms, it seems useful to consider the laws and archaeology to help determine how youth and young people might have been understood in Early Medieval England.

1.2.1 *Laws and Archaeological Evidence about Youth and Young People*

Both Crawford and Rabin, in his study of parent-children relationships in EME charters, agree that there must have been an ‘age of transition’ between childhood and adulthood, although Rabin remarks that the laws are not clear about when this period started, when it ended or how long it lasted.¹²⁰ However, it would seem that, according to the laws, a ten- or twelve-year-old was legally an adult.¹²¹ The ‘age of majority’ in Early Medieval England seemed to have changed throughout the centuries. For instance, a law by Kings Hlothhere and Eadric of Kent (seventh century) states that a boy without a father shall

¹²⁰ Crawford, *Childhood*, p. 52; Andrew Rabin, “‘Sharper Than a Serpent’s Tooth’: Parent-Child Litigation in Anglo-Saxon England”, in *Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. by Irvine and Rudolf, pp. 270-90 (p. 275).

¹²¹ Crawford, *Childhood*, pp. 155, 157.

have a guardian to take care of his property until he is ten years old; similarly, in the laws of King Ine of Wessex (eighth century) it is said that a ten-year-old could be accused of theft.¹²² However, King Athelstan (tenth century) initially raises the minimum age at which a thief could be killed for his crimes to twelve and then to fifteen as ‘it seemed too cruel to him that a man so young (*geongne*) should be killed’.¹²³ King Cnut (eleventh century) again lowers the age to twelve, decrees that any man over the age of twelve should swear that he will not be a thief or know of any theft, and also states that any free man older than twelve shall be included in a hundred and a tithing.¹²⁴ Rabin observes that these limitations suggest that, according to Early Medieval English law-makers, the age of majority depended on two main factors: the ability to ‘administer property’ and the possession of an adequate ‘sense of responsibility’.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, it does not seem like these ages had particular importance in the literary record, as authors rarely state how old someone is.¹²⁶

Furthermore, the archaeological record suggests that reality was more complex: young men aged from twelve to twenty were usually buried with spears and shields (younger children are instead given knives, which are likely symbolic and used as

¹²² *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England: Comprising Laws Enacted under the Anglo-Saxon Kings from Æthelbirht to Cnut. Volume 1, Containing the Secular Laws*, ed. and trans. by Benjamin Thorpe, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012; Originally Published for the Record Commissioners in 1840), I, pp. 30 (‘The Laws of Hlothhere and Eadric’; law n° 6), 106 (‘The Laws of King Ine’; ‘of stealing’; law n° 7).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 198 (‘The Laws of King Athelstan’; ‘Athelstan’s Ordinances’; ‘of thieves’; law n° 1), 228 (‘The Laws of King Athelstan’; ‘V. *Judicia Civitatis Lundoniæ*’; law n° 1), 240 (‘The Laws of King Athelstan’; ‘V. *Judicia Civitatis Lundoniæ*’; ‘Twelfth’; law n° 1).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 386 (‘The Laws of King Cnut’; ‘That Every Man Shall Be in a Tithing’; law n° 20), 388 (‘Of Thieves’; law n° 21).

¹²⁵ Rabin, ‘“Sharper Than a Serpent’s Tooth”’, p. 276.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

everyday tools, and occasionally short spears), but swords (although quite rare) begin to be found with older men in their twenties. In Crawford's view, this means that ten- and twelve-year-olds, despite the evidence of lawcodes, were not considered fully grown until their twenties. In other words, even if a ten- or twelve-year-old was no longer a child, he was not an adult either, and had to undergo a further period of maturation.¹²⁷ Stoodley and Hadley support Crawford's findings, suggesting that 'convincing exceptions to the widespread association of swords with the burials of adult males ... are few indeed'.¹²⁸ Hadley explains that swords were not only markers of status and wealth, but their occurrence in burials might also be related to the '[s]tage in the life-cycle', as they are found predominantly in the graves of males aged between twenty and forty-five.¹²⁹ Stoodley, in particular, believes that there was a transition around ages 18-20, as this was the 'crucial age' starting from which individuals are often found in a coffin, do not share a grave, are laid supine, and the grave tends to be adorned with 'external markers', like 'marker posts' and 'barrows', which may mean that 18- or 20-year-olds were considered adults.¹³⁰ Lewis, in her osteological analysis on work and the 'adolescent' in medieval England, defines 'adolescents' as those between the ages of '6.6 and 25', because, she claims, 'this conforms both to modern medical practice, and the medieval religious

¹²⁷ See Crawford, *Childhood*, pp. 157-165.

¹²⁸ Dawn M. Headley, 'Masculinity', in *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies*, ed. by Jacqueline Stodnick and Renée R. Trilling (Chichester: Blackwell, 2012), p. 117 (pp. 115-32); Hilda Roderick Ellis Davidson, *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England: Its Archaeology and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 10; Nick Stoodley, *The Spindle and the Spear: A Critical Inquiry into the Construction and Meaning of Gender in the Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Rite* (Oxford: J. and E. Edges, 1999), pp. 29, 106-8.

¹²⁹ Hadley, 'Masculinity', p. 117.

¹³⁰ Nick Stoodley, 'From the Cradle to the Grave: Age Organization and the Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Rite', *World Archaeology*, 31(3), Human Lifecycles (Feb. 2000), 456-72 (pp. 461-9) <[HTTPS://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/125112](https://www.jstor.org/stable/125112)> [accessed 14 February 2022].

concept of *adolescentia* or *iuventus* [...]'.¹³¹ I do not agree with her definition, partly because I do not believe that 'modern medical practice' can be applied to the Middle Ages, and more importantly because, as I have shown above (sections 1.2 and 1.3), *adolescentia* and *iuventus* were often not understood as synonyms, and the latter more properly indicated adulthood. I also explained why the modern term 'adolescence', or, in this case, 'adolescent', should not be used for medieval youths. Overall, then, it seems more likely, as Lee observes, that there was not a single age of transition, but children obtained adult status gradually.¹³² This further supports the view that there was a period of 'youth' in which the individual was no longer a child but not yet an adult. However, it should be noted that these distinctions are rarely, if ever, reflected in the literary record, hence literary representations of youth should be considered within their own textual contexts (see section 1.5).

Concerning the presence of swords in burials of men in their twenties or older, it may be possible to put forward some hypotheses as to why swords do not occur with younger men.¹³³ In her study on masculinity in EME culture, Hadley argues that swords were a recognized symbol of masculinity, which might explain why they are not found in the graves of younger males, who (despite the evidence of the lawcodes) may not have been recognized as adult men, since as suggested above, there seems to have been a period

¹³¹ Mary Lewis, 'Work and the Adolescent in Medieval England AD 900-1500: The Osteological Evidence', *Medieval Archaeology* 60 (2016), 138-171 <https://doi-org.nottingham.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/00766097.2016.1147787> [accessed 3 March 2023].

¹³² Lee, 'Forever Young', in *Youth and Age*, ed. by Lewis-Simpson, pp. 17-37, footnote n° 27, p. 23.

¹³³ On the sword in EME culture, especially archaeology, see: Hadley, *Masculinity*, pp. 115-132; Hilda Roderick Davidson, *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England: Its Archaeology and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); Sue Brunning, *The Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe: Experience, Identity, Representation* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2019).

of transition between childhood and adulthood; moreover, Hadley explains that swords were a mark of status, although '[p]osition in the household and broader community is also likely to have been a factor'.¹³⁴ This might have meant that a man needed to establish themselves in their community first, and accumulate wealth, which might have taken a few years and might not have been possible to achieve for younger men. However, Brunning has criticized the view that swords were 'elite symbols', considering this 'a modern value judgement that was not necessarily shared in the early medieval past', as 'the number of swords recovered from Anglo-Saxon graves does not reflect the number in circulation, implying that sword ownership was not exclusive to elites but was more widespread [...]'.¹³⁵ However, Davidson, who provided the first study of the sword in Early Medieval England, Hadley and Brunning focus exclusively on the making and conditions of the swords in furnished burials and not on the skeletons they were buried with, hence it is not possible to know more about the age or status of these people.¹³⁶

It should be noted that the main issue concerning young people in the archaeological record is that (to my knowledge) archaeologists are still not sure how to interpret the age of skeletons: that is, while 'the methods used to assess the age of non-adults are well understood' (one method being dental development, for instance), it is not clear how young people were considered in Early Medieval England, or indeed in modern

¹³⁴ Hadley, 'Masculinity', pp. 122, 124.

¹³⁵ Brunning, *The Sword*, p. 7.

¹³⁶ See Brunning, *The Sword*, esp. pp. 59-111. Hadley only notes that swords were predominantly buried with adult males, as mentioned above, and notes that individuals aged over twelve were adults according to the laws, but does not elaborate on the age of the specific skeletons in the burials she considers. Hadley, 'Masculinity', p. 117.

times, as I also previously observed.¹³⁷ In other words, although archaeologists can tell whether a skeleton is that of, for instance, a thirteen-year-old male, how can we know whether it was considered a child, a youth, or an adult in Early Medieval society? And for that matter, is a thirteen-year-old a child, an ‘adolescent’, or a youth in our society? Or something else? Crawford suggests that the problem might be caused by ‘the inability of archaeologists to define our terms’; that is, to determine what was, and is, meant by ‘boy’, ‘youth’, and ‘adult’, as archaeologists often only distinguish between ‘adults’ and ‘sub-adults’, which is less than helpful as far as young people are concerned, because this division does not seem to recognize a phase of youth between childhood (or ‘sub-adulthood’) and adulthood, despite the fact that some archaeologists, like Crawford, Lee and Stoodley (see above) seem to believe that there was an age of transition between childhood and adulthood, which might explain why twelve-year-olds, despite being legally adults, were not buried with swords.¹³⁸ However, this issue is difficult to solve since, as seen in the preceding section, both EME and modern terminology concerning young people is ambiguous, and it is not clear how old a ‘young person’, or a ‘child’ and ‘adult’ are supposed to be, either in EME or Modern English, and how our definitions apply to EME ones. This debate regarding how to define ‘juveniles’ in the archaeological record seems to be ongoing: Crawford observed the difficulty in defining children, as well as youths and adults, in 2007, and again in 2018; she bases her studies on the laws, considering as children those younger than ten or twelve years, and as ‘adults’ those who are older, but this methodology is (once again) not useful for identifying young people,

¹³⁷ Jo Buckberry, ‘Techniques for Identifying the Age and Sex of Children at Death’, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Childhood*, ed. by Sally Crawford et al. (Oxford: University Press, 2018), pp. 55-70 (p. 69).

¹³⁸ Crawford, *Childhood*, pp. 157-165; Lee, ‘Forever Young’, in *Youth and Age*, ed. by Lewis-Simpson, footnote n° 27, p. 23; Stoodley, ‘From the Cradle’, pp. 461-9.

as it does not seem to take them into account, despite the fact that archaeological findings suggests that there was a transitional period of ‘youth’ between childhood and adulthood.¹³⁹ This issue was also recognized by Hadley and Hemer, but they do not offer a solution.¹⁴⁰

Therefore, both laws and the archaeological record are not particularly helpful in determining what was meant by ‘youth’ and ‘young people’ in Early Medieval England. It is also difficult to find any meaningful connection between the laws, the burial record, and the texts; that is, laws and archaeology do not seem to have influenced the literature and vice versa. It seems thus better to focus on the texts and consider them separately.

In order to determine how authors understood youth as a period of maturation in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, it is also necessary to examine how medieval scholars considered youth in relation to the other stages of human growth. Theorizations of the human life-course were a *topos* in medieval thought and have become known as the ‘ages of man’. EME interpretations of this idea and their sources are analyzed in the next section, which seeks to determine how youth was characterized as part of the human life-course.

1.3 *Youth in Early Medieval English Interpretations of the ‘Ages of Man’*

Since Classical Antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, intellectuals divided the human life-course into various life-stages to understand the course of nature and time; these divisions, known as the ‘ages of man’, are essential to appreciate how

¹³⁹ Sally Crawford, ‘Companions, Co-Incidences or Chattels? Children in the Early Anglo-Saxon Multiple Burial Ritual’, in *Children, Childhood and Society*, ed. by Sally Crawford and Gillian Shepherd (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007), pp. 83-92 (pp. 83-4).

¹⁴⁰ D. M. Hadley and K. A. Hemer, ‘Introduction: Archaeological Approaches to Medieval Childhood, c. 500-1500’, in *Medieval Childhood: Archaeological Approaches* (Havertown, U. S.: Oxbow Books, 2014), pp. 1-25 (pp. 2, 7).

medieval people saw their world and humanity's place in it. By focusing on the description and place of youth in the attestations of this scheme, I aim to analyze how EME authors conceptualized youth and understood it in relation to the other life-stages.

The human lifespan was divided into several stages, from two to twelve.¹⁴¹ I focus on some significant examples which divide the human life-course in two, three, four, five or six stages. Before doing so, however, I should like to introduce briefly the human life-stages as they were understood in the Middle Ages. One of the most influential descriptions of the ages of man is by Isidore of Seville, who divided human life into six stages, each with a specific duration: *infantia* from birth to the age of 7, *pueritia* from 7 to 14, *adolescentia* as the period from the ages of 14 to 28 and *juventus* from 28 to 50, both of which were distinct from adulthood (*gravitas*), from 50 to 70; lastly, the sixth age, 'old age' (*senectus*), lasted from 70 until death.¹⁴² Both *adolescentia* and *juventus* thus seem to refer to youth, but Isidore states that while an *adolescens* is old enough to procreate, a *juvenis* is at the peak of his growth, and when he reaches the age of 30, he attains full maturity.¹⁴³ Therefore, while *adolescentia* still seems to be a period of maturation, *juventus* corresponds to adulthood; indeed, Isidore calls it *firmissima aetatum omnium* ('the strongest of all ages').¹⁴⁴ In his *Differentiae*, he provides a similar sixfold scheme of human growth in which he likewise divides youth into *adolescentia* and *juventus*, but calls the fifth age, after *juventus*, *senectus* ('old age') and the sixth [*aetas*]

¹⁴¹ Porck, *Old Age*, p. 16; Porck, 'Ages of Man', pp. 17-39.

¹⁴² Isidore, 'Etymologiarum Libri XX', in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by Jean-Paul Migne (Ann Arbor, Michigan: ProQuest, 1996), Vol. 82, cols. 0073-0728B (cols. 0415B-6A), henceforth *PL*, followed by volume and column number. For a discussion of Isidore's scheme and of its variations in his works, see J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 82.

¹⁴³ Isidore, 'Etymologiarum', col. 0415C.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

senium ('[age] of the old'), which constitutes *extrema aetas* ('the latest age'), hence here it seems clearer that *juventus* for Isidore equals maturity, as it is immediately followed by old age.¹⁴⁵

As shown below, not all EME authors depicted youth as a period of growth. This partly depended on whether the text was in Latin or OE, and, more obviously, on whether the human lifespan was divided into two, three, four, five or six ages. Different divisions entailed different degrees of complexity, and while some authors include various theorizations of human life-stages like Isidore (who is frequently their source), others merely describe the progression of human life-stages from birth to death without focusing on their meaning. Mentions of the 'ages of man' are found either in homiletic or scientific texts, but it should be kept in mind that authors are not specifically concerned with the life-stages themselves, but rather with how they can help the audience understand the word of God or the processes of the natural world.

The first type of division, in two stages, divides human life into youth and old age.

An example occurs in *Maxims II*:

God sceal wið yfele, geogoð sceal wið ylðo,
lif sceal wið deaþe, leoht sceal wið þystrum,

(Good must stand against evil, youth against age,
life must be against death, light against the shadows; lines 50-1).¹⁴⁶

As Thijs Porck observes, this twofold division presents youth and old age as opposites, and 'it is more likely that the Anglo-Saxons referred to youth and old age as two extremes of a more complex spectrum of life'.¹⁴⁷ Neither youth nor old age are given specific

¹⁴⁵ Isidore, '*Differentiarum, Sive De Proprietate Sermonum, Libri Duo*', in *PL*, vol. 83, cols. 0009-0098A (cols. 0081B-D).

¹⁴⁶ '*Maxims II*', in T. A. Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* (Cambridge: Brewer; Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1976), pp. 76-9 (p. 78). My translation.

¹⁴⁷ Porck, *Old Age*, pp. 18-9.

characteristics, but it may be inferred that, as youth coincides with the beginning of life and old age with its end, the former is portrayed more positively. However, this distinction is not particularly useful for this analysis, as it might be argued that in this instance youth also included childhood (and perhaps adulthood as well), as suggested by Izdebska, and was thus not considered as a separate life-stage in its own right.¹⁴⁸

It is the three-stage division which first shows how youth was understood as a period of growth. An example of this division occurs in the ‘Parable of the Three Vigils’ (Luke 12:36-8), in which ‘Christ compared his disciples to servants who await their lord’s return from a wedding feast during three vigils’.¹⁴⁹ It is found in the writings of Bede and Ælfric.¹⁵⁰ Bede writes:

Prima vigilia primaevum tempus est, id est pueritia. Secunda, adolescentia vel juvenus. Quae auctoritate sacri eloquii unum sunt dicentis: *Laetare, juvenis, in adolescentia tua* (Eccle. XI). Tertia autem, senectus accipitur. Qui ergo vigilare in prima vigilia noluit, custodiat vel secundam, ut qui converti a pravitatibus suis in pueritia neglexit, ad vias vitae saltem in tempore juventutis evigilet. Et qui vigilare in secunda vigilia noluit, tertiae vigiliae remedia non amittat, ut qui et in juventute ad vias vitae non evigilat, saltem in senectute resipiscat.¹⁵¹

(The first vigil is the youthful time, which is boyhood. The second, youth or adulthood. Which according to the authority of the holy writ are one, saying: ‘Rejoice, o young man, in your youth’ (Eccle. IX). Moreover, the third one is agreed to be old age. Therefore, the one who does not want to keep watch during the first vigil, should keep awake during the second, so that he who failed to turn away from his wickedness in childhood, at least should keep watch to the ways of life in the time of adulthood. And he who does not want to keep watch during the second vigil, may he not let go of the remedies of the third vigil, so that he who is not awake to the ways of life in youth, he may at least recover his sense in old age).¹⁵²

Bede mentions both *adolescentia* and *juvenus* together, but they are not followed by maturity, as in Isidore’s scheme, but by old age. It would then seem that they refer to

¹⁴⁸ Izdebska, ‘Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens’, p. 58.

¹⁴⁹ Porck, *Old Age*, p. 20; Porck, ‘Ages of Man’, pp. 24-5.

¹⁵⁰ Porck, *Old Age*, pp. 20-1; Porck, ‘Ages of Man’, pp. 24-6.

¹⁵¹ Bede, ‘*In Lucae Evangelium Expositio*’, in *PL*, vol. 92, cols. 0301-0634D (col. 0496C).

¹⁵² *Primaevum* means ‘that belongs to the first age’, i. e. childhood. See ‘[P]rimaevus; sense 1’, in *DMLBS* <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/PRIMAEVUS](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/primaevus)> [accessed 1 August 2021].

adulthood, and *adolescentia*, in this specific instance, is synonymous with maturity, therefore is not understood as a period of growth. The vocabulary is thus ambiguous, and it is not altogether clear how it should be translated. However, it should be noted that this idea of youth is presented positively, as Bede's quotation from the book of Ecclesiastes shows.

Ælfric's rendition of the 'Parable of the Three Vigils' is included in his homily '*Sermo in Natale Unius Confessoris*'.¹⁵³ It has the same purpose as Bede's, which was one of his sources, but it is written in OE. Ælfric maintains the same correspondences as Bede, translating *pueritia* as *cildhad* ('childhood'), *adolescentia vel juvenus* as *weaxendum cnihtade* ('growing youth') and *senectus* as *forweredre ylde* ('decrepit old age'). It can be seen that Ælfric, like Bede, also divides the human lifespan into three stages, with childhood and old age as the extremes and youth in between; but he only uses one term for youth. Moreover, in this case the stage of youth does not seem to refer to maturity, unlike in Bede's division. This is shown by the adjectival participle which Ælfric employs to qualify *cnihtad*: *weaxende*, from the verb *weaxan*, 'to grow'.¹⁵⁴ Thus, Ælfric explicitly describes youth as a period of growth, clearly distinguished from childhood and old age. This is even more significant when one considers that Bede's description of *adolescentia vel juvenus* was taken word-for-word from Gregory's homily XIII, yet Ælfric modifies his sources to provide a specific representation of youth as a stage of growth.¹⁵⁵ It would seem as if his interpretation of 'growing youth' was based

¹⁵³ 'Hom. 4', in *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. by Bruno Assmann (Kassel: Georg H. Wigand, 1889), pp. 49-64 (pp. 51-2); Porck, *Old Age*, p. 21; Porck, 'Ages of Man', pp. 25-6.

¹⁵⁴ '[W]eaxan', in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*
<[HTTP://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/034889](http://bosworthtoller.com/034889)> [accessed 1 August 2021].

¹⁵⁵ Gregory the Great, '*XL Homiliarum in Evangelia Libri Duo*', in *PL*, vol. 76, cols. 1075-1312C (cols. 1125B-1125C).

only on *adolescentia*, which, as noted above, was predominantly understood as a period of growth (as shown by its connection with the verb *adolescere*), while Ælfric does not seem to include *juventus*, although Bede and Gregory use *adolescentia* and *juventus* as synonyms. This threefold division of human growth, then, first shows that youth could be understood as a period of growth, although youth is not placed between childhood and adulthood, but, like Bede, between childhood and old age.

The fourfold division of the life-course is more complex, as it allowed authors to compare the life-stages with the four seasons, the four humours and the natural elements.¹⁵⁶ In this way, each stage was also attributed specific characteristics. For instance, Bede, in his *De Temporum Ratione* (c. 725), writes that blood, which is moist and hot and increases in spring, corresponds to air and is found the most in children (*infantes*); red choler, which is hot and dry and increases in summer, corresponds to fire and it is strongest in young people (*adolescentes*); black choler, which is dry and cold and increases in Autumn, corresponds to earth and is found the most in middle-aged people (*transgressores*), whereas phlegm, which is cold and moist and increases in Winter, corresponds to water and is found the most in the elderly (*senes*).¹⁵⁷

Bede then explains that *[c]holera vero rubea facit [adolescentes] macilentos, multum tamen comedentes, veloces, audaces, iracundos, agiles* ('indeed red choler makes [young people] lean, even though they eat a lot, fast, bold, hot-tempered, agile').¹⁵⁸ Bede's description might certainly resonate with a modern audience, especially his observations that young people remain lean, no matter how much they eat, and are quick to anger. More importantly, however, Bede provides markedly different descriptions of children,

¹⁵⁶ Porck, *Old Age*, p. 31; Porck, 'Ages of Man', pp. 29-30.

¹⁵⁷ Bede, 'De Temporum Ratione', in *PL*, vol. 90, cols. 0293-0578D (cols. 0458B-0459A); Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, pp. 12-8.

¹⁵⁸ Bede, 'De Temporum Ratione', col. 0459A.

middle-aged people and old men: children are sweet and carefree, middle-aged people stern and gloomy, and old people sleepy and forgetful.¹⁵⁹ Unlike the ambiguous mention of youth in Bede's 'Parable of the Three Vigils' above, it would seem that here Bede clearly distinguishes youth from the other life-stages, and places it between childhood and adulthood. Indeed, he uses the word *adolescens*, which is the present participle of the verb *adolescere*, 'to grow', hence 'people who are growing'.¹⁶⁰

Byrhtferth of Ramsey in his *Enchiridion* (1012-20) provides a division of the life course which is based on Bede: Byrhtferth also lists the human life-stages as *cildhad* ('childhood'), *cnihtiugoð* ('youth'), *geþungen yld* ('mature age') and *swyðe eald yld* ('very old age').¹⁶¹ Like Bede, then, he also places youth between childhood and maturity, as shown by the participial adjective *geþungen*, which can both refer to full growth (as I translated it), as well as to something which is '[...] thriven, advanced [morally, mentally, etc.], excellent, pious, noble, perfect'.¹⁶² It seems to imply, then, that youth was a time in which the individual still had to grow and hone his or her moral and mental qualities.¹⁶³

Byrhtferth too maintains the same correspondences between the ages and the seasons, humours and temperaments, so that youth again corresponds to summer and red choler.¹⁶⁴ Byrhtferth's reliance on Bede would suggest that he had a similar conception

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ '[A]dolescere; 2', in DMLBS <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/ADOLESCERE](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/adolescere)> [accessed 18 January 2023].

¹⁶¹ Porck, *Old Age*, p. 33; Porck, 'Ages of Man', pp. 30-7.

¹⁶² Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*, ed. and trans. by Peter S. Baker and Michael Lapidge, S. S. 15 (Oxford: Published for the Early English Text Society by the Oxford University Press, 1995), I.1, pp. 10, 12, ll. 117-33; '[G]eþungen', in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* <[HTTP://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/016526](http://bosworthtoller.com/016526)> [accessed 1 August 2021].

¹⁶³ For examples of this, see Barber, 'Alcuin and the Student Life-Cycle', pp. 99-103.

¹⁶⁴ Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*, I.1, pp. 10, 12, ll. 99-133.

of youth, showing how interpretations of young people as immature and prone to strong emotions remained constant throughout the Pre-Conquest period.¹⁶⁵

Concerning the five-fold division of the ages of man, a clear example can be found in Ælfric's homily on 'Septuagesima Sunday' in which he recounts the 'Parable of the Vineyard'. In this parable, the workers who are called to work in the vineyard at different times 'signified people who became Christian at different moments in their lives':

Witodlice ures andgites merigen is ure cildhád, ure cnihtád swylce undern-tíd, on þam astihð ure geogoð, swa swa seo sunne deð ymbe þære ðriddan tide; ure fulfremeda waestm, swa swa middaeg, forðan ðe on midne daeg bið seo sunne on ðam ufemestum ryne stigende. swa swa se fulfremeda waestm bið on fulre strencoðe þéonde. Seo nóntid bið ure yld, forðan ðe on nón-tíde asihð seo sunne. and ðaes ealdigendan mannes maegen bið wanigende. Seo endlyfte tíð bið seo forwerode ealdnyss, þam deaðe genealaecende, swa swa seo sunne setlunge genealaehð. on þaes daeges geendunge. Eornstlice þonne summe beoð gelædde on cildhade to gódum ðeawum and rihtum life, sume on cnihtade, sume on geðungenum wæstm, sume on ylde, sume on forwerodre eaaldnyss; þonne bið hit swylce hí beon on mislicum tidum to ðam wíngearde gelaðode.¹⁶⁶

(Indeed the morning of our understanding is our childhood, our adolescence is like the third hour of the day, in which rises our youth, just like the sun does around the third hour; our full growth is just like midday, because at midday the sun will be rising to the highest level, just like the full growth will be increasing to its full strength. The ninth hour is our old age, because in the night hour the sun declines, and the might of the old man is waning. The eleventh hour is decrepit old age with death approaching, just like the sun approaches setting at the end of the day. Indeed some are led to good works and a righteous life in childhood, others in youth, others in mature growth, others in old age, others in decrepit old age; then it will be as if they have been called to the vineyard at different times).¹⁶⁷

It would seem as if here Ælfric employs *cnihtad* and *geogoð* as synonyms, to define the period between childhood and full growth in which the person has not yet attained physical maturity. Ælfric's source was an homily by Gregory the Great, in which he also

¹⁶⁵ At least based on extant sources.

¹⁶⁶ CH II, p. 76; Porck, *Old Age*, p. 37; Porck, 'Ages of Man', p. 26.

¹⁶⁷ I translated *cnihtad* as 'adolescence' to distinguish it from *geoguð*. Although they seem to be used as synonyms, to indicate a period of growth before adulthood, I believe that the context suggests that they should be translated differently (hence, not both as 'youth'), as 'our youth is like the third hour of the day, in which rises our youth' seems a rather strange translation.

recounted the ‘Parable of the Vineyard’ and compared the phases of the sun to the human life-stages; Gregory similarly mentions *pueritia* (‘childhood’), *adolescentia* (‘youth’), *juventus* (‘adulthood’), *senectus* (‘old age’) and *aetas ... decrepita vel veterana* (‘distant old age’) which correspond to Ælfric’s *cildhad*, *cnihtad* and *geogoð*, *fulfremeda waestm*, *yld* and *forwerode ealdnyss*, respectively.¹⁶⁸ Sánchez-Martí notes that ‘the Old English version departs significantly from the Latin original and presents a genuinely Anglo-Saxon view of the ages of man’.¹⁶⁹ He points out that while Gregory considers *juventus* to be the period of ‘greatest physical strength’ (*plenitudo roboris*; like Isidore), which is immediately followed by man’s decay during the stage of *senectus*, for Ælfric youth precedes the period of full growth, which is when man is strongest.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, it seems that Ælfric’s *cnihtad* and *geogoð* correspond not to Gregory’s *juventus*, which would more likely be adulthood, not youth, as it precedes the ‘distant old age’, but to *adolescentia*, and thus reflect its connection with growth.

Sánchez-Martí then makes another important point: that while childhood and youth are associated with growing *andgit* (‘understanding’), from the period of ‘full growth’ onwards Ælfric focuses on the increase and decay of physical strength.¹⁷¹ The idea that young people lack in wisdom, which only comes with experience, is attested elsewhere in the corpus, for instance poems such as *Maxims I* (in Chapter 2), *Guthlac A* (in Chapter 3, section 3.2.), *The Wanderer* (in Chapter 5, section 5.2), which emphasize that young people still need to develop wisdom during their youth. For instance, in *Maxims I* it is

¹⁶⁸ Sánchez-Martí, ‘Age Matters’, p. 207. For Gregory’s homily, see Gregory the Great, ‘*Homiliarum in Evangelia*’, cols. 1155B-D.

¹⁶⁹ Sánchez-Martí, ‘Age Matters’, pp. 206-7.

¹⁷⁰ Gregory the Great, ‘*Homiliarum in Evangelia*’, col. 1155B; Sánchez-Martí, ‘Age Matters’, p. 207.

¹⁷¹ Sánchez-Martí, ‘Age Matters’, p. 207. See also Izdebska, ‘Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens’, pp. 64-65, 72-75.

stated that the young person *syllē him wist ond wædo, / oppæt hine mon on gewitte alæde* ('is given food and clothing, / until he is led into his knowledge'; l. 47).¹⁷² Barber has also shown that this idea is repeatedly mentioned in the writings of Alcuin of York, as he states that the age of *adolescentia* should be devoted to learning the liberal arts, and, more specifically, it is an age in which one should gain wisdom.¹⁷³ By employing this theme in his description of the ages of man, Ælfric then reinforces his representation of youth as a period of growth (see Chapter 3), because the individual can only gain understanding as he or she becomes older.

The final division of the ages of man overlaps with the *topos* of the 'six ages of the world': in this scheme, world history is divided into six ages which correspond to specific eras in Biblical history, which in turn correspond to six stages of human growth. It is first found in the writings of Saint Augustine and later Isidore of Seville.¹⁷⁴ Augustine divides the history of the world as follows: the first from Adam to Noah, which corresponds to *infantia*; the second, *pueritia*, from Noah to Abraham; the third, *adolescentia*, from Abraham to David; the fourth, *juventus*, from David to the Babylonian Captivity; the fifth, *gravitas*, from the Babylonian Captivity until Christ's incarnation; and the sixth and final age, *senectus*, from Christ's incarnation until the end of the world.¹⁷⁵ Isidore, as seen at the beginning of this section, also provided a division of human life in six stages, with the duration of each. He does not connect it with the history of the world, but distinguishes between 'adolescence' and 'youth', which was likely influenced by Augustine, as both

¹⁷² 'Maxims I', in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, pp. 156-63.

¹⁷³ Barber, 'Alcuin and the Student Life-Cycle', pp. 90-114.

¹⁷⁴ Porck, *Old Age*, p. 38; Porck, 'Ages of Man', pp. 26-8.

¹⁷⁵ Augustine, 'De Diversis Quæstionibus LXXXIII Liber Unus', in *PL*, vol. 40, cols. 0011-0099 (col. 0043).

authors seem to again imply that *adolescentia* corresponds to a period of growth before maturity, which instead coincides with *juventus*.

This six-fold division of human growth was adopted and revisited by EME authors. Bede, in his *De Temporum Ratione* and *De Temporibus* (c. 703) reproduces Augustine's division of the ages of man, describing *adolescentia* as the period when man becomes able to reproduce and *juvenilis aetas* ('youthful age', in *De Temporum Ratione*; he calls it *juvenilis ... dignitas*, 'youthful ... dignity', in *De Temporibus*) as the age when one becomes able to rule a kingdom; in both cases, the latter seems to constitute full maturity, as it is followed by *aetas senilis* ('old age') in *De Temporum Ratione*, which is when man's decline begins, and by *gravi senectute* (*gravis senectus*, 'grave old age') in *De Temporibus*.¹⁷⁶ Bede thus seems to present consistent interpretations of youth within his version of the scheme of the ages of man, as while *adolescentia* never corresponds to adulthood, the *juvenilis aetas* (or *dignitas*) seems to constitute maturity. The *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae* present a similar division, which places *adolescentia* and *juventus* before *senectus* and includes the length of each stage (following Isidore); it is not explicitly stated which stage corresponds to full maturity, although, given Isidore's influence, perhaps it can be assumed that it was *juventus*.¹⁷⁷

The influence of Isidore is evident in other religious writings: for instance, some works by or attributed to Alcuin also present this six-fold scheme, but with important differences compared to Bede's division. In the *Disputatio Puerorum per Interrogationes et Responsiones*, he provides a representation of the ages of the world which is very

¹⁷⁶ Bede, 'De Temporibus Liber', in *PL*, vol. 90, cols. 0277-0292C (col. 288A) and 'De Temporum Ratione', in *PL*, vol. 90, cols. 520D-521.

¹⁷⁷ Martha Bayless and Michael Lapidge, *Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae*, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 14 (Dublin: School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1998), n° 378, p. 182.

similar to Augustine's and Isidore's definitions. Alcuin also mentions *adolescentia* and *juventus* and the former is the period when someone is mature enough to reproduce, while *juventus* (like for Isidore) is *firmissima aetatum omnium* ('the strongest of all ages', meaning full growth) which precedes the decay which starts with *gravitas*, the following stage.¹⁷⁸ The same succession of the life-stages occurs in Alcuin's commentary on John 4:6, but he only mentions the length of each stage (again based on Isidore) without elaborating on the specific stages as Augustine and Bede do.¹⁷⁹ There are some other examples in EME texts, but like this latter example, they place the life-stages in the same order but do not state which one corresponds to full maturity or describe the periods of adolescence and youth in any detail.¹⁸⁰

While there are many other examples of the *topos* of the 'ages of man' in the source texts, herein I only have space to discuss the ones relevant to youth. Also, it has been seen that many examples are similar to each other and are therefore representative of a certain way of thinking about youth. Nevertheless, I hope to have demonstrated some of the ways in which youth was considered as part of human growth in EME texts by focusing on a limited number of, in my view, important examples. These suggest, firstly, that youth was an essential part of human growth, as it appears consistently in all the different divisions of the ages of man analyzed in this section, from two to six. It would therefore seem that

¹⁷⁸ Alcuin, *Disputatio Puerorum per Interrogationes et Responsiones*, ed. by L. E. Felsen, 'Disputatio Puerorum': Analysis and Critical Edition', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Oregon, 2003, V3, lines 26-39, cited in Porck, *Old Age*, p. 40. As Porck notes, the only difference with Isidore is that for Alcuin *juventus* begins at 27 rather than at Isidore's 28. For other examples in Alcuin's works in which he follows this scheme, see Barber, 'Alcuin and the Student Life-Cycle', pp. 90-114.

¹⁷⁹ Alcuin, '457 *Opusculum Sextum. Commentarii in S. Joannis Evangelium*', in *PL*, vol. 100, cols. 0733-1008C (0792A-D).

¹⁸⁰ See Porck, *Old Age*, pp. 41-4.

examples by EME authors, writing in Latin (like Bede), or in OE, like Byrhtferth and Ælfric, predominantly, although not always, considered youth as a period of growth, which they called *adolescentia*, *cnithad* and/or *geoguð*, which often (at least, starting with the threefold division of the ages of man) was followed by adulthood.¹⁸¹ It might be argued that these examples provide a somewhat less ambiguous depiction of youth compared to other instances, such as the mention of youth in *The Wanderer* or *Guthlac A*, but it should be noted that these authors still do not clarify what is meant by *geoguð*, *cnithad* or *adolescentia*, as Bede, Byrhtferth and Ælfric do not repeat the age distinctions described by Isidore, hence it is not clear whether these terms refer to the same ages as Isidore's, and as a consequence, these words are still, to an extent, vague.

It has also been suggested that authors like Byrhtferth and Ælfric were influenced by earlier depictions, such as those by Gregory, Bede and Isidore, but they also made changes to convey their own ideas. It is thus important to examine the sources of EME authors to determine if and how they modified them. The transmission and re-interpretation of youth is the topic of the next section, which focuses on how it was understood by the Church Fathers, from whom EME authors derived different interpretations of youth which they then engaged with in their own works.

1.4 Patristic Interpretations of Youth

Patristic writings were an important influence on EME conceptualizations of youth, although they were by no means the only one.¹⁸² EME authors often employed and

¹⁸¹ Sánchez-Martí, 'Age Matters', pp. 206-7.

¹⁸² It is possible that there was a Classical tradition which also influenced EME authors' interpretations of youth independently from the Church Fathers, perhaps the same authors that may have influenced Early Christian views, but this seems difficult to prove; and of course, EME authors would have been drawn their understandings of youth directly from the Bible.

engaged with patristic understandings of youth in their works; it is therefore important to become familiar with these depictions in order to be able to recognize them in EME texts and determine how EME authors adopted and adapted them for their own purposes. In this section, I focus on the main interpretations of youth in patristic literature to examine how the Church Fathers influenced EME authors.

I intend to argue that this patristic influence, while significant, was not necessarily direct: I found no certain evidence of verbal borrowings between patristic and EME descriptions of youth and young people. Instead, I suggest that the Church Fathers might have demonstrated that youth could be interpreted in different ways, including as a period of growth, and could be employed to convey textual values; EME authors then employed these representations of youth and young people to convey their own ideas. Modern scholars seem to believe that Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, and Gregory at least were known to EME clerics.¹⁸³ Ælfric also lists Smaragdus and Haymo as his sources for the *CH*.¹⁸⁴ Isidore, Augustine and Gregory's interpretations of youth have already been discussed in the previous section; the conceptualizations of youth and young people discussed in this section are derived from the works of Augustine, Jerome and Ambrose.

The fact that EME authors were influenced by the Church Fathers does not mean that the former were 'unoriginal' for deriving understandings and uses of youth from earlier authors; on the contrary, I want to focus on Patristic ideas of youth to show how EME authors modified them and adapted them to the aims of their texts, which would demonstrate their literary skill and understanding of the uses of youth.

¹⁸³ Thomas Hall, 'Biblical and Patristic Learning', in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. by Philip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 334-5.

¹⁸⁴ Ælfric, *CH* I, p. 1; Hall, 'Biblical and Patristic Learning', p. 335.

Lastly, it should be noted that the Church Fathers themselves did not ‘invent’ their interpretations of youth and young people, but these were similarly drawn from earlier authors. In particular, Ancient Roman authors on the one hand and the Bible on the other both shaped the way the Fathers, and in turn EME authors, thought about youth. For instance, Cicero speaks of the ‘*ferocitas* [ferocity] of youth’, exemplifying an interpretation of young people as brash and immature.¹⁸⁵ However, this view was not universal, and there were also those who recognized the beauty of youth, like Seneca, who described it as ‘the best age of man’, as a period of happiness in the face of an uncertain future; more importantly, he also wrote that the young mind might [*f*]acillime enim ... conciliantur ... ad honesti rectique amorem (‘[m]ost easily be won over to the love of what is honest and right’), providing a more positive and virtuous interpretation of youth.¹⁸⁶

These interpretations suggest that the Ancient Romans viewed youth as a stage of ‘youthfulness’ which could be considered in different ways; but they also understood youth as a period of moral and intellectual development, in which the young person gained an awareness of his own individuality and destiny that he lacked as a child. This period of growth also involves the risk of making mistakes which will have serious consequences for the youth’s life. Cicero again, for instance, mentions the *multas vias adolescentiae lubricas* (‘many treacherous paths of youth’) which nature has put before

¹⁸⁵ Marcus Tullius Cicero, ‘*De Senectute*’, in *On Old Age. On Friendship. On Divination*, trans. by William Armistead Falconer, Loeb Classical Library 154 (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1923), pp. 8-100 (p. 42). See Emiel Eyben, *Restless Youth in Ancient Rome*, trans. from the original Dutch by Dr Patrick Daly (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 9.

¹⁸⁶ Eyben, *Restless Youth*, p. 40; Seneca the Younger, ‘Epistle CVIII’, in *Epistles, Volume III: Epistles 93-124*. Trans. by Richard M. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library 77 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), pp. 228-55 (pp. 236-8). See Eyben, *Restless Youth*, p. 40.

the young and on which they will stumble and fall.¹⁸⁷ Eyben observed that '[i]t was the opinion of the ancients that youth primarily was *the* critical age of human life, a period of storm and stress, of tensions and conflicts'.¹⁸⁸ For the Ancient Romans, then, youth was a complex concept with several interpretations, much like for the Church Fathers and EME authors.

Patristic tradition brings together Roman understandings of youth and Christian teachings. Indeed, youth is also mentioned often in the Bible. For instance, the Psalmist at one point wonders: 'By what doth a young man correct his way? By observing [God's] words' (Psalm, 118:9) and 2 Timothy 2:22 says: 'But flee thou youthful desires, and pursue justice, faith, charity and peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart'. This psalm and this verse suggest that there was an implicit tension about youth, as it was easy for a young person to lose his way or give in to youthful passions; I return to this idea of sinful youthful passions below. However, in the book of Ecclesiastes (11:9) the young man is exhorted to rejoice in his youth, although he is also reminded that he will be subjected to God's judgement; 1 Timothy (4: 12) says: 'Let no man despise the youth: but be thou an example of the faithful, in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in chastity'.¹⁸⁹ These examples show that youth could also be a period of joy, and a young person could also become a model of faithful and moral conduct.

Of course, the Bible was most important to the Church Fathers for the Christian teachings it provided, rather than for specific depictions of youth. This didactic and moral

¹⁸⁷ Marcus Tullius Cicero, 'Pro Caelio', in *Pro Caelio. De Provinciis Consularibus. Pro Balbo*; trans. by R. Gardner, Loeb Classical Library 447 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 397-552 (p. 458). See Eyben, *Restless Youth*, p. 16.

¹⁸⁸ Eyben, *Restless Youth*, p. 14; emphasis of the original.

¹⁸⁹ For the quotations, see <[HTTPS://VULGATE.ORG](https://vulgata.org)> [accessed 1 August 2021]. Translation of the original.

purpose, to exhort the audience to live in accordance with Christian teachings, was also achieved by presenting a virtuous depiction of youth: such an interpretation is found in Augustine's *Against Academics*, in which he describes youth as *illam aetatem atque animum, quae pulchra et honesta videbantur avide sequentem ...* ('that age and mind, which seemed to follow avidly what is good and honest ...').¹⁹⁰ Augustine therefore could, just as Seneca before him, conceive a positive interpretation of youth, as a means to provide a model of proper behaviour to which one could aspire and which was not associated with unchristian or lustful behaviour. This view of youth is however rarer, and the Church Fathers, when they were not critical of youth, were more often wary of its vulnerability to sin.

Indeed, it is its immorality which is most important to the Church Fathers: once youth is accommodated within a Christian discourse, youthful behaviour becomes associated with sin, most frequently lust. For example, Saint Ambrose provides a scathing criticism of *adolescentia* as *invalida viribus, infirma consiliis, vitio calens, fastidiosa monitoribus, illecebrosa deliciis* ('weak in strength, irresolute in judgement, hot in vice, wearisome to teachers, wanton in pleasures').¹⁹¹ Ambrose thus emphasizes the physical, intellectual and moral failings of youth. Likewise, Jerome is very concerned with the lustfulness of youth: in his *Letters*, he explains that one should *flammas libidinis et incentiva ferventis aetatis extinguere ... continentiae frigore [...]* ('extinguish the flame of libido and the burning temptations of youth with the coldness of chastity [...]').¹⁹² In

¹⁹⁰ Augustine, 'Contra Academicos Libri Tres', in *PL*, vol. 32 cols. 0903-0958 (col. 0906).

¹⁹¹ Ambrose, 'De Interpretatione Iob et David Libri Quatuor', in *PL*, vol. 14, cols. 0797A-0850B (col. 0806B).

¹⁹² Jerome, 'CVII. A Girl's Education', in *Select Letters*, ed. and trans. by F. A. Wright, Loeb Classical Library 262 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933) pp. 338-69 (pp. 362-364).

this last example, Jerome employs the connection between youth and lust to deliver an exhortation to chastity. His warning first shows how Early Christian writers re-interpreted Classical views of youth from a Christian perspective and employed the negative associations of youth to exhort their audiences to adhere to Christian moral principles; in this case, to remain chaste.

However, Jerome also provides some more ambivalent depictions of youth: in one of his *Letters*, he tells his audience that *[s]citis ipsi lubricum adolescentiae iter* ('you yourselves know the treacherous path of youth').¹⁹³ As previously mentioned, the idea of the *adulescentiae lubricas vias* which Jerome references here was Classical in origin, being described by Cicero, and conveys the idea that youth was especially vulnerable to temptations. He again shows his concern with lust when he observes that *adulescentia multa corporis bella sustineat et inter incentiva vitiorum et carnis titillationes ...* ('youth has to withstand many battles with [lit. 'of'] the body and amidst the temptations of vices and titillations of the flesh ...').¹⁹⁴ In these two examples, Jerome understands youth as a period in which the young person was especially vulnerable to sin and to carnal desires in particular and had to strive to withstand these temptations and preserve his morality. However, it should be noted that Jerome here does not condemn youth as sinful: his view of youth seems rather ambiguous, as it does not criticize it, but recognizes that young people are prone to sinful lust.

This analysis has so far suggested that the Fathers, like Classical and EME authors, considered youth as a period of 'youthfulness' which could be understood as either immoral or virtuous, but could still be employed to convey Christian teachings; additionally, however, they also understood it as a more ambiguous period of growth, in

¹⁹³ Jerome, 'VII. Family Affairs', in *Select Letters*, ed. and trans. by Wright, pp. 18-27 (p. 24).

¹⁹⁴ Jerome, 'LII. A Clergyman's Duties', in *ibid.*, pp. 188-229 (p. 192).

which the young man had to face and overcome moral and spiritual temptations to acquire the experience and wisdom of adulthood. This interpretation is evidenced in one of Augustine's *Sermons* (n° 391), addressed to *iuvenes* ('young people').¹⁹⁵ Augustine explains that they are *flos aetatis, periculum mentis* ('in the flower of youth/life, [in a period of] danger of the mind').¹⁹⁶ This introduction already outlines the paradox of youth for Augustine: youth is the best period of man's life, yet he also adheres to the interpretation of youth as vulnerable to temptations. In the remainder of the sermon, Augustine likewise criticizes the youth as lustful, unfaithful, and only interested in perishable and immoral pleasures.¹⁹⁷ However, Augustine explains that all ages of man, not just youth, but also childhood and old age, are vulnerable to temptation; thus, youth is no more sinful than other stages of life.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, he believes that young people are not beyond help, as at the end of his sermon, he addresses two exhortations to virtuous living, one to young men and one to young women. The former are encouraged to pursue *sapientiae amorem* ('love of wisdom') rather than striving for *sensibilibus* ('material things'), whereas *feminae adolescentulae* ('young women') are exhorted to reject *juvenilia desideria* ('youthful desires').¹⁹⁹ Augustine here considers youth as a period of spiritual and moral uncertainty, in which young people need to be encouraged towards virtue, but are not necessarily sinful, as he seems to believe that they can overcome their temptations.

¹⁹⁵ Augustine, *Classis V. Sermones Dubii. Quos Inter Qui Visi Sunt Minus Referre Augustinum, Typis Minutioribus Exhibentur*, in *PL*, vol. 39, cols. 1639-1718 (col. 1706).

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 1706.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, col. 1707.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, cols. 1706-1707.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, cols. 1708-1709.

As seen above, Jerome is generally more critical than Augustine, yet he reminds one of his young addressees that *excelsa sectari et adulescentiae, immo pubertatis, incentiva calcantem perfectae quidem aetatis gradum scandere* ('only by pursuing lofty things, and trampling on the temptations of youth and puberty, can you in fact climb the steps to maturity [lit. 'perfect age']'), but again reminds him that this is a *lubricum iter*.²⁰⁰ In this instance, Jerome, like Augustine in the previous example, clearly interprets youth as a period of uncertainty, but also of necessary maturation, showing that the Church Fathers also considered youth as a period of growth, not just as 'youthfulness', which is another way in which they could have influenced EME authors.

This brief analysis has focused on a limited number of the most important Classical and patristic sources and has provided a general overview of their depictions of youth from the works of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine which show the multiple ways in which youth could be understood in relation to Christian morality. The Church Fathers understood youth both as a period of 'youthfulness' and as a 'period of growth', which could be considered as wholly sinful, ambiguous, or, more rarely, as a period of happiness in which the young person is drawn to virtue. It should also be pointed out that neither the Church Fathers mentioned in this section, nor the Classical authors, nor the Bible passages provide a clear definition of what they meant by 'youth': it seems that these authors all had a specific view of it in mind, given that they attributed to it particular qualities, positive or negative, but they never define it or explain what they mean by 'youth'. This might have been one of the reasons why EME authors also do not clarify or describe in detail their representations of youth and young people; because they inherited this ambiguity from earlier sources. Moreover, despite the different interpretations of

²⁰⁰ Jerome, 'CXXV. Good and Bad Monks', in *Select Letters*, ed. and trans. by Wright, pp. 396-439 (p. 398).

youth that the Church Fathers convey, the above examples all employ youth to convey textual ideas, specifically Christian teachings. This was a preferred strategy by EME hagiographers as well (as shown in Chapters 3 and 5), as they often employ youth, and especially the association between youth and sin, to encourage their audience to follow spiritual teachings; but youth could also convey themes which were not strictly Christian, for instance in *Maxims I* (wisdom; see Chapter 2) and *Beowulf* (heroic values; see Chapter 4). Therefore, it must be recognized that the Fathers were not only influential because they interpreted youth in different ways, as a positive or negative period of youthfulness or as an ambivalent period of development, but also because they deployed youth to convey textual values.²⁰¹ Centuries later, authors like Ælfric of Eynsham and the *Beowulf*-poet would also resort to youth to convey the meanings of their texts, but the textual importance of youth in EME literature has not yet been fully appreciated by scholars.

So far, I established the research framework of my study by considering previous studies on youth and the other life-stages in medieval studies, I examined the most common OE and Latin terms for youth and young people employed in these works, how youth was understood by some important EME authors according to the *topos* of the ‘ages of man’, and lastly, I have drawn attention to the main ways in which youth was understood and employed in patristic writings, as these greatly influenced how the theme was represented and employed in EME literature. Next, I show how all these have informed the methodology and structure of my thesis.

²⁰¹ As previously mentioned, Classical authors likely also used youth to convey textual ideas and they might have been known to EME writers.

1.5 Methodology and Structure

In this section, I explain how I intend to provide a textual, thematic and functional study of youth and young people in EME literature to demonstrate the importance of this theme for the understanding of EME literary sources, and how I organized my thesis to convey my argument.

Firstly, this is a textual study of youth, because it deals exclusively with textual sources and my approach mostly consists of close textual analysis. This should not be considered as a limitation; on the contrary, focusing on the literature allows me to avoid engaging with issues of historicity which would entail more questions than answers. I aim to consider how youth and young people are described within, and contribute to, their texts. Each example I consider should thus first be understood within its own textual context, and only then can it be compared with other examples. For this reason, I also chose to provide a limited number of case studies instead of a broader discussion, as youth needs to be understood in relation to the themes of a specific work.

I am also interested in how youth and young people are described in their texts. In section 1.2, I provided a lexical study of the most common terms for youth and young people in the texts analyzed in the following chapters. I attempt to define youth and young people as EME authors themselves defined them, although I have noted that both OE, Latin and Modern terms relating to youth and young people are not easy to define, and their ambiguity must be taken into account. However, I try not to force Modern definitions on medieval texts; in other words, I agree with Levi and Schmitt, editors of *Ancient and Medieval Rites of Passage*, that youth is culturally and socially defined, and as such descriptions of youth and young people should not be considered from a modern perspective.²⁰² On the contrary, I suggest that one should look at EME descriptions of

²⁰² Levi and Schmitt, 'Introduction', pp. 1-2, 7-8.

youth and young people through the words of the EME authors who described them. Subsequently, I also want to examine what terms authors used to depict youth and young people, despite their vagueness, whenever these are relevant to my analysis. I do not only mean terms such as the ones discussed in section 1.2 (*geogub*, *cniht*, etc.); adjectives, adverbs and verbs also reveal how youth and young people were represented and employed within a text and need to be taken into account.

It may seem obvious that a study of youth and young people in EME texts adopts a thematic approach, because it focuses on a particular theme; but my thesis is thematic also because it aims to determine how youth and young people are used to convey and engage with other themes in their respective textual contexts. These themes change according to the text, but it should be noted that youth and young people can have different functions, or illustrate different ideas, even within the same literary work. This thesis shows that youth and young people are employed to provide different spiritual teachings, or wisdom more generally, as well as heroic values. Therefore, my concern is not just ‘limited’ to youth and young people, but it also encompasses other important themes in the works under discussion, and thus aims to provide a better understanding of EME texts.

Of course, as I have mentioned, not all descriptions of youth and young people have a textual function; some are just descriptive, but do not illustrate any teachings or values, that is, they do not contribute to the meaning of the text, and as such, they are not included in this thesis. An example of this distinction has already been provided, concerning the many mentions of young female saints in EME hagiography: these women may (depending on one’s translation of the terms *mæden* and *fæmne*) be considered to be young, but their youth is not presented as an important theme, nor does it contribute to the development of other themes; conversely, the passages from *Guthlac A* and *The*

Wanderer discussed above instead suggest that youth could play important textual roles, clarifying the themes and the meaning of a literary work (1.2). Therefore, this study is also ‘functional’, as it focuses not on how youth and young people are described, but also on *why* they are described in a certain way, and on their textual functions — that is to say, how they contribute to other themes — within a text. Thus, I tried to consider only examples in which youth and young people are textually significant.

The matter of audiences also needs to be briefly addressed. Knowing to whom an author conveyed their ideas is certainly useful to understand how and why they crafted their themes in a certain way, and I take audiences into account whenever possible, meaning whenever the addressee(s) are made clear in the text itself. This often happens in saints’ lives: for instance, Ælfric explicitly states that his *Lives of Saints* (in which the ‘Passion of Chrysanthus’ is included) are addressed to monks as well as to his patrons, Æthelweard and Æthelmær, while Felix, the author of the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, dedicates his work to King Ælfwald of East Anglia (r. 713-49).²⁰³ However, the audience of other texts, such as *Beowulf*, cannot be known with certainty.²⁰⁴ In these cases, I prefer to focus only on how authors convey their themes rather than on hypothesizing to whom they conveyed them.

The themes illustrated by the descriptions of youth and young people varied according to the aims of a particular text. For the purposes of this thesis, I have attempted to group texts in which youth has similar functions. *Maxims I*, which is a wisdom poem, is discussed in Chapter 2 (‘Youth and Young People in *Maxims I*’). Hagiographic texts,

²⁰³ *LS I*, p. 4; ‘Prologue’, in *Felix’s Life of Saint Guthlac*, p. 60.

²⁰⁴ On the audience in *Beowulf* see, for instance, Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951) and, more recently, Porck, *Old Age*, pp. 209-11, in which he suggests that the poem was written for an elderly patron, specifically King Offa I of Mercia (d. 796).

in which the depictions of young and young people convey spiritual teachings, are examined in Chapter 3 ('Youth and Young People in Hagiography'). These include the two *Lives* of Saint Guthlac (3.1), the poem *Guthlac A* (3.2), and Ælfric's 'Passion of Chrysanthus and His Wife Daria' (3.3). Chapter 4 ('Youth and Young People in *Beowulf*'), as the title suggests, considers how youth and young people convey various heroic values and examples of heroic behaviour in *Beowulf*, through the portrayals of young Beowulf (4.1), Wiglaf (4.2), Hrothgar (4.3) and Scyld (4.4), Beow (4.5) and Heremod (4.6).

Although the texts included in the same chapters share evident similarities, there are also important differences. For instance, all the texts of Chapter 3 present youth as a period in which one learns spiritual teachings, but these vary: for example, *Guthlac A* conveys the need to let go of worldly things to enter heaven, whereas the 'Passion of Chrysanthus' illustrates the importance of chastity and faith. Alternatively, sometimes texts share similar themes, as in the case of *Maxims I* (Chapter 2) and *The Wanderer* (Chapter 5), as both employ youth to illustrate the importance of wisdom, but this same theme is conveyed through two very different representations and uses of youth and young people. Lastly, authors also employed youth in different ways within the same text, as shown by the various portrayals of young characters by the *Beowulf*-poet in Chapter 4, as he uses them to illustrate different models of heroic behaviour.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 all present the interpretation of youth as a period of growth. But youth, as discussed above, could also be interpreted in other ways, for instance as a period of 'youthfulness'. This second conception also deserves attention, as it could also be employed in various ways to illustrate textual ideas and values. It is explored in the next and last chapter (Chapter 5: 'Other Textual Uses and Representations of Youth'), in which I analyze how youth and young people are described and used in Willibald's *Vita*

Bonifatii (5.1) and in *The Wanderer* (5.2). Although these texts deal with different themes and provide different depictions of youth and young people, they both seem to present a more general interpretation of youth, as a period of ‘youthfulness’ which is not given specific connotations, but which still contributes to conveying the main themes of the texts: in the *Vita*, youth is used to emphasize Boniface’s sanctity and virtue as well as the need to be faithful and study the Bible in order to avoid falling into sin, while in *The Wanderer* it shows how earthly happiness is fleeting and man can only find stability and eternal joy in heaven.

Therefore, this thesis deals with different interpretations of youth, different texts, and different themes: but these all share a concern with the textual representations and functions of youth and young people. Furthermore, each chapter ends with a Conclusion in which I bring together the main ideas of each chapter and draw attention to the similarities and differences of its depictions of youth and young people. Likewise, I include a Conclusion (Chapter 6) after Chapter 5, which summarizes the most important findings of this analysis and offers some suggestions for further research.

As may already be clear from this introduction, youth is a complex topic. I do not aim to examine all the occurrences of youth and young people in the corpus, as this would not be possible within the restrictions of a doctoral thesis; I thus focused on those texts which, in my view, provided the most important descriptions of youth and young people, and which might best illustrate the ambiguity and usefulness of this theme.

1.6 Conclusion

The concepts presented in this introduction should be kept in mind in the following chapters, as they are essential to appreciate how the representations of youth are analyzed and understood in this thesis. Firstly, the literature review (1.1) has shown that while

youth has already been considered in medieval scholarship, and critics have already recognized that youth was an important cultural construct, there has not yet been a study focusing on youth in EME culture or literature. This is, I believe, due to a tendency on the part of scholars to consider youth exclusively in relation to childhood, although some, like Jesch, have shown that youth can be studied on its own. Both childhood and old age in Early Medieval England have already gained scholarly attention. Therefore, a study of youth would be timely.

Furthermore, the rich vocabulary in both Latin and OE (1.2), seems to make clear that EME authors had a concept of youth and many terms for young men and women, and that youth could be understood in different ways. However, OE and Latin terms for youth and young people are ambiguous, and since Modern terminology is equally vague, it is not possible to understand with certainty what EME authors meant by ‘youth’ or ‘young people’. Therefore, rather than focusing on providing a specific definition of EME youth and young people, which may not be possible, within this study, I mostly interpret youth as a period of growth between childhood and adulthood, in which the young person did not yet have adult maturity and experience; but I also consider it as a more general period of ‘youthfulness’, in which it was not especially significant for the individual’s development, but it still had important textual functions.

The idea of youth as a period of development is further supported by the occurrences of youth in EME schemes of the ‘ages of man’ (1.3). Youth is always included in these attestations, showing its importance in contemporary interpretations of human growth; furthermore, EME authors, at least from their threefold divisions onwards, often seem to place youth between childhood and adulthood. This always occurs in contemporary descriptions in OE, in which youth is presented as a single stage (*cnihtad*, *geogub* or both) after childhood and before maturity. Concerning Latin texts, these tend

to divide youth into two different stages, *adolescentia* and *juventus*, and while the former always constitutes a period of development, the latter is sometimes equated with adulthood. Therefore, EME authors seemed to consider youth as an important part of human growth, and overall tended to understand it as a period of necessary growth to maturity.

But EME conceptualizations of youth were also influenced by patristic interpretations (1.4). The Church Fathers reconsidered the many understandings of youth in Ancient Rome through a Christian perspective. The Fathers seemed to have been especially concerned with young people's vulnerability to sin, and were often critical of youth; however, they could also provide positive descriptions. Youth was thus understood as a period of 'youthfulness'; but it could also be interpreted more ambiguously, as a period of growth in which young people had to withstand moral and spiritual temptations to gain adult maturity. Furthermore, the Fathers understood the complexity of youth and employed it as a theme to convey specific ideas and teachings in their writings. I suggested that it is both their interpretations and uses of youth which influenced EME authors, as the latter (most likely indirectly) adopted their different understandings of youth and used them to convey their own textual ideas.

I then explained the methodology and structure of this thesis (1.5). My aim is to provide a thematic, literary, and functional analysis, which will allow me to examine the representations and functions of youth and young people in literary sources, and I am specifically concerned with how these descriptions convey textual themes. My methodology mostly consists in a close textual analysis, but I also pay attention to important terms used to refer to or describe youth and young people. I consider different types of texts, in which youth and young people are textually significant and which have been grouped together according to the themes which youth helps to convey: Chapters 2,

3 and 4 all illustrate the conception of youth as a period of growth, in which youth illustrates wisdom, Christian teachings, and heroic values, respectively, while Chapter 5 considers youth in its broader sense of ‘youthfulness’ in the *Vita Bonifatii* and *The Wanderer*. This chapter is then followed by a Conclusion (Chapter 6) which summarizes my main arguments and suggests avenues for future research on youth in EME literature.

After detailing the scholarly and theoretical framework of this study, it is now necessary to turn to the texts. I begin with an analysis of youth and young people in *Maxims I*, in order to provide a first demonstration of how youth could be understood as a period of growth in EME texts, and how it could convey textual ideas.

Chapter 2

Youth and Young People in *Maxims I*

45 [...] Læran sceal mon geongne monnan,
 trymman ond tyhtan þæt he teala cunne,/ oþþæt hine mon atemedne hæbbe,
 sylle him wist ond wædo,/ oþþæt hine mon on gewitte alæde.
 Ne sceal hine mon cildgeongne forcweþan,/ ær he hine acyþan mote;
 þy sceal on þeode geþeon,/ þæt he wese þristhygende.

([...] A young person must be taught,
 strengthened with words and exhorted so that he has good understanding,/ until he
 has been disciplined,]
 he is given food and clothing,/ until he is guided into his knowledge.
 The child-young must not be reproached,/ before he can reveal himself;]
 in this way he must grow up among [his] people,/ so that he should be firm of
 purpose.])²⁰⁵

These lines in the poem *Maxims I* (in the *Exeter Book*) seem to provide an explicit description of a ‘young person’ (*geong mon*). In his analysis of the structure of *Maxims I*, MacGregor Dawson observed that this maxim was meant to show that the young ‘need to be taught, [in order to] develop their characters’.²⁰⁶ MacGregor Dawson thus argues that these lines about young people had a specific purpose, but since he is not concerned with the themes of the poem, he does not explain how or why the poet illustrates this purpose. However, this focus on the young person suggests that this excerpt might convey specific ideas about youth, and thus seems an ideal place to start this analysis of the meanings and uses of youth in EME literature: this chapter aims to determine what these ideas could be, and what they might reveal about the understandings of youth in EME texts.

²⁰⁵ The edition of the poem is ‘*Maxims I*’, in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, pp. 156-63 (p. 158).

²⁰⁶ R. MacGregor Dawson, ‘The Structure of Old English Gnostic Poems’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 61(1) (January 1962), 14-22 (p. 16)
 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27713941>> [accessed 16 September 2021].

Although *geong mon* at l. 45b might seem, at first sight at least, an obvious reference to youth, this passage has often been considered as ‘a scene of child-rearing in a secular context’.²⁰⁷ Drout and O’Camb, in particular, assume that this *geong mon* is a child, and suggest that these lines reflected the spiritual educational practices in the *Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang* and Æthelwold’s OE translation of the *Benedictine Rule*, respectively.²⁰⁸ However, Izdebska argues that *geong* in the *Benedictine Rule* refers to ‘adolescents rather than children’, hence it may be that this *geong mann* was older than a child.²⁰⁹ Yet, the adjective *geong* is another of those complex age terms, like *geogub*: it comes from the Proto-Germanic **junga* (‘young’), cognate to the Old Norse *ungr* and the Old Frisian *jung*, which have the same meaning.²¹⁰ **Junga* comes from Pre-Indoeuropean **h₂oi-u*, meaning ‘lifetime, age’, hence there seems to have been a narrowing in its meaning in Proto-Germanic and then the Germanic languages, as it became used only for a specific portion of one’s life, that is, one’s youth.²¹¹ The ambiguity of *geong* derives from the fact that it can, like *cniht* and *cnapa*, refer to one who is ‘[...] in the period of childhood, youth or adolescence [...]’, hence it may describe a child as well as a young person. Likewise, *geong mann (mon)* instead indicates a ‘young man, youth, boy, adolescent’: thus, while a *geong mann* was clearly younger than an adult, it is not clear how old he or she was.²¹²

²⁰⁷ Brian O’Camb, ‘Bishop Æthelwold and the Shaping of the Old English *Exeter Maxims*’, *English Studies*, 90(3) (June 2009), 253-73 (p. 258)

<<https://doi.org/10.1080/00138380902796714>> [accessed 16 September 2021].

²⁰⁸ Michael D. C. Drout, *How Tradition Works: A Meme-Based Cultural Poetics of the Anglo-Saxon Tenth Century* (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), pp. 272-86; O’Camb, ‘Bishop Æthelwold’, pp. 255, 257, 260-2, ff..

²⁰⁹ Izdebska, ‘Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens’, p. 64.

²¹⁰ *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic*, ed. by Kroonen, p. 275.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² See ‘[G]eong; senses I.A.i and I.A.1.a.iv’, in *DOE*.

Yet, it should be noted that Bäck does not include the meaning ‘boy’, and translates *geong mann* as ‘a human being who is young’, but also as ‘a youth’.²¹³ These translations are also unclear: how old is a youth, and what did Bäck mean by ‘young’? However, it seems to me that it is not possible to prove beyond doubt that this *geong mann* was either a child or a youth, as both the *DOE* and Bäck do not explain their translation choices, although MacGregor Dawson, Larrington and Sánchez-Martí also seem to believe that the *geong mann* was a ‘young man’ and not a child, and Bradley translates *geong mon* as ‘young man’; I also believe that *geong mann* referred to a young person older than a child, as suggested by Bäck, Izdebska, Larrington, MacGregor Dawson and Sánchez-Martí, and I base the following analysis of *Maxims I* on this assumption, but this argument, as it often happens with OE age terms, cannot be proven.²¹⁴

Coming back to Drout and O’Camb’s discussions, some of their points are useful, such as Drout’s remark on the similarities between these lines in *Maxims I* and the first lines in *The Fortunes of Men*, or O’Camb’s observations regarding the term *mann* (see below), but both neglect the textual context of *Maxims I* and only consider lines 45b-9 as a derivation of the *Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang* and the OE *Benedictine Rule*, which leads them to believe that these lines are about childhood, although I suggest that they could equally be about youth. Neidorf convincingly argues that both of their analyses are based on the occurrences of a small number of terms in both *Maxims I* and the two *Rules*, which, on their own at least, do not seem to support the hypothesis that this maxim in

²¹³ Bäck, *Synonyms*, pp. 168-169.

²¹⁴ ‘*Maxims I*’, in S. A. J. Bradley, ed. and trans., *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Everyman, 1995), pp. 344-50 (p. 347); Carolyn Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense: Gnostic Theme and Style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 120; MacGregor Dawson, ‘Structure’, p. 16; Sánchez-Martí, ‘Age Matters’, p. 209.

Maxims I was influenced by the *Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang* or the OE *Benedictine Rule*.²¹⁵

Sánchez-Martí has also commented on lines 45b-7 of this passage in his discussion of male growth in OE poetry. He maintains that these lines aimed to teach the audience how to provide proper instruction to the young, in order for them to acquire wisdom and become full members of society, and suggested that this instruction is presented as a communal duty.²¹⁶ His ideas seem borne out by the poet's syntactical choices, as explained below. However, Sánchez-Martí's argument may be further developed through a consideration of how the poet describes and employs youth to convey their teachings to the audience; lines 48-9 should also be taken into account, as they might be important to appreciate the meaning of the maxim.²¹⁷

Moreover, this analysis of youth could help to promote a better understanding of the themes and purpose of the poem. Sánchez-Martí's argument that lines 45b-7

²¹⁵ These terms are *fremde* ('foreign'), *brystcgend* ('courageous') and *trymman* ('to instruct'); see Drout, *How Tradition Works*, pp. 287-92. O'Camb adds *cildgeong* ('child-young'), *acyþan* ('to reveal') and *styrān* ('to steer'); see O'Camb, 'Bishop Æthelwold', pp. 259, 261-63. These are Neidorf's translations; Leonard Neidorf, 'On the Dating and Authorship of *Maxims I*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 117(1) (2016), 137-53 (pp. 138-9) <[HTTPS://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/26386191](https://www.jstor.org/stable/26386191)> [accessed 16 September 2021]. I provide my own below when discussing the terms relevant to my analysis (*trymman*, *cildgeong*, *acyþan* and *brystcgend*).

²¹⁶ Sánchez-Martí, 'Age Matters', pp. 208-9.

²¹⁷ I use 'they' and 'their' to refer to anonymous poets and translators (like the translator of Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* in section 3.1), as while it seems more likely that they were male, it cannot be excluded that the author or translator might have been female. On female authorship and literary production in EME England, see for instance Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, 'Women and the Origins of English Literature', in *The History of British Women's Writing, 700-1500*, ed. by Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt, 1 (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 2015), pp. 31-40.

explained how to provide wisdom to the young seems in accordance with the scholarly belief that *Maxims I* is mainly about wisdom, as it is usually classified as a ‘wisdom poem’, together with *Maxims II*, *Precepts*, *The Fortunes of Men*, and the second *Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn*, among others.²¹⁸ These all deal with the acquisition of wisdom and provide general considerations about nature and society, but it is not yet clear what is meant by ‘wisdom’ in these poems.²¹⁹ Most critics, such as Fulk and Cain, or Calder and Greenfield, do not define it.²²⁰ Shippey believed that ‘[w]isdom was the greatest virtue and the key to salvation’, but in another volume he states that

Anglo-Saxon wisdom, it seems, is neither knowledge nor faith nor morality, but an uneasy mixture of all these and more, a way of life rather than a possession, a balance only to be acquired [...] by age and experience [...].²²¹

²¹⁸ Fulk and Cain rightly note that ‘[t]he aphoristic mode pervades Old English literature, and so there is hardly a work that does not in some degree belong to the category of “wisdom literature”’. R. D. Fulk and Christopher M. Cain, *A History of Old English Literature. With a Chapter on Saints’ Legends by Rachel S. Anderson*, 2nd edn. (Chichester, West Sussex, U. K.: Blackwell, 2013), p. 243. For instance, *The Wanderer* and *Beowulf* can both be considered as wisdom poems as well as elegiac and heroic ones, respectively. See Stanley B. Greenfield and Daniel G. Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature, with a Survey of the Anglo-Latin Background by Michael Lapidge* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1986), p. 259; T. A. Shippey, *Old English Verse* (London: Hutchinson, 1972), pp. 61, 67.

²¹⁹ Antonina Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry*, Costerus New Series 143 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), pp. 61-62. ‘Wisdom poems’ are also described as ‘gnomic’: according to Cavill, a gnome characterizes something, while a maxim is ‘a sententious generalization’, but is longer than a gnome and syntactically more articulated. Paul Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1999), pp. 11, 74.

²²⁰ See section ‘1. Sententious Lore in Prose and Verse’, in ch. 10, ‘Wisdom Literature and Lyric Poetry’, in Fulk and Cain, *A History of Old English Literature*, pp. 241-56 and ch. 11, ‘Lore and Wisdom’, in Greenfield and Calder, *A New Critical History*, pp. 253-79.

²²¹ Shippey, *Old English Verse*, p. 67; T. A. Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* (Cambridge: Brewer; Totowa: Bowman & Littlefield, 1976), p. 4.

There thus seems to be a tendency to assume that these poems all dealt with the same kind of wisdom, understood as a ‘general’ virtue. I intend to determine whether this idea is also true in the case of *Maxims* I, or if its comments on youth illustrate a more specific conception of wisdom.

Concerning the purpose of the poem, Cavill believed that wisdom poems constituted an attempt to

outline, and in the process construct, an Anglo-Saxon understanding of reality, quite deliberately focusing on the everyday, the typical, the social, the natural, in order to build up a framework which potentially comprehends all human and natural phenomena and sets the whole construct under the conscience of God.²²²

There are many lines in *Maxims* I which seem to support this statement (for instance ll. 7-8a, 15b-18a, 25b-26, 39b-41a, 50b-58a, 70-79, 110-112, 123, 128-30, 151-59, and 166-75, among others). Cavill further remarks that wisdom poems ‘are not as didactic as some other poems [...]’, although he recognizes that ‘there are undoubtedly times when wisdom forms are intended to teach’ and wisdom poems are ‘educational in the sense of presenting what everybody knows’.²²³ However, other scholars, such as Battles, Larrington, Fulk and Cain, argue that wisdom poems like *Maxims* I were meant to convey wisdom, and can thus be considered didactic; this view also seems in accordance with Sánchez-Martí’s assertion that ll. 45b-7 might have been meant to instruct the audience in how properly to teach the young.²²⁴ However, to my knowledge, scholars have so far not considered how the maxim on youth contributes to the purpose of the poem.

²²² Cavill, *Maxims*, p. 183.

²²³ Ibid., pp. 9, 183.

²²⁴ Paul Battles, ‘Toward a Theory of Old English Poetic Genres: Epic, Elegy, Wisdom Poetry, and the “Traditional Opening”’, *Studies in Philology*, 111(1) (Winter, 2014), 1-33 (pp. 16-7) <[HTTPS://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/24391997](https://www.jstor.org/stable/24391997)> [accessed 16 September 2021]; Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense*, p. 120; Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English Literature*, p. 249; Greenfield and Calder, *New Critical History*, p. 253.

I begin the following analysis by examining the description and function of youth in lines 45b-9 (2.1), to determine what ideas of youth and wisdom they convey; I then consider the prologue of *Maxims I* (lines 1-4; 2.2), in which the poet first introduces wisdom and illustrates the purpose of the poem, as this can explain how the maxim on youth conveys the main theme of the text and contributes to the aim of *Maxims I*. The prologue might also help to understand how and why youth is represented and employed as it is in lines 45b-9.

2.1 Lines 45b-9

As previously mentioned, the first line of the maxim introduces a *geong mon* ('young person'; see above): although the term *mon* (*mann*) might refer exclusively to men, it was predominantly used for 'a human being of either sex', hence this youth could be a man or a woman.²²⁵ The fact that the maxim was possibly about young men as well as young women might signify that it was addressed to a mixed audience (perhaps supported by references to proper female conduct in the poem; see lines 62b-64, 83b-91, 99), and maybe youths as well.

MacGregor Dawson connected these lines with the previous maxim: *[l]ef mon læces behofað* ('[a] sick man needs a physician'; l. 45a) and observed that '[a]s the

²²⁵ 'Mann; sense I', in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/22348](https://bosworthtoller.com/22348)> [accessed 16 September 2021]. On the term *mann*, see Christine Rauer, 'Mann and Gender in Old English Prose: A Pilot Study', *Neophilologus*, 101 (2017), 139-58 <DOI 10.1007/s11061-016-9489-1> [accessed 16 September 2021]. Following O'Camb's approach, since *mann* is grammatically masculine, I refer to the *geong mon* as 'he' in my translation; however, while the pronoun only reflects the grammatical gender of the term it refers to, *mann* could describe both men and women, hence I use 'they' in my analysis to signify that this could be a young man or a woman. See O'Camb, 'Bishop Æthelwold', footnote n° 66, p. 269.

physician is to the sick man, so the teacher is to the youth'.²²⁶ This point seems supported by the verbs used in these lines: *læran*, *trymman*, *tyhtan*, *alædan*, and arguably *atemian*. All of these verbs seem to signify some kind of teaching. *Læran*, for instance, can mean 'to teach, instruct, educate, to give religious teaching, to preach, to teach a particular tenet or dogma, to enjoin a rule, to exhort, admonish, advise, persuade, suggest'.²²⁷ It seems to have both a general and a spiritual meaning, but the verb mostly occurs in religious poems, homilies, and saints' lives (likely because these constitute the largest group of extant texts) and laws, with reference to the teaching of spiritual precepts. In these contexts, its Christian connotations are further clarified by the fact that the subject is often a religious figure (a saint, an apostle, Christ or God, etc.) and is often explicitly mentioned.²²⁸ Yet, in *Maxims I* the poet does not state that the youth must be taught spiritual precepts, and the identity of the teachers is also left implicit, so that it does not seem possible to demonstrate that here *læran* refers to Christian teachings, and it may have indicated teaching in general.

Both *trymman* and *tyhtan* can have physical as well as metaphorical connotations: *trymman* can mean to 'strengthen' with reference to objects, physical and mental strength, among other meanings, but Bosworth-Toller suggests that here it means 'to strengthen with words, exhort, encourage, comfort'; *tyhtan* instead means 'to draw', but in this case it more properly refers to drawing 'the mind to something, to incite, exhort, provoke, [etc]'.²²⁹ They thus have similar meanings, and seem to have been juxtaposed because

²²⁶ MacGregor Dawson, 'Structure', p. 16.

²²⁷ '[L]æran', in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/20977](https://bosworthtoller.com/20977)> [accessed 16 September 2021].

²²⁸ See *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, ed. by Antonette diPaolo Healey, with John Price Wilkin and Xin Xiang (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2009), henceforth *DOEC*.

²²⁹ '[T]rymman; senses I.1; I.2; I.3; I.4; II.7', in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* <[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/31093](https://bosworthtoller.com/31093)> [accessed 16 September 2021]; 'tyhtan; senses I

they alliterate. Like *læran*, both verbs also seem to occur in Christian texts (likely because, as stated above, these are the most common): for instance, God is the subject of *trymman* in ‘Genesis’ (l. 217a) and Christ in ‘*Andreas*’ (l. 463b), respectively, while *tyhtan* is used in the OE translation of Pope Gregory’s *Pastoral Care* by Saint Paul, to explain that ‘the teacher must be mighty to exhort (*to tyhtanne*) to salutary doctrine’.²³⁰ However, also like *læran*, in *Maxims I* they are not explicitly used in a spiritual sense.

According to the *DOE*, *alædan* (‘to lead’) in this instance indicates ‘the guiding of someone’s mind, thoughts, habits’; with these connotations it appears twice in the works associated with King Alfred. In the *Pastoral Care*, it denotes Moses’s wish to ‘wean (*alædan*) his father-in-law Hobab from his heathen customs’, and in the *Consolation of Philosophy*, Philosophy laments the folly that ‘leads mortals from (*alæt of*) the right way’, which is God.²³¹ In these examples the verb signifies leading someone away from an erroneous spiritual belief or practice, whereas in *Maxims I* it instead seems to mean to lead the youth ‘into [their] understanding’ (l. 48b; my emphasis); there is no mention of Christianity or paganism.

and II’, in *ibid.* <[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/31382](https://bosworthtoller.com/31382)> [accessed 16 September 2021]. *Tyhtan* can also mean ‘to instruct, teach’ (see sense IV in *ibid.*), but Bosworth-Toller provides no examples.

²³⁰ *DOEC*. See ‘*Andreas*’, in *The Vercelli Book*, ed. by George Philip Krapp, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, II (London: Routledge; New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), pp. 3-51 (p. 16); ‘*Genesis*’, in *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. by Krapp, pp. 3-87 (p. 65); *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care. With an English Translation, the Latin Text, Notes, and an Introduction*, ed. and trans. by Henry Sweet, 2 vols., EETS 45, 50 (London, 1871; repr. 1958), 1, ch. 15, pp. 90-91. Sweet’s translation.

²³¹ ‘[A]-lædan; sense 1.a.v’, in *DOE*. *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care*, ch. 41, p. 304; *King Alfred’s Old English Version of Boethius’ De Consolatione Philosophiae. Edited from the MSS., With Introduction, Critical Notes and Glossary*, ed. by Walter John Sedgefield (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), ch. 32, p. 73. Sweet’s translation.

Finally, *atemian* can mean either ‘to tame, train [...]’ or ‘to subdue, discipline’.²³² In the first sense, it was commonly used for animals or birds (for instance, it describes the hawk that needs to be tamed in *The Fortunes of Men*; ll. 85-6).²³³ Larrington seems to prefer this meaning and suggests that here the poet implies a comparison between the youth and a rebellious young animal, as the young are ‘naturally wild creatures’, although she recognizes that the poet’s tone is ‘affectionate’.²³⁴ However, the *DOE* suggests that in this case *atemian* means ‘to subdue, discipline’. In this sense, *atemian* occurs twice in the OE translation of the *Pastoral Care*, to describe specific Christian behaviours. In the first occurrence, *atemian* denotes those who ‘bridle their greediness and subdue their bodies’, but are so focused on their fasting that they lose their concord, which is a far more important virtue.²³⁵ *Atemian* thus seems to refer to sexual discipline. Similarly, Alfred later recounts how Moses, when God was irate with the Jews, bade the men to put their swords on their hips: according to Alfred, this was a way to ‘prefer[...] the zeal of instruction to the lusts of the flesh, and take care to subdue (*atemige*) and conquer unlawful lusts and doctrines [...]’.²³⁶ *Atemian* here seems deliberately used in a spiritual manner, as it conveys the need to control sinful impulses and ‘doctrines’. In the OE translation of Gregory’s *Dialogues*, it likewise refers to the suppression of one’s sinful lust.²³⁷ In these examples *atemian* repeatedly appears to illustrate the need to control one’s

²³² ‘[A]temian; senses 1 and 2’, in *DOE*.

²³³ ‘*The Fortunes of Men*’, in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, pp. 154-56 (p. 156).

²³⁴ Larrington, *Store of Common Sense*, p. 124.

²³⁵ *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care*, ch. 46, pp. 345-46, l. 23. Sweet’s translation.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, ch. 49, p. 383, ll. 1-5. Sweet’s translation.

²³⁷ *Bischof Waerferths von Worcester Uebersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, ed. by H. Hecht, Bib. ags. Prosa 5 (Leipzig and Hamburg; [repr. Darmstadt 1965]), bk. 2, ch. 2, p. 101, l. 31.

sexual desire; although these connotations are not apparent in the maxim, they may have been implicit and could certainly be relevant in a passage about youth, given that young people were often thought to be particularly vulnerable to the temptations of the body (see section 1.4 in the Introduction and the following chapter). *Atemian* might then imply that young people had to be taught to curb their urges, providing another kind of instruction compared to the other teaching verbs in the maxim, but which was necessary nonetheless.

These lines thus seem to support MacGregor Dawson's observation that young people need instruction.²³⁸ It is more difficult to determine what kind of instruction is conveyed by these verbs. While they almost always occur in religious works (as these are the most numerous) and convey Christian precepts, their references are usually more explicit than the ones in *Maxims* I, as the poet does not state what the young person needs to be taught, or by whom. On the other hand, *atemian* may be an exception, as it seems to have been often employed to denote sexual continence. Perhaps this ambiguity was deliberate on the part of the poet, in order to address the maxim to both a religious and secular audience.²³⁹ But it might also imply that the poet was more concerned with *how* the youth should be taught, rather than about what they needed to learn.

²³⁸ MacGregor Dawson, 'Structure', p. 16.

²³⁹ *Maxims* I include references to God (for instance at ll. 4b-6, 7a, 35a, 43a, etc.), lay life, including how men and women give birth to children (23b-25a), of proper kingly or martial behaviour (57b-62a, 80-83b, 128a; 176-77, 200-3) and, as mentioned above, ideal female conduct (62b-64, 83b-91, 99), while some maxims present both lay and religious elements (124-130, 152-63, 168-70). These examples suggest that the poem was aimed at a mixed audience including not only men and women (see above), but also laymen and clergymen, hence the teachers could have been both secular and religious. However, this supposition cannot be proven. Cf. Mark C. Amodio, *The Anglo-Saxon Literature Handbook* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), p. 245.

Therefore, perhaps these lines are about teaching in general, and it can be argued that they were meant for the teachers, not for the young pupils; as Sánchez-Martí observes, they may have been intended to show the teachers how to teach the young effectively.²⁴⁰ The audience might have been members of the community who had some responsibility for teaching the young.²⁴¹ The repeated use of teaching verbs might imply that this process was a cumulative one and that the audience needed to be patient with the young.

The first lines of the maxim also appear to portray the young person as passive. The poet repeatedly resorts to the impersonal *mon* to convey these actions, so that the youth is always the receiver rather than the subject, at least when the teaching verbs are used, which was likely meant to underscore their dependence and inexperience. As the poet does not address the young person, the poet's syntactical strategies might again imply that these lines were addressed to the young person's instructors.

This description of youthful inexperience can be better understood in contrast to the wisdom of old age. Elsewhere in the poem the poet provides an image which explicitly connects old age and wisdom:

[...] Þing sceal gehegan
frod wiþ frodne;/ biþ hyra ferð gelic,
20 hi a sace semað,/ sibbe gelærað,
þa ær wonsælge/ awegen habbað.

([...] A meeting must be held
wise with wise;/ their minds will be alike,
20 they always settle a dispute,/ teach peace,]
when earlier the evil ones/ have disturbed [it/the peace).

²⁴⁰ Sánchez-Martí, 'Age Matters', pp. 208-9.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

These lines seem to signify that wisdom was the purview of the old, not the young.²⁴² The adjective *frod*, as Kwikstra observes, could mean either ‘old’ or ‘wise’ separately (as in *frodum wordum* at l. 1a, see below), or it could refer to one who was ‘old and wise’.²⁴³ The difference between these connotations may be illustrated by a line in *Maxims II*, in which the poet states: [...] *gomol snoterost, fyrngearum frod, se þe ær feala gebideð* [...] (‘[...] the old man is the wisest, advanced in years, who earlier experiences many events’; ll. 11b-12).²⁴⁴ As in *Maxims I*, here old age is connected with wisdom, but in *Maxims II* the association seems clearer, as both *gamol* and *frod* mean ‘old’, yet Kwiststra notes that the latter more specifically refers to one who is wise *because* they are old, as wisdom comes from experience.²⁴⁵ Similarly, in the above excerpt from *Maxims I* the poet describes how the elderly, because of their greater wisdom, had leading roles in society as negotiators and teachers.²⁴⁶ Thus, wisdom also has a social dimension.²⁴⁷ When compared with the description of the young person needing instruction, it seems evident that they were not yet ‘wise’, nor were they expected to be, because of their youth.²⁴⁸

Yet, the repeated use of temporal expressions such as *opþæt* (ll. 46b, 47b), *þæt* (l. 49b) (both meaning ‘until’), and *ær* (‘before’; l. 48b) implies that the period of youth was seen as temporary and was thought to be concluded once the young person finished their

²⁴² Corey J. Kwiststra, ‘“Wintrum Frod”: *Frod* and the Aging Mind in Old English Poetry’, *Studies in Philology*, 108(2) (Spring, 2011), 133-64 (pp. 153, 159) [\[https://www.jstor.org/stable/23055985\]](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23055985) [accessed 16 September 2021].

²⁴³ ‘[F]rod; sense 2’, in DOE. See also the discussion of *frod* in *The Wanderer* in Chapter 5. Kwiststra, ‘“Wintrum Frod”’, pp. 133-34.

²⁴⁴ ‘*Maxims II*’, in Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning*, pp. 76-9 (p. 76).

²⁴⁵ ‘*Frod*; sense 2.a’, in DOE. Kwiststra, ‘“Wintrum Frod”’, pp. 148-9.

²⁴⁶ On the role of the elderly as wisemen and advisers, see Porck, *Old Age*, pp. 68-73.

²⁴⁷ Battles, ‘Toward a Theory’, p. 14.

²⁴⁸ Kwiststra, ‘“Wintrum Frod”’, pp. 153, 159.

‘training’. Gruber observed that ‘[...] *oppæt* and *þæt* [...] seem to signify a qualitative transformation of perception: the process of learning, of becoming self-aware [...] [which] involves a “movement” from ignorance to understanding’.²⁴⁹ Though Gruber notes that this was a period of instruction, she does not seem to point out that this period coincided with the individual’s youth. However, Gruber’s conclusions can be supported by some specific lines in the maxim.

For example, in the following half-line the poet explains that the youth’s training has a specific purpose: the youth had to learn, be strengthened with words and exhorted *þæt he teala cunne* (‘so that he has good understanding’; l. 46a). The verb *cunnan* generally means ‘to know, to understand’, hence it implies wisdom: it would seem that the purpose of the youth’s instruction was to help the young become wise.²⁵⁰ It would thus be more appropriate to suggest that it is *cunnan* which conveys ‘a “movement” from ignorance to understanding’, while *þæt* implies that this ignorance is temporary. Moreover, according to the *DOE*, when *cunnan* occurs with the adverb *teala* it should be translated as ‘[...] to have (good) sense, understanding or knowledge’.²⁵¹ In *The Order of the World* (also in the *Exeter Book*) this expression is used to denote one who ‘has good understanding’ of how everything on earth is joined together under God’s control (ll. 43-46), that day is joined with night, the deep with the high [*hean*], the air with the river, the land with the sea, etc. (ll. 82-85), and thus seems to refer to one’s awareness of the natural world and God’s creation.²⁵² Coming back to *Maxims I*, it is not stated what this ‘good

²⁴⁹ Loren C. Gruber, ‘Of Holly, Vassalage and *oppæt*: Three Notes on *Maxims I*’, in *In Geardagum, 2: Essays on Old and Middle English Language and Literature*, ed. by Loren C. Gruber and Dean Loganbill (Denver, Colorado: Society for New Language Study, 1978), pp. 9-17 (p. 14).

²⁵⁰ ‘[C]unnan; sense I.A’, in *DOE*.

²⁵¹ ‘[C]unnan; sense III.A.3.a’, in *DOE*.

²⁵² ‘*The Order of the World*’, in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, pp. 163-66 (p. 166).

understanding’ might be; nevertheless, although wisdom was usually associated with old age, the poet here appears to suggest that one was supposed to acquire it during their youth.²⁵³ *Cunna*, then, seems to provide for the first time an explicit connection between youth and wisdom. This idea is not limited to *Maxims I*, but is found throughout EME culture: for instance, Barber has examined how Alcuin repeatedly states that people in the stage of their *adolescentia* (specifically, young monks) must gain wisdom; but unlike the poet of *Maxims I*, he also clarifies how they should do this and what they should learn, emphasizing their need to study the liberal arts.²⁵⁴

It should also be noted that this act of knowing is performed by the young person, not the teachers, as the young person is the subject rather than the impersonal *mon*, which was used with the verbs of teaching earlier in the maxim. This might mean that the aim of the youth’s instruction was not only to help them (meaning the youth) gain wisdom, but also to provide them with personal agency. This would have been an important lesson for the teachers, and appears to show that young people were expected to become more independent in the course of their youth.

So far, the poet has provided a rather hopeful depiction of youth, as the young person was expected to become wise. However, the poet then adds that the youth needs to be taught, strengthened with words and exhorted not only until he ‘has good understanding’, but also *oppæt hine mon atemedne hæbbe* (‘until he has been disciplined’; l. 46b). The verb *atemian*, as noted above, can mean either ‘to tame, train [...]’ or ‘to subdue, discipline’.²⁵⁵ The latter seems the more likely interpretation in this instance; based on the occurrences of the verb in the works attributed to King Alfred and the OE

²⁵³ Kwistra, “*Wintrum Frod*”, pp. 153, 159.

²⁵⁴ Barber, ‘Alcuin and the Student Life-Cycle’, pp. 99-103.

²⁵⁵ ‘[A-]temman, a-temian; senses 1 and 2’, in *DOE*.

translation of Pope Gregory's dialogues, I suggested before that it might have connotations of regulating sexual desire. *Atemian*, then, might perhaps imply a criticism of common youthful behaviour, as young people were often criticized for their supposed vulnerability to sexual temptations, especially in Christian works (see 1.4 and the next chapter).²⁵⁶ This condemnation becomes clearer when contrasted with the image of the old wisemen (ll. 18-21): while they made decisions for the community and helped to preserve social harmony, the young person, who has not yet learnt self-restraint, still needs to be kept in check by their teachers. The poet then resorts to the impersonal *mon*, as they did with the other teaching verbs at the beginning of the maxim, perhaps to emphasize the teachers' role in controlling the young person, and the youth's inability to control their own urges.

Sánchez-Martí remarked, while discussing the maxim as a whole, that it meant that 'society needs to domesticate and civilize the younger ones' in order for them to become full members of the community.²⁵⁷ This interpretation might, perhaps, be supported by the previous line; however, the poet then states that

47 sylle him wist ond wædo,/ oþþæt hine mon on gewitte alæde.
(he is given food and clothing,/ until he is guided into his knowledge).

This reference to food and clothing might suggest that the teachers were not only supposed to discipline the young, but also to take care of them. The expression *wist ond wædo* also occurs in King Alfred's translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*,

²⁵⁶ The fact that this criticism of youthful sexual conduct is often found in Christian works may again suggest that the maxim may have been addressed to both a religious audience and a secular one; the poet does not condemn young people directly, perhaps because it might also have been intended for a secular audience, who may not have recognized the sexual connotations of *atemian*.

²⁵⁷ Sánchez-Martí, 'Age Matters', p. 209.

in which it denotes the bare necessities of life.²⁵⁸ In *Daniel*, King Nabuchadnezzar makes sure that the Three Youths lack neither *wiste ne wæde* ('food nor clothing'; 103a), although in this case, given his faithlessness and pridefulness, the expression does not convey his concern for the youths.²⁵⁹ Perhaps more tellingly, this description seems to recall how in the *Fortunes of Men* (ll. 1-8a) the parents teach, clothe and provide for their child until he is ready; similarly, in Riddle 9 in the *Exeter Book* ('The Cuckoo'), the stepmother clothes and feeds her stepchild until he has grown.²⁶⁰ The actions of clothing and feeding the young are similar to those described in *Maxims I*; these tender depictions seem to suggest that a parent, or one acting in a parental role, was expected to raise the young until they were independent. It is not made clear how old the child or the cuckoo are, but these depictions seem to span a number of years, from birth (in *Fortunes*) and childhood (the riddle) until adulthood, hence the texts seem to imply that a young person was not yet considered grown.²⁶¹ This line from *Maxims I*, then, may also have been

²⁵⁸ King Alfred's *Old English Version of Boethius' De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ch. 33, p. 77, l. 7; see *DOEC*.

²⁵⁹ 'Daniel', in *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. by Krapp, pp. 111-32 (p. 113).

²⁶⁰ Drout, *How Tradition Works*, pp. 264-86, esp. 280-1; 'Riddle n° 9', in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, p. 185; Jennifer Neville, 'Fostering the Cuckoo: *Exeter Book* Riddle 9', *The Review of English Studies*, 58(236) (2007), 431-46 (p. 435) <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.nottingham.ac.uk/10.1093/res/hgl1154>> [accessed 16 September 2021]. In 'The *Fortunes of Men*', the verb *gyrwan* (lit. 'to prepare'), which can mean 'to clothe' (see 'gyrwan, senses 1; 2; 2.a', in *DOE*), is used twice (ll. 3b, 8a), while the verb *gyfan* (lit. 'to give') can also mean 'to give food' (see 'gyfan, senses 1 and 1.B.1.a', in *DOE*); in Riddle 9, the cuckoo mentions that his stepmother *wedum þeccan* ('covered [him] with clothing'; 4b), *hleosceorpe wrað* ('wrapped [him] in a protective garment'; 5b), and *fedde* ('fed [him]'; 9b).

²⁶¹ In 'The *Fortunes of Men*', the poet states that the parents take care of the child until his *geongan leomu ... geloden weorpað* ('young limbs ... are grown'; 5a-6b); at the end of this passage, he remarks that only God knows what the winters will bring the child *weaxendum* ('as he grows up'; 9a). In Riddle 9, the cuckoo is also fed *opþæt [he] aweox* ('until [he] grew up'; 10a).

meant to show the audience that the young can still learn to control their impulses and mature with the proper instruction, and thus implies a more affectionate attitude towards youth.

In the second half-line, the verb *alædan*, which here seems to mean ‘the guiding of someone’s mind, thoughts, habits’, implies, like the other teaching verbs mentioned above, that the young person needs guidance, and the impersonal construction again seems to convey the youth’s dependence on their teachers.²⁶² However, it is again not stated who these are: secular teachers, monks, parents, or perhaps the wisemen mentioned above (ll. 18-21).²⁶³ A possible interpretation is provided below. It should also be noted that in these lines the poet repeatedly explains how the youth should be taught (they should be disciplined, but also taken care of, and now guided), but they never describes what the youth should learn.

Indeed, the term *ge-wit* can mean ‘wit’, ‘senses’, ‘(right) mind’, ‘intellect’, or ‘knowledge’, ‘understanding’, and ‘consciousness’, hence it has cognitive connotations and seems to refer to wisdom, but it is still not entirely clear.²⁶⁴ As explained below, both ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’ would be suitable translations, although ‘knowledge’ perhaps better conveys the connection with wisdom. Gaining this understanding is once more presented as the ultimate aim of the youth’s instruction. But understanding of what?

The answer to the latter question is given in the next line: *[n]e sceal hine mon cildgeongne forcwepan,/ ær he hine acypan mote* ‘[t]he child-young must not be reproached,/ before he can show himself’; l. 48). The first half-line again seems to

²⁶² See ‘*a-lædan*’; sense 1.a.v’, in *DOE*.

²⁶³ For my interpretation of the audience of the poem, see footnote 156 herein.

²⁶⁴ ‘[G]e-wit; senses I and II’, in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTP://BOSWORTH.FF.CUNI.CZ/FINDER/3/GEWIT](http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/finder/3/gewit)> [accessed 16 September 2021]; Harbus, *Life of the Mind*, p. 45.

encourage the teachers to be patient until the youth is ready, hence, like the previous line, it may again illustrate an affectionate attitude to youth. This idea that young people must not be rebuked before they are ready to understand is also found in the penitentials: as Flowers shows, the authors of the penitentials prescribed a harsher penance for those who had reached an ‘age of understanding’, usually understood to be 15 or 20 years for young men and 13-14 years for young women.²⁶⁵ For instance, the *Scriftboc* (10th century) says that a ‘young man’ (*cniht*) must be under his father’s jurisdiction until he is 15 years old, whereas a ‘virgin’ (*fæmne*) is under the jurisdiction of her parents until she is 13 or 14; after that age she can be given in marriage by her father, with her consent.²⁶⁶ This tendency is even clearer in the *Old English Penitential* (11th century), in which it is stated that if a ‘person’ (*man*) fornicates with an animal or another male, and has reached the age of 20, he or she can understand the shameful thing he or she has committed, and must confess and fast for 15 years; the author then adds that *geonge men & andgitlease* (‘young and ignorant men’) must be beaten if they commit this sin.²⁶⁷ Therefore, these examples from the penitentials further show that in Pre-Conquest England it was seemingly believed that there was also an intellectual threshold, after which the young person acquired intellectual maturity. As Flowers suggests, it appears that this intellectual maturity was acquired at some point during one’s youth.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Flowers, ‘Theology of Puberty’, pp. 163-64.

²⁶⁶ *Scriftboc* X13.01.00–X13.02.01, in *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database*, ed. and trans. by Allen J. Frantzen <<http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/>> [accessed 1 February 2023].

²⁶⁷ Flowers, ‘Theology of Puberty’, p. 176; *The Old English Penitential* Y42.06.01, in *The Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, ed. and trans. by Frantzen <<http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/>> [accessed 1 February 2023].

²⁶⁸ Flowers, ‘Theology of Puberty’, p. 176. This idea is also found in some writings of Alcuin of York, who specifically connects the phase of *adolescentia* (which was seen to be a period of

The term *cildgeong* is ambiguous, as it does not seem to have been used to describe young people. In poetry it seems to refer to infants: both in *Christ C* (The Last Judgement; l. 1425a) and *Andreas* (l. 685a), it describes Christ as a baby.²⁶⁹ However, I argue that this *cildgeong* is the same *geong mann* mentioned earlier, hence it is a youth, not a child.

Bäck, in his linguistic study of terms relating to children and young people in the OE corpus, also suggests that *cildgeong* meant ‘youthful, infant’, but then writes that the element *cild* (for which see below) can refer ‘not only [to] infants but also older children, ... about 15-year-old children’.²⁷⁰ Izdebska also notes that *cild* can refer to infants, but also to older children; however, it did not seem to be used for a youth.²⁷¹

In the *TOE* *cildgeong* is in the category ‘childish, young’, underneath ‘young’ and ‘youth’, although its synonyms *cildisc* and *cildic* only apply to children, and the *TOE* does not mention primary sources, hence it does not seem to support the hypothesis that *cildgeong* could also refer to youths.²⁷² Bosworth-Toller translates *cildgeong* as ‘young as a child’.²⁷³ According to the *DOE* it means ‘youthful; childlike’, and again denotes young children and boys, not young men, and specifically in an ecclesiastical context.²⁷⁴ Similarly, O’Camb translates it as ‘oblate’; oblates were given to the Church as children.²⁷⁵ Yet, translating *cildgeong* as ‘child’ also has problems, as it can be assumed

growth in Ch. 1 herein) with intellectual development. See Barber, ‘Alcuin and the Student Life-Cycle’, pp. 99-103.

²⁶⁹ ‘Christ’, in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, pp. 3-49 (p. 42).

²⁷⁰ See Bäck, *Synonyms.*, p. 61

²⁷¹ Izdebska, ‘Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens’, p. 50.

²⁷² See ‘*cildgeong*’, ‘*cildisc*’ and ‘*cidlic*’ in *TOE*.

²⁷³ ‘[C]ild-geong; I’, in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/006146](https://bosworthtoller.com/006146)> [accessed 16 September 2021].

²⁷⁴ ‘[C]ild-geong; senses 1; 1.a; 2’, in *DOE*.

²⁷⁵ O’Camb, ‘Bishop Æthelwold’, p. 269. See Mayke De Jong, *In Samuel’s Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden; New York; Köln: Brill, 1996).

that this *cildgeong* refers to the same person previously described as a *geong mon* at the beginning of the maxim: arguably, it would not make sense for the poet to suddenly introduce a child while they have so far described the instruction of a young person. As noted above, *geong mann* was (probably) not used for children, hence *cildgeong* might here have a particular meaning.

Bradley resolves this ambiguity by translating this half-line thus: '[a young man] must not be decried *as* a child before he is able to prove himself'.²⁷⁶ While I do not agree with Bradley's translation of *acyþan* (which he translates as 'to prove himself'), in this way the young person would remain the subject of the maxim; indeed this translation seems to emphasize the need to recognize that the young person deserves to be treated respectfully and also implies that they were not, in fact, a child. However, this does not seem to be a faithful translation of the OE, as there is no indication that *cildgeong* is meant as a comparison the way Bradley interprets it.

Cildgeong might be a substantivized adjective: O'Camb observes that *cildgeong* is also used as a noun in the OE translation of the *Benedictine Rule* by Bishop Æthelwold, which he views as evidence that lines 45b-9 of *Maxims I* were based on it (although his position has been convincingly challenged by Neidorf).²⁷⁷ In two of these instances, the adjective *cildgeong* is juxtaposed with *eald* ('old') and *ofereald* ('very old'), respectively: for instance '[b]e ealdum munecum and cildgeongum' ('about old and youthful [?] monks').²⁷⁸ O'Camb assumes that these occurrences form a clear parallel with l. 48 in

²⁷⁶ 'Maxims I', in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, pp. 344-50 (p. 347).

²⁷⁷ Neidorf, 'Dating and Authorship', p. 138; see '*cild-geong*', sense 2', in *DOE*.

²⁷⁸ See Arnold Schröer, *Die Angelsächsischen Prosabearbeitungen der Benedictinerrege*, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa; Bd. 2 (Kassel: G. H. Wigand, 1885-1888), ch. 70, p. 130, l. 1 and ch. 37, p. 61, l. 10, for instance; see '*cild-geong*', senses 1.a; 2' in *DOE*.

Maxims I.²⁷⁹ However, perhaps in these examples from the *Benedictine Rule* *cildgeong* does not specifically denote children, but, together with *eald* and *ofereald*, may have been used to refer to all the monks in the monastery. *Geong*, as a substantivized adjective, is used in a similar manner: the expressions ‘*geong and ealde*’, ‘*ealde and geong*’, and variations thereof, were often employed to indicate people in general, ‘(both) young and old, of all ages, of any age’, so that these *cildgeonge* might, perhaps, also have been youthful monks.²⁸⁰

It should also be noted that the first element *cild* is another ambiguous age-term, as it has a broader meaning than the Modern English *child*, which is predominantly used for ‘a young person of either sex, usually one below the age of puberty; a boy or a girl’, while the meaning ‘[a] young man; a youth, an adolescent’ became obsolete by the sixteenth century, but was attested in OE literature, for instance in *Ælfric*.²⁸¹ Indeed, the *DOE* translates ‘*cild*’ as ‘infant or young person’, which is not very helpful to demonstrate that it could refer to young people.²⁸² It can also refer to ‘boys’ in religious communities; but as noted above, it has been shown that there have not been specific religious or spiritual references in this maxim.²⁸³ Additionally, ‘boy’ is also not very useful as a definition; we do not know how old a boy was supposed to be. The editors of the *DOE* add that *cild* can refer to an unborn child, male children, to schoolchildren, to the Holy Innocents, to the

²⁷⁹ O’Camb, ‘Bishop Æthelwold’, pp. 259, 261-2.

²⁸⁰ ‘[G]eong; sense I.A.i.a.viii’, in *DOE*.

²⁸¹ [C]hild; senses 2.a and 2.b’, in *OED*. See for instance *CH I*.

²⁸² ‘[C]ild; sense 1.a’, in *DOE*; see Izdebska, ‘Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens’, p. 53. For an analysis and comparison of children in EME insular sources, including Welsh and Irish texts, see Christian-Michael Zottl, ‘Von Ælfrics *unsprecende cild* zu Wulfstans *cradolcild* – Kindheit und Jugend als eigenständige Lebensabschnitte in frühmittelalterlichen, insularen Textquellen’, *Concilium Medii Ævi* 13 (2010), 117-52.

²⁸³ ‘[C]ild; sense 1.c.i’, in *DOE*; Izdebska, ‘Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens’, p. 55.

relationship between a believer and God and Mary or between Christ and God and Mary; to denote an ‘innocent’ or ‘child-like’ person, a ‘offspring, descendant’, a ‘noble’ or a ‘prince’, as a title for a noble ‘youth’ (but it is not clear how old this youth was), as a personal name, and finally as a place-name element.²⁸⁴ However, none of these senses seem relevant, save perhaps for the description of the *cildgeong* as an ‘innocent’ or ‘child-like person’, although I propose a more likely explanation below.

Yet, another interpretation for the occurrence of *cildgeong* in a maxim about a young person might be that the first element *cild*, on its own, can have affectionate connotations, for instance from a parent to a child or within ‘religious or ecclesiastical contexts’.²⁸⁵ This sense is also included by Bäck in his analysis of the meanings of *cildgeong*.²⁸⁶ Therefore, it seems that *cildgeong* could have a similar meaning. It can be argued that, in this sense, the term does not necessarily refer to actual children, but it might also describe young, or even adult people, from the perspective of an older person. The statement that the *cildgeong* must not be reproached might have been meant to remind the teachers to be affectionate and patient with their charges, and also seems

²⁸⁴ ‘[C]ild; senses 1.b; 1.c; 1.c.ii; 1.c.iii; 1.d; 1.d.i; 1.e; 1.f; 2; 3; 4; 5’, in *DOE*.

Concerning place-names containing the element *cild*, see for instance Chilford Hundred (Cambridgeshire), which denotes ‘a ford which could be crossed by a child’ or ‘[a place] where young persons assembled’; Albert Hugh Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, English Place-Name Society, XXV (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), Part I: Introduction, Bibliography, The Elements A-IW, Maps, p. 93.

In other place-names, *cild* occurs in the genitive plural, like Chilton (Berkshire), from *cilda tūn* (*tūn* being an enclosure or farmstead); *cilda* is another form of the genitive plural *cildra* which formed in the late OE period. Smith suggests that this genitive plural means that ‘some kind of communal possession is implied’ and ‘[t]he most probable explanation is that such p.ns. denoted farms or plots of land allocated to younger sons [...]’ (ibid., p. 94).

²⁸⁵ ‘[C]ild; senses 1.a.iii, 1.d.i’, in ibid.; Izdebska, ‘Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens’, p. 55.

²⁸⁶ Bäck, *Synonyms*, p. 45.

similar to the earlier precept concerning how the youth must be given food and clothing. Perhaps more importantly, it might indeed imply a tender tone towards the *cildgeong* and thus support the interpretation that *cildgeong* was a kind form of address. However, this supposition cannot be firmly demonstrated, and it thus remains unclear how the term should be translated.

In the second half-line, after the poet has repeatedly emphasized the youth's dependence and inexperience through the verbs of teaching and the impersonal constructions throughout the maxim, the youth is finally allowed to gain personal agency as they reveal themselves to the world. Like at l. 46 above, the young person's action is again conveyed in the active voice. This half-line also introduces another aim for the youth's instruction: the youth must be ready to 'reveal [themselves]'. So far, the poet has stated that the youth needed to be taught and instructed so that they 'ha[d] good understanding' (*teala cunne*; l. 46b) and must be 'guided into [their] knowledge' (*on gewitte alæde*; l. 47b); these statements were taken to mean that teachers had to provide them with wisdom, but it is still unclear what this wisdom is. The poet suggests that the wisdom which young people have acquired throughout their youth must now be revealed: in this instance, *acyþan* seems to specifically mean 'to show oneself (for what one is)'.²⁸⁷ MacGregor Dawson observed that the aim of this maxim was to show that the young needed to be taught '[in order to] develop their characters'; however, according to this line, the specific aim of the young person's instruction, and of their youth in general, was to fulfill their self-realization as an individual.²⁸⁸ Consequently, this line also supports my translations of *teala cunn[an]* as 'to have good understanding or knowledge' and of *ge-wit* as 'knowledge' or 'understanding', as the youth has to gain 'knowledge', or

²⁸⁷ '[A]-cýþan; sense 2.b', in *DOE*.

²⁸⁸ Dawson, 'Structure', p. 16.

‘understanding’, of themselves. It thus seems that in this maxim wisdom was specifically understood as a personal identity developed during one’s youth.²⁸⁹ As Harbus notes, ‘wisdom is a necessary attribute in the development of the self [...]’.²⁹⁰

The end of the maxim is also significant: *þy sceal on þeode geþeon, / þæt he wese þristhycgende* (‘in this way he must grow up among [his] people, so that he should be firm of purpose’; l. 49). *Þy* likely refers to the young person’s newfound self-consciousness mentioned in the preceding verse. This is shown to lead to finding one’s place in society, which in turn entails a strengthening of one’s resolve. Besides *Maxims I*, the participle *þristhycgend* only occurs in *Christ I (The Advent Lyrics)* to describe the Virgin Mary’s determination to offer her maidenhood to God (l. 288b).²⁹¹ In both cases, the term seems to refer to inner firmness. These concluding lines appear to convey the idea that wisdom derives from one’s inner beliefs, which are developed through instruction and experience during one’s youth, but which need to be revealed to and shared with others within the community.

These lines might also answer the question regarding the identity of the young person’s teachers. I have earlier suggested that these might be secular teachers, clergymen, the young person’s parents, or the wisemen mentioned at l. 19. However, this concluding line of the maxim seems to imply, as Sánchez-Martí remarked, that the young person should be taught by the whole community, until they have found their place among them.²⁹² *[Þ]eod* here seems to indicate either a nation or a people, hence *on þeode* could

²⁸⁹ Kwistra, ‘Wintrum Frod’, pp. 148-9.

²⁹⁰ Harbus, *Life of the Mind*, p. 79.

²⁹¹ *DOEC*.

²⁹² Sánchez-Martí, ‘Age Matters’, p. 209.

be translated as ‘with [their] people’ or ‘in [their] nation’.²⁹³ I translated it as ‘with [their] people’, following Shippey and Bradley’s translations, as it might signify that it is the youth’s growing up within their community which allows them to become firm of purpose; the fact that wisdom has a social dimension was already suggested in the description of the wisemen and is further emphasized in the prologue (see 2.2).²⁹⁴ These lines would then provide an important lesson to the audience: everyone has to play a role in instructing the young. According to the depiction in this maxim, young people should be treated as an integral part of the community, first being taught, encouraged and disciplined, and then welcomed once they have developed their own personal identity.

MacGregor Dawson argues that these lines about youth should be understood in relation to the following maxim: *[s]tyran sceal mon strongum mode* (‘[a] strong mind must be steered’; l. 50).²⁹⁵ *Mod* could refer to memory, emotion, cognition, mood, and decision-making.²⁹⁶ However, here there appears to be an implication that ‘the mind is both powerful and inclined to waywardness’, hence perhaps this line means that the mind must be ruled by the self.²⁹⁷ This statement might have moral connotations such as *atemian* above (so, one must control one’s mind not to fall into sin), but a better interpretation might be that it reinforces the message of the previous line, as the injunction

²⁹³ ‘*[p]eod*; senses I and II’, in Bosworth-Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/31670](https://bosworthtoller.com/31670)> [accessed 16 September 2021] and ‘*on*; senses I.1 and I.5’, in *ibid.* <[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/24432](https://bosworthtoller.com/24432)> [accessed 16 September 2021].

²⁹⁴ Sánchez-Martí, ‘Age Matters’, p. 209. Bradley, in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 341, translates *on peode* as ‘in the community’ and Shippey, in *Poems of Wisdom*, p. 67, translates it as ‘among people’.

²⁹⁵ Dawson, ‘Structure’, p. 16.

²⁹⁶ Harbus, *Life of the Mind*, pp. 40-41.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

to restrain one's mind seems to recall the need to be 'firm of purpose'. This line, then, further emphasizes the importance of the self, so that while lines 45b-9 described how a young person should be taught discipline and self-awareness, the poet here explains how this self-awareness should be employed: it should control one's mind, meaning one's thoughts, emotion, disposition, and decisions.

This analysis of youth in lines 45b-9 has repeatedly suggested that they describe the young person's individual maturation in the course of their youth, as the *geong mon* is first introduced as inexperienced and needing instruction and discipline, then gradually gains agency, experience and wisdom, understood as a personal realization within society, becoming one who is 'firm of purpose'. The poet repeatedly conveys the idea that the young person needs time to mature and develop their own convictions, and while young people must be disciplined when necessary, older people also need to be patient and take care of the young until they are ready.

Youth, therefore, appears to be an important period of personal, moral and social growth, which seems to be described as a natural part of human development. Furthermore, it has been shown that this representation also has an important textual function, such as describing the development of the young person. By this description, the poet also shows the audience (that is, the community) how to teach the young properly, and he also conveys a specific idea of wisdom as personal realization within society, which is the result of the instruction and experiences gained during one's youth.²⁹⁸

This chapter has so far focused on the specific meaning of lines 45b-9; I now intend to determine whether youth might have a wider role in the poem. To do so, it is

²⁹⁸ Cf. lines 45b-9 in *Maxims* I with lines 15-6 in *Maxims* II, in which youth is not presented as a period of growth (as the young person does not mature) and is connected with heroic values.

necessary to turn to the prologue, to determine what the purpose of *Maxims I* might be, and then how lines 45b-9 could contribute to it.

2.2 The Prologue of *Maxims I*

The poem begins as a dialogue between the poet and the audience:

1 Frige mec frodum wordum!/ Ne læt þinne ferð onhælnē,
degol þæt þu deopost cunne!/ Nelle ic þe min dyrne gesecgan,
gif þu me þinne hygecræft hylest/ ond þine heortan geþohtas.

(Ask me with wise words!/ Do not let your mind [be] hidden,
keep hidden what you know most deeply!/ I do not wish to tell you of my secret
knowledge,
if you conceal your wisdom from me/ and the thoughts of your heart).

Neidorf observes that ‘the first three lines of *Maxims I* seem to function as the introduction for the entire poem’.²⁹⁹ The prologue could thus reveal what *Maxims I*, as a whole, is about. This should first be considered on its own; I then intend to compare it with my conclusions regarding youth in lines 45b-9, to determine whether the prologue can help to understand how youth is represented and employed in the maxim, and, subsequently, in what ways the maxim contributes to the purpose of the poem.

The poet seems to address the audience directly, as seen by the repeated use of imperatives like *frige*, *læt* or verbs in the second person present like *hylest*, the pronoun *þu* and the adjective *þin(n)e* (twice). The poet thus seems to create a close and mutual relationship with their hearers: as stated in ll. 2-3, the poet does not wish to share their knowledge unless the audience does the same.³⁰⁰ The verbs of speaking (*frige*, *gesecgan*) and the encouragements that the audience do not to keep their knowledge hidden or secret (*ne ... onhælnē*, *degol*), further stress that wisdom must be expressed.

²⁹⁹ Neidorf, ‘Date and Authorship’, p. 150.

³⁰⁰ Harbus, *Life of the Mind*, pp. 79-80.

In the next line, the poet then adds that wisdom must also be shared between men: *[g]leawe men sceolon gieddum wrixlan* ('[w]ise men must exchange maxims'; l. 4).³⁰¹ This line could also be taken as part of the introduction, as MacGregor Dawson considers it, since it seems to emphasize the same ideas as the earlier lines.³⁰² In particular, the verb *wrixlan* illustrates a 'reciprocal, mutual action [...]', which further illustrates that this poem is not simply about mere articulations of wisdom, but rather about mutual, explicit and verbal exchanges of knowledge, once again implying that wisdom had a social dimension.³⁰³ Therefore, it seems that *Maxims I* is a poem about the correct use of wisdom.

The poet's concern with wisdom is further suggested by their other lexical choices in these lines: for instance, the adjective *frod* occurs again in l. 1a. This had earlier been used to refer to the old wisemen (ll. 18-21), in its sense of 'old *and* wise', but here seems used in its general sense of 'wise', rather than as an age-term, as it refers to 'words', not individuals. According to Kwistra, in its meaning of 'wise', '*frod* is [...] concerned with the internal, the mental', rather than the physical.³⁰⁴ Harbus notes that the connection with the mind was a specific characteristic of wisdom in EME texts, because in OE literature

[w]isdom is conspicuously situated in the mind, and the mental faculty is repeatedly and explicitly referred to as both the venue of wisdom and as the tool which is required to generate personal meaning from the external phenomena of received truth.³⁰⁵

³⁰¹ Dawson, 'Structure', p. 15.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Harbus, *Life of the Mind*, p. 69; '[W]rixlan; sense III', in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* <[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/36681](https://bosworthtoller.com/36681)> [accessed 16 September 2021]. This idea is also expressed in other maxims in the poem, for instance, *[r]æd sceal mon secgan* ('[good] counsel must be spoken'; l. 168).

³⁰⁴ '[F]rod; sense 1.b'; Kwistra, 'Winter Frod', pp. 134, 147.

³⁰⁵ Harbus, *Life of the Mind*, pp. 66, 70, 71, 85 (p. 66).

This connection is also shown by the verb *cunnan* (l. 2a): according to the *DOE* in this instance it means ‘to know or understand a secret or mystery, delusion or dream [...]’.³⁰⁶ *Ferð* (‘mind, soul, spirit, heart’) and *hyge* (in *hygecræft*, ‘power of the mind’), can also refer generally to the mind, but the former can also indicate the ‘spirit’, while the latter can denote the ‘character’. Furthermore, Harbus notes that *hyge* could also indicate ‘the place of thought or intention’, though here it could also refer to ‘the thinking, rational part of the mind’.³⁰⁷ *Ferð*, instead, could additionally signify the ‘spiritual aspect of the mind, though it is the place of wisdom and resolution’, and can also mean ‘life’ and ‘human consciousness’.³⁰⁸ These examples all seem to suggest that wisdom was understood as an inner, mental knowledge. Like other terms in this poem, it is not clear whether these words should be considered in their generalized or specific senses. It might be that these terms refer to different ‘parts’, or faculties, of the mind, showing that wisdom was the result of the application of the mind in its entirety.³⁰⁹

The reference to the *heortan gepohtas* (‘thoughts of the heart’) can be explained by the fact that written evidence suggests that OE speakers tended to think that the mind resided in the breast, hence the heart was ‘the receptacle of the mind’ and was also deemed capable of thinking.³¹⁰ Finally, *dyrne* (‘something secret; secret knowledge [...]’) also seems to imply that wisdom was a mental capacity rather than a virtue or general knowledge.³¹¹ Thus, it appears that the prologue of *Maxims I* demonstrates that this is not

³⁰⁶ ‘[C]unnan; II.H.3’, in *DOE*.

³⁰⁷ Harbus, *Life of the Mind*, p. 47.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25; although some authors, like Ælfric, also believed that the mind was situated in the brain; see *ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

³¹¹ ‘[D]yrne’, in *DOE*.

only a wisdom poem, but also a poem ‘*about wisdom*’.³¹² Specifically, the poet seems to present wisdom as an inner knowledge that should be shared with others. However, he does not state what this knowledge is.

This analysis of the prologue might help to understand better some of the main conclusions drawn from the description of youth in lines 45b-9. The fact that the poet repeatedly exhorts the audience to express and share their wisdom in the prologue, for instance, recalls the idea that lines 45b-9 might have been intended to provide wisdom to the young: the maxim, then, is also about the need to share wisdom, as knowledge is passed down to the younger generation, and this is presented as essential for the personal development of the youths themselves. More explicitly, this might also be the reason why the young person is encouraged to reveal themselves; this is the same idea stated in the prologue, that one’s knowledge must not be kept hidden but must be revealed to others. Moreover, at the end of the maxim on youth the poet declares that the *cildgeong* must grow up among their people in order to become firm of purpose. The youth seem to be explicitly encouraged to share their wisdom, this time with their community, once again showing that wisdom could have a social dimension.

The emphasis on wisdom in the prologue also explains the importance of wisdom in the maxim, further proving that *Maxims I* are a poem about the correct use of wisdom. The prologue also first shows that wisdom is understood as an inner knowledge in this text, but the mental nature of wisdom is only vaguely alluded to in the maxim (for instance by *gewit*, which has cognitive connotations) until l. 48, when the poet states that the *cildgeong* must not be reproached until they can reveal themselves.³¹³ The need to show

³¹² Battles, ‘Towards a Theory’, p. 17.

³¹³ Harbus, *Life of the Mind*, p. 45.

oneself suggests that wisdom comes from within, but this is not clearly shown in the maxim, and can only be understood in relation to the prologue.

Conversely, lines 45b-9 might help to better understand the ideas expressed in the prologue. Indeed, by explaining to the audience how to impart wisdom to the young, the poet tells the audience how to realize the aims described in the prologue; in other words, while the poet begins the poem by stating that wisdom should be shared, in lines 45b-9 he explains one way to do so: by teaching, encouraging, disciplining and taking care of young people, until they are ready to reveal themselves to the world.³¹⁴

The maxim on youth also helps to understand better the conception of wisdom in the poem. Wisdom is introduced in the prologue as an inner, mental knowledge, although it is vague; it remains unclear in most of the maxim, being referred to either as ‘knowledge’ or ‘understanding’ (depending on one’s translation), but it is not stated of what. It only becomes clear what the poet means by wisdom when he declares that the young person must not be reproached until they can reveal themselves, as this implies that wisdom in this poem is understood as part of one’s personal identity, which is acquired during one’s youth and comes from within, but must be eventually expressed and shared with others. Thus, the prologue helps to explain the representation and function of youth in lines 45b-9, but also shows that youth had important textual functions and contributes to the purpose of *Maxims* I in several ways.

³¹⁴ I say ‘one way’ because l. 4 in the prologue and the description of the wisemen at ll. 18-21 suggest that wisdom should also be shared among and with wise people, but both this and the description of ll. 45b-9 seem presented as effective ways of expressing one’s knowledge.

2.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, it may now be seen that, in lines 45b-9, youth is understood as a period of growth, during which the young person is taught and encouraged to develop wisdom, understood as a personal identity, within his or her community. In the prologue, the poet also invites the audience to share their wisdom, that is, their identity, with others. Thus, the maxim realizes the aim of the prologue, as it shows one way in which the audience can share their wisdom with the young, by teaching it to them, and the young are in turn encouraged to share their wisdom with the community by revealing themselves to others. The maxim thus conveys a specific view of wisdom and youth and helps to clarify important points in the prologue.

This interpretation of youth is also found in other EME texts, which are considered in the following chapters, so that this analysis of youth in *Maxims I* could also help to recognize this representation of youth in other literary works.

The next chapter examines how hagiographers used the theme of youth to convey various Christian values, drawing upon the (presumably) common understanding of youth as a period of growth, as first exemplified in this chapter.

Chapter 3

Youth and Young People in Early Medieval English Hagiography

Hagiographical texts, by virtue of being one of the largest group of extant texts in the EME corpus, provide the majority of examples of young people, most of whom are saints.³¹⁵ This chapter focuses on three saints whose youths are explicitly described, to determine how youth is represented and employed in EME hagiography: Guthlac (in the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* and *Guthlac A*) and Chrysanthus and Daria (in Ælfric's 'Passion of Chrysanthus and His Wife Daria').³¹⁶ But before looking at the texts it is first necessary to provide an outline of the main features of hagiography, including its definition, purposes, conventions and audiences, in order to contextualize and understand better the descriptions of saintly youth discussed in this chapter.

In its simplest sense, 'hagiography' refers to the writing of saints' lives.³¹⁷ However, in the following analysis I borrow Delehaye's more complex definition of an 'hagiographic document' as any text featuring saints and 'aim[ed] at edification', which

³¹⁵ Other young people in saints' lives include individuals healed by the saints, like young Hwaetred in the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, or the immoral *cnihtas* who seek to marry a female saint, and young converts; the last two are mentioned in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*. See 'Vita Sancti Guthlaci Auctore Felice' (henceforth VSG), in *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, pp. 60-171 (ch. XLI, pp. 126-30), and LS I, pp. 170-82 ('Life of Saint Agnes', which contains an example of an immoral *cniht*); for young converts, see the heathen soldier in the 'Passion of Chrysanthus' below.

³¹⁶ VSG, pp. 60-171; 'Guthlac A', in *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*, pp. 83-107; 'The Passion of Chrysanthus and His Wife Daria', in LS II, pp. 378-99.

³¹⁷ Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head, 'Introduction', in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head (London, England: Sheed & Ward, 1995), pp. xiii-xliv (p. xvii).

was ‘inspired by religious devotion to the saints and intended to increase that devotion’.³¹⁸ Hagiography could have several aims: for instance, saints’ lives might be intended for entertainment, to establish or propagate the cult of a saint (as suggested by Delehaye), to strengthen the audience’s faith, or to show God’s power.³¹⁹ Nevertheless, two specific purposes seem prevalent in hagiographic texts and are shared by all works discussed in this chapter: providing moral and religious teachings, and demonstrating the saint’s sanctity.³²⁰

Concerning the former, this seems covered by Delehaye’s definition, as he says that saints’ lives were ‘aimed at edification’, but he does not clarify what he means by ‘edification’; other scholars, such as Donovan, Head and Noble, seem to agree that hagiography provided religious instruction, although their opinions differ regarding what this instruction entailed. According to Donovan, saints’ lives provided only knowledge of ‘salvation’s history and future’, rather than ‘exemplars of behaviour’, but she does not provide an example of her argument.³²¹ Yet, this point may be supported by Hurt’s study on Ælfric, in which he states that Ælfric’s *LS*, for instance, were meant, alongside the *Catholic Homilies*, to ‘provide a sound, systematic body of Christian literature for his country’ (although this was not their only purpose, as they were also meant for preaching,

³¹⁸ Hyppolite Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, trans. by Donald Attwater, With a Memoir of the Author by Paul Peeters and a New Introduction by Thomas O’Loughlin (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), p. 3.

³¹⁹ Leslie A. Donovan, ‘Introduction’, in *Women Saints’ Lives in Old English Prose. Translated from Old English with Introduction, Notes and Interpretative Essay*, ed. and trans. by Leslie A. Donovan (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), pp. 1-23 (p. 8); Rachel S. Anderson, ‘Saints’ Legends’, in *A History of Old English Literature*, ed. by Fulk and Cain, pp. 133-56 (p. 133).

³²⁰ The propagating of a cult is relevant to the *VSG*, while Ælfric is particularly concerned with strengthening the faith of his audience, as shown below.

³²¹ Donovan, ‘Introduction’, pp. 8, 10.

for example), hence why he presented ‘a broad survey of the major individual saints and kinds of saints honored by the faithful’.³²² In other words, Ælfric may have intended, among other things, to provide his audience with knowledge of the main saints of the English Church.

However, Noble and Head argue that saints’ lives also had a deliberate didactic and moral purpose: ‘[a]bove all else, such works instructed the faithful in the virtues of the Christian life’.³²³ They further add that

[i]t is important to keep in mind that the primary aim of the authors ... was not to compose a biographical record of the saint, but rather to portray the subject as an example of Christian virtue.³²⁴

They thus suggest that hagiography did, in fact, provide ‘exemplars of behaviour’ for the audience, although these examples may have been ‘almost unattainable’ for common Christians.³²⁵ For instance, Ælfric again, in ‘The Memory of the Saints’ (also in the *LS*), states that *[w]e magon niman gode bysne/ ... æt þam halgum þe þam hælende folgodon* (‘[w]e might take good examples/ ... from the saints who followed the Saviour’), seemingly supporting Noble and Head’s view that hagiography also had a moral purpose.³²⁶ Donovan’s and Noble and Head’s suggestions, then, are not mutually exclusive, and imply that hagiography was intended to teach both Christian doctrine and examples of Christian virtue.

The texts analyzed below also share a concern with demonstrating the saint’s holiness. Rollason remarks that ‘[t]he aim of the writers of hagiography was quite simply

³²² James Hurt, *Ælfric* (New York: Twayne Publishers), p. 61.

³²³ Noble and Head, ‘Introduction’, p. xvii.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. xvii, xviii.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

³²⁶ *LS I*, p. 336.

to establish that the person in question was really a saint ...'.³²⁷ This purpose is however more difficult to determine, because it is not clearly stated; for instance, Ælfric does not mention it in his Preface to the *LS*.³²⁸ Yet, it can be inferred from the frequent praises which the authors give to their saints, emphasizing their virtue both to encourage the audience to follow their example, and also to present them as ideals of Christian virtue. These two main purposes of hagiography need to be kept in mind when examining the following texts, as they explain why hagiographers chose to craft their saints' youths as they did; in other words, their descriptions might have been deliberate, to demonstrate their saints' holiness and to convey specific Christian teachings.

In order to show a saint's spiritual worthiness, the hagiographer would also draw on a set of established conventions; these were

[s]tories, themes, and motifs [which] were repeated from the life of one saint to that of another, each hagiographer adapting a traditional pool of material to the needs of the narrative at hand.³²⁹

For instance, saints were expected to perform miracles or have visions, which would prove their exceptional virtue and connection with God.³³⁰

In the above quotation Noble and Head make an important point: these ideas were not simply copied by different hagiographers, but adapted to the purposes and audiences of their works. Therefore, understanding how Felix, the *Guthlac A*-poet and Ælfric engaged with hagiographic conventions is also useful to understand how they described and employed their saints' youths.

³²⁷ David Rollason, 'The Concept of Sanctity in the Early Lives of Saint Dunstan', in *St. Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult*, ed. by Nigel Ramsey, Margaret Sparks, Tim Tatton-Brown (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1992), pp. 261-72 (p. 263).

³²⁸ *LS I*, pp. 1-6.

³²⁹ Noble and Head, 'Introduction', p. xviii.

³³⁰ Rollason, 'The Conception of Sanctity', p. 264.

Authors were also concerned with audiences, since hagiographers would provide Christian precepts in accordance with the perceived needs of their listeners and readers, as Ælfric shows in the Preface to the *LS*, dedicated to his patrons Æthelweard and Æthelmær.³³¹ One should therefore pay attention to how a hagiographer's descriptions and values appear to relate to their audiences, as this might also help to understand the purpose and meaning of a saint's youth. The audiences of the texts analyzed in this chapter are thus also considered, when possible, in relation to the teachings they may have gained from the hagiographers' depictions of their saints' youths.

This brief discussion has outlined several points of interest which need to be considered in relation to the study of saints' youths: firstly, these may have been meant to convey specific spiritual teachings, in accordance with the didactic purpose of hagiography, and to provide knowledge of Christian doctrine and history; moreover, the description of youth may also have been meant to contribute to demonstrating a saint's sanctity. Hagiographers also engaged with several conventions, which they may have employed for their own uses, and their descriptions may have been addressed to a specific audience, which could thus explain why a saint's youth was presented in a certain way. These features help to contextualize the representations of the saintly youths of Guthlac, Chrysanthus and Daria. These are now considered in turn, beginning with the earliest work, the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* (3.1).

3.1 *The Vita Sancti Guthlaci*

Guthlac (c. 674-714) was a Mercian saint who, after spending most of his youth as a warrior, left human companionship to choose a life of asceticism in the fens of Crowland. Guthlac's life was narrated in a Latin *VSG* by an hagiographer called Felix and in an

³³¹ *LS* I, p. 4.

anonymous OE translation, which describe the saint's life from his birth to his death, and his post-mortem miracles.³³² Two poems regarding Guthlac were also composed: *Guthlac A*, included in the tenth-century *Exeter Book*, which recounts his hermitage at Crowland; and another titled *Guthlac B*, also included in the *Exeter Book*, which instead deals with Guthlac's death. Finally, Guthlac is the subject of Vercelli homily XXIII, and is mentioned in the Old English *Martyrology*, the eleventh-century *Resting Places of the Saints*, pre- and post-Conquest chronicles, and later medieval versions of the VSG, including the 'Harley Roll'.³³³

Guthlac's youth is mentioned in the two *Vitae* and *Guthlac A*. The latter is discussed in the next section, while this analysis examines chapters I-XXIII of the Latin VSG, which describe Guthlac's birth, childhood and youth, until he decides to take holy vows and enter the monastery of Repton (chs. XX-XXIII, pp. 84-6). I also consider the OE translation of the *Vita* with regards to Guthlac's youth (chs. I-II), to compare the two texts and determine if and why there are any differences in how Guthlac's youth is described.

Little is known about Felix; he was likely a monk, although it is not clear whether he was an East Anglian or hailed from the Continent, and nothing is known about his life or possible other works.³³⁴ Felix dedicated his work to King Ælfwald of East Anglia (r.

³³² VSG; *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Life of Saint Guthlac, Hermit of Crowland. Originally Written in Latin, by Felix (Commonly Called) of Crowland. Now First Printed from a MS. in the Cottonian Library, With a Translation and Notes*, ed. and trans. by Charles Wycliffe Goodwin (London: John Russell Smith, 1848).

³³³ See Colgrave, VSG, pp. 19-25 and Jane Roberts, 'An Inventory of Early Guthlac Materials', *Mediaeval Studies*, 32 (1970), 193-233 <[HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.1484/J.MS.2.306081](https://doi.org/10.1484/J.MS.2.306081)> [accessed 25 October 2021].

³³⁴ Colgrave, VSG, pp. 15-6; N. J. Higham, 'Guthlac's *Vita*, Mercia and East Anglia in the First Half of the Eighth Century', in *Æthelbald and Offa: Two Eighth Century Kings of Mercia. Papers*

713-49; 'Prologue', p. 60); the dates of Ælfwald's kingship, together with the fact that Guthlac is not mentioned in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (completed in 731), led Colgrave to believe that the VSG was composed between 730 and 740.³³⁵

Concerning the purpose of the text, Higham suggests that the VSG was a failed attempt to strengthen Guthlac's cult in East Anglia, while Cavill argues that Felix used the *Vita* to curry favour with both King Ælfwald of East Anglia and King Æthelbald of Mercia and to propagate the cult of the saint in both kingdoms.³³⁶ Both are intriguing hypotheses, as they might mean that Felix had to provide a virtuous depiction of Guthlac to encourage his devotion, and invite the question of how Guthlac's youth was intended to contribute to this positive portrayal.

Scholars have also debated what the VSG could reveal about Guthlac's early cult and whether the VSG was addressed only to King Ælfwald (as the text suggests), or also to King Æthelbald of Mercia and Abess Ecgburh of Repton (where Guthlac receives his tonsure), both of whom appear in the VSG (Æthelbald in ch. XLIX, pp. 148-50 and ch. LII, pp. 164-6, and Ecgburh in ch. XLVIII, pp. 146-8).³³⁷ These differing scholarly views are unlikely to ever be fully reconciled, but however one chooses to interpret Felix's audience, it should be noted that if Felix wished to dedicate his work also to Æthelbald

from a Conference Held in Manchester in 2000, ed. by David Hill, Margaret Worthington, BAR British Series 383 (Manchester: Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, 2005), pp. 85-90 (p. 85); Jane Roberts and Alan Thacker, 'Introduction to Guthlac's Life and Cult', in *Guthlac: Crowland's Saint*, ed. by Jane Roberts and Alan Thacker (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2020), pp. xv-xlvi (p. xvii).

³³⁵ Colgrave, VSG, p. 19.

³³⁶ Higham, 'Guthlac's *Vita*', pp. 85-90, see esp. p. 89; Paul Cavill, 'The Naming of Guthlac', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 59 (2015), 25-47 (pp. 38-9).

³³⁷ Cavill, 'The Naming of Guthlac', pp. 38-40, 42, 44; Higham, 'Mercia and East Anglia', pp. 86, 89; Jane Roberts and Alan Thacker, 'Introduction', in *Guthlac: Crowland's Saint*, p. xxiv.

and Ecgburh, he would have mentioned their names alongside King Ælfwald in the prologue, which he does not do.

On the contrary, Felix only states that Ælfwald ordered him to compose the VSG, and that after finishing the text Felix presented it to him *coram* ('publicly'; 'Prologue', p. 60). As Higham observed, the adverb implies that Felix gave the VSG to the King in the presence of his advisers: therefore, the textual evidence seems to suggest that Felix wrote his text only for Ælfwald and his court, as a means to promote Guthlac's cult in East Anglia; every other hypothesis must remain speculation.³³⁸ Subsequently, the following analysis considers how the representation of Guthlac's youth was used to present him as a worthy saint in the eyes of an aristocratic and educated audience such as King Ælfwald and his court.³³⁹

Guthlac's youth in the VSG was examined by Magennis, Meaney, Hall, and more recently by Bacola. Magennis provided an examination of the saint as *miles Christi* in Ælfric's *LS*, in which he briefly discusses the VSG, and calls Felix '[a]n example of an Anglo-Saxon hagiographer struggling to present the life of a saint who had also been a warrior'.³⁴⁰ According to Magennis, Felix was 'uncomfortable' in presenting Guthlac as a rightful yet fierce warrior, a portrayal which was (seemingly) at odds with his virtuous childhood and future sainthood; furthermore, in the case of other warrior saints, like Saint Martin, there is no evidence that they committed violent acts, unlike Guthlac.³⁴¹ Meaney and Hall also remark that Felix was 'uncomfortable' with Guthlac's past as a warrior,

³³⁸ Higham, 'Mercia and East Anglia', p. 85.

³³⁹ I call the audience 'educated' since they were presumably able to understand Felix's Latin.

³⁴⁰ Hugh Magennis, 'Warrior Saints, Warfare, and the Hagiography of Ælfric of Eynsham', *Traditio* 56 (2001) <[HTTPS://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/27832000](https://www.jstor.org/stable/27832000)> [accessed 25 October 2021], 27-51 (p. 27).

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-9, ff..

although Hall is more ambivalent, as he also notes that Felix praises some of young Guthlac's actions.³⁴² Bacola instead suggests that Guthlac's youth was meant to convey his 'sacrifice' in rejecting his 'successful' career as a warrior in favour of becoming a hermit (but this consideration does not seem to take into account that Felix heavily foreshadowed Guthlac's saintly destiny in the earlier chapters), or to present him as a saint with whom a secular audience could identify themselves (a view with which I agree, as I explain below), and finally that it could convince the audience to repent (an intriguing hypothesis, although I propose a different interpretation). However, her points could be developed further.³⁴³ Scholars have, therefore, proposed different ways to understand why Guthlac's youth was included in the VSG. My analysis aims to provide a possible answer by evaluating whether Felix was indeed 'uncomfortable' with Guthlac's time as a warrior, or whether Guthlac's youth may have contributed to the purposes of the VSG; and if so, how.

It seems more difficult to determine the aims and audiences of the eleventh-century anonymous OE prose translation of Felix's *Vita*, preserved in British Museum MS Cotton Vespasian D xxi (fols. 18-40); this text was itself based on an earlier Mercian translation of the *Vita* from the Alfredian period, which is no longer extant.³⁴⁴ Although the author occasionally omits or changes some of the details, it describes the same events as the Latin source.

³⁴² Alaric Hall, 'Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity: Tradition, Innovation, and Saint Guthlac', in *Images of Medieval Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson*, ed. by Debra Higgs Strickland, Visualising the Middle Ages, I (Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 207-35 (pp. 210-3); Audrey Meaney, 'Felix's *Life of Saint Guthlac*: History or Hagiography?', in *Æthelbald and Offa*, ed. by Hill, Worthington, pp. 75-84 (p. 76); Magennis, 'Warrior Saints', pp. 28-9.

³⁴³ Meredith Bacola, '"Vacuas in Auras Recessit"? Reconsidering the Relevance of Embedded Heroic Material in the Guthlac Narrative', in *Guthlac: Crowland's Saint*, ed. by Roberts and Thacker, pp. 72-85 (pp. 74-6).

³⁴⁴ Jane Roberts, 'An Inventory of Early Guthlac Materials', *Mediaeval Studies*, 32 (1970), 193-233 <<https://doi.org/10.1484/J.MS.2.306081>> [accessed 30 January 2023], p. 202 and

The OE version has generally been considered, for instance by Colgrave, a faithful but less complex retelling of the original and has thus been neglected by scholars.³⁴⁵ Only Roberts devoted some attention to this work: she focused on its orthography and vocabulary, noting that while the former showed that the text was certainly West-Saxon, the lexicon also presented many Anglian forms, concluding that the work could be dated around the tenth century, but was not composed by a West-Saxon.³⁴⁶ Moreover, Colgrave also remarked on ‘the unusual skill of the translator’, while its editor, Goodwin, critically notes that the Anglo-Saxon redactor ‘sometimes quite mistakes the sense of the original’.³⁴⁷ Roberts seemed to agree with Colgrave, as she suggested that the Anglo-Saxon version was ‘edited ... carefully, seeking to eliminate out-of-date or unfamiliar words and probably at the same time cutting out passages from the copy-text’.³⁴⁸

The analysis of the functions of youth in this text demonstrates that Colgrave and Roberts’s assessments are more accurate than Goodwin’s. In fact, it is shown that most, if not all, of the changes in the OE *Life of Saint Guthlac* can be explained by supposing that the work was aimed at a different audience than its source, rather than because of the supposed lack of skill on the part of the redactor. This can be inferred by the fact that the translator chose to use the vernacular, which might imply that their audience was at least mostly non-Latinate, unlike Felix’s. It is also not clear why such a translation was undertaken in the first place; a possible interpretation might be that the translator, like

‘Hagiography and Literature: The Case of Guthlac of Crowland’, in *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. by Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 2001), pp. 69-86 (p. 80).

³⁴⁵ Colgrave, *Felix’s Life of Saint Guthlac*, p. 19; Lee, ‘Healing Words’, p. 261.

³⁴⁶ Jane Roberts, ‘The Old English Prose Translation of Felix’s *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*’, in *Studies in Earlier English Prose: Sixteen Original Contributions*, ed. by Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), pp. 365-75.

³⁴⁷ Colgrave, *Felix’s Life of Saint Guthlac*, p. 19; Goodwin, *Life*, p. iv.

³⁴⁸ Roberts, ‘Hagiography and Literature’, p. 80.

Felix, was also interested in re-introducing, or strengthening, the cult of Saint Guthlac in their own time, although it is currently impossible to prove.

In order to understand Guthlac's youth it is first necessary to consider his birth and childhood, as they are necessary to understand and contextualize it. As Hill notes, *[p]ueritia* [childhood] and *adolescentia* ... were essential and powerful tools in the hands of the hagiographer of Anglo-Saxon male saints'.³⁴⁹ In her chapter, she demonstrates this connection between the childhood and youth of male saints, both of which are employed to convey important values and examples to the audience; hence, a saint's childhood also needs to be analyzed. The following analysis is divided into two parts, one concerning Guthlac's infancy and early years (2.1.1), and the other focusing on his youth and maturation (2.1.2).

3.1.1 *Guthlac's Birth and Childhood*

Felix begins the account of Guthlac's life with a description of his youthful parents, Penwalh and Tette. This seems important, as it provides a first description of youth, and the portrayal of Guthlac's parents may also contribute to the purposes of the text:

Itaque cum iuvenilis aevi viridante vigore florebat, adoptata sibi coetanea virgine inter nobilium puellarum agmina, condecens nuptiarum legibus uxorem duxit, vocabulo Tette, quae a primaevae rudimenti sui diebus in puellari verecundia vivere studebat

(So when he was flourishing in the blooming vigour of youth, he took for himself a wife, a maiden of similar age, among the multitude of noble virgins, according to the seemly laws of marriage, by the name of Tette, who since the youthful beginning of her days had desired to live in maidenly modesty; ch. III, p. 74).

³⁴⁹ Hill, 'Childhood', p. 161.

Penwalh and Tette's youth seems conveyed by the adjectives *iuvenilis* and *puellaris*, which were used for young men and women, respectively.³⁵⁰ This first depiction of youth appears to be a positive one: for instance, Felix underscores the *vigor* ('strength') of Penwalh's youth through a metaphoric use of the terms *viridans* (from *viridare*, 'to become green') and *florere* ('to bloom'), which imply a connection between youth and Spring; *florere* can also mean 'to be in the flower of one's youth', further supporting this

³⁵⁰ 'Juvenilis; senses 2 and 3', in *DMLBS* <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/JUVENILIS](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/juvenilis)> [accessed 25 October 2021]; '[p]uellaris; sense 2', in *ibid.*

<[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/PUELLARIS](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/puellaris)> [accessed 25 October 2021].

Although both the *DMLBS* and Lewis and Short's *Latin Dictionary* translate *juvenilis* as 'youthful', and I use the recommended translation, Lewis and Short's *Latin Dictionary* states that *juvenilis* is connected with *juventus*, which has been seen, in sections 1.2 and 1.3, to refer more properly to adulthood, not youth, whereas *puellaris* may refer to a young woman or a girl (*puella*), hence it is another ambiguous term. See 'juvenilis; sense I', in *A Latin Dictionary* <<https://logeion.uchicago.edu/iuvenilis>> [accessed 25 February 2023] and 'puellaris', in *ibid.* <<https://logeion.uchicago.edu/puellaris>> [accessed 25 February 2023].

It is also worth noting that many saints' parents are elderly, hence the youth of Guthlac's parents (assuming they are indeed portrayed as young and not as adults, as their portrayal is ambiguous) stands out. See for instance Leoba's parents in Rudolf, 'Vita S. Leoba', in *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany: Being the Lives of SS. Willibrord, Boniface, Sturm, Leoba, Lebuin, Together With the Hodeporicon of St. Willibald and a Selection from the Correspondence of Saint Boniface*, ed. and trans. by T. H. Talbot (London: Sheed and Ward, 1981), pp. 205-29 (pp. 210-1), cited in Porck, *Old Age*, p. 130, footnote n° 111. See also Machutus's parents in *The Old English Life of Machutus*, ed. by David Yerkes (Toronto; London: Published in Association with the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto by University of Toronto Press, 1984), 3, ll. 17-8, cited in *ibid.* Elderly parents are also found in the Bible, for example Abraham and Sarah or Isaac and Rebecca (*ibid.*).

Perhaps Felix meant to illustrate a comparison or contrast between Guthlac and his parents, but given that their youths are described ambiguously, it is not clear what ideas the hagiographer meant to convey.

interpretation.³⁵¹ This connection seems here employed as an explanation for Penwalh's decision to marry, which Felix seems to present as natural for people of his age. In the case of Tette, her youth seems instead used to demonstrate her modesty. The description of Guthlac's parents implies that both behaved in accordance with ideal youthful conduct, so that youth acquires a number of positive values in this first occurrence, which are then re-considered through the example of Guthlac. Moreover, their virtuous representation may perhaps also provide a model of youthful behaviour for the lay audience.

The positive portrayal of Penwalh and Tette could have also provided a positive depiction of their son. Saints' parents are often presented as moral paragons in hagiography, in order to further demonstrate the saintliness of their children: for instance, in Ælfric's *LS*, Julian, Æthelthryth, and Euphrasia (or Euphrosyne) are all born of noble and devout parents, and so is Dunstan.³⁵² This was a long-established commonplace in hagiography: Antony's parents, in Athanasius's *Life of Antony*, were also said to be faithful Christians and of good family.³⁵³ Thus, Penwalh and Tette follow the conventional positive portrayal of saints' parents, as they fulfil their social obligations to marry and reproduce, while also possessing excellent qualities, such as Penwalh's vigour, Tette's modesty, and their nobility. Felix's depiction of Guthlac's parents seems therefore deliberate and it can be assumed that it was meant to foreshadow their son's virtuousness.

³⁵¹ 'Florere; sense 2', in *ibid.* <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/FLOREERE](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/florere)> [accessed 25 October 2021]; 'Viridare; sense 1', in *ibid.* <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/VIRIDARE](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/viridare)> [accessed 25 October 2021].

³⁵² 'B., *Vita S. Dunstani*', in *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, ed. by Michael Winterbottom and Michael Lapidge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), pp. 1-109 (pp. 10-12); *LS* I, pp. 90, 432; *LS* II, pp. 334-6.

³⁵³ 'Life of Antony by Athanasius', in *Early Christian Lives*, ed. and trans. by Carolinne White (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. 3-70 (p. 8).

Furthermore, Guthlac descends from the royal house of Mercia through his father, and his mother also belonged to nobility (ch. III, p. 74), thus making him royalty. Many saints recorded in EME texts are of noble or royal blood, like Chrysanthus (see below), Eugenia, Maurus, Julian, and Æthelthryth, among others.³⁵⁴ Noble and Head suggest that this might be because it was ‘assumed that spiritual virtue could not be easily developed by those who did not also possess illustrious lineage’, while Hill puts forward the hypothesis that perhaps the greater was the saint’s nobility and wealth, the greater a sacrifice it would have been to leave them behind, which would have emphasized his or her virtuousness.³⁵⁵ Guthlac likely really was highborn, but his illustrious ancestry nevertheless might have been employed by Felix to prove his sanctity and strengthen his cult.

The same can be said regarding the portents announcing Guthlac’s birth: Felix mentions the *caelistis oraculi portentum* (‘omen of a heavenly announcement’; ch. IV, p. 74) when Tette is in childbirth, which seems to demonstrate Guthlac’s future saintliness. This divine ‘sign’ is then described as a gold-red hand which appeared in the sky in front of Penwalh and Tette’s house (ch. V, p. 74). Felix states that it indicates the *futuræ indolis infantulum* (‘infant of future promise’; *ibid.*); the meaning of the portent is also declared by a woman who cries that *futuræ gloriæ huic mundo natus est homo* (‘a man destined for future glory has been born in this world’; ch. VIII, p. 76). Felix also mentions that some men who witnessed this prodigy recognized it as a sign of the infant’s *perpetuæ beatitudinis* (‘everlasting bliss’; *ibid.*). Such miraculous predictions of the birth of saints are common in hagiography and, as Hill has shown, were meant to show that the saint

³⁵⁴ LS I, pp. 24-6, 48, 90, 432; Noble and Head, ‘Introduction’, p. xxxiv. See footnote n° 32 herein.

³⁵⁵ Joyce Hill, ‘Childhood in the Lives of Anglo-Saxon Saints’, in *Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. by Irvine and Rudolf, pp. 146-47; Noble and Head, ‘Introduction’, p. xxxiv.

was already chosen by God before being born, but Felix repeatedly points out Guthlac's holy destiny when describing his conception and birth, thus encouraging the audience to believe that Guthlac will smoothly fulfill his destiny.³⁵⁶ Felix thus continues to strengthen the audience's expectations regarding Guthlac's saintly fate, as God has already predicted Guthlac's attainment of sainthood.

These expectations regarding Guthlac's destiny are further supported, and seemingly proven correct, in Felix's description of Guthlac's childhood. Indeed, as Joyce Hill remarks, '[t]he use of the saint's childhood to mark him out as chosen by God is of course a commonplace of hagiography', hence Guthlac's childhood is employed to further prove his worthiness of sanctity.³⁵⁷ Firstly, Guthlac is named, and his name is explained as *belli munus* ('the gift of war'; ch. X, p. 78), which is another demonstration of his spiritual destiny:

[Q]uia ille cum vitiis bellando munera aeternae beatitudinis cum triumphali infula perennis vitae percepisset

([B]ecause by fighting against vices he would receive the rewards of eternal happiness with the triumphal fillet of perpetual life; *ibid.*).³⁵⁸

The following description of Guthlac's childhood seems to follow the predictions made before his birth. Guthlac is baptized *divino gubernante numine* ('under the authority of divine will'; ch. XI, p. 78), and Felix then explains that *infans mirae indolentiae nobilibus antiquorum disciplinis aulis in paternis inbuebatur* ('this infant of wonderful disposition was instructed in the noble teachings of the ancients in his father's court'; *ibid.*). Wieland, in his study of the functions of orality in the VSG, observes that while it is not altogether clear what these 'teachings' entailed, it is very likely that they included 'heroic tales of the past', as shown by the similar descriptions Felix provides when Guthlac becomes a

³⁵⁶ Colgrave, VSG, p. 177; Hill, 'Childhood', p. 145.

³⁵⁷ Hill, 'Childhood', p. 142.

³⁵⁸ On the significance of Guthlac's name, see Cavill, 'The Naming of Guthlac', pp. 25-47.

warlike young man and when he has his spiritual realization (see below). Indeed, these ‘heroic tales’ will have an essential role in Guthlac’s youth.³⁵⁹

Evidence suggests that listening to heroic songs was part of the education of young nobles: for instance, King Alfred himself, according to Asser, was noted to be an avid listener to poems and would easily memorize them, which Asser uses to show that Alfred had possessed his proverbial love of wisdom since boyhood. His natural proclivity for learning is famously shown in the scene in which his mother promises to give a book of English poems to the first of the princes who memorizes it, which Alfred immediately does.³⁶⁰ These poems were thus considered important for the intellectual and cultural development of young noblemen in Early Medieval England. In the case of Felix’s VSG, this description of lay aristocratic education seems to contribute to describing Guthlac as the perfect child, but it also allows Felix to present him as an ideal saint for King Ælfwald and his court, who would, arguably, have received a similar education.³⁶¹

Felix then repeatedly praises Guthlac’s perfect behaviour in his childhood:

Igitur transcens infantiae suae temporibus, cum fari pueriliter temtabat, nullius molestiae parentibus nutricibusve seu coetanis parvulorum coetibus fuit. Non puerorum lascivias, non garrula matronarum deliramenta, non vanas vulgi fabulas, non ruricularum non bardigiosos vagitus, non falsidicas paratisorum fribulas, non variorum volucrum diversos crocitus, ut adsolet illa aetas, imitabatur

³⁵⁹ Gernot Wieland, ‘Aures Lectoris: Orality and Literacy in Felix’s *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*’, *The Journal of Medieval Latin*, 7 (1997), 168-77 (p. 172)
<[HTTP://WWW.BREPOLSONLINE.NET.EZPROXY.NOTTINGHAM.AC.UK/DOI/PDF/10.1484/J.JML.2.304432](http://www.brepolsonline.net.ezproxy.nottingham.ac.uk/doi/pdf/10.1484/J.JML.2.304432)> [accessed 25 October 2021].

³⁶⁰ ‘Asser’s Life of King Alfred’, in *Alfred the Great: Asser’s Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources, Translated With an Introduction and Notes by Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge*, ed. and trans. by Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp. 66-110 (chs. 22 and 23, pp. 74-5).

³⁶¹ Crawford, ‘Childhood and Adolescence’, in *Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. by Irvine and Rudolf, pp. 29-30. Crawford uses Guthlac himself to support the idea that listening to heroic poetry would be an important part of children’s education in Early Medieval England, which would inform their worldview, as Guthlac proves in his youth.

(Therefore as he passed from the time of his infancy, when he tried to speak childishly, he was of no trouble to his parents or nurses or to the bands of children of his own age. He did not imitate the jesting of the children, nor the chattering ravings of the matrons, nor the empty tales of the common people, nor the bardish screams of the rustics, nor the false triflings of parasites, nor the different croaks of the various birds, as that age is accustomed to; ch. XII, p. 78).

This portrayal appears to contrast Guthlac's biological age with his spiritual maturity, and Guthlac is presented as a conventional example of the Classical topos of the *puer senex*, according to which a child is endowed with wisdom beyond his years.³⁶² Hill seems to correct to be correct when she points out that in this depiction, Felix highlights Guthlac's virtuousness by describing 'what [he] does not do, coupled with an almost idealized statement of his virtues', which also allows the hagiographer to criticize common behaviour, and therefore provide another ideal model for the audience.³⁶³

Felix strengthens his positive depiction of Guthlac, remarking that he was *[e]ximia sagacitate pollens, hilari facie, sincera mente, mansueto animo, simplici vultu* ('rich in exceptional perception, cheerful appearance, pure mind, tame soul, sincere countenance'; ch. XIII, p. 78). He then provides another portrayal, this time focusing on Guthlac's behaviour, adding that he was

in pietate parentibus, in oboedientia senioribus, in dilectione conlactaneis, neminem seducens, neminem increpans, neminem scandalizans, nulli malum pro malo reddens, aequanimis utebatur

(respectful to his parents, obedient to his elders, affectionate to his foster siblings, enticing no one away, reproving no one, was used to never tempting anyone to evil, never paying back evil for evil, always tranquil; ch. XIV, p. 78).

³⁶² On the topos of the *puer senex*, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. from the German by Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), pp. 98-101. Curtius observes that the topos 'becomes a hagiographic cliché' in the medieval period (*ibid.*, p. 100); some examples of other *pueri senes* in EME literature are provided below. See also Barber, 'Alcuin and the Student Life-Cycle', p. 95.

³⁶³ Hill, 'Childhood', p. 142.

Thus, Felix continues to describe Guthlac in accordance with the topos of the *puer senex*, and seems to emphasize his childhood virtuousness to foreshadow his sanctity. He then writes:

Erat enim in ipso nitor spiritalis luminis radescens, ut per omnia omnibus, quid venturus esset, monstraretur

(In fact in him the spiritual light was so bright, that it was evident to all in all things what he would be; ch. XV, p. 80).

Therefore, Guthlac's childhood behaviour, like the portents before his birth, again serves to mark him as chosen by God: he is repeatedly described as unique and more mature than his peers, and occasionally his elders as well. It would seem that, while his parents had been depicted positively because they were fulfilling common expectations regarding young men and women, Guthlac by contrast demonstrates his uniqueness by not behaving as expected of people his age.

Saintly children are often described in similar ways in EME hagiography, like Saint Cuthbert, who at first seems a normal child, if more skillful than his peers, as he takes part in the same games as the other children, but at the age of eight he is reproached by a three-year-old child who condemns his childish behaviour as unfit for a future bishop and saint.³⁶⁴ Cuthbert's portrayal thus shows that most saints were supposed to demonstrate their sanctity by displaying uncommon maturity and wisdom, in accordance with their spiritual age, not their biological one.

This tendency is also found in other saints' lives: for instance, the description of Guthlac's childhood is very similar to Wilfrid's, whose birth was also foretold by a heavenly sign (an illusion of his parents' house on fire) and whose behaviour as a child

³⁶⁴ 'Vita Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Beda', in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life. Text, Translation and Notes*, ed. and trans. by Bertam Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 141-308 (ch. I, pp. 154-8 and ch. II, 158-60).

is described by Eddius Stephanus as perfect, unlike other boys'.³⁶⁵ Similarly, Saint Agnes, at thirteen years of age, is said to be 'childish (*cildisc*) in years, but old (*ealdisc*) in mind'.³⁶⁶ Other examples of saintly children include Saint Benedict, Birinus, Kenelm, Rumwold, and Martin.³⁶⁷ These descriptions attest to a tradition according to which saintly children demonstrated their wisdom and faith at an early age, or were expected to, in accordance with the topos of the *puer senex*, and seem to show how Felix appropriated this hagiographic convention to gain support for Guthlac's cult.

As a child, then, Guthlac repeatedly demonstrates his suitability for sainthood, and Felix seems to repeatedly assure the audience that he will indeed become a saint. Yet, despite these continuous references to his future holiness, Guthlac's behaviour radically changes when he becomes a young man.

3.1.2 *Guthlac's Youth*

Once Guthlac reaches youth, he is suddenly inspired to become a warrior, and spends nine years subduing his enemies before experiencing a religious re-awakening and rediscovering his saintly destiny. As mentioned above, scholarly views regarding Guthlac's youth, by Hall, Magennis and Meaney, have been rather critical, as they all

³⁶⁵ *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus. Texts, Translation and Notes*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 4-7.

³⁶⁶ *LS* I, p. 170.

³⁶⁷ 'Life of Benedict by Gregory the Great', in *Early Christian Lives*, ed. and trans. by White, pp. 161-204 (p. 165); 'Life of Martin of Tours by Sulpicius Severus', in *Early Christian Lives*, ed. and trans. by White, pp. 129-59 (pp. 136-7); 'Vita S. Birini', in *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives: Vita S. Birini, Vita et Miracula S. Kenelmi and Vita S. Rumwoldi*, ed. and trans. by Rosalind Love (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 1-47 (pp. 2-5); 'Vita et Miracula Santi Kenelmi', in *ibid.*, pp. 49-89 (pp. 54-5); 'Vita S. Rumwoldi', in *ibid.*, pp. 91-115 (pp. 98-101, ff.).

note that Felix was ‘uncomfortable’ with Guthlac’s youth, although Hall points out that Felix also praises young Guthlac (see below).³⁶⁸ This ‘discomfort’ which these scholars repeatedly emphasize seemingly derives from the fact that as a future saint, Guthlac was not supposed to commit violent acts or shed blood. I intend to reconsider Guthlac’s youth to determine why, then, Felix chose to include this passage, and how it might have contributed to Felix’s aims of strengthening Guthlac’s cult and demonstrating his holiness to King Ælfwald and his court.

Felix describes Guthlac’s youth thus:

Igitur cum adolescentiae vires increvissent, et iuvenili in pectore egregius dominandi amor ferveret, tunc valida pristinorum heroum facta reminiscens, veluti ex sopore evigilatus, mutata mente, adgregatis satellitum turmis, sese in arma convertit

(Now when his youthful strength had grown, and an excellent desire to command began to boil in his young breast, remembering the noble deeds of ancient heroes, as though woken from sleep, he changed his disposition and after gathering troops of followers he took up arms; ch. XVI, p. 80).

At first, the reason for this change of behaviour is not clear, as Felix only explains it as Guthlac *mutata mente* (‘having changed his disposition’; ch. XVI, p. 80) and as having a sudden realization which is compared to awakening from sleep (ibid.).³⁶⁹ However, a more careful consideration suggests that the cause might be biological. The above passage seems to imply that Guthlac took up arms after experiencing a ‘desire to command’ and a recollection of the deeds of ancient heroes; but these in turn occur when Guthlac becomes a young man (after his *adolescentiae vires* have increased, says Felix), hence they are presented as a natural consequence of entering the phase of youth. While Guthlac’s behaviour was exceptional as a child, then, he now seems to be behaving as

³⁶⁸ Hall, ‘Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity’, p. 210; Meaney, ‘Felix’s Life of Saint Guthlac’, p. 76; Magennis, ‘Warrior Saints’, p. 28.

³⁶⁹ Hall, ‘Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity’, p. 210; Magennis, ‘Warrior Saints’, p. 28; Meaney, ‘Felix’s *Life of Guthlac*’, p. 76.

expected of a young person. Thus, in this instance it seems that youth was understood as mentally, spiritually, and biologically different from childhood.

When Felix's description of Guthlac's youth is compared with the OE translation, the two depictions seem similar: the translator mentions that Guthlac's

mægen ... weox and [he] gestipode on his geogoðe, þa gemunde he þa strengan dæda
þara unmana and þara woruld-fulmena

(strength waxed and [he] became strong in his youth, then he remembered the mighty
deeds of the ancient heroes of the world; *Life*, ch. II, p. 12).

This is not a wholly faithful translation, however, as Felix referred to Guthlac's youth by mentioning his *adulescentiae vires* ('youthful strength') and *iuvēnili ... pectore* ('youthful ... breast'), while the OE author clarifies that Guthlac's strength increases during his *geogoðe*. Neither Felix nor the translator explain what they mean by these terms (*adulescentiae ... iuvēnili ... geogoðe*): it is also not clear whether *geogoð* refers to Guthlac's *adulescentiae vires* or his *iuvēnili ... pectore*, because, as seen with regards to the description of Penwalh, Guthlac's father, in the preceding section, *iuvēnilis* refers to *iuvēntus*, which seems to have indicated adulthood, not youth (see sections 1.2 and 1.3); however, given that *geogop* (*geogoð*) could mean both 'youth' and 'early adulthood' (see my discussion in section 1.2), it remains ambiguous how old Guthlac is at this point in both texts, although the reference to the *adulescentiae vires* seems to suggest that he could at least be considered as a young man (since *adolescēntia* can only mean 'youth', and specifically 'youth as a period of growth'; see section 1.2). Nevertheless, it is becoming clear that many of these descriptions of youth in EME texts are vague.

The general meaning of this passage remains the same, but in the OE version Guthlac's youthful changes are first physical (his strength increases) and then mental (he remembers the deeds of the heroes), whereas in Felix's version these changes appear to have occurred at the same time, as he used the conjunction *et* ('and'), but it is not clear

what this difference means, or if it indeed means anything. The OE translator also follows Felix in describing how Guthlac's *mod oncyrrred ... swa [he] slæpe onwoce* ('mind changed ... as if [he] woke from sleep'; ch. II, p. 14) and in recounting how Guthlac destroyed his enemies and their homes (ibid.). However, in contrast to the source, the reference to Guthlac's *amor dominandi* is not included. Perhaps this might be explained as an attempt by the translator to simplify their rendering for the benefit of their audience, but without any certainty regarding who their audience might have been, or the circumstances behind the translation of the *Vita*, it is impossible to know why he omitted this detail. Moreover, as the OE version did not include the reference to the stories of ancient heroes which Guthlac learnt as a child (*Vita*, ch. XI, p. 78; compare with *Life*, ch. I), Guthlac's desire to emulate 'the strong deeds of the heroes' and his change of behaviour in his youth are even more sudden than in the Latin text.

The mention of the ancient heroes in the Latin *Vita* is significant, because it suggests that Guthlac passively learnt heroic stories as a child and is only now re-interpreting them and understanding their meaning, despite the wisdom he already possessed. Yet, by retaining this second reference to ancient heroic stories in Guthlac's youth, the OE translator still implies that Guthlac's desire to emulate the ancient heroes is a consequence of his growth into a young man, and he later employs the same reference to bring about his redemption (see below); therefore, this may be a demonstration of the translator's skill and concern for their audience.

Moreover, like in the source, the translator does not appear uncomfortable or critical in their description of Guthlac's youth; on the contrary, by mentioning how Guthlac recalls the *strengan dæda þara unmanna and þæra woruld-fulmena* ('mighty deeds of the ancient heroes of the world'), they also underscore Guthlac's bravery and strength. They then describe how Guthlac *wræc ... his æfþancas on his feondum*

(‘wreaked his disdain on his enemies’), burning their cities, ravaging their towns, and taking goods from them; but then, as in the Latin source, Guthlac is admonished by God and gives back a third of what he stole (*Life*, ch. II, p. 14), demonstrating that Guthlac still retains his inner goodness. The expression *wrecan ... his æþþancas on his feondum* seems interesting, as in the Latin version it is the *praedas, caedas rapinasque* (‘plunder, massacre and robbery’) which Guthlac and his band of warriors ‘wrought’ (*triverunt*; *Vita*, ch. XVIII, p. 80). The translator seems to emphasize Guthlac’s feelings and focuses on him, while in the *Vita* the verb *triverunt* is plural. The fact that Guthlac acts on his *æþþancas* might also be significant, as the term *æþþanca* could mean ‘disdain’, ‘offence’, or ‘envy’.³⁷⁰ It is not clear why Guthlac should be envious of his enemies, so the choice seems to be between ‘disdain’ and ‘offence’. I chose ‘disdain’ because ‘offence’ may imply that Guthlac is acting in retaliation, which did not seem to be the case in the source, at least, but it is not possible to determine which translation is preferable from the context.

Magennis, who studied the Latin *Vita*, considered Guthlac’s behaviour as evidence that Felix had difficulty conveying the depiction of Guthlac as a *miles Christi*, as it required him to reconcile Guthlac’s devoutness (as shown in his childhood and adulthood) with his violent behaviour as a young man, which Felix tries (unsuccessfully, in Magennis’s opinion) to depict as justified.³⁷¹ It should be pointed out that the description of Guthlac as a warrior is not negative or immoral in itself, as young nobles in Early Medieval England were expected to be skilled at arms.³⁷² But when examined in light of Guthlac’s miraculous birth, virtuous childhood and saintly destiny, it can be seen that there is an obvious contrast in Guthlac’s portrayal as a youth compared to his

³⁷⁰ ‘[Æ]f-þanca; æf-þunca’, in DOE [accessed 23 January 2023].

³⁷¹ Magennis, ‘Warrior Saints’, pp. 27-9.

³⁷² Crawford, *Childhood*, pp. 155-157.

depiction as a child and adult. Indeed, as repeatedly stated by Felix in his account of Guthlac's birth and childhood, Guthlac's fate is to become a saint, while there was no hint that he would become a warrior. In fact, the recurring images of the spiritual light or flame, which were mentioned in the description of Guthlac's childhood (see above), do not occur again until he finally overcomes his enemies and lays down his arms (see below). Thus, Felix deliberately seems to describe Guthlac's childhood and youthful behaviour in different ways, suggesting a contrast between the two phases, and, more specifically, that Guthlac's violence was at variance with his saintly fate.

On the other hand, it may be too simplistic to consider this representation of Guthlac's youth as wholly negative. Hall seems right in noting that Felix also praises young Guthlac, for instance when he mentions his *egregius dominandi amor*.³⁷³ The term *amor*, here used to describe Guthlac's ambition to take up arms against his enemies, can indicate a powerful desire, but on its own it is neither positive nor negative; yet, Felix describes it as *egregius* ('excellent') and also writes that Guthlac is inspired by the *valida pristinorum heroum* ('noble deeds of ancient heroes'). The words *egregius*, *valida* ('noble') and *heroum* ('of heroes'; *ibid.*) have obviously positive connotations, suggesting that Guthlac's youth is not as negative as it first appears.

Guthlac is said to destroy *adversantium ... urbes et villas, vicos et castella* ('the towns and estates of his enemies, [their] villages and strongholds'), which perhaps implies that Guthlac's violence was only directed towards his foes (in other words, he did not attack the innocent) and should thus not be taken as a demonstration of his immorality. Finally, Felix explains that Guthlac, *velut ex divino consilio edoctus* ('as though instructed by divine counsel'), would also give back a third of what he amassed (ch. XVII, p. 80); Magennis again considered this as evidence of Felix's 'discomfort', but it may also show

³⁷³ Hall, 'Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity', p. 210.

that, despite Guthlac's brutality towards his enemies, there was still some good within him, and he was still under God's control (see below).³⁷⁴ It should also be remembered that, despite current scholarly opinions, Felix was clearly comfortable enough with this portrayal that he included it in a text which he dedicated and presented to King Ælfwald ('Prologue', p. 60), hence it is very likely that he believed that the King and his court would appreciate his description of Guthlac's youth and that it would have made Guthlac a more relatable saint for a lay aristocratic audience, in that he conformed to the same social norms (see below).

This more positive view may seem incompatible with the idea that Guthlac's youthful behaviour was at odds with his saintly childhood and fate. Yet, I would suggest that these interpretations are not mutually exclusive: I would argue that Guthlac's youth is neither completely positive nor negative, but rather ambivalent. On the one hand, it cannot be denied that his violent actions, although likely acceptable for a young eighth-century English layman, are not suitable for a future saint. On the other hand, however, Felix also provides a positive description of Guthlac's youth, for instance when he mentions the noble deeds of ancient heroes, Guthlac's *egregius dominandi amor*, and his desire to give back a third of what he stole from his enemies, which may be considered as a demonstration that Guthlac can still fulfill his prophesized destiny. Yet, rather than focusing exclusively on one interpretation at the expense of the other, it may be that this ambiguity could have been deliberate on Felix's part, and hence the positive and negative aspects of Guthlac's youthful behaviour should both be considered. His representation might suggest that, although Guthlac did engage in unsaintly and violent behaviour as a young man, straying off the path to sainthood, he could still be redeemed and realize his destiny. This is further evidenced in the description of Guthlac's spiritual epiphany, which

³⁷⁴ Magennis, 'Warrior Saints', p. 28.

also seems to provide a more positive depiction of youth thanks to its connection with redemption.

After detailing how he spends around nine years fighting his foes and forces them to stop their *praedas, caedes rapinasque* ('plunder, massacre and robbery') when he subdues them, Guthlac is called a *vir beatae memoriae* ('man of blessed memory'; ch. XVIII, p. 80; in OE *se eadiga*, 'the blessed'; *Life*, ch. II, p. 14). The term *vir* was predominantly used for adult men, and may thus demonstrate that, even though Guthlac might have derailed from his saintly destiny as a young man, this temporary loss of purpose was still part of a normal process of growth.³⁷⁵

Before examining Guthlac's realization, it should first be noted that the fact that Felix includes it supports the fact that Guthlac's youth was meant to be, to some extent, problematic and at odds with his saintly destiny, otherwise Guthlac would have no need to experience this conversion in the first place; but on the other hand, the fact that he rediscovers his spiritual calling also demonstrates that he is still worthy to become a saint.

Guthlac finally experiences his conversion. Felix provides a vivid description of Guthlac's inner confusion, describing how Guthlac, after making peace with his enemies, is thrown *inter dubios volventis temporis eventus* ('among the doubtful events of the passing time'; ch. XVIII, p. 80) and *atras caliginosae vitae nebulas, fluctuantes inter saeculi gurgites* ('the black uncertain clouds of life, among the whirling waters of the world'; *ibid.*), a series of metaphors which perfectly describe his mental turmoil. Moreover, Guthlac is again called a *vir*, perhaps to indicate that he has grown, at least biologically, although Guthlac has not yet converted, and has thus not yet matured spiritually.

³⁷⁵ 'Vir; sense 1', in *DMLBS* <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/VIR](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/vir)> [accessed 25 October 2021].

Guthlac's conversion occurs at night, when he is contemplating *sollicitus curas mortales intenta meditatione* ('anxious the worries of men with intent consideration'; ch. XVIII, p. 81): suddenly *velut percussus pectore, spiritalis flamma omnia praecordia supra memorati viri incendere coepit* ('as though it had struck his chest, a spiritual flame began to burn in this man's heart'; *ibid.*). As shown in these lines, his repentance seems foreshadowed by the re-appearance of the image of the flame, which recalls the spiritual light which was previously used to convey Guthlac's spiritual worthiness in his childhood (ch. XV, p. 80).

He then gains awareness of *antiquorum regum stirpis suae ... miserabiles exitus* ('the miserable deaths of the ancient kings of his dynasty'), the *caducas mundi divitias* ('the transitory riches of the world') and *contemtibilem[...] temporalis vitae gloriam* ('the contemptible glory of temporal life'), which in turn leads to a realization of his own mortality: *tunc sibi proprii obitus sui imaginata forma ostentatur* ('then the imagined form of his own death showed itself to him'). Then, Guthlac, *instigante divino numine* ('by the encouraging of the divine power'), swears that if he lives until tomorrow, he will serve Christ (ch. XVIII, p. 82). This passage is meaningful, as not only does Guthlac decide to become a man of God, but this mention of God's encouragement seems to imply that Guthlac's conversion is prompted by God, which may mean that Guthlac's youth was also ordained by God, hence youth also appears to be part of God's plan for man. This depiction of youth seems similar to the patristic interpretation of youth as a period of spiritual and moral turmoil (1.4), and as seen below, I suggest that Felix uses it to convey specific Christian teachings.

It is interesting that Felix connects Guthlac's realization with the deaths of the ancient kings, because this seems to reference the teachings which Guthlac learnt as a child in his father's court (ch. XI, p. 78) and which partly contributed to his youthful

violence (ch. XVI, p. 80).³⁷⁶ Indeed, although Felix uses this hagiographic topos to provide a more positive depiction of his saint, these recurrent references have an important textual function, as they illustrate the different stages of Guthlac's maturation: he is fascinated by them as a child, then misinterprets them as a youth, only focusing on the supposed glory of battle and the glory he could obtain, but it is not until years later that he finally realizes the real meaning of these stories, which is spiritual, not secular, and understands the fleetingness of human life and worldly things. He thus finally rediscovers God: his is a tale about spiritual redemption.³⁷⁷

This realization allows Guthlac to find again his spiritual purpose: Felix mentions that *exutis umbrosæ noctis caliginibus* ('the dark clouds of night had cleared'; ch. XIX, p. 82), as Guthlac decides to turn to God. This reference recalls the earlier natural descriptions of Guthlac's emotional and spiritual turmoil. More significantly, it again suggests that Guthlac's youth was meant to be understood as a period of spiritual crisis (as theorized by the Church Fathers; see 1.4), which he has now overcome, gaining spiritual maturity and finally realizing his saintly destiny.

The OE translator adapts this significant and complex episode by once again remaining rather faithful to the source while simplifying some of Felix's most difficult passages. For instance, he describes how Guthlac merely *betweox þises andweardan middaneardes wealcan dwelode* ('wandered in the midst of the waves of this present earth'; *Life*, ch. II, p. 14). Once again, then, the translator retains and significantly reduces the metaphors of the original, but his description is nevertheless effective in conveying Guthlac's loss of purpose, perhaps because he supposed that his audience would not have

³⁷⁶ Wieland, 'Aures Lectoris', p. 172.

³⁷⁷ Magennis, 'Warrior Saints', p. 28.

understood the complexity of Felix's description, further supporting the interpretation that his audience, while also secular, was less educated.

Guthlac's epiphany takes place at night in the OE version as well, but does not include the metaphor of the spiritual flame. Instead, *wæs [Guthlac] færinga mid Godes ege onbryrd, and mid gastlicre lufan his heorte innan gefylled* ('[Guthlac] was suddenly inspired with fear of God, and his heart was inwardly filled with spiritual love'; *Life*, ch. II, p. 14). These lines have the same purpose as the metaphor of the spiritual flame: to indicate that Guthlac is about to rediscover his spiritual vocation and thus that, despite his youthful mistakes, he is still destined for sainthood. However, in this case the translation arguably presents a more moving description than Felix's, as the OE *Life* focuses on Guthlac's contrasting emotions. In particular, the mention of Guthlac's love for God, which is an addition by the translator, is an explicit mention of Guthlac's faith after the parenthesis of his youth, which appears to make him more sympathetic than in the corresponding passage in the Latin *Vita*, as the latter does not provide any demonstration of his belief or devotion.

Furthermore, it should not be surprising that the translator here retained the mention of the ancient kings, as they employ Guthlac's knowledge of the heroic past to bring about his spiritual conversion: like in the *Vita*, Guthlac realizes that, despite their wealth and power, the old kings still met a miserable end. He thus abandons the wealth of the world and, after becoming aware of his own inevitable death, again filled with godly fear, he promises to God that if he will live until the next day, he would be Christ's servant (*Life*, ch. II, p. 14). Therefore, although the translator repeatedly reduces or omits references to Guthlac's spirituality, in this specific case, again following the source, they employ both Guthlac's secular and spiritual identities to provide a model of proper spiritual behaviour for their (supposedly) secular and aristocratic audience.

It has been seen that (in both texts) in his youth Guthlac strayed from his saintly destiny and became a violent warrior, although he was never completely immoral; and eventually had a realization which allowed him to return to the path to sainthood. But why would Felix, and in turn the translator, include such a description? Bacola argues that Guthlac's time as a warrior and his conversion were meant to encourage the secular audience to repent.³⁷⁸ This view is certainly possible, although I suggest a different interpretation: that Guthlac's warlike youth and subsequent redemption were meant to demonstrate, perhaps drawing on an earlier patristic interpretation of youth as a period of turmoil, that one can rise above their sins through God's help, showing the lay audience how even a fierce warrior could repent from his sins and turn back to God. Guthlac's youth thus becomes a metaphoric representation of man's imperfection, but also of his potential for redemption, and it might have inspired King Ælfwald (or the current king, in the case of the OE version) to support the cult of a saint like Guthlac, who could also be a model of spiritual behaviour for a warrior audience. This, in turn, might have arguably been meant to make Guthlac more relatable in the eyes of King Ælfwald so as to promote the Saint's cult, in which I agree with Bacola.³⁷⁹

It should also be noted that, following his spiritual resolution, Guthlac is once again as spiritually, morally and intellectually perfect as he was in his childhood: in the *Vita*, because of the *divinae gratiae inflammatio* ('flame of the divine grace'), which recalls the image of the spiritual flame (ch. XVIII, p. 81) and light (ch. XV, p. 80), Guthlac abandons worldly relations to fulfill his religious calling (ch. XIX, p. 82). In the OE version, the catalyst for his decision is *Godes lufan* ('God's love; ch. II, p. 16). After receiving the tonsure at Repton, he endeavours to expiate his *praeterita piacula* ('past

³⁷⁸ Bacola, "*Vacuas in Aureas Recessit*?", pp. 75-6.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

sins'; ch. XX, p. 84) for which he renounces to drink alcohol except during the celebration of the eucharist (*ibid.*). This renunciation should perhaps be considered as a punishment to which Guthlac deliberately subjects himself: Sarah Foot observes that the consumption of alcohol was an important element in the social life of monastic communities in Early Medieval England (and of course the eucharist), hence by not drinking wine during meals Guthlac is willingly not participating in the communal life of the monastery.³⁸⁰ Interestingly, there is no mention of 'past sins' in the OE version, but Guthlac still does not drink alcohol (*Life*, ch. II, p. 16). Perhaps the translator thought that Guthlac had no sins which needed expiation, hence why they removed this reference. However, after this, Guthlac is described as modest, pleasant, wise and handsome, so that even the once envious monks eventually welcome him (*Vita*, chs. XXI-XXIII, pp. 84-6; see *Life*, ch. II, p. 16). This latter description further shows that Felix (and thus the translator) depicted Guthlac's youth as a parenthesis between his childhood and adulthood, in which he lost his way to sainthood and then found it again after rediscovering his spiritual and personal purpose, eventually becoming as spiritually perfect as he was in childhood, and once again deserving of sanctity.³⁸¹ Hence, it can be suggested that his youth was a period of spiritual growth, in which he strays off the path to sainthood before rediscovering his destiny.

Therefore, it can be argued that Felix was not necessarily 'uncomfortable' with Guthlac's youth, but he described it as a period of biological and spiritual development

³⁸⁰ Sarah Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 233, 236, 239.

³⁸¹ The fact that Felix and the translator clearly divide Guthlac's life into infancy, childhood, youth and adulthood suggests that they are applying a scheme of the 'ages of man'; this separation into specific stages can also be found in the 'Passion of Chrysanthus and His Wife Daria' (3.3) and the *Vita Bonifatii* (5.1).

which was also a metaphoric description of man's imperfection and capacity for redemption. The message of Guthlac's youth, that one can always be redeemed for their sins, could have also resonated with King Ælfwald and his court, as it may have shown them that they, despite being warriors, could nevertheless be reconciled with God, and it may have thus contributed to propagating Guthlac's cult in East Anglia. Therefore, Guthlac's youth is an important part of the *VSG*, with significant textual functions. Similarly, the same message seems conveyed in the translation, as Guthlac also strays from, but then rediscovers his destiny, and this may also have been a useful lesson for the audience.

This theme of repentance is also common to *Guthlac A*, analyzed next, in which it is also connected with youth, although the latter is otherwise different from *VSG*, and has a different purpose.

3.2 *Guthlac A*

The poem *Guthlac A* recounts Guthlac's struggle against the demons during his hermitage at Crowland.³⁸² It is included (with *Guthlac B*) in the tenth-century *Exeter Book* (Exeter, Cathedral Library 3501, fols. 8-130), a collection of poems and riddles which Leofric, Bishop of Exeter, gave Exeter Cathedral in 1072.³⁸³

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, besides the two *vitae*, *Guthlac A* is the only other text about Saint Guthlac which mentions youth, and it seems that the poet knew

³⁸² 'Guthlac A', in *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*, ed. and trans. by Roberts, pp. 83-107. References are given as in-text citations, followed by line numbers. All translations, unless specified, are mine.

³⁸³ On the *Exeter Book*, see George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, 'Introduction', in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, pp. ix-lxxxviii.

Felix's VSG, even if he did not base his poem on it.³⁸⁴ *Guthlac A* has been studied in a number of ways, for instance in the context of ecocriticism, while some critics, such as Conner, Weber and Jones, consider it in relation to the Benedictine reform; these scholars suggest, in light of the poet's many references to 'monastic life', that the poem may be aimed at a monastic audience, but (with the exception of Weber, discussed below) do not mention Guthlac's youth.³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ See, for instance, Christopher A. Jones, 'Envisioning the *Cenobium* in the Old English *Guthlac A*', *Mediaeval Studies*, 57 (1995), 259-91 (p. 260)

<[HTTPS://WWW.BREPOLSONLINE.NET/DOI/PDF/10.1484/J.MS.2.306436](https://www.brepolsonline.net/doi/pdf/10.1484/J.MS.2.306436)> [accessed 25 October 2021]; Jane Roberts, 'Guthlac A: Sources and Source Hunting', in *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane*, ed. by Edward Donald Kennedy, Ronald Waldron, and Joseph S. Wittig (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Brewer, 1988), pp. 1-18 (p. 2, but see also ff.); *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, ed. and trans. by Mary Clayton (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. xiii.

³⁸⁵ Benjamin D. Weber, 'A Harmony of Contrasts: The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 114(2) (2015), 201-18 (pp. 217-8) <[HTTPS://MUSE.JHU.EDU/ARTICLE/577385](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/577385)> [accessed 25 October 2021]; Jones, 'Envisioning the *Cenobium*', pp. 265-72; Patrick W. Conner, 'Source Studies, the Old English *Guthlac A* and the English Benedictine Reformation', *Revue Bénédictine*, 103(3) (1993), 380-413 (p. 386). On ecocriticism in *Guthlac A*, see, for instance, Kristin Bovaird-Abbo, 'Redeeming Wastelands, Building Communities in the Old English *Guthlac A*', *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 24(2) (Spring 2017), 196-223 (p. 386) <[HTTPS://DOI-ORG.EZPROXY.NOTTINGHAM.AC.UK/10.1093/ISLE/ISX004](https://doi-org.ezproxy.nottingham.ac.uk/10.1093/isle/isx004)> [accessed 25 October 2021]; Lindy Brady, 'Colonial Desire or Political Disengagement? The Contested Landscape of *Guthlac A*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 115(1) (January 2016), 61-78 <[HTTPS://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/10.5406/JENGLGERMPIL.115.1.0061](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jenglgermpil.115.1.0061)> [accessed 25 October 2021]; Stephanie Clark, 'A More Permanent Homeland: Land Tenure in *Guthlac A*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 40 (2012), 75-102 <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.nottingham.ac.uk/10.1017/S0263675111000068>> [accessed 25 October 2021] and Stephanie Clark, 'Guthlac A and the Temptation of the Barrow', *Studia Neophilologica*, 87 (2015), 48-72 <[HTTPS://DOI-ORG.EZPROXY.NOTTINGHAM.AC.UK/10.1080/00393274.2015.1004892](https://doi-org.ezproxy.nottingham.ac.uk/10.1080/00393274.2015.1004892)> [accessed 25 October 2021]. For an overview on ecocriticism in the poem, see *ibid.*, pp. 48-9.

Youth in *Guthlac A* has been discussed by Weber, Norris and Hall. Weber observes that *Guthlac A* ‘explores the means and ends of [Guthlac’s] spiritual growth’ and it presents Guthlac’s youth as a particularly important period in this development. Yet, Weber’s concern is with the relationship between *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, hence he does not consider whether youth has any textual purpose in the poem.³⁸⁶ Norris instead points out that youth is connected with worldly things and argues that this connection demonstrates the influence of Augustinian philosophy on the poem, but she again does not consider whether youth has any functions of its own in *Guthlac A*.³⁸⁷ Moreover, Hall, in his examination of the conception of sanctity in *Guthlac A*, viewed Guthlac’s youth as a means to provide an example of proper Christian behaviour, but he does not specify what this behaviour consists of, instead comparing the representation of youth in the poem with *Beowulf* and the Icelandic sagas.³⁸⁸ These ideas (youth as a period of spiritual growth, its connection with worldly things, and its use as an example of Christian virtue) all contribute to my own interpretation of youth in *Guthlac A*, although I believe that none of these examinations focuses specifically on youth and thus fully considers how youth is described and how it contributes to the purpose of the poem.

To determine what youth can reveal about the themes of *Guthlac A* and how it relates to the values of the poem, I divide the occurrences of youth in the poem into two different sections: heavenly youth, and earthly youth. I begin by looking at the depiction of heavenly youth (3.2.1), as this occurs first, and then earthly youth (3.2.2).

³⁸⁶ Weber, ‘A Harmony of Contrasts’, pp. 201-2, 205-6, 208-9, 211, 218.

³⁸⁷ Robin Norris, ‘The Augustinian Theory of Use and Enjoyment in *Guthlac A* and *B*’, *Neophilologische Mitteilungen*, 104(2), (2003), 159-78

<[HTTP://WWW.JSTOR.COM/STABLE/43344085](http://www.jstor.com/stable/43344085)> [accessed 25 October 2021], pp. 166-8, 170.

³⁸⁸ Hall, ‘Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity’, pp. 210-3.

3.2.1 Heavenly Youth

Heavenly youth is only mentioned towards the end of the prologue (ll. 1-29), after the poet has already discussed several themes. The prologue describes the encounter between an angel and a human soul, after the soul has abandoned *þas eorþan wyne* ('the joys of the earth'; 2b) and *þas lænan dreamas* ('the fleeting pleasures'; 3a).³⁸⁹ The angel then tells the soul that she is finally where she has striven to be for a long time (6-7). This depiction introduces two important themes: one is the need to reject worldly riches to enter heaven, as the soul does, which would have been an important teaching for an audience of monks, and the second, as noted by Shook, is the opposition between heaven and earth.³⁹⁰ These ideas seem intertwined, because earthly life is associated with fleeting pleasures, in contrast to heaven which is presented as the ultimate destination for the good Christian.

The first reference to youth occurs in this heavenly context, after the poet develops the contrast between earth and heaven in different ways: first through an emotional depiction, perhaps to underscore the joy of heaven in contrast with the misery of earthly life, as in heaven there is no *hreow* ('grief'; 10b) and *edergong fore yrmþum* ('beggary as a result of misery'; 11a), but only *engla dream* ('the joy of the angels', 11b) and *sib* 7

³⁸⁹ There is some debate about whether the prologue should be considered as part of the poem. I think it is, because it introduces important themes which recur many times in the text (see below). My opinion is also shared by Clayton, in *Old English Poems*, ed. by Clayton, p. xiv; Jones, 'Envisioning the *Cenobium*', p. 260, footnote n° 6; Lawrence K. Shook, 'The Prologue of the Old English *Guthlac A*', *Mediaeval Studies*, 23 (1961), 294-304 <[HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.1484/J.MS.2.305972](https://doi.org/10.1484/J.MS.2.305972)> [accessed 25 October 2021], esp. pp. 295, 299, 304; *Guthlac Poems*, ed. by Roberts, p. 30. However, others, such as Krapp and Dobbie, instead believe that the first twenty-nine lines constitute 'an independent poem or fragment', which to me seems less convincing. See Krapp and Dobbie, 'Introduction', in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, p. xxx.

³⁹⁰ Shook, 'Prologue', pp. 295-6, 297-300.

gesælignes ('peace and happiness', 12a). He then evokes ideas of finality, for instance by describing how heaven is a *sawla ræst* ('resting place for souls', 12b) for those who are now worthy to rejoice with God as they *his domas her/ aefnað on eorþan* ('performed His judgements here on earth', 14b-15a; see also ll. 22ff); then immutability, since in heaven *getimbru ... no trydiað* ('buildings ... never decay', 18). Finally, he conveys these same concepts by juxtaposing emotional states and the human life-course: for those who enter heaven *ne þam fore yrmþum þe þær in wuniað/ lif aspringeð* ('life does not decay for the sake of miseries for those who dwell there', 19-20a), as they *geogoðe brucað 7 Godes miltsa* ('enjoy youth and God's mercy', 21).

This description is again ambiguous: it is not clear whether youth refers to a specific phase between childhood and adulthood, or it has a more general meaning, including infancy, childhood and early adulthood (see 1.2); however, here youth seems to be portrayed positively: it is associated with God's mercy, it is one of the rewards for the faithful Christian who has managed to reject earthly riches, and is also in opposition to earthly decay. However, it is only one of the themes which the poet employs to convey the contrast between earth and heaven, and does not seem to entail any space for personal or spiritual development, because it is a reward for the already virtuous Christian soul.

The association between youth and eternal life in heaven is found frequently in the corpus: for instance, it is common in homilies, in which youth is one of the eternal rewards to which Christians must aspire. This is usually conveyed by the expression *geoguð butan ylde*, 'youth without age'.³⁹¹ It might be argued that this mention of youth

³⁹¹ This conception is very briefly included in the *DOE* as '[...] eternal youth in heaven'. See '*geogup*; sense B.1.a', in *DOE*. See for instance the homily 'Shrove Sunday' (homily 21) in the *Vercelli Homilies*, in which heaven is described as a place where there is 'life without death ... youth without age ... beauty without change ...'. 'Homily XXI', in *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, ed. by Daniel Scragg, EETS 300 (London: Published for the Early English Text

in *Guthlac A* has the same function: to encourage the audience of monks to let go of earthly things in order to become worthy of heaven.

This positive representation of youth is further emphasized in the following lines: the poet explains that *[w]oruld is ónhrered,/ colap Cristes lufu* ('the world is disturbed, love of Christ becomes cold', 37b-38a), and,

[e]aldað eorþan blæd æþela gehwylcre
 7 of wlite wendað wæstma gecyndu;
 45 bið seo sibpre tid sæda gehwylces
 mætre in mægne. ...

([t]he earth's prosperity grows old in every of its excellent things],
 and the nature of its fruits decreases in beauty;]
 45 everything that grows is weaker in strength than last time).

In the above passage, the description of the decay of the world, only alluded to in the preceding excerpts, is further developed. This decadence is conveyed through a metaphoric description of the aging of the world: thus, youth is associated with heaven, while old age is associated with earth. This also seems an occurrence of the motif of the 'ages of the world' (see 1.3), in which old age was also connected with man's decay. Moreover, lines 37a-38b suggest that earthly decline is a consequence of man's decreasing faith, thus illustrating the need for the audience to strengthen their belief. In turn, this seems to imply that youth should be connected with faithfulness, as also shown by the fact that it was earlier presented as a reward for the good Christian. It can be seen that whereas youth entails joy, God's mercy, and eternal life, the decaying world is instead connected with a decrease in men's faith, the worsening state of material things and fruit, and with weakness. Consequently, this negative representation of old age and earthly life indirectly emphasizes the positive representation of youth and heaven in the preceding

Society by the Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 351-62 (p. 362). For other examples of this *topos*, see 'geoguð; B.1.a.', in *DOE*.

lines and would, perhaps, further encourage the monks to let go of worldly things in order to become worthy of entering heaven.

Therefore, in this first occurrence youth is presented as a reward for the faithful soul and contrasted with earthly decay; but it is not the only depiction of youth in the poem. The poet also describes another, earthly conception of youth, which is more closely connected with Saint Guthlac.

3.2.2 *Earthly Youth*

Earthly youth is introduced together with Guthlac himself. However, as in the case of the heavenly conception of youth in the prologue, this description should also be understood in connection with other themes which the poet introduces earlier in the text, in this instance the repeated condemnation of earthly riches and the need to live virtuously, specifically as an anchorite.

For instance, the poet first scathingly criticizes his contemporaries, noting that many only wish to reach heaven for their own glory and through their words, not their actions, as they are not willing to let go of worldly things, which should be foreign to every man, while now they despise the saints who instead contemplate heaven (60-70). In these lines the need to reject worldly riches to enter heaven, which was implicit in the prologue, is made clearer, which seems to support the view that the abandonment of earthly things is an important theme in the poem.³⁹²

In contrast to the decay of common people, faithful Christians exchange worldly treasures for heaven, are afraid of God and follow His commandments, giving alms, comforting the poor, and being generous (70b-80); the poet says that some dwell in the desert, where they await to enter their heavenly home, and where they are tempted and

³⁹² Clayton, *Old English Poems*, p. xiv.

plagued by the devil (81-88a). This description likely foreshadows Guthlac's own struggle against the devils (below), and would have provided a model of behaviour for the monkish audience. These anchorites are instead defended by angels (88b-90); they are called *gecostan ceman* ('chosen champions', 91a) and will receive the rewards of those who show their love for God (91b-92). Guthlac is then finally introduced as one who, at first sight at least, perfectly follows these principles: he corrected his mind according to God's will, rejected worldly riches and remembered his home in heaven (93-8a). He thus seems portrayed as an example of Christian virtue.

However, then the poet explains that Guthlac has not always been so virtuous:

[...] [H]im wæs hyht to þam [...]
 siþþan hine inlyhte se þe lifes weg
 100 gæstum gearwað, 7 him giefte sealde
 engelcunde, þæt he ana ongan
 beorgseþel bugan, 7 his blæd gode
 þurh eaðmedu ealne gesealde
 ðone þe he on geoguðe bigan sceolde
 105 worulde wynnum

(That was his hope in that,
 after he who makes ready the way of life
 100 for souls enlightened him, and gave him
 angelic grace, so that he began to
 inhabit a mountain-dwelling alone
 and with humility gave God
 all the abundance that in his youth used to
 devote to the joys of the world.)

At first, it appears that these lines support the previous representation of Guthlac as a perfect Christian: Guthlac received enlightenment from God and angelic grace, and began to live like those holy anchorites whom the poet had praised earlier. It may thus be surprising to learn that Guthlac had devoted his youth to the 'joys of the world': it seems that as a young man, Guthlac behaved just like those men whose highest hope is worldly wealth, above eternal life (62-3a). Given how the poet has repeatedly criticized men's love for worldly things, first through the opposition between heaven and earth in the prologue, then by saying that wealth must become 'foreign (*fremde*) to every earth-

dweller' (63b-4), it seems clear that Guthlac's youthful behaviour should be considered as immoral and sinful.

This mention not only complicates the description of Guthlac himself, but also the depiction of youth in the poem. The first time the poet mentioned *geoguð*, in the prologue, it was associated with heaven and God's mercy, and, I argued, it was likely meant to encourage the audience to abandon their love of worldly wealth. In this last occurrence, youth appears to have the opposite implication, as it seems more closely associated with worldly riches.

Again, it should be noted that in this instance youth is not clearly defined: it may refer to a specific period between childhood and adulthood, or it might include childhood and adulthood. I think that here Guthlac is a young man, older than a child but younger than an adult, an assumption shared by Norris, Weber, and Hall, and in light of the association between youth and sin (discussed with reference to the Church Fathers in 1.4), whereas, to my knowledge, childhood was not represented as sinful.³⁹³ And although it cannot be excluded that Guthlac is being described as a (young) adult, the poet later portrays him as a *wer* ('man'; see below), which suggests that he was younger here. Overall, it would seem that the poet is more interested in representing Guthlac's youth in a certain way, rather than providing a specific definition of it.

The next excerpt, however, shows that earthly youth is not completely flawed:

105 ... hine weard biheold,
halig of heofonum, se þæt hluttre mód
in þæs gæstes gód georde trymede

(105 ... A holy
guardian from heaven protected him, so that he
eagerly strengthened that pure mind in spiritual goodness).

³⁹³ Hall, 'Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity', pp. 210-3; Norris, 'Augustinian Theory', 166-8, 170; Weber, 'A Harmony of Contrasts', pp. 201-2, 205-6, 208-9, 211, 218.

The fact that Guthlac was protected by an angel seems to signify that even during his youth, when he loved worldly things, he still had some good within himself. Guthlac thus appears to become more spiritually mature during his youth, and earthly youth itself does not seem completely negative. Yet, I do not think that the poet means to excuse or justify Guthlac's youthful behaviour, either. I believe that the poet might be trying to convey that Guthlac commits sins in his youth, but he also learns from them and grows in spiritual understanding.

Indeed, the poet then adds:

Hwæt we hyrdon oft þæt se halga wer
 in þa ærestan ældu gelufade
 110 frecnessa fela; fyrst wæs swa þeana
 in Godes dome hwonne Guðlace
 on his ondgietan engel sealde
 þæt him sweðraden synna lustas

('Lo, how often have we heard that the holy man
 in his earliest age [youth] loved
 110 many dangers! Yet that time
 was under God's control, until He
 gave Guthlac's mind an angel
 so that his sinful pleasures subsided).

The poet's allusions to the 'many dangers' which Guthlac 'loved' in his youth and to his 'sinful pleasures' might be significant. The audience is not told what these 'dangers' and 'pleasures' were, but perhaps the previous reference to Guthlac's youthful love of worldly riches implies that they may refer to that, as *frecnessa* could also indicate 'spiritual' dangers; the theme of wealth may be again connected with youth, and it also seems explicitly criticized as immoral and dangerous for the soul.³⁹⁴ Yet, in these lines it is clearly stated that Guthlac, despite his youthful sins, was still worthy of angelic protection, and more importantly God's: this again suggests that youth is not completely

³⁹⁴ '[F]*rēcennes*, *frēcnes*; sense b', in *DOE*.

sinful, and is still part of God's plan for man, as eventually Guthlac, thanks to the angel strengthening his mind, is able to overcome these sinful temptations.³⁹⁵

In fact, the lessons which Guthlac, through God, learns during his youth have ultimately a positive outcome, as he is then called an *halga wer*. The adjective *halga* ('holy') implies that Guthlac will achieve holiness, while *wer*, equivalent of the Latin *vir*, was used for an adult, fully grown man, not a youth; thus Guthlac's spiritual and biological maturation are intertwined.³⁹⁶ Moreover, as already noted with regards to youth in the VSG, the fact that Guthlac gradually overcomes his sins during his youth, becoming a saint, may also present youth as a metaphoric representation of man's potential for redemption, and as an example for the audience, showing that one can overcome their sins — more specifically, that one can learn to forsake worldly things — and become a good Christian.

It may be perhaps more evident now that the description of Guthlac's youth is more complex than previously thought, as it seems to be neither completely positive, nor completely negative, as he did commit sins in his youth, but he also learnt from his mistakes. Yet, although Guthlac conveys an ambiguous conception of earthly youth, the next excerpt suggests that this is still in contrast with heavenly youth. The poet describes an ongoing battle between God's angel, who attempts to show Guthlac that the earth is *læne* ('fleeting', 120a) and tries to reveal to him the *longan gód* ('lasting good', 120b) of heaven, and the demon who encourages Guthlac to love and seek worldly things by plundering with thieves (127-32); however, this battle is finally ended by God, who puts the demon to flight (134-5). This contrast again seems to convey the opposition between

³⁹⁵ Weber, 'Harmony of Contrasts', p. 206.

³⁹⁶ 'Wer. II', in Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTP://BOSWORTH.FF.CUNI.CZ/035342](http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/035342)> [accessed 25 October 2021]. Weber, 'Harmony of Contrasts', pp. 205-6, 208-9, 211, 218.

heaven and earth seen in the prologue, as the former is connected with eternal good while the latter is fleeting and associated with the sinful love for earthly riches, which might further encourage the audience to overcome the temptation of material riches and focus on their spiritual goodness. However, the fact that this deciding battle for Guthlac's soul takes place during Guthlac's youth implies that youth was considered as an essential period of maturation, in which one defined their adult identity (as already noted in Chapter 2).³⁹⁷ It also appears to emphasize the opposition between a virtuous conception of heavenly youth and a sinful interpretation of earthly youth.

Sánchez-Martí considers this scene as a demonstration of what he saw as a commonly negative interpretation of youth in EME literature, as Guthlac's sins could be expiated 'only through divine intervention', not because he strived for redemption.³⁹⁸ However, it should be noted that the poet already stated that Guthlac grew in spiritual understanding during his youth, becoming more faithful and, eventually, a saint, hence young Guthlac is not yet beyond God's help. Moreover, these lines imply that one's fate is already decided, despite their youthful sins.

The importance of youth for Guthlac's development seems further shown by the fact that, while his spiritual virtue is tested again and again even after he outgrows his youth, there is no evidence that he was ever in danger of losing his morality again.³⁹⁹ This is evident when Guthlac as an adult is tormented by demons, as the poet repeatedly praises his resolve: for instance, he describes how, despite Guthlac being beset by *ealdfeonda nið*

³⁹⁷ Weber, 'A Harmony of Contrasts', p. 206.

³⁹⁸ Sánchez-Martí, 'Age Matters', pp. 215-6.

³⁹⁹ Weber believes that Guthlac continues to grow spiritually until the end of the poem; I do not disagree, but it seems to me, as shown by the emphasis of the poet, that Guthlac's youth constitutes one of the most important and dramatic stages of his maturation, if not the most important one. Weber, 'Harmony of Contrasts', p. 207.

(‘the hatred of old enemies’, 141b), he continued to work miracles, honour God and reject worldly things (159b-69). The poet then triumphantly declares: *[g]od wæs Guðlac!* (‘Guthlac was good!’, 170a) as *[h]e in gæste bær/ heofoncundne hyht* (‘he in his spirit bore heavenly hope’, 170b-171a) and had *hælu geræhte/ ecan lifes* (‘attained the salvation of eternal life’, 171b-172a). Yet, even though *se cempa oferwon/ frecnessa fela* (‘the warrior had overcome many dangers’, 180b-81a), the demons could not let go of their *æfeste* (‘malice’, 187a) and brought him *frasunga fela* (‘many temptations’, 189a). This reference to ‘many dangers’ which Guthlac has overcome might recall how he had loved ‘dangers’ in his youth (108-110a), and may show that Guthlac has spiritually matured since then. Indeed, Guthlac’s spirit was not *þy forhtra* (‘more frightened for this’, 201b-202a), as God forbade the devils from attacking Guthlac’s spirit or body (226-8a); and Guthlac himself declares that God will protect him (240b-45). Indeed, the demons continue to threaten Guthlac (266-91), but God made him strong in his answer and courage (292a-293), and he declares that his *hyht* (‘hope’) is in God and earthly wealth does not mean *owiht* (‘anything’) to him (318b-319). The poet further praises Guthlac by calling him the *wuldres cempa* (‘champion of glory’, 324b) and then even wonders: *[h]wylc wæs mara þonne se?* (‘[w]ho was greater than he?’, 400b). Therefore, after overcoming his youthful temptations, the older Guthlac appears never again to be in danger of being corrupted by the demons or loving worldly riches as he did in his youth.

One of the demons’ temptations is particularly relevant for the understanding of the conception of youth in *Guthlac A*: after they attack Guthlac again with *eald-feonda nið* (‘hatred of old enemies’, 390b), the devils lift him up and show him some monks in their monasteries:

... [Þ]e hyra lifes þurh lust
 idlum æhtum 7 oferwlencum,
 gierelum gielplicum: swa bið geoguðe þeaw
 420 þær þæs ealdres egða ne styreð

(... [W]ho enjoy their lives in pleasure
with empty possessions and opulent means,
with ostentatious clothes, as is the custom of youth
420 when fear of an elder does not control them).

This is another vague description of youth, as it is not clear whether the poet understands it as a specific stage or in a more general sense; although, as in the case of Guthlac earlier, there is an opposition with adulthood, here represented by the ‘elder’, which implies that these monks were not considered as adults. In any case, these lines seem to convey another immoral representation of youth: the young monks, like Guthlac in his youth, love the vanity of material things; thus, youth seems once again to be associated with sin.⁴⁰⁰ Sánchez-Martí interpreted this scene in a similar manner:

in the absence of a guiding figure, young men whose training has been defective or whose probity is inadequate become more vulnerable to sin and unable to resist temptation.⁴⁰¹

It would therefore seem, at first sight at least, that this description may have been meant to provide a condemnation of youthful behaviour and another criticism of men’s love for worldly riches, which could have encouraged the audience of monks to proper behaviour.⁴⁰²

However, if, on the one hand, the behaviour of the young monks clearly shows that men have forgotten God and turned to material things, as described earlier in the poem, on the other, a closer analysis of these lines reveals that in this instance youth is not as negative as initially thought: it can be argued that a great deal of responsibility for the young men’s actions is also placed on their elders, as they should guide the younger

⁴⁰⁰ Aldhelm also criticizes the scandalously glamorous dresses worn by monks and nuns, but makes no mention of their age; *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, ed. and trans. by Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (Ipswich: Brewer, 1979), pp. 127-8.

⁴⁰¹ Sánchez-Martí, ‘Age Matters’, p. 215.

⁴⁰² Conner, ‘Source Studies’, pp. 406-7.

people.⁴⁰³ Old age is perhaps condemned more harshly than youth, as the mention of the ‘custom’ of youth seems to suggest that mistakes are to be expected from an inexperienced young person, whereas an older man should use his knowledge and example to teach proper behaviour. That is not to say that youthful mistakes should be ignored or justified, as Guthlac also had to overcome his sins and, as he notes in the next passage, youthful experiences are essential to gain adult wisdom. As already noted with regards to Guthlac’s youth, then, in this instance youth is similarly ambiguous rather than clearly positive or negative, but still conveys a criticism of men’s faithlessness and love for material things.

Guthlac then again fights back against the devils, declaring that they wanted to reproach him for tolerating *rume regulas ond reþe mod/ geongra manna in Godes templum* (‘lax rules and cruel minds of the young men in God’s temples’, 489-90), but observes that the devils only showed him the *sæmran* (‘worst ones’, 492a). He then declares to wish to tell them the *sop* (‘truth’, 494a), which they cannot see:

495 God scop geoguðe 7 gumena dream;
 ne magun þa æfteryld in þam ærestan
 blæde geberan ac hy blissiað
 worulde wynnum, oððæt wintra rim
 gegæð in þa geoguðe þæt se gaest lufað
 500 onsyn 7 aetwist ylðran hades
 ðe gemete monige geond middangeard
 þeowiað in þeawum; þeodum ywaþ
 wisdom weras, wlencu forleosað,
 siððan geoguðe geað gaest aflihð

(495 God created youth and men’s joy;
 they cannot when in their first maturity [youth]
 produce fruit, but they rejoice
 in worldly happiness until a number of winters
 passes in youth so that the spirit loves
 500 the appearance and substance of a more mature condition
 which many throughout the earth properly
 serve in their customs; men display their
 wisdom to the people, and abandon
 their pride, after their spirit drives away the foolishness of youth).

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

These lines were already mentioned in the Introduction. These mentions of youth are once again ambiguous, although in light of the descriptions of Guthlac's and the young monks' youth above, it can be at least argued that the poet had a specific view of youth in mind: as in the other occurrences, youth is here opposed to adulthood, as the poet appears to contrast young people and *weras* ('men'; see above), and also seems to present youth as a period of immaturity (see below), which may imply that youth refers to the earlier life-stage before adulthood. It has also been noted that Guthlac's speech can be said to provide important ideas about the interpretation of youth in the poem: that is, as I argued throughout this discussion, that earthly youth in *Guthlac A* seems to be presented as a period of personal and spiritual growth, which might recall a patristic interpretation of youth, and as a textual means to provide an ideal example of Christian conduct to the audience, teaching them to reject worldly riches in order to be allowed into heaven.⁴⁰⁴ After becoming familiar with the main aims and depictions of youth in the poem, it may now be possible to demonstrate this argument by looking at this passage more closely.

Firstly, Guthlac acknowledges that young people tend to neglect their spiritual wealth in the pursuit of worldly happiness, providing another demonstration of the negative connection between youth and worldly riches (although he does not condemn it explicitly); however, he also explains that making mistakes should be expected of young people, as they do not yet have adult wisdom.⁴⁰⁵ This idea has been conveyed before, first in the description of Guthlac's own youthful sins and in the earlier depiction of the young monks who are not disciplined by an elder.

⁴⁰⁴ Weber, 'A Harmony of Contrasts', p. 208.

⁴⁰⁵ Conner, 'Source Studies', p. 406.

In these lines, this same interpretation of youth is alluded to through the metaphor of the fruit, which could represent wisdom and can only be produced after a ‘number of winters’ (years) in youth, when the spirit comes to love ‘the appearance and substance of a more mature condition’. Notably, Guthlac says that only *weras* (‘[adult] men’) are capable of wisdom. He also mentions that many people become more enlightened as they grow older, which recalls his earlier rebuke to the devils that they had only shown him the ‘worst ones’: for most people, then, youth has a positive outcome. In other words, Guthlac here seems to be describing youth as a period of necessary personal and spiritual maturation, as already implied in the depictions of his own youthfulness, during which one gains wisdom thanks to their youthful experiences and grows out of their ‘pride’ and the ‘foolishness of youth’.

This latter description appears to imply another negative interpretation of youth, as it is associated with immaturity, pride, and foolishness, but it ultimately does not, because, as Guthlac says at the beginning of this passage, youth can also entail joy. This seems to recall the depiction of heavenly youth provided in the prologue, in which youth and happiness had been depicted as exclusive features of heaven in opposition to the decay of old age which characterizes earthly life. Now Guthlac shows that this is not quite the case, as there is youth and joy on earth too.

Heavenly and earthly youth are thus shown to have a similar purpose: the former is a reward for the faithful and might encourage the audience to abandon worldly things; but the poet has also repeatedly made clear that earthly youth is not completely negative, and would have shown the audience that sinners can mature and turn back to God, like Guthlac himself, who would have provided a successful example of one who has overcome their love for worldly riches. Both conceptions of youth might teach the

audience to find happiness on earth and in heaven, respectively, and, I argued, are means employed to reinforce the need to abandon earthly riches.

Therefore, Guthlac's speech suggests that youth (or earthly youth, at least) should be considered as a period of spiritual growth, in which the young grow in wisdom and learn to overcome their love for worldly things, and that human youth is not as different from heavenly youth as previously suggested. This description of youth with regards to the misbehavior of young monks thus seems to have the same message as Guthlac's, as both demonstrate that one can learn from their mistakes and become wiser and more spiritually mature.

It should also not be forgotten that Guthlac is speaking from experience, as described earlier. His own sanctity shows that one is not defined by his youthful sins, as one's destiny has already been decided by God. Guthlac's defense of youth is thus a demonstration of the poet's skill, as he expands on the implications of the VSG, in which youth was also associated with repentance, and vocalizes Guthlac's understanding of his own youthful mistakes.

It can be concluded that in *Guthlac A* youth repeatedly demonstrates that one can overcome the temptations of material things and find salvation in heaven after death, like the faithful soul at the beginning of the poem; hence, as already noted with regards to the VSG, youth can be considered as a period of spiritual growth and as a metaphoric representation of man's capacity for redemption, thus delivering a hopeful message to the monks in the audience.

The next section, on Ælfric's 'Passion of Chrysanthus and His Wife Daria', provides yet another, more positive depiction of youth.

3.3 *Youth in Ælfric's 'Passion of Chrysanthus and His Wife Daria'*

The 'Passion of Chrysanthus and His Wife Daria' narrates Chrysanthus's growth from a *cnapa* ('boy'), to a *cniht* ('youth'), and finally to a *halga wer* ('holy man'), during which he also converts the young Daria; both convert many other youths before being tortured and martyred.⁴⁰⁶ Before beginning my analysis, I should point out that while *cnapa* and *cniht* might be synonymous (as discussed in section 1.2), I believe that in the case of this passion they denote two different stages of Chrysanthus's growth: although both *cnapa* and *cniht* could mean 'boy', from around the year 1000 *cniht* began to be understood in the sense of 'youth'.⁴⁰⁷ Indeed, Bäck uses Ælfric's works as an example of this change and argues that '[*cnapa*] ousts *cniht* in the sense 'boy', the latter being hardly ever found with Ælfric in that sense', hence *cniht* should be taken to mean 'youth' or 'young man' in this text.⁴⁰⁸ Crawford also remarks that when *cnapa* and *cniht* occur together, 'the *cnapa* is younger than the *cniht*'.⁴⁰⁹ Although it cannot be proven, it therefore seems at least likely that the words *cnapa*, *cniht* and *wer* refer to specific and different stages in Chrysanthus's biological growth.

I intend to determine what ideas of youth are represented in the passion and what values they convey, by looking at three examples of young people therein: Chrysanthus (3.3.1); Daria, who is described as a *mæden* ('young woman' or 'virgin'; 3.3.2); and a young heathen soldier, also described as a *cniht*, who is converted by Daria (3.3.3).

⁴⁰⁶ The Old English edition of Ælfric's 'Passion of Chrysanthus and his Wife Daria' is in *LS* 2. Note that Ælfric, like Felix in 3.1, also applies a division of the 'ages of man' to his text, as he neatly divides Chrysanthus's growth into different stages.

⁴⁰⁷ Bäck, *Synonyms*, pp. 140, 182.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁴⁰⁹ Crawford, *Childhood*, p. 156.

Ælfric based his translation on the third-century *Passio Chrysanthi et Dariae*.⁴¹⁰ He occasionally makes significant changes to the original, especially with regards to his portrayal of Chrysanthus, Daria and the young heathen soldier. These are taken into account, as they reveal how Ælfric further develops the textual significance of youth in his translation, and his interest in the theme.

Ælfric's passion is included in the second series of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, composed c. 993x998 for Ælfric's lay patrons, Æthelweard and Æthelmær; although Ælfric states in his Preface that the collection were also intended for monks (*coenobite*; p. 2).⁴¹¹ As noted in the introduction to this chapter, Ælfric seems to have meant both to 'instruct [his audience] in the faith' and, as he says at the end of the passion, because the stories of the saints might benefit *us sylfum ... to gebysunge, þæt we þe beteran beon* ('ourselves ... as an example, so that we might be better') and *to þing-rædene* ('as intercession'; *LS*, p. 396). Apparently, then, these lives and passions were meant to lead to a practical improvement in the lives of the audience, either by providing them with examples of proper Christian behaviour, or, Ælfric says, through the saints' intercession, perhaps by mediating with God on behalf of the believer.

These didactic, moral and practical aims also have important implications for the understanding of the passion and its values, as they imply that Ælfric deliberately crafted his texts and their themes to convey specific Christian teachings. Therefore, Ælfric's concerns need to be kept in mind throughout the following analysis, as these help to appreciate the purposes of youth in the passion.

⁴¹⁰ The Latin edition of the '*Passio Chrysanthi et Dariae*' is *Ælfric's Life of the Virgin Spouses*, ed. and trans. by Upchurch, pp. 218-49, henceforth *Virgin Spouses*, followed by page number.

⁴¹¹ Aaron J. Kleist, *The Chronology and Canon of Ælfric of Eynsham*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 37 (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2019), p. 135; Hurt, *Ælfric*, p. 60.

Besides Skeat's standard edition and translation of the *LS*, the collection is considered in Hurt and Hill's studies on Ælfric, alongside his other works, while a critical edition and translation of the *vitae* of the virgin spouses and their Latin sources was provided by Upchurch.⁴¹² He and Gulley both discuss the audiences, purposes, and themes of the texts: Upchurch convincingly argues that the 'Passion of Chrysanthus and His Wife Daria' illustrates the importance of chastity and faith, and shows how the text could thus be aimed both at Ælfric's lay patrons and to a clerical audience.⁴¹³ The text seems to support Upchurch's interpretation, although I would add that Chrysanthus also provides a model of moderation (see below). Gulley instead examines the reception of the text by a female clerical audience (although she does recognize that it was mainly aimed at men), an idea which I reconsider with regards to Daria's youth (see 3.2).⁴¹⁴

Concerning the aims of the passion, Upchurch reads Ælfric's lexical choices as an attempt to provide an ascetic code of behaviour which might strengthen the audience's faith and prevent further Viking attacks, while Gulley suggests that the text should be understood from an eschatological perspective, an interpretation which seems to be supported by the concluding lines of the Passion (*LS*, pp. 396-8).⁴¹⁵ These hypotheses, if true, would further show that the themes of the passion have a practical purpose.

⁴¹² Hurt, *Ælfric*; Joyce Hill, 'Ælfric's Life and Works', in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. by Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, Volume 18 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 35-65; *LS*.

⁴¹³ Robert K. Upchurch, 'The Legend of Chrysanthus and Daria in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*', *Studies in Philology*, 101(3) (2004), 250-64 <<https://doi.org/10.1353/sip.2004.0017>> [accessed 23 November 2021], pp. 251-3, ff.

⁴¹⁴ Alison Gulley, *The Displacement of the Body in Ælfric's Virgin Martyr Lives* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 4-5, 12.

⁴¹⁵ Alison Gulley, 'Knockin' on Heaven's Door: Sexual Renunciation, Eschatology, and Liminality in Ælfric's Lives of the Virgin Spouses', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 117(2) (2018), 141-59 <[HTTPS://MUSE.JHU.EDU/ARTICLE/690389](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/690389)> [accessed 23 November 2021].

Both Gulley and Upchurch also recognize that while the work deals mainly with virginity, this is not its only theme: Upchurch, for instance, remarks on Ælfric's evident interest in conversion, as shown by his vocabulary and the fact that many characters in the passion are converts, including Chrysanthus, Daria, the heathen soldier, and the prefect Claudius and his family.⁴¹⁶ Gulley also observes that learning (or rather, the need to correctly employ one's learning to achieve salvation) is another important idea (see below).⁴¹⁷ Upchurch and Gulley do not focus on the role of youth in the text, although Gulley recognizes that the passion is concerned with growth: '[t]he subjects of the Virgin Spouses *vitæ*, as initiates to Christianity and eventual sanctity, are in the process of moving from the secular world to the desired status of the heavenly world'.⁴¹⁸ However, there are many other references to youth through which the spiritual development of Chrysanthus and Daria (and, to a lesser extent, the heathen soldier) occurs. I intend to show that youth is closely intertwined with all of these themes (chastity, faith, moderation, conversion, and learning), and contributes to instructing the audiences to allow them to gain salvation.

Ælfric's representations of the three young people are now examined in turn: I begin with Chrysanthus, as he is introduced first, then I discuss Daria, and lastly, the heathen soldier.

2021]; *Ælfric's Lives of the Virgin Spouses. With Modern English Parallel-text Translations*, ed. and trans. by Robert K. Upchurch (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), p. 20 and 'The Legend of Chrysanthus and Daria', pp. 253, 269.

⁴¹⁶ Upchurch, 'The Legend of Chrysanthus and Daria', pp. 261, 264, 266; see also Upchurch, *Ælfric's Lives of the Virgin Spouses*, p. 22.

⁴¹⁷ Gulley, *The Displacement of the Body*, p. 97.

⁴¹⁸ Gulley, 'Knockin' on Heaven's Door', p. 142.

3.3.1 *Chrysanthus*

Although this examination of Chrysanthus is mostly concerned with his description as a *cniht*, it is necessary to focus briefly on the saint's childhood and adulthood, as I have done with regards to Guthlac's VSG, because in his descriptions of Chrysanthus as a *cnapa* ('boy') and *halga wer* ('holy man'), Ælfric significantly changes his source, and these modifications also concern his depiction of Chrysanthus's youth.

While the Latin original begins with a lengthy introduction (*Virgin Spouses*, p. 219), Ælfric changes these lines and moves them to the end of his passion (*LS*, pp. 396-8), instead focusing directly on Chrysanthus (*ibid.*, p. 379). Chrysanthus is introduced as the son of the nobleman Polemius; as a boy, Chrysanthus is made to learn *woruld-wisdome* ('secular wisdom'; *ibid.*, p. 378) and *hæþene béc* ('heathen books', *ibid.*), while in the Latin source he acquires knowledge in *omnibus liberalibus* and *philosophorum studiis* ('all liberal [studies ...]' and 'the studies of the philosophers'; *Virgin Spouses*, p. 220). In the source, the only, and indirect, mention of his heathenism occurs when Chrysanthus decides to convert to Christianity, whereas Ælfric underscores Chrysanthus's heathenism compared to the original.

As the following lines show, this change might have been meant to make Chrysanthus's eventual conversion more significant:

Chrysanthus þa leornode mid leohtum andgite
and mid gleawum mode grammatican cræft
and þa hæþene béc oþ-þæt þa halgan godspel
him becómon to hande. Ða cwæð he to him sylfum.
Swa lange ic leornode þa ungeleaffullan béc
mid þeostrum afyllede oþ-þæt ic færlice becom
to soðfæstnysse lehote and ic snotor ne beo
gif ic cyrre to þeostrum fram þam soðan leohte.
Uton healdan fæste þone fægeran gold-hord
nelle ic hine for-leosan nu ic swa lange swanc.
un-nyt ic leofode gif ic hine nu forlæte.

(Chrysanthus then learned with bright intellect
and with wise mind grammatical knowledge
and then heathen books, until the holy gospels
came to his hand. Then he said to himself:

‘for so long I [have] learned these unfaithful books
 filled with darkness, until I by chance came
 to the light of faithfulness and I am not wise
 if I turn to the darkness from the true light.
 Let us hold fast to that beautiful treasure
 I will not let it go, now [that] I [have] labored so long
 I [have] lived in vain if I let it go now’; *LS*, p. 378).

Like the source, this passage connects learning with Christian faith, but Ælfric significantly abridges Chrysanthus’s conversion. Chrysanthus’s internal monologue retains the contrast between the *tenebras* (‘darkness’) and *lumen ... ueritatis* (‘light of truth’; *Virgin Spouses*, p. 220) as well as his desire not to let go of this revelation (*LS*, p. 378); for instance: *[n]on est prudentiæ ut ad tenebras redeamus a lumine* (‘[i]t is not wise to turn back to darkness from light’; *Virgin Spouses*, p. 220). However, in the Latin source this idea is repeated more often than in the OE adaptation, and the original compares faith to *aurum* (‘gold’; *ibid.*), *argentum* (‘silver’; *ibid.*) and *lapides præciosos* (‘precious stones’; *ibid.*), which Ælfric perhaps considered inappropriate.

In both versions Chrysanthus’s conversion is also a demonstration of his learning and of his suitability for sanctity; in particular, these lines depict his learning as the means by which he discovers the Christian faith, as the event occurs during his studies.⁴¹⁹ Both Ælfric and the Latin source had previously praised Chrysanthus’s intelligence: the former had remarked on his *leohtum andgite* (‘bright intellect’) and *gleawum mode* (‘wise mind’; *LS*, p. 378), which translate the Latin original’s description of his *ardentis ingenii* (‘eager talent’) and of his ability to retain information in his *capaci animo* (‘great intellect’; *Virgin Spouses*, p. 220). These portrayals emphasize that Chrysanthus has reached religious enlightenment, metaphorically depicted through the references to *leoht* (‘light’)

⁴¹⁹ See Gulley, *Displacement of the Body*, pp. 83, 85, in which she demonstrates the connection between logic and faith in Daria’s conversion and argues that Ælfric’s main aim was to show the importance of learning (see below).

in the OE adaptation and to fire in the Latin version (as the present participle *ardens* comes from the verb *ardere*, which literally means ‘to be on fire’), through his own genius.⁴²⁰ He is then baptized by a mass-priest, instructed in the Christian religion, and starts to preach the word of God (*LS*, p. 378; *Virgin Spouses*, p. 222).

When Polemius discovers that his son is now a Christian, he is advised by Chrysanthus’s friends to imprison the *cnapa* (‘boy’) so as not to be deprived of his goods and his own life (*LS*, p. 380). It is interesting to note that in the Latin version Chrysanthus is described as a *iuvēnis* (‘young man’; *Virgin Spouses*, p. 222), whereas he is younger in the OE version.⁴²¹ Moreover, Chrysanthus is never referred to as a *cnapa* again in the remainder of the text, but only as a *cniht* (‘youth’) and then as a *wer* (‘man’; see below). Although Chrysanthus is already a young man in the Latin source, Ælfric’s decision to depict him as a child could indicate the beginning of his spiritual growth, which starts with his conversion as a boy.

Ælfric then recounts how, after Chrysanthus’s imprisonment fails to weaken his faith, his father Polemius is told to try and *geweman [Chrysanthus] fram criste* (‘turn [Chrysanthus] from Christ’; *LS*, p. 380) by offering him dainties so as to *olæcan* (‘allure’) him and make him take a wife, to make him forget that he is a Christian. Polemius thus frees his son from prison, and at this point Ælfric describes Chrysanthus as a *cniht* (‘young

⁴²⁰ ‘*Ardere*; sense n° 1’, in *DMLBS* <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/ARDERE](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/ardere)> [accessed 23 November 2021].

⁴²¹ ‘*Juvenis*’, in *DMLBS* <<https://logeion.uchicago.edu/juvenis>> [accessed 23 November 2021]; *Virgin Spouses*, p. 222.

I suggest that Chrysanthus is younger in the OE version because *juvenis* more properly refers to one who is in the stage of *juventus* (adulthood), as made clearer in Lewis and Short’s *Latin Dictionary*, which state that a *juvenis* was for people ‘older than *adolescentes* and younger than *seniores*’: ‘*juvenis*; sense II’, in *A Latin Dictionary* <<https://logeion.uchicago.edu/iuvenis>> [accessed 22 March 2023].

man'; *ibid.*). Polemius, according to plan, tries to corrupt him by giving him *deorwurðum reafum* ('precious garments'; *ibid.*), by adorning his bed chamber with *pallum* ('cloths'; *ibid.*) and *wah-ryftum* ('curtains'; *ibid.*), by often sending him *sanda* ('meats' ; *ibid.*), *estas* ('delicacies'; *ibid.*) and *drencas* ('drinks'; *ibid.*) and finally asking five *mædenu* ('young women'; *ibid.*) to *awendon mid heora wodlican plegan/ His gepanc fram criste* ('turn with their mad play his thoughts from Christ'; *ibid.*). Thus, it seems that while Ælfric employs Chrysanthus's childhood to signify his conversion, he presents his youth as a period in which he has to strengthen his faith by facing physical, sexual and moral temptations.

While neither food nor intercourse were considered sinful if one behaved with moderation, excesses, meaning the sins of gluttony and lust, were harshly condemned by the Church. Ælfric himself cautions against both in his homily 'On the Greater Litany (Tuesday)'. Concerning lust, Ælfric writes that *[n]e gesceop se Ælmihtga God men for galnysse* ('[t]he Almighty God did not create man for lust'), while concerning food he writes that *[o]ft unmen secgað þaet hi unsynnige beon. ðeah ðe hi leohtlice mettas him on muð bestingon. on swilcum faestendagum mid fraecere gyfernysse [...]* ('[o]ften men say that they are without sin, although they lightly push food in their mouth on such feast-days with voracious gluttony [...]'). He also connects the consumption of food with the original sin.⁴²² Upchurch remarks that it may be surprising that Ælfric stresses the

⁴²² CH II, pp. 180-90; *ibid.*, p. 185. Ælfric was not against lay marriage, although he believed that its main purpose was procreation, not sexual pleasure. In his homily on 'Sexagesima Sunday', he writes that those laymen who marry in order to procreate while abstaining from intercourse during forbidden times (such as pregnancies) will reap thirty-fold fruit. On Ælfric's opinions concerning lay marriage, see Gulley, 'Knockin' on Heaven's Door', 141-59, esp. pp. 144-7, 154; Peter Jackson, 'Ælfric and the Purpose of Christian Marriage: A Reconsideration of the *Life of Saint Æthelthryth*, Lines 120-30', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 29 (January 2000), 235-60

importance of chastity to a lay audience (his patrons Æthelweard and Æthelmær), which was not bound by the same rules as the monks, yet he points out that Ælfric, in this case, likely meant ‘spiritual chastity’, according to which the laity ‘are virgins of the faith who remain chaste through steadfast belief’, an idea which Ælfric more clearly expresses in his homily on the ‘Common of Virgins’, in which he speaks of a ‘maidenhood of faith’. Therefore, according to this view, chastity and faith are intertwined, and, together with moderation, were meant both for Ælfric’s monkish audience and for his lay one.⁴²³ Furthermore, Lee observes that ‘[a]bstention from food is often a characteristic of saints’.⁴²⁴ Hence, these temptations are sinful and pose a threat to Chrysanthus’s spiritual growth towards sanctity, as Polemius and his advisers aim to undermine his religious virtue by making the youth ‘forget that he is a Christian’.

<[HTTPS://DOI-ORG.EZPROXY.NOTTINGHAM.AC.UK/10.1017/S0263675100002477](https://doi-org.ezproxy.nottingham.ac.uk/10.1017/S0263675100002477)>

[accessed 23 November 2021], pp. 241-51 and Robert K. Upchurch, ‘For Pastoral Care and Political Gain: Ælfric of Eynsham’s Preaching on Marital Celibacy’, *Traditio*, 59 (2004), 39-78

<[HTTPS://DOI-ORG.EZPROXY.NOTTINGHAM.AC.UK/10.1017/S0362152900002531](https://doi-org.ezproxy.nottingham.ac.uk/10.1017/S0362152900002531)>

[accessed 23 November 2021], pp. 44-71. On fasting in Early Medieval English culture, see Christina Lee, ‘Reluctant Appetites: Anglo-Saxon Attitudes towards Fasting’, in *Saints and Scholars: New Perspectives on Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture in Honour of Hugh Magennis*, ed. by Stuart McWilliams (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), pp. 164-86 (p. 165).

⁴²³ Upchurch, ‘The Legend of Chrysanthus and Daria’, p. 255. For the homily for the *Common of Virgins*, see *CH* II, pp. 327-34.

⁴²⁴ Jackson, ‘Ælfric and the Purpose of Christian Marriage’, p. 246; Lee, ‘Reluctant Appetites’, p. 165. Food and intercourse were strictly regulated according to the liturgical calendar, as shown in the penitentials. For instance, the *Old English Introduction* states that one must ‘[f]asten each day in the Lenten period to the ninth hour ... and abstain from dairy foods [...]’ (trans. by Allen J. Frantzen), whereas concerning intercourse it is written in the *Canons of Theodore* that ‘[w]hoever fornicates on a Sunday, let him ask God for forgiveness and fast three days’ (trans. by Allen J. Frantzen; note the use of fast as penance in this case). See *Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, ed. by Allen J. Frantzen <[HTTP://WWW.ANGLO-SAXON.NET/PENANCE/INDEX.PHP](http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/index.php)> [accessed 21 November 2021].

Here Ælfric also appears to show his concern with youth and his awareness of patristic interpretations: his decision to characterize Chrysanthus's youth as a period of tribulations does not seem to be coincidental and may have been based on the patristic association between youth and moral uncertainty (see 1.4). Moreover, it seems also significant that Ælfric's description of Chrysanthus as a *cniht* is again different from the corresponding passage in the Latin source, in which he is never called a youth, but rather either by name, *eum* ('him') or a *[u]ir Dei* ('[m]an of God'; *Virgin Spouses*, p. 224). In Latin, *vir* means 'man (opp. to a boy)': Ælfric thus again modifies the Latin *Passio*, according to which Chrysanthus was already an adult at this point, to further focus on his youth.⁴²⁵

But contrary to common interpretations of young people as prone to sin and moral weakness, when faced with threats to his moral and spiritual virtue, Chrysanthus withstands them:

[A]c se cniht forseah þa sanda and drencas.
and þa mædena onscunode. Swa swa man deþ næddran.
He læg on gebedum. And forbeah heora cossas.
and bæd þone hælend þæt he ge-holde his clænnyse.

([B]ut the youth rejected the dishes of meat and drinks
abhorred the young women, just like one does [abhor] snakes.
He lay in prayers and shunned their kisses.
and prayed the lord that he preserve his chastity; *LS*, p. 380).

Chrysanthus thus demonstrates his moderation, chastity and faith: he shows moderation by rejecting the food, chastity by scorning the young women, and faith by praying to God to preserve his virtue. Subsequently, by withstanding these temptations, Chrysanthus proves his spiritual worthiness and provides an ideal model of Christian behaviour for both the clerical and secular audiences of the *LS* (*ibid.*). His success is further shown

⁴²⁵ 'Vir', sense n° 1', in *DMLBS* <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/VIR](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/vir)> [accessed 23 November 2021].

when, after his prayer, God works a miracle so that the maidens fall asleep every time they try to seduce him in his bed chamber, protecting his virginity (ibid., pp. 380-2). As noted above, miracles convey God's favour on His saints and thus provide further demonstration of their holiness.

However, Chrysanthus's response also complicates the interpretation of youth in the passion. I had earlier suggested that Chrysanthus's temptations reflect Ælfric's understanding of youth as a period of moral uncertainty, according to the 'ambiguous' depiction of youth as a period in which the young person tends to make mistakes because of their inexperience and tendency towards immorality, but it might now be seen that Chrysanthus, unlike Guthlac, never commits any 'sins' or strays from his path to sainthood in his youth (see 3.1 and 3.2), and thus embodies a different conception of youth, which is apparently not connected with sin, unlike the depictions seen so far in the *VSG* and *Guthlac A*.

The contrast between Chrysanthus and his father also suggests that, on the one hand, Polemius, his advisers, and the five young women convey a sinful interpretation of youth, hence their attempts to corrupt Chrysanthus by appealing to his vanity, gluttony and lust; but on the other hand, Chrysanthus himself personifies an alternative model of youth which illustrates moderation, chastity and faith, and thus shows that youth can also be virtuous. Thus, father and son adhere to two opposing moral and religious belief systems (Chrysanthus's Christianity and his father's paganism), which also correspond to different conceptions of youth (virtuous and sinful). By triumphing over his temptations, Chrysanthus shows the audience the superiority of the Christian conception of youth he represents and of the virtues it entails, encouraging them to follow his example.

The significance of this contrast in the OE passion becomes clearer when the Latin source is also taken into account. In the original, Polemius's friends tell him that

‘[s]i filium tuum ab hac usurpatione conaris eripere, magis eum deliciis et uoluptatibus occupa, et cuicumque elegantissimæ puellæ atque prudentissimæ coniugio trade ut cum didicerit esse maritus, obliuiscatur esse Christianus

(‘[i]f [you] are trying to snatch away your son from this cult, rather engage him with delicacies and pleasures, and marry him to some very elegant and wise young woman so that when he dedicates himself to be a husband, he will forget to be a Christian’; *Virgin Spouses*, p. 222).

While the Latin original provides a more physically violent image through the verb *eripio* (‘to snatch away’), Ælfric employs the verb *geweman* (‘to turn’), which recalls Chrysanthus’s conversion and specifically his decision not to abandon his new-found Christian faith by ‘turning’ (*cyrran* in OE) to darkness, implying that Chrysanthus’s temptation in Ælfric’s text is subtler and tests his moral resolve, as also shown by the verb *olæcan* (‘to allure’), which seems to imply persuasion.⁴²⁶

As detailed in the next section, Chrysanthus is then tempted by Daria but instead converts her. Both youths then convert many other young people to Christianity (*LS*, pp. 384-6). Chrysanthus and Daria are then denounced to the judge Claudius, and tortured, but Chrysanthus is not harmed as God’s miracles protect him (*ibid.*, pp. 386-8): for example, his tormentors try to bind him, but his fetters are always untied; this miraculous event, like the miracle of the five maidens, may show God’s favour on Chrysanthus and his faith, and also foreshadows his future sanctity. Chrysanthus is then called a ‘Christian youth’ when Ælfric describes how *ysrondon þa cempa on gean þone cristenen cniht* (‘the soldiers became angered against the Christian youth’; *LS*, p. 386). The expression *cristen cniht* pairs youth and faith and seems to show that youth can be employed to reinforce Christian values. However, this is the last time Chrysanthus is referred to as a *cniht*.

⁴²⁶ See for instance ‘The Decollation of Saint John the Baptist’ in *CH* I, pp. 451-8, p. 458, and ‘Martin’, in *CH* II, pp. 288-97, p. 295.

Chrysanthus is bound, drenched in urine, sewn to an ox's skin, tied in chains and thrown in prison, but God works miracles so that he is unharmed and does not suffer; he is then miraculously freed and there is a sudden bright light. He is sent to Claudius, who tortures him again, but these torments also fail, and Claudius decides to convert to Christianity with his family (ibid., pp. 388-90). These tortures allow Chrysanthus to mature, and indeed Ælfric refers to him as *þone halgan* ('the saint'; p. 388). Chrysanthus has thus finally obtained sainthood. Indeed, as previously mentioned, from this point onwards he is no longer referred to as a youth: after converting Claudius, his family and his servants, he is called a *halga wer* ('holy man'; p. 390). While he was already a saint and a *uir* in the source, Chrysanthus's description as an *halga wer* at this point is another addition by Ælfric. As *wer* usually indicates an adult man, this description suggests the completion of Chrysanthus's growth: after being described as a *cnapa* when he converts, he is then referred to as a *cniht*, even a *cristen cniht*, when he endures different tortures, and finally an *halga wer*.⁴²⁷ Thus, it can be seen that although Chrysanthus seems spiritually perfect from childhood to adulthood, unlike Guthlac, the passion is not simply about youth, but rather, like the other texts analyzed in this chapter, about spiritual growth, which concludes with the attainment of sanctity. Yet, there is an evident focus on the saint's youth, as the period in which he strengthens his belief by withstanding moral, sexual and physical tortures and first displays his Christian virtues, providing the audience with a virtuous example of a young man who illustrates the virtues of chastity, moderation and faith.

This idea of a virtuous interpretation of youth illustrated by Chrysanthus is then reconsidered through the portrayal of the beautiful, intelligent and heathen Daria.

⁴²⁷ *Virgin Spouses*, p. 242; 'Wer; sense n° II', in Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* <<http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/035342>> [accessed 19 November 2021].

3.3.2 *Daria*

Polemius seeks Daria's help to corrupt Chrysanthus after the failure of the five maidens. She is introduced as a *mæden*, which in section 1.2 was seen to mean 'young woman' or 'virgin'.⁴²⁸ In the rubric Ælfric calls her a *uirgo*, which can likewise mean 'young (unmarried) woman' or 'virgin', reinforcing this ambiguity.⁴²⁹ Although Ælfric might be more interested in Daria's virginity, as he was in the description of Eugenia (see 1.2), later in this text Ælfric describes both *cnihtas* and *mædenu*, juxtaposing the two terms, and given that *cniht* was likely used to denote young men, it may seem that *mæden* also had connotations relating to youth in this passion, not just virginity. Thus, it is not altogether clear what meaning should be preferred with regards to Daria, 'young woman' or 'virgin', although I suggest that, perhaps, both meanings might be true: she could be a young virgin.

She is also *wundorlice cræftig* ('wonderfully ingenious'), *æpelborenre mægpe* ('of noble family'), and on *uðwitegunge snoter* ('wise in philosophy'; *LS*, p. 382). Chrysanthus was described in a similar manner at the beginning of the passion: he is also the son of the *æpelboren man* ('noble-born man'; *ibid.*, p. 378) Polemius, he also studied *þæt he uð-wita wurde* ('so that he might become a philosopher'; *ibid.*) and he is also characterized as wise, as he studies first heathen books and then the holy gospels *mid gleawum mode* ('with bright mind'; *ibid.*) and *mid leohtum andgite* ('with eager intellect'; *ibid.*). However, Daria is still *hæðenscipe wunigende* ('living in heathendom'; *ibid.*, p. 382). She is thus Chrysanthus's counterpart, as she has his intelligence and noble birth but lacks his faith.

⁴²⁸ See Bäck, *Synonyms*, pp. 199-213.

⁴²⁹ '[V]irgo; senses 1 and 2', in *DMLBS* <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/VIRGO](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/virgo)> [accessed 19 November 2021].

Her description is similar in the Latin source, where she is *uirgo super omnes pulchritudinem, elegantior, et ita sapiens ut illi nec ipsi oratores occurrant* ('a young woman [or virgin?] superior to all in beauty, more elegant, and so wise that not even orators themselves go against her'; *Virgin Spouses*, p. 228). If compared with the OE description, it can be seen that Ælfric, as he did with Chrysanthus, emphasizes her intellect and heathenism. It should be noted that Daria is a *uirgo* in the source, a term which has the same meanings, and thus the same ambiguity, as *mæden* (see above).

Ælfric also describes her as *wlitig on wæstm* ('beautiful in appearance'; *LS*, p. 382), which does not seem to be present in the source. The term *wæstm* is interesting: while in this passage it would seem to refer to Daria's beauty, it can also refer to fruits and one's progeny, yet its first meaning is 'growth'.⁴³⁰ An example of this meaning is in Ælfric's homily on 'The Nativity of the Holy Innocents', in which he mentions the rebirth of the children killed by Herod, who will be reborn on Judgement Day *mid fullum wæstm*, translated by Thorpe as 'in full growth'.⁴³¹ While the Latin source only refers to Daria's beauty, the OE adaptation arguably foreshadows her conversion and spiritual growth. However, *wæstm* likely also conveys a reference to her appearance, implying that she is another threat to Chrysanthus's chastity which he will have to overcome. The term *wæstm* thus alludes to both of Daria's textual roles, as a temptation for Chrysanthus and to her spiritual growth, from heathen to Christian.

In the next passage Ælfric continues to emphasize Daria's beauty and sensuality. She approaches Chrysanthus adorned with *scinendum gymstanum swilce sun-beam færllice* ('gold and gemstones shining like a sunbeam'; *LS*, p. 382) and *hine frefrode mid hire fægerum wordum* ('consoled him with her beautiful words'; *ibid.*). Ælfric here again

⁴³⁰ 'Wæstm', in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTP://BOSWORTH.FF.CUNI.CZ/035342](http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/035342)> [accessed 21 November 2021].

⁴³¹ *CH* I, pp. 84-5.

praises Daria for her beauty and her rhetoric skill, but, interestingly, does not criticize her for tempting Chrysanthus, not even when Daria attempts to corrupt him *mid spræce* ('with her speech'; *ibid.*): this seems another reference to her intelligence and also implies another contrast between Daria and the five young women who try to seduce Chrysanthus with sex, showing that Daria, despite her heathenism, is not sinful, but rather an intelligent and beautiful young woman. Ælfric further illustrates the opposition between Daria and Chrysanthus when he explicitly describes her as a heathen, while in the original she is one of the virgins who serve Vesta. Of course, she cannot corrupt his *clænum mode* ('pure mind'; *ibid.*).

The encounter between the two youths could end in the same way as Chrysanthus's temptation by the five young women, by having Chrysanthus showing his superiority over Daria, but instead he decides to convert her. He tells her that she might have Christ as her bridegroom if she were willing to live in chastity, and she *wurde swa witlig/ Wiþ-innan on mode swa swa þu wið-utan eart* ('would become as beautiful/ Within, in [her] mind, just as [she is] outwardly'; *LS*, p. 384). This further reference to her beauty is connected with faith, not with sensuality and temptation as the previous ones, and again suggests that Daria can become a faithful Christian.

Daria subsequently demonstrates her inner goodness when she explains that she agreed to tempt Chrysanthus so that he would not be lost to his father or the gods, not for wantonness (*LS*, pp. 382-4). Thus, unlike other heathen characters in this passion, such as Polemius and the young women, Daria is depicted in sympathetic terms because of her concern for Chrysanthus's relationship with his father and with the heathen gods; she is thus a virtuous young woman, although she is not (yet) a Christian. Moreover, Daria is also not passive; she has her own reasons for accepting Polemius's request and is not depicted as immoral for her decision.

These positive qualities are further shown in the following exchange, which also occurs in the source (*Virgin Spouses*, pp. 230-6), in which Chrysanthus converts Daria to Christianity, first through a condemnation of the immorality of the pagan gods, then for a long time he tries to convert her *mid wordum* ('with words'; *LS*, p. 384) and he is successful. This sequence again showcases Chrysanthus and Daria's intelligence and wisdom, as he is able to convince her to renounce her paganism through a logical and coherent argument and she recognizes the truth of his reasoning: learning once again becomes the means of conversion.⁴³² This is again more apparent in the OE version, as Ælfric does not replicate a dialogue on the nature of pagan belief (perhaps because he thought it could lead the audience into error or would have made him appear as less than devout in the eyes of his patrons) and only retains the examples of Saturn, Jove and Hercules (*LS*, p. 384). Once again, Ælfric seems to employ conversion to demonstrate the truthfulness of his Christian conception of youth and show the audience the importance of chastity, moderation and faith. Daria's transformation from a beautiful, well-meaning and intelligent, yet pagan young woman to a beautiful, well-meaning, intelligent and faithful Christian convert recalls Chrysanthus's words to her that if she accepted Christ as bridegroom, she would become as beautiful inside as she is outside (*ibid.*, p. 382). Daria has now realized this hypothesis, willingly recognizing the logic of Christianity and abandoning the falseness of paganism (as Chrysanthus also did). She thus seems to have become another positive representation of a young saint, which may again show how Ælfric employs this passion to convey a positive image of youth, associated with intelligence, faith, and chastity. It can also be argued that Daria provides a more specifically feminine depiction of virtuous youth, perhaps for a female audience as Gulley suggested, because, despite her heathenism and her beauty, she is never depicted as a

⁴³² Gulley, *Displacement of the Body*, p. 97.

sexual temptress like the five maidens, as she, while beautiful, is also chaste, intelligent and, eventually, a believer.⁴³³

Ælfric describes the applicability of this model of Christian youth more explicitly by describing how Chrysanthus and Daria live in chaste marriage and convert many to Christianity and their virtuous way of life, so that the realization of Chrysanthus and Daria's conception of youth is here shown to involve chastity and faith, but also companionship and learning (ibid., p. 384).⁴³⁴ Once again, as in the case of the two saints, mentions of youth are accompanied by descriptions of conversion. In this case the young men and women (*cnihtas* and *mædenu*; ibid.) are converted by Chrysanthus and Daria. This scene also further underscores the agency of Chrysanthus and Daria, as they put their knowledge into practice and further illustrate the values of the text. In contrast to Ælfric, the Latin hagiographer then explains that many *uirgines*, *iuenes*, *uiri* and *mulieres* ('wives'; p. 238) who had been deprived of their partners by Chrysanthus and Daria stirred a *seditiona confusio* ('turbulent disorder'), for which they denounced the saints to the pagan judge Claudius (ibid.). The OE is less clear, as Ælfric only mentions that *men astyrodon sace be þysum* ('men stirred up strife about this') but does not specify if this crowd included any young people; perhaps he may have done so in order to maintain a virtuous depiction of youth. Upchurch also observes that in the Latin the protest was due to people being deprived of their partners and the Latin source explicitly refers to their *uoluptatum studio et carnali commertio* ('desire for pleasure and sexual intercourse'), thus focusing on 'the social repercussions' of the saints' conversion, whereas Ælfric

⁴³³ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁴³⁴ 'Mann; sense 1', in Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/22348](https://bosworthtoller.com/22348)> [accessed 23 November 2021].

eschews any mention of carnal desire.⁴³⁵ In so doing, Ælfric also rejects the association of youth and lust which was common in patristic writings.

After Chrysanthus and Daria are imprisoned (*LS*, p. 392), Ælfric again focuses on Daria. She is sent to a brothel, where God protects her chastity, then back to prison, which is illuminated by heavenly light, and finally she is sent a lioness by God (*ibid.*). At this point she is called a *geleaffulle mæden* ('a faithful young woman'; *ibid.*). This expression recalls Chrysanthus's description as a *Cristen cniht*, and again juxtaposes youth and Christian belief, but it also demonstrates that Daria is a dynamic and virtuous character, introduced as a heathen temptress before embracing Christianity and becoming faithful. Her depiction again presents her as a youthful model of faith, beauty and intelligence which perhaps was specifically aimed at a female audience.

Like Chrysanthus, Daria manifests her faith by converting another, a pagan soldier who tries to attack her in her cell, which might show her sanctity and rationality, as she uses logic to convert him, as Chrysanthus did with her. This soldier only appears in one scene, but is given a very different characterization compared to the source (his youth, for one), which may contribute to the representation of youth in the passion.

3.3.3 *The Heathen Soldier*

When the pagan *cniht* tries to attack Daria, a lioness protects her, but Daria asks the animal to spare the youth (*LS*, pp. 392-4). The original describes the soldier as *quendam turpissimum qui in scelere corruptionis opinatissimus habebatur* ('a most disgraceful [man] who was considered as the most renowned in the shameful act of seduction'; *Virgin Spouses*, p. 244). Ælfric completely changes the introduction of the soldier: he is only *heora an* ('one of them', i. e. the heathens) and he does not possess any outstandingly

⁴³⁵ Upchurch, 'The Legend of Chrysanthus and Daria', pp. 259-60.

negative qualities (*LS*, p. 392). Ælfric describes him as *ofdræddan men* ('the terrified man') and he tells Daria *mid fyrhte* ('with fear'; because of Daria's lioness) that if she lets him go, he will convert and preach God and her power (*ibid.*, pp. 392-4), which he does (*ibid.*, p. 394). Unlike Chrysanthus and Daria, this heathen soldier is not a saint or especially intelligent or virtuous, but a common man; however, it seems interesting that he is described as a *cniht* twice (*ibid.*, p. 392), whereas the source never specifies that he is young, which perhaps suggests that Ælfric intended him to be another representation of virtuous behaviour for the audience.

But what could be the purpose of these changes? I would argue that Ælfric made the heathen soldier a young man to provide a different, more relatable model to the audience compared to the two saints, as the soldier is not described as especially learned or faithful, but as a 'normal' man who nevertheless discovers God and abandons his heathenism. In this way, he again conveys a connection between youth and conversion, and provides another positive depiction of youth, just like Chrysanthus and Daria do. Indeed, despite his heathenism, Ælfric does not criticize him, even though he tries to attack Daria, which is different to the source text where he is despised; on the contrary, Ælfric makes him more sympathetic in the eyes of the audience, for instance by repeatedly stating that he is frightened by the lioness.

Chrysanthus, Daria and the heathen soldier repeatedly show that youth is an important period in their spiritual growth: Daria and the soldier convert in their youth, while Chrysanthus, who embraced Christianity as a boy, withstands several moral and physical temptations and strengthens his faith as a young man, which eventually allow him to become a saint. However, all three youths seem to convey a more positive depiction of youth compared to the example of Guthlac in the *VSG* and *Guthlac A*, as they do not

commit sins or immoral acts (not even Daria and the heathen soldier, despite their paganism) and thus show that youth in EME literature could be understood as a period of virtue, and young people could also become ideal models of Christian behaviour for the audience. The examples of Chrysanthus, Daria and the heathen soldier might have strengthened the faith of the audiences through their scenes of conversion, and Chrysanthus would have shown them the virtues of faith, chastity and moderation, while Daria could be a model specifically for the female audience, with her intelligence and beauty, and the heathen soldier could be a more relatable example. These young characters thus have an important role in the *LS*, and contribute in several ways to Ælfric's textual purposes.

3.4 Conclusion

The young characters analyzed in these hagiographic texts repeatedly show that youth could be employed to convey various Christian teachings, and could be represented in different ways: Guthlac in the *VSG* and *Guthlac A* represents youth as a metaphor for redemption, as a period in which one makes mistakes but also learns from them, teaching the audience that they can always be redeemed, and in *Guthlac A* this lesson is intertwined with the need to reject worldly riches to enter heaven. The 'Passion of Chrysanthus and Daria' instead shows that youth could also be understood as virtuous, as Chrysanthus, Daria and the heathen soldier are never depicted as sinful or criticized, despite their earlier heathenism. Therefore, these examples demonstrate that youth is an important period of spiritual growth, which allows these young characters to obtain sainthood, and also a significant theme in EME hagiography.

The next chapter focuses on *Beowulf* to determine how youth and young people were understood in a heroic context.

Chapter 4

Youth and Young People in *Beowulf*

There seems to be little, if any, doubt that *Beowulf* is ‘essentially about a hero and about heroism’.⁴³⁶ Cherniss noted that ‘heroic ideals pervade the poem’: the most important of these ideals, which constitute what has become commonly known as the ‘heroic ethos’ or ‘code’, are loyalty between the retainers and their lord, as the warriors fight for their lord who in turn rewards and gains their loyalty by giving them treasure, horses, and feasts (80b-1a, 1043-8a. 2633-8a), and the need for warriors to win glory by feats of arms (1534b-6).⁴³⁷

This chapter examines how youth is presented and understood within this heroic context and how the representations of youth and young people are employed to convey heroic values. Since Tolkien defined *Beowulf* as ‘an elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and age’, scholars have become aware of the importance of the theme of youth in the text.⁴³⁸ Bruce considers the representation of youth in *Beowulf* with regards to Beowulf himself and, to a lesser extent, Wiglaf, and

⁴³⁶ R. E. Kaske, ‘“*Sapientia et Fortitudo*” as the Controlling Theme of *Beowulf*’, *Studies in Philology*, 55(3) (1958), 423-56 <[HTTPS://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/4173241](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4173241)> [accessed 17 December 2021], p. 423.

⁴³⁷ Jayne Carroll, ‘The Verse of Heroes’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature in English*, ed. by Elaine Treharne and Greg Walker With the Assistance of William Green (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 133-59 (p. 134); Michael D. Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ: Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Christian Poetry* (The Hague, Netherlands; Paris, France: Mouton, 1972), pp. 11, 30-1, 36, 57, 59.

⁴³⁸ J. R. R. Tolkien, ‘*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics’, in *Interpretations of Beowulf: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by R. D. Fulk (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 14-44 (p. 32).

argues that the text had been envisaged to provide heroic teachings to young warriors.⁴³⁹ The idea that *Beowulf* is a didactic poem is not new, having been already suggested by Schücking in 1929; this is an intriguing possibility which might help to explain the numerous references to youth and young people in the text.⁴⁴⁰

Although Dockray-Miller and Anderson also comment on the youth of Wiglaf (2599ff) and Beow (12-25), respectively, while Lee examines Beowulf's youthful race with Breca (498ff), the majority of scholars addressing the subject have focused on lines 2177-89, which describe how Beowulf had to suffer the scorn of the Geats for most of his youth.⁴⁴¹ These lines, as Eliason put it, 'come as a stunning surprise, for this is contrary to what we expect of a hero and at odds with everything we have been told about Beowulf [...]', as until that point 'he has seemed a perfect hero'.⁴⁴² As shown below, Eliason's

⁴³⁹ Alexander M. Bruce, 'An Education in the Mead-Hall: *Beowulf*'s Lessons for Young Warriors', *Heroic Age*, 5 (2001) <[HTTP://WWW.HEROICAGE.NET/ISSUES/5/BRUCE1.HTML](http://www.heroicage.net/issues/5/bruce1.html)> [accessed 17 December 2021].

⁴⁴⁰ Levin L. Schücking, 'The Ideal of Kingship in *Beowulf*', in *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, ed. by Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), pp. 35-49; Bruce, 'Education'.

⁴⁴¹ Bruce, 'Education'; Dongill Lee, 'A Study on *Geogop* in Old English Poetry: *Beowulf* 535-8', *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern English Studies Association of Korea*, 10(2) (2002) <[HTTP://ANTHONY.SOGANG.AC.KR/MESAK/MES102/DONGILLLEE.HTM](http://anthony.sogang.ac.kr/MESAK/MES102/DONGILLLEE.HTM)> [accessed 17 December 2021]; Earl R. Anderson, 'Beow: The Boy Wonder (Beowulf 12-25)', *English Studies*, 89(6) (2008), 630-42 <[HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.1080/00138380802396045](https://doi.org/10.1080/00138380802396045)> [accessed 17 December 2021], p. 633; Mary Dockray-Miller, 'Dating Wiglaf: Emotional Connections to the Young Hero in *Beowulf*', in *Dating Beowulf: Studies in Intimacy*, ed. by Daniel C. Remein and Erica Weaver (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 304-18. Beowulf's sluggish youth is more properly described in lines 2183b-9, but most critics, not altogether correctly, have tended to consider lines 2177-89 together. I focus on lines 2183b-89 to analyze Beowulf's youth, and examine lines 2177-83a separately.

⁴⁴² Norman E. Eliason, 'Beowulf's Inglorious Youth', *Studies in Philology*, 76(2) (1979), 101-8 <[HTTPS://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/PDF/4173999.PDF](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4173999.pdf)> [accessed 17 December 2021], p. 101.

interpretation illustrates a tendency in *Beowulf* criticism to consider the hero's youth as unheroic, or 'inglorious', as scholars have described it at least since Bonjour examined it in 1950, and as an inconsistency with Beowulf's otherwise heroic character.⁴⁴³ Therefore, lines 2183b-9 seem to be an ideal starting point for a (re)examination of youth in *Beowulf*.⁴⁴⁴ In particular, I intend to challenge Eliason's and other scholarly beliefs (summarized below) that this passage somehow undermines Beowulf's heroism.

The following analysis also considers other instances of youth and young people in the poem, including, for example, Beowulf's exchange with Unferth regarding the swimming race with Breca in their youth (498ff), as well as the descriptions of other characters described at some point as young, but whose youth has received less attention, such as Scyld (8-11), Beow (12-25), Hrothgar (64-67a), Wyglaf (2599ff), and Heremod (901-915, 1709b-23a), although in Beowulf's, Scyld's and Heremod's depictions their youthfulness seems implicit.

There are many other young people in *Beowulf*, such as Hygelac (1831b, 1969a), Hygd (1926b), and Freawaru (2025a), to name a few; but I will focus on the representations of young Beowulf (4.1), Wiglaf (4.2), Hrothgar (4.3), Scyld (4.4), Beow (4.5) and Heremod (4.6), in turn, because in these cases the characters' youths may be said to provide different representations of heroism and convey heroic values, while the youths of characters such as Hygelac and Hygd seem to be given less importance by the poet.

⁴⁴³ Adrien Bonjour, *The Digressions in Beowulf* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1950), p. 24.

⁴⁴⁴ The edition of *Beowulf* used herein is Klaeber's *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. Edited, with Introduction, Commentary, Appendices, Glossary, and Bibliography by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D. Niles; with a Foreword by Helen Damico, 4th edn (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 2008). References are given as in-text citations by line number. All translations are mine.

Moreover, the youthful descriptions of Beowulf, Wiglaf, Hrothgar, Scyld, Beow and Heremod are considered in relation to each other, to argue that the poet conveys his reflections by weaving a web of parallels and contrasts between ‘present’ and ‘past’ characters, which would reinforce previous interpretations of youth and heroism: Beowulf, Wiglaf and Hrothgar should then be considered first, while Scyld, Beow and Heremod, former kings of the Scyldings, are examined afterwards. By determining how the youths of these characters are interpreted, I hope to raise the possibility that youth in *Beowulf* is more closely intertwined with the heroic concerns of the poem than has hitherto been recognized. I begin with the much-discussed passage about Beowulf’s ‘inglorious’ youth.

4.1 *Beowulf*

The description of Beowulf’s youth occurs when Beowulf reunites with Hygelac after triumphantly returning from Denmark:

... Hēan wæs lange,
 swā hyne Ġēata bearn gōdne ne tealdon,
 2185 nē hyne on medobenċe micles wyrðne
 (dry)hten Wedera ġedōn wolde;
 swýðe (wēn)don þæt hē slēac wære,
 æðeling unfrom. Edwenden cwōm
 tīrēadigum menn torna ġehwylċes.

(... Long had he been of little worth
 so the sons of the Geats did not consider him good,
 2185 nor much honour to him on the mead-bench]
 the commander of the Geats would grant;]
 they very much thought that he was lazy,]
 a weak prince. A reversal came]
 to the glorious man for each of these troubles).

Klaeber dismisses this episode as ‘not very convincing’, and since then scholars have devised several theories to refute the idea that the otherwise heroic Beowulf had been a ‘slacker’ in his youth. Klaeber also recognizes that the above description features the ‘Ash Lad’ or ‘Cinderella’ folkloric motif, which Bonjour and Malone call the motif of the

‘sluggish youth’; according to this, a character begins as an unpromising young man before becoming a hero.⁴⁴⁵

While Klaeber believes that the poet had employed the motif unsuccessfully, Malone instead suggests that the poet found the folkloric motif ‘attached’ to Beowulf and tried to ‘explain it away’; in his view, the scorn Beowulf suffered from the Geats was ‘a mistaken interpretation of the hero’s forbearance in the face of insults and (perhaps) attacks’. The description of what Malone considers as Beowulf’s ‘forbearance’ is provided in lines 2177-83a (below). Hence, Beowulf would not actually have had an ‘inglorious’ youth, but was a self-restrained and good man all along; Malone thus does not take these lines at face-value, but proposes a different reading which emphasizes Beowulf’s heroism.⁴⁴⁶ However, it should be noted that the poet never states that Beowulf’s ‘mistreatment’ was due to his self-restraint, hence Malone’s claim does not seem to be supported by textual evidence.

Other authors continued to make attempts to justify what they perceived as an incoherent portrayal of Beowulf. For instance, Eliason, whose strong feelings with regards to this passage have been shown in the introduction to this chapter, argues that these lines do not refer to Beowulf at all, but rather to Hygelac, although his interpretation, again not clearly supported by the text, was recently rejected by North.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁵ Bonjour, *Digressions*, p. 24; Kemp Malone, ‘Young Beowulf’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 36(1) (1937), 21-3 <[HTTPS://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/27704216](https://www.jstor.org/stable/27704216)> [accessed 17 December 2021], p. 21; *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, p. 236.

⁴⁴⁶ Malone, ‘Young Beowulf’, pp. 21-2.

⁴⁴⁷ Eliason, ‘Beowulf’s Inglorious Youth’, pp. 103-8; Richard North, ‘Hrothulf’s Childhood and Beowulf’s: A Comparison’, in *Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. by Irvine and Rudolf, pp. 222-43 (p. 234). Interestingly, Bosworth-Toller seems to make a similar suggestion, as in the entry for ‘*tireadig*’, it reports the occurrence in line 2189a and claims it refers to Hygelac; but as I explain next, this supposition seems to be flawed. ‘[T]ír-éadíg’, in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

To my knowledge, Tripp Jr's is the most recent reassessment of lines 2183b-9: like previous critics, he argues that they describe a period in which Beowulf had to endure the unjustified scorn of the Geats, but he tries to show that this did not occur during Beowulf's youth, but later, when he refused to take the throne of the Geatish kingdom from the rightful but young heir Heardred after Hygelac's death (2354b-79a).⁴⁴⁸ Tripp Jr's argument may be supported by the fact that the poet never explicitly says that he is describing Beowulf's youth in lines 2183b-9; this was an assumption first made by Klaeber and then borrowed by other scholars.⁴⁴⁹ However, Bonjour had earlier seemingly solved this issue by pointing out that 'the audience of *Beowulf* was conversant with the moti[f] of the sluggish youth', and therefore that 'a reference to an inglorious period in Beowulf's early life would have been almost automatically associated by the audience with the hero's youth, unless otherwise stated'.⁴⁵⁰ Since the poet does not state otherwise, scholars have since concurred that lines 2183b-9 indeed refer to Beowulf's youth, and I also agree with this interpretation.

These views by Klaeber, Malone and others all share two main problems: firstly, they are based on the assumption that Beowulf's youthful portrayal is at odds with other representations of the hero in the poem because it somehow diminishes his heroism; this latter point is also closely intertwined with the second issue, which is that their arguments do not appear to be evidenced by the text. Therefore, a critical re-examination of lines 2183b-9 is necessary.

<[HTTP://BOSWORTH.FF.CUNL.CZ/030561](http://BOSWORTH.FF.CUNL.CZ/030561)> [accessed 17 December 2021]; henceforth Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*.

⁴⁴⁸ Raymond P. Tripp Jr, 'Did Beowulf Have an "Inglorious Youth"?', *Studia Neophilologica*, 61(2) (1989), 129-43 (pp. 129-39).

⁴⁴⁹ Klaeber's *Beowulf*, p. 236.

⁴⁵⁰ Adrien Bonjour, 'Young *Beowulf*'s Inglorious Period', in *Twelve Beowulf Papers, 1940-1960, With Additional Comments* (Neuchâtel: Faculté des Lettres, 1962), pp. 89-93 (p. 93).

In particular, I aim to answer the following question: what happens if one takes the above excerpt at face-value and accepts that Beowulf was indeed unheroic for most of his youth? To do so, it must first be determined what the point of the description of Beowulf's 'inglorious' youth may have been; why would the poet provide such an unflattering representation of the hero? Then, these lines should also be considered in relation to other events in Beowulf's youth and life as narrated elsewhere in the text, as these might also convey important textual values, and could help the reader to interpret Beowulf's youthful portrayal.

The reason why critics have tended to disregard the representation of Beowulf's youth in lines 2183b-9 is that they believed it was inconsistent with both his actions at Heorot and the description of his childhood.⁴⁵¹ In Denmark, Beowulf famously defeats both Grendel (745b-823a) and his mother (1492-1569) and is greatly praised by Hrothgar (939b-56, 1702b-9a), Wealhtheow (1220b-31) and the poet (825a-36, 856b-61, 1644-7).⁴⁵² As Eliason noted, '[u]p to this point, he has seemed a perfect hero, flawless in ability and matchless in prowess'.⁴⁵³

Beowulf recalls his childhood later:

l̥c wæs syfanwintre þā mec sinca baldor,
frēawine folca æt mīnum fæder genam;
2430 hēold mec ond hæfde Hrēðel cyning,
geaf mē sinc ond symbel, sibbe gemunde;

⁴⁵¹ See, for instance, Eliason, 'Beowulf's Inglorious Youth', p. 101.

⁴⁵² It is not wholly clear how old Beowulf is in the first half of the poem: he is said to be the eldest of his company when he comes to Heorot (258a, 363a), but his precise age is not given; both Wealhtheow and Hrothgar mention his youth (she calls him *hyse*, 'young man', 1217a, and he commends Beowulf on his wisdom *on swā geongum feore*, 'at such a young age', 1843a), but since both are likely much older than him, this is also not a useful indication. He is certainly not old, probably in his early adulthood; in any case, he is not 'young' as I interpret it, as he already matured and is no longer in his *geogub*, understood as a period of necessary personal maturation.

⁴⁵³ Eliason, 'Beowulf's Inglorious Youth', p. 101.

næs ic him tō life lāðra ōwihte,
 beorn in burgum, þonne his bearna hwylc,
 Herebeald ond Hæðcyn oððe Hygelāc mīn.

(I was seven winters old, when the lord of treasure,
 the lord and friend of the people, took me from my father;
 2430 held and had me, King Hrethel,
 gave me treasure and a feast, remembered kinship,
 I was not by him while living less in anything
 a man in the town, than each of his own sons,
 Herebeald and Hæthcyn or my Hygelāc).

This picture of a loving childhood certainly seems in stark contrast with Beowulf's abject youth. However, this does not necessarily mean that the description of his youth was an inconsistency on the part of the poet. Since youth, as it is considered in this thesis and as it was often understood by EME authors (see previous chapters), is the period between childhood and adulthood, then this account of Beowulf's childhood precedes his youthful experience narrated in lines 2183b-9, which would have taken place later. Therefore, there seems to be no reason to consider Beowulf's youth in relation to his childhood: indeed, I intend to argue that Beowulf's youth might have a specific textual function, and therefore should be considered on its own.

In lines 2183b-9 (provided above), young Beowulf is described as *[h]ēan*, *gōdne*, *slēac* and *unfrom*: *[h]ēan* means 'of low degree, of humble condition, poor [...]' and seems to have referred to one's condition or station in life, but here it more likely meant 'of little worth, mean, ignoble, [...]'.⁴⁵⁴ Elsewhere in the OE poetic corpus *hēan* seems used to signify a moral deficiency: in Cynewulf's *Juliana*, *hēan* refers to the devil who visits the saint in prison, when Juliana asks him to describe his evil deeds, and thus seems connected with his wickedness.⁴⁵⁵ A maxim in *Maxims I* states that 'helmets must be for

⁴⁵⁴ '[H]ēan; senses 1.a; 1.b', in DOE.

⁴⁵⁵ 'Juliana', in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, l. 457a.

the bold one (*cene*)/ and for the wretched one (*hēan*) the least extraordinary hoard'.⁴⁵⁶ In this instance, *hēan* seems specifically employed to denote one's lack of heroic virtues: it may have been used in a similar way in *Beowulf*, perhaps alluding to Beowulf's (at this time) lack of heroic reputation (hence 'of little worth'). Given that the connotations of *hēan*, and the fact that, as Cherniss observes, '[t]he primary ambition of the Germanic hero was to win praise (*lof*) among men and have his glory (*dom*) preserved forever', it can be argued that *hēan* was meant to convey a criticism of young Beowulf and to highlight his unheroic behaviour.⁴⁵⁷

It is also stated that the Geats did not consider him *gōdne*: *gōd* can have a more general meaning, referring to '[...] persons, as a term of indefinite commendation: good, worthy, estimable, distinguished by good qualities [...]'.⁴⁵⁸ According to the *DOE*, however, the adjective has particular connotations in *Beowulf*, 'apparently referring to the specific virtue of bravery [...]'.⁴⁵⁹ For example, the adjective occurs again in the latter half of the poem (2641b), when Wiglaf addresses the rest of Beowulf's retainers and encourages them to help his kinsman fight the dragon: he says that Beowulf considered them *gōde* and gave them rings, after they had promised him to help in battle (2633-8a). While in this instance *gōd* conveys the trust that Beowulf had in his warriors in the context of the lord-retainer relationship, in the description of Beowulf's youth it seems to have signified his lack of courage, as the poet explicitly says that Beowulf was not *gōd*. Courage was an essential heroic quality, as the warrior had to win glory by risking his life in battle and performing brave deeds.⁴⁶⁰ The negative sentence appears to convey a clearer

⁴⁵⁶ 'Maxims I', in *ibid.*, ll. 203b-204a.

⁴⁵⁷ Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 11.

⁴⁵⁸ '[G]ōd; sense A.4', in *DOE*.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, see sense B.1.a.v.

⁴⁶⁰ Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, pp. 11, 36.

criticism of young Beowulf compared to his description as *hēan*, as it evidences that he is not behaving in accordance with the heroic code.

Slēac, instead, has the same connotations as the Modern English derivative ‘slack’: when referring to people, it can mean ‘inactive, slothful, lazy, [...]’ or ‘careless, negligent, [...]’.⁴⁶¹ It is not clear which of these meanings should be preferred here. Apart from this mention in *Beowulf*, *slēac* often occurs in religious and pastoral texts: for instance, Ælfric of Eynsham uses *slēac* to describe those who have wasted their days in idleness and have not yet started to live their life according to God’s precepts.⁴⁶² *Slēac* then seems to have had a specifically moral, rather than physical, acceptance, and may have been meant to illustrate that Beowulf was too lazy to strive for glory, as he should have done.

Similarly, *unfrom* is the opposite of *form*, meaning ‘firm, strong [...]’; besides *Beowulf*, it is only found in the *Paris Psalter* (Psalm 138), in which the Psalmist says [*e]ágan ðíne gesáwon ðæt ic ealles was unfrom on ferhþe* (‘your eyes saw that I was utterly infirm in mind’), apparently illustrating the miserable condition of man compared to God.⁴⁶³ Perhaps the adjective may have been again employed to emphasize Beowulf’s moral weakness during his early youth. All of these adjectives thus contribute to providing a decidedly unheroic depiction of young Beowulf.

⁴⁶¹ ‘[S]læc; sense 1.1; 1.2’ in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTP://BOSWORTH.FF.CUNI.CZ/027917](http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/027917)> [accessed 17 December 2021].

⁴⁶² ‘Dominica in Septuagesima’, in Malcolm Godden, ed., *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The Second Series, Text*, EETS S. S. 5 (London: Published for the EETS by Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 41-51 (p. 45), l. 122.

⁴⁶³ ‘Psalm 138’, in *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius*, ed. by George Philip Krapp (London: Routledge; New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records V, verse 14; ‘from; 1’ in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTP://BOSWORTH.FF.CUNI.CZ/032986](http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/032986)> [accessed 17 December 2021].

The poet then adds that the *drihten Wedera* would not honour Beowulf much; this *drihten* is usually understood to be Hrethel himself.⁴⁶⁴ This line may be taken to describe the consequences of Beowulf's behaviour: because of his laziness and the Geats' lack of esteem in him, Hrethel did not honour him as a member of his retinue. This would have been a great shame, as a warrior's deeds brought glory to his lord, and the lord in turn must reward his retainers' loyalty and service in battle by repaying them with gifts, as often shown in the poem (80b-81a, 2144-7, 2634-8a).⁴⁶⁵ The poet thus seems to repeatedly suggest that young Beowulf, because of his sluggishness, moral weakness, and lack of bravery, did not fit in within heroic society.

This reference to Hrethel has been seen by Bonjour as yet another inconsistency, as in the description of his childhood Beowulf mentions that at the age of seven Hrethel adopted him and never loved him any less than his own sons while he was alive (2428-34, see above), while now the poet reveals that Hrethel scorned young Beowulf as well.⁴⁶⁶ Bonjour admits that this apparent mistake is difficult to explain. However, a possible solution may be provided by the different modes of narration of Beowulf's youth and his childhood: while the former is narrated by the poet, the latter is given in Beowulf's own words, as his own memory. This is an important distinction, as one might expect the poet to provide a truthful account of the character's past, but not necessarily the character himself. Furthermore, as noted above, Beowulf's childhood and youth must have been a

⁴⁶⁴ See Tripp Jr, 'Did Beowulf Have an Inglorious Youth?', p. 129. He points out that *Wedera* is a frequent emendation of *Wereda*, and that the title *drihten Wereda* more frequently refers to God. He also suggests that *drihten Wedera* may 'also refer to another human chieftain', although I agree with Bonjour that it more probably refers to Hrethel; Bonjour, *Twelve Beowulf Papers*, p. 95.

⁴⁶⁵ Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, pp. 41, 51; Carroll, 'Verse of Heroes', p. 134.

⁴⁶⁶ Bonjour, 'Young Beowulf's Inglorious Period', p. 95.

few years apart, and it may have been enough time for Hrethel to change opinion about his grandson.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is that, as Bonjour rightly noted, the poet never explicitly says that Beowulf was lazy; he states that the Geats *ne tealdon* ('did not consider') him *gōd* (2184b) and *swýðe wēndon* ('very much thought') that he was lazy (2187). Both *tellan* and *wenan* convey the opinions of the Geats about Beowulf, but their views may or may not be true. Bonjour uses this point to argue once again that the description of Beowulf's youth should not be taken at face value, but was a way for the poet to stress the young man's unappreciated heroism.⁴⁶⁷ This might thus also mean that the 'reversal' might not have affected Beowulf's behaviour, but only the Geat's opinion of him. Yet, the poet begins the description of Beowulf's youth by noting how for a long time he had been 'of little worth' (2183b), and this is not presented as a subjective view but rather as an objective statement regarding young Beowulf: in other words, even if the Geats' assumptions about Beowulf were wrong, his actions (at this point, at least) were still not heroic. Perhaps, then, rather than dismissing the description of Beowulf's youth or trying to present it as a demonstration of Beowulf's heroism, another possible interpretation might be to accept what the poet says.

The adjectives *[h]ēan*, *slēac* and *unfrom* have been shown to have negative connotations and *gōd* to have been used in a negative sense: they seem to convey a repeated criticism of Beowulf's unheroic behaviour, and, given the poet's insistence, it may be suggested that his depiction may have been (at least to an extent) deliberate. Consequently, it seems that the poet's use of the motif of the 'sluggish youth' may have

⁴⁶⁷ Bonjour, 'Young *Beowulf*'s Inglorious Period', p. 95, footnote n° 1; '*ge-tellan*', in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* <[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/030302](https://bosworthtoller.com/030302)> [accessed 15 December 2021]; '*wēnan*; sense I', in *ibid.* <[HTTP://BOSWORTH.FF.CUNI.CZ/035064](http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/035064)> [accessed 17 December 2021].

had a specific function, as perhaps the poet intended to use Beowulf as a negative example to (indirectly) emphasize heroic values and proper heroic behaviour, such as being active in the quest for glory by performing heroic feats and being well-respected by one's companions and especially one's lord, which is, of course, precisely what young Beowulf is not. Likewise, by describing how the Geats did not reckon him *gōdne*, and how Hrethel did not honour Beowulf much, the poet may have tried to illustrate how not following the heroic code would result in social rejection.

But the fact that Beowulf may have been slothful for most of his youth does not necessarily mean that he did not later become a heroic warrior. According to the two remaining lines in the description of his 'inglorious' youth, Beowulf at some point experienced an *edwenden* ('reversal', 2188b) for his troubles, after which, it is implied, he became the brave and skilled warrior which audiences know him as. Nevertheless, it is not clear at which point of Beowulf's youth this reversal occurred. There are other references to Beowulf's youth scattered throughout the poem: his race with Breca (498ff) is perhaps the most famous one, but Beowulf also mentions the heroic feats he undertook in his youth at different points in the text (for instance, 408b-9a, 419-24a, 526, 2426-7, 2511b-12a, 2664-6a). Different interpretations of this *edwenden* have been proposed: both Malone and North identified the 'reversal' with the fight with Grendel.⁴⁶⁸ Yet, when Beowulf arrives in Denmark he mentions killing foes of the Geats, ogres and sea-monsters in the past (419-24a), which suggests that the 'reversal' probably occurred earlier.

I believe it took place before he came to Heorot and before Beowulf's race with Breca, an opinion also shared by Anderson and Bonjour.⁴⁶⁹ As the latter notes, 'after all

⁴⁶⁸ Bonjour, *Twelve Beowulf Papers*, pp. 89-91; Malone, 'Young Beowulf', p. 23; North, 'Hrothulf's Childhood', p. 235.

⁴⁶⁹ Bonjour, *Digressions*, p. 26; Anderson, 'Beow', p. 637.

there are degrees ... in youth', meaning that there was time for young Beowulf to have experienced his 'reversal' and to have performed heroic deeds (as described in ll. 419-24a), all before the main events of the poem.⁴⁷⁰ It thus seems possible that Beowulf underwent this turnaround while still a young man, which would mean that Beowulf's youth was especially important for his personal and heroic development. I recognize that this is no more than a hypothesis, as the poet never mentions this *edwenden* again, at least with reference to Beowulf. The term first occurs when Beowulf declares his intent to help Hrothgar by fighting Grendel, if *edwendan* ('change') for the king should ever come as deliverance from his affliction (280-1) and one last time later, when Hrothgar describes how for him *edwendan*, from joy to sorrow, came when Grendel started his attacks on Heorot (1774-6). *Edwenden* can thus have a positive or negative meaning, and, although the poet does not explain what caused this reversal, in the case of Beowulf's youth it clearly had a positive effect.

This is repeatedly shown by the many instances in which Beowulf demonstrates his heroism, such as when he decides to come to Hrothgar's aid (199b-200), despite Hygelac begging him not to go (1994b-7a); once at Heorot he tells Hrothgar that he decided to come to *fremman ... eorlic ellen* ('perform a noble act of strength', 636b-7a) or perish in the attempt (637b-8). Indeed, he had earlier asked Hrothgar not to refuse him to fight the monster now that he has come all the way to Heorot (429-30). These references all suggest that Beowulf, following his reversal, seems to have gained the thirst for glory, bravery, and selflessness that he lacked in his early youth.

The poet also explicitly praises Beowulf for his courage, often commenting that he was not afraid to die (for instance, 1442b, 1529b, 1537b): Beowulf is *mærða gemyndig* ('mindful of fame', 1530a), and the poet even uses him as the subject of a maxim,

⁴⁷⁰ Bonjour, *Digressions*, p. 26. Also, cf. lines 2177-83a below.

proclaiming (with regards to Beowulf's deeds in the mere), that 'so must a man do to win long-lasting glory (*lof*), he cares not about his life' (1534b-6). He retains this trait in his old age, when he fights the dragon (2347b-49a, 2508b-9, 2512b-14a, 2534-7, 2541b); during his elegy Wiglaf says that they could not convince him not to fight the dragon (3079-81) and he and the other retainers recall Beowulf's *eorlscipe ond his ellenweorc* ('heroic actions and works of courage', 3173) and remember him as the most generous and most gracious king in the world, and the one *lofgeornost* ('most eager for glory', 3180-2b). Hrothgar also declares that Beowulf has gained glory (1761b-2a, 1783a) and even predicts that he will become the next king of the Geats (1850-3a); Waltheow also tells him that men will forever praise him for defeating Grendel (1221b-4a). It thus seems that Beowulf clearly gained the glory and heroic reputation he lacked in his youth.

Moreover, while in the description of Beowulf's youth the poet had implied that Hrethel did not honour him much because of his sluggishness, Brodeur notes that Beowulf, in the first part of the poem, shows great loyalty to his lord and uncle Hygelac, as the poet explicitly says (2170b); unlike with Hrethel, Beowulf fought for Hygelac, as he accompanied him in the raid to Frisia, where he died (2354b-68). His affection for his lord is also made repeatedly clear (435b-6, 1482-7, 1819b-20a, 2148-9a, 2150b-1): for instance, Beowulf refers to him as *Hygelac min* ('my Hygelac', 2434b).⁴⁷¹ Beowulf is also referred to as Hygelac's *þegn* ('thegn') multiple times (194b, 407b-8a, 2977b; see also 260b-1) and their kinship is also mentioned by the poet (737a, 758b, 914a, 1574b). It thus seems that Beowulf respects and loves his lord and now fulfills his obligations towards him. For his part, Hygelac clearly reciprocates Beowulf's devotion, as shown by his joyful reaction when Beowulf returns from Denmark (1975-98), as he calls his nephew *leof[.] mann[...]* ('beloved man', 1994a). The good relationship between uncle and

⁴⁷¹ Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf*, pp. 78-9.

nephew and king and retainer might thus demonstrate that he has become worthy of his lord's respect and affection.

Finally, Beowulf also seems to have found his place among the Geats, compared to his youth when he had to endure their scorn: Beowulf calls himself a Geat (260b), and proudly declares that he will show Grendel the might and courage of the Geats (601b-2a). The poet also often reminds the audience that Beowulf belonged to the Geatish people (1191a, 1301b, 1492b, 1785a, 1792b), and, more importantly, he was a *leod* ('prince'; 669a, 829a, 1538a, 1612b, 2551a), a *cempa* ('champion'; 1551b), and, after becoming king, the *dryhten Geata* ('lord of the Geats'; 2402a, 2560b, 2576a, 2991b) and *goldwine Geata* ('gold-friend of the Geats'; 2419a, 2584a). The Geats themselves seem to care for Beowulf and hold him in high esteem now, as shown by the description of his funeral (3137ff), in which they lamented his death (3148b-9, 3171-2, 3178-9a), praised his heroism (3173-4a), and remembered him as the best king in the world (3180-3). Therefore, it appears that Beowulf has overcome his youthful flaws and finally became a hero.

But the clearest demonstration of Beowulf's maturity following his 'reversal' is provided by lines 2177-83a, which directly precede Beowulf's 'inglorious' youth:

Swā b(eald)ode bearn Ecgðēowes,
 guma gūðum cūð, gōdum dædum,
 drēah æfter dome; nealles druncne slōg
 2180 heorðgenēatas; næs him hrēoh sefa,
 ac hē mancynnes mæste cræfte
 ġinfæstan ġife þe him God sealde hēold hildedēor. ...

(Thus he was bold, the son of Ecgthreow]
 man famed in battles, for good deeds,]
 he strove after glory, never, having drunk, slew]
 2180 his hearth-companions; he did not have a cruel heart,]
 but he mankind's greatest strength]
 that ample gift which God gave him]
 held, bold in battle. ...)

In this passage, Beowulf appears to be presented as the perfect warrior and to personify ideal heroic behaviour: Beowulf shows that a heroic warrior is brave, accomplishes great deeds, gains fame, strives for glory, is considerate of his fellows and also possesses, in his case at least, great strength. At first sight, it may appear that lines 2177-83a are at odds with lines 2183b-89, but it may also be that the former lines describe how Beowulf is in the 'present', after fighting at Heorot, and therefore after the 'reversal' he experienced as a young man, while lines 2183b-9 describe how Beowulf used to be before the *edwenden*. The two halves show a contrast, but are not necessarily incoherent. On the contrary, they seem united by a passage of time in which Beowulf matured and overcame his youthful limitations. The same can be said about the demonstrations of Beowulf's heroism and loyalty mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, as they may simply describe his behaviour after the *edwenden*.

It would thus seem that the description of Beowulf's unpromising youth and these references to his later noble behaviour appear to convey his growth from a sluggish youth into a heroic warrior. Yet, I would note that Beowulf's 'inglorious' youth should not be dismissed in favour of his heroic portrayal, as it may be important to understand Beowulf's characterization in the poem: perhaps, by presenting Beowulf as a lazy youth, who then undergoes a change of behaviour and becomes a hero, the poet may have intended to provide a specific representation of heroism (though this is not the only one in the poem), to show that even a lazy young man can become a valiant warrior, and an 'inglorious' youth does not necessarily prevent one from having a heroic destiny. It would thus seem that this passage about Beowulf's youth does not diminish his heroism, nor, conversely, present Beowulf as a flawless hero. Subsequently, Beowulf's youth appears to be not only a pivotal moment in the hero's life, but also to have a significant role in the

text, as the poet's unheroic depiction of Beowulf could also serve to illustrate a specific depiction of heroic growth.

This is not, however, the only reference to Beowulf's youth, as noted earlier: there are other mentions which seem to convey a connection between youth and heroism. The first occurs when Beowulf comes to Heorot and is announced to Hrothgar, who says: [*i*]c *hyne cūðe cnihtwesende* ('I knew him when he was a youth'; 372). The verb *cnihtwesan* (as translated here, 'to be a youth') is difficult to interpret, because the term *cniht* could mean either 'boy' or 'young man', hence it is unclear whether Hrothgar is saying that he knew Beowulf in his childhood or youth, although he clearly met him at an earlier stage in his life.⁴⁷²

More importantly, Hrothgar does not say anything about how Beowulf was when he was younger: he recounts how Ecgthreow, Beowulf's father, married Hrethel's daughter (373-5a), the way in which Beowulf has now come to Heorot *heard* ('bravely', 376a) to seek a loyal friend (376b); and that he, Hrothgar, must reward him for his daring (384b-5). It seems telling that the only description that Hrothgar provides of Beowulf is that he has the strength of thirty men (379b-81a): he thus focuses on how Beowulf is in the present rather than on how he was when they first met, and now he is someone who shows bravery and friendship and who can help him. In other words, Beowulf's past does not seem to matter to Hrothgar.

But while Hrothgar is, ostensibly, not concerned with Beowulf's earlier life (perhaps indeed his youth, depending on how one translates *cniht*), Beowulf's introduction to Hrothgar implies that one's youth could also function to establish one's heroic credentials. Beowulf greets Hrothgar (407a), introduces himself as Hygelac's kinsman and retainer (407b-408a), and then says: *hæbbe ic mæ̅rða fela/ ongunnen on*

⁴⁷² See my discussion of the term *cniht* in 1.2.

geogobe ('I have undertaken many great deeds in [my] youth'; 408b-9). These deeds are described later, at lines 419-24a. Like other mentions of youth in the corpus, it is ambiguous how youth should be understood in this instance: how old was Beowulf when he performed these 'great deeds'? It is difficult to tell, although since he describes his childhood separately, he was likely not a child. Nevertheless, it is not clear if he was a young man, meaning younger than an adult, or in his early adulthood, but he does not clarify this. However, it appears that Beowulf is here using his youth (whatever he means by this) to demonstrate his suitability to fight Grendel: unlike Hrothgar, then, Beowulf seems to believe that youthful actions are a demonstration of a warrior's worthiness and heroism later in life. Hrothgar and Beowulf's opposing positions seemingly convey two contrasting interpretations of heroic youth: Hrothgar's words suggest that one's youth is not as important as one's actions as an adult, whereas Beowulf's introduction to the king indicates that he believes that one's youth, and indeed his own, foreshadows a person's heroic destiny. If these interpretations were accepted, Beowulf's belief would be ironic, given his own (initially, at least) unheroic youth. In fact, it can be argued that Beowulf himself disproves his own belief, as he became a heroic warrior despite his lazy youth.

This is never explicitly stated in the poem, and the following exchange between Beowulf and Unferth appears (at least at first) to reinforce Beowulf's position. Unferth is introduced as a jealous individual who brings up a particular episode from Beowulf's youth, when Beowulf, says Unferth, lost a swimming race with another young man, Breca (506-528). Unferth's criticism of Beowulf hinges on two main points: firstly, Beowulf was reckless to race with Breca, especially after many tried to dissuade them (510b-2) from their *sorhfullne sīð* ('sorrowful course', 512a), because they both undertook the race *for wlence* ('for arrogance'; 508) and risked their lives *for dolgilpe* ('for foolish pride'; 509-10a). This is the only occurrence of *dolgilp* in the corpus, and it seems to be rather

negative, as the *DOE* translates it as ‘foolish boast, foolish pride’.⁴⁷³ On the other hand, *wlencu* could have either positive (see l. 338a) or negative (see l. 1206a) associations, although Unferth clearly intends to insult and humiliate Beowulf, and appears to try to do so by portraying him as an arrogant young man, thus providing a depiction of youth as a period of immaturity.⁴⁷⁴

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Unferth taunts Beowulf by claiming that he lost the race because Breca *hæfde mære megen* (‘had greater strength’; 518a), hence Beowulf could not fulfill his boast.⁴⁷⁵ While the first criticism can be blamed on both Beowulf and Breca, as they both took part in the race (and Unferth specifically uses the dual pronoun *git*, ‘you two’, 508a, 512b, 513a, 516b), the fact that Beowulf lost the challenge leads Unferth to conclude that, just as Beowulf was not able to fulfill his boast to best Breca in his youth, neither will he be able to fulfill his boast to defeat Grendel now (though he recognizes that Beowulf was victorious in the past; 526).

The need to fulfill one’s boast was especially important in heroic society, as a warrior needed to be able to carry out his heroic *beot* (‘promise, vow’), otherwise he would prove himself either incompetent (as in this case) or cowardly (as Wiglaf tells the fleeing thanes who abandoned Beowulf against the dragon, 2884-91).⁴⁷⁶ Dongill Lee, one of the few scholars who considered references to youth in the poem besides Beowulf’s ‘inglorious’ youth, noted that not fulfilling a boast in youth was even more

⁴⁷³ ‘[D]ol-gylp’, in *DOE*.

⁴⁷⁴ ‘[W]lencu’, in Bosworth-Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/36348](https://bosworthtoller.com/36348)> [accessed 17 December 2021].

⁴⁷⁵ Kaske, “*Sapientia et Fortitudo*”, pp. 430-1.

⁴⁷⁶ On the concept of the *beot*, see Stefán Einarsson, ‘Old English *Beot* and Old Norse *Heitstrenging*’, *PMLA*, 49(4) (1934), 975-93 <[HTTPS://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/458120](https://www.jstor.org/stable/458120)> [accessed 17 December 2021]. Beowulf is discussed at pp. 975-9.

‘blameworthy’.⁴⁷⁷ Unferth thus repeatedly criticizes Beowulf’s youthful behaviour to question his worth as a warrior.

The fact that Unferth predicts (wrongly) that Beowulf will lose to Grendel (525-8) also seems to suggest that, like Beowulf himself (as shown in his introduction to Hrothgar), Unferth also believes that one’s youthful actions foreshadow one’s future glory, even though he recognizes that Beowulf earlier prevailed in many battles (526). Yet, Beowulf manages to defeat Grendel and his mother, hence, while the poet never draws explicit attention to it, it may be argued that Beowulf proves Unferth wrong (and himself as well, considering his sluggish youth): one’s youthful failures do not necessarily prevent one from gaining glory later in life.

The importance attributed to youth in heroic mentality is also, finally, suggested by Beowulf’s lengthy response to Unferth; first, Beowulf observes that Unferth is drunk (531) and then claims that he will tell *sōð* (‘the truth’; 532b), providing his own version of events (533-81a). The beginning of his answer to Unferth is especially relevant:

535 Wit þæt gecwædon cnihtwesende
 ond ġebēotedon — wæron bēgen þa ġīt
 on ġeogoðfēore — þæt wit on ġārsecg ūt
 aldrum nēðdon, ond þæt geæfndon swā.

(535 The two of us had agreed, being young,
 and vowed — we were both then still
 in the years of youth — that we out in the ocean
 would risk our lives, and so [we] did that).

Beowulf here again uses the verb *cnihtwesan*, which was earlier used by Hrothgar; while in the previous instance its meaning was ambiguous, as the element *cniht* could refer to either a boy or a youth, here a useful hint may be given by the word *ġeogoðfēore*. *Ġeogoðfēorh* refers specifically to ‘the years of youth’ (although, once again, it is not made clear when this period occurred in one’s life or how long it lasted), hence it might

⁴⁷⁷ Lee, ‘A Study on *Geogop*’, p. 2.

be argued that the preceding *cnihtwesende* also indicated Beowulf's youth rather than his childhood.⁴⁷⁸ Lee noted that *geogoðfēorh* refers to the 'proper time of youth in which heroic disposition is revealed'.⁴⁷⁹ He remarks that this consideration also applies to *geogub*; as I earlier suggested that Beowulf starts to realize his heroic identity during his youth, his observation may be correct, and perhaps it may also apply to some of the other characters analyzed below: Wiglaf, Hrothgar, Scyld and Beow.⁴⁸⁰

Lee considers this episode as yet another demonstration of Beowulf's heroism, noting that '*geogub* is never used to indicate youthful immaturity in the poem, [but is] a stock expression to indicate past achievements of glory'.⁴⁸¹ Lee seems justified in his belief, as Beowulf often recalls the 'past achievements of glory' of his youth (419-24a, 2426-7a, 2511b-2a). Yet, in this speech Beowulf twice employs his youth as a justification for his impulsive actions (and Unferth similarly accuses Beowulf of being arrogant when he recounts his race with Breca, see above), hence the poet here seems to provide, contrary to Lee's view, a flawed depiction of youth as a period of immaturity, when Beowulf had not yet understood the importance of selflessness and was only focused on achieving glory for himself. It can be argued that this description of youth again entails a reflection on heroic behaviour, as the poet seems to convey another implicit criticism of Beowulf's behaviour, perhaps to explain that a warrior must not be rash or selfish in his pursuit of glory. However, the poet has also already shown that Beowulf has overcome these youthful limitations and has become a more mature warrior, as he

⁴⁷⁸ '[G]eoguð-fēorh', in DOE.

⁴⁷⁹ Lee, 'A Study of *Geogob*', p. 2. However, Lee does not explain when this *geoguðfēorh* took place in one's life, or how long it lasted, so that it can be considered as another ambiguous age term, like *geogub*.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid. Heremod might be considered a subversion (see 4.6).

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

willingly decided to go help Hrothgar to defeat Grendel: perhaps, then, the poet could also be again implying that it is possible to become a hero by overcoming one's youthful flaws.

It can be seen that, according to my interpretation, the 'Unferth episode' provides a representation of youth which tallies with the lines about Beowulf's 'inglorious' past: in both cases, youth seems to be a period in which Beowulf still has to fulfill his heroic potential and mature, yet both descriptions might also convey a reflection on heroic behaviour, as by indirectly criticizing young Beowulf's actions, the poet indirectly illustrates how a heroic warrior should behave. The mentions of Beowulf's youthful deeds and the praises of his noble behaviour should not be considered to be at odds with these accounts of his youthful immaturity, as these likely refer to different moments in Beowulf's development.

The representations of Beowulf's youth all seem to suggest that it was an essential period in his personal and heroic growth, as he begins as a sluggish youth, before experiencing a reversal and beginning to perform heroic deeds; but even then, as shown by the race with Breca, Beowulf does not seem to be a mature and selfless warrior yet. It is likely that this development occurred over time, as Beowulf performed more and more heroic feats and discovered the true nature of heroism, so that by the time he comes to Heorot, he has truly become the personification of the heroic ideal. Taken together, these descriptions of young Beowulf seem to convey the same idea, that even an unpromising youth could become a heroic warrior, hence Beowulf's youth can be read as a means to illustrate a specific representation of heroism.

But Beowulf's is not the only representation of youth in the poem: another description of youthful heroic behaviour is later provided by Beowulf's kinsman, young Wiglaf.

4.2 Wiglaf

Since at least Klaeber's edition of *Beowulf*, Wiglaf has been considered as a foil to old Beowulf and as another heroic representation in the poem.⁴⁸² Kaske, for instance, considers Wiglaf as 'an embodiment of the *sapientia et fortitudo* ideal', as shown by his killing of the dragon.⁴⁸³ More recently, Bruce and Dockray-Miller have commented on Wiglaf's positive description as a young hero: Bruce considers him as another youthful 'heroic model', while Dockray-Miller argues that he 'offers a new definition of heroic masculinity'.⁴⁸⁴ However, it still needs to be determined what idea of youthful heroism Wiglaf provides, and how this differs from the other representation of youth analyzed so far, Beowulf's.

Wiglaf is introduced as an unnamed warrior, the only one who comes to Beowulf's help when he is fighting the dragon:

... Hiora in ānum wēoll
 2600 sefa wið sorgum; sibb æfre ne mæg
 wiht onwendan þām ðe wel þenceð.

(... In one of them [the retainers who fled] welled
 2600 his heart with sorrows; kinship can never]
 at all be destroyed, for him who thinks well).

This brief passage sets Wiglaf apart from the band of cowards who abandoned their lord, by presenting him as the only man who is concerned about Beowulf's fate and is mindful of their kinship; it highlights his loyalty to his lord and his desire to help him in battle, in accordance with proper heroic behaviour.⁴⁸⁵ In the next line, his name is revealed (2602a); he is then called a *lēoflic lindwiga* ('a dear shield-warrior'; 2603a), a depiction which

⁴⁸² Klaeber's *Beowulf*, p. 252.

⁴⁸³ Kaske, "Sapientia et Fortitudo", p. 454.

⁴⁸⁴ Bruce, *Education*; Dockray-Miller, 'Dating Wiglaf', p. 304.

⁴⁸⁵ Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, pp. 30, 50.

again shows his devotion to Beowulf. When he sees his lord *hāt prōwian* ('suffer heat'; 2605b), he remembers the honour that Beowulf had previously done to him (206), and he reveals his courage when he resolves to help his kinsman (2609-10). Therefore, Wiglaf's heroic qualities seem evident from the start.

The poet then adds:

2625 ... þā wæs forma sīð
 ġeongan cempan þæt hē gūðe ræs
 mid his frēodryhtne fremman sceolde.
 Ne ġemealt him se mōdsefa ne his mæġes lāf
 ġewāc æt wīġe; þæt se wyrm onfand,
 syððan hīe tōgædre ġegān hæfdon. 2630

(2625 ... That was the first time
 for the young champion that he the rush of battle]
 with his noble lord had to undertake.]
 His heart in him did not melt away nor the rest of his strength]
 fail in the fight; that the wyrm discovered,]
 2630 after they had come together)).

It is revealed that Wiglaf is a young man. As Dockray-Miller observes, the poet repeatedly mentions his youth (for instance at lines 2626a, 2674a, 2675a, 2811a, 2860a, in which Wiglaf is always described as *geong*).⁴⁸⁶ As noted in Chapter 2 with regards to the *geong mon* in *Maxims I*, *geong* is another ambiguous term which can be applied to childhood, 'adolescence' or youth, hence it is not altogether clear how young Wiglaf is.⁴⁸⁷ He is later called *eorl* (l. 2695a) and *secg* (2700a), terms which seem to have been used for adult men (see below), hence he may have been older than a child, given that he is also fighting the dragon, but this remains an assumption and it is not possible to determine how old, or rather how young, Wiglaf is based on the little information the poem provides.

The poet explains that this was Wiglaf's first battle, and again praises him for his courage: hence, it can be argued that, as seen with Beowulf, Wiglaf's youth likewise

⁴⁸⁶ Dockray-Miller, 'Dating Wiglaf', p. 306.

⁴⁸⁷ See '[G]eong; senses I.A.i and I.A.1.a.iv', in *DOE*.

appears as a significant period in his maturation, as he first gains fighting experience and displays his heroic qualities. This emphasis on Wiglaf's youth and his courage and loyalty may suggest that he is another young character whose youthful behaviour may be employed to convey a representation of heroism.

Dockray-Miller also observes that Wiglaf's youth serves to make him 'praiseworthy' and does not convey the usual connotations of youth as an age of immaturity.⁴⁸⁸ Indeed, even in his youth and his first fight, Wiglaf embodies the heroic ideal, as shown when he declares that he would rather perish alongside Beowulf than return home without killing his foe (2650b-6a), which further highlights Wiglaf's loyalty, and arguably presents him as the epitome of the loyal retainer who supports his lord in battle.⁴⁸⁹ His heroism is underscored when he helps his lord and kinsman fight the dragon, and exhorts him to remember the boast he made in youth that he would not allow glory to fail (2663-6a), saying to Beowulf *ic ðē fullāestu* ('I shall help you'; 2668b), and when he chastises the cowards who abandoned Beowulf (2884-91), after earlier encouraging them to help their lord (2633-50a).

The description of the scene in which Wiglaf stabs the dragon, fulfilling his promise to Beowulf, is of particular interest:

2695 ... eorl ellen cȳðan,
 cræft ond cēnðu, swā him ġecynde wæs.
 Ne hēdde hē þæs heafolan, ac sīo hand ġebarn
 mōdiġes mannes þær hē his mæġes healp,
 þæt hē þone nīðġæst nioðor hwēne slōh
 secg on searwum, þæt ðæt sweord ġedēaf 2700
 fāh ond fæted, þæt ðæt fȳr ongon
 sweðrian syððan.

(2695 The noble showed courage,
 strength and boldness, as was natural to him.
 He did not heed the dragon's head, though the hand was burned
 of the spirited man there he his strength helped,

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Bruce, *Education*; Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 50.

that the malicious guest struck somewhat lower
 2700 the warrior in his wargear, so that the sword pierced
 bright and adorned so that the fire began
 to decrease afterwards).

Although Wiglaf's virtuous character had been evident from the beginning, and he has already made heroic speeches, this passage focuses more on his actions, and might be said to provide a clearer demonstration of his heroism. Wiglaf is here referred to as an *eorl* ('noble') and *secg* ('warrior'), terms employed to refer to adult members of heroic society: it seems that the *ellen ... cræft ond cénðu* he displayed while fighting the dragon have helped him mature.⁴⁹⁰ The poet then remarks that these virtues are *him gecynde*: the adjective *gecynde* can have many meanings, including 'rightful' or 'hereditary' (see 2197b), but here it likely means 'natural, in keeping with the native constitution (of someone or something), innate' and seems to signify that Wiglaf's heroism is inborn, likely deriving from his noble birth.⁴⁹¹ This consideration may be specific to Wiglaf, however, because it does not seem to apply to Beowulf (who only became heroic after experiencing a 'reversal') and Hrothgar (see below), despite both being noblemen. Similarly, when he washes the wounded Beowulf's face, Wiglaf is called *þēoden mārne þegn ungemete till* ('the great prince, the immensely good thane'; 2721) and later, *gēong/ magoþegn mōdiġ* ('the brave young thane'; 2756b-7a). Thus, Wiglaf's youth and heroism again appear to be closely connected.

When he addresses the fleeing thanes, Wiglaf recognizes his limitations compared to Beowulf, but states that he helped his kinsman nonetheless (2877-82a), and concludes the speech with a powerful statement which embodies the heroic code:

⁴⁹⁰ Dockray-Miller, 'Dating Beowulf', p. 313. He is also later called *hæle hildedīor* ('battle-brave warrior'; 3111a).

⁴⁹¹ '[Ġ]e-cynde; 1.a, 4', in DOE.

2890 Dēað bið sēlla
 eorla ġehwylcum þonne
 edwītlīf!

(2890 death is better
 for every man than
 a life of shame!)

This declaration seems to show Wiglaf's awareness of ideal heroic behaviour, and further highlights his own heroism, as Wiglaf has just put the maxim into practice by risking his life to help his lord and kinsman: Wiglaf himself becomes a personification of heroism, like Beowulf (see 1534b-6). But Wiglaf also grows in wisdom, as after Beowulf's death, when he addresses the men who fled, he is described as *se snotra* ('the wiser'; 3120a), demonstrating that the experience has helped him become more mature as well.⁴⁹² Therefore, the poet's mentions of Wiglaf's youth suggest that as a young man he not only improves as a warrior (as he first gains experience in war), but he also grows as an individual, as mentioned here, so that youth repeatedly appears to be an essential period of personal, and not only heroic, maturation.

As Wiglaf's heroism and youth repeatedly seem to go hand in hand, it may be argued that Wiglaf constitutes another heroic representation of youth. The only other example considered so far, Beowulf, was understood to signify that one might become a heroic warrior despite having an 'inglorious' youth; on the contrary, Wiglaf appears to be a young hero from the beginning. And he remains unfailingly heroic throughout the poem: he is introduced as the only loyal thane who decides to help Beowulf fight the dragon, and he is eventually recognized as his heir and successor (2800b-1), and is never criticized for his behaviour, unlike Beowulf.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹² Dockray-Miller, 'Dating Beowulf', p. 314.

⁴⁹³ Yet, the poet, in a rather pessimistic and foreboding tone, also implies that as the new king he will have to face the threat of the neighbouring tribes after the death of Beowulf (2910-13a, 2999-3007a, 3028-30a). Nevertheless, this is not shown to the audience.

Consequently, both Beowulf and Wiglaf's youths seem described as essential stages of development, as they begin their heroic maturation as young men, and their youthful representations appear to illustrate heroic values: both Beowulf and Wiglaf show that a warrior should risk his life in battle, although Beowulf seems more concerned with the attainment of glory, and Wiglaf better exemplifies the bond of loyalty between a retainer and his lord. But while Beowulf's description illustrates heroic values indirectly, by using him as a negative example, the poet repeatedly and explicitly emphasizes and praises Wiglaf's courage and loyalty, perhaps to convey heroic virtues directly through his actions. Therefore, the poet seems to show that there are different ways of acquiring heroic virtues, although both of these models of heroism appear to be equally valid, as Wiglaf's example is never explicitly praised over Beowulf's, and both indicate that youth is closely connected with heroism in the poem.

In addition to Beowulf and Wiglaf, there is a third example of a young character to consider, Hrothgar, which may provide yet another reflection on heroic youthful behaviour.

4.3 *Hrothgar*

Most readers and listeners of *Beowulf* may think of Hrothgar only as an old king.

However, he is first introduced as a young warrior not unlike Wiglaf. After detailing the genealogy of the Scyldings (1-63), the poet presents Hrothgar thus:

þā wæs Hrōðgāre herespēd ġyfen,
 65 wīġes weorðmynd, þæt him his winemāgas
 ġeorne hȳrdon, oðð þæt sēo ġeogoð ġewēox,
 magodriht micel.

(Then was to Hrothgar success in war given,
 65 honour in war, so that his retainers]
 eagerly obeyed him, until the troop of untried warriors grew],
 into a great band of young men).

Before Grendel's attacks, Hrothgar gained glory in war, as a warrior and a king was expected to do.⁴⁹⁴ The poet also mentions that Hrothgar's retainers followed him 'eagerly' and they became a *micel* ('great') band of men; here *micel* perhaps conveys the retinue's loyalty and valour in battle, not just their size, as the adjective could also have metaphorical connotations.⁴⁹⁵ This description seems important, as a lord's worth was determined both by the size of his retinue (the larger the warband, the more honour the lord gained), and by the heroic feats of his warriors (which also brought glory to their lord), hence this apparent praise of Hrothgar's retainers also implies a positive portrayal of Hrothgar himself.⁴⁹⁶ Moreover, it should be noted that while *geogub* usually indicates a group of young, inexperienced warriors, who are contrasted with the *dugub* ('the veterans'), in this passage the growth of Hrothgar's retainers into more skilled warriors still occurs during their youth, as the term *magu* (in *magodriht*) also refers to young people, although Izdebska points out that *magu* might indicate adults as well.⁴⁹⁷ Therefore, while it has already been noted that *geogub* is ambiguous, and this ambiguity also applies to its collective sense, because it is not conveyed how old these young warriors are, it seems that *magodriht* is equally vague, as it is not clear whether this band of warriors was made up of youths or adult men.

It might likewise be assumed that Hrothgar gained 'success' and 'honour in war' while still young; indeed, it is later stated that he held the kingdom in his youth (466). After the construction of Heorot, he is also described as giving out treasure (80b-81a);

⁴⁹⁴ Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 37.

⁴⁹⁵ '[M]icel; senses I; III', in Bosworth-Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* <[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/22770](https://bosworthtoller.com/22770)> [accessed 17 December 2021].

⁴⁹⁶ Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, pp. 37-8, 40-1.

⁴⁹⁷ See 'geogub; sense C.1.c' and 'dugub; senses 4.a; 4.a.1' in *DOE* and 'magu; III', in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* <[HTTP://BOSWORTH.FF.CUNI.CZ/022280](http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/022280)> [accessed 17 December 2021], and Izdebska, 'Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens', p. 61.

generosity was the most important virtue for a ruler, further showing that Hrothgar was a good king.⁴⁹⁸

Therefore, unlike Beowulf, there is no mention that Hrothgar was ever slack in his youth or had to overcome the scorn of his people: he seems to have always been a heroic warrior throughout his youth, and he and his companions gained necessary experience in warfare, similarly to Wiglaf, so that Hrothgar's youth also seems employed to convey an ideal depiction of youthful heroism.

However, later lines imply that Hrothgar may not be as heroic as he first appears: after a glorious youth he has to endure a painful old age thanks to Grendel's attacks (see for instance 131-3a, 144-71a, 189-93).⁴⁹⁹ There has been much discussion regarding Hrothgar's effectiveness as king, but it cannot be denied that, even though Hrothgar's wisdom is frequently mentioned (190b, 279a, 1313b, 1318a, 1384b, 1475a, 1874a, 2114a, 2156a) and he is called a 'good king' (863b; see also 1885b-6a), he did not manage to protect his people from Grendel as an old man and was therefore less competent as a warrior and king than he had been in his youth, as the poet also seems to say (1885b-7).⁵⁰⁰ His example appears to show that, despite a promising youth, one may not necessarily

⁴⁹⁸ Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 41.

⁴⁹⁹ Porck, *Old Age*, p. 190. Beowulf himself observes that Hrothgar mourned for his youth (2111-3a).

⁵⁰⁰ On Hrothgar's kingship, see, for instance, Britt C. L. Rothauser, 'Winter in Heorot: Looking at Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Age and Kingship Through the Character of Hrothgar', in *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, ed. by Albrecht Classen, Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 2 (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), pp. 103-20; Brian McFadden, 'Sleeping After the Feast: Deathbeds, Marriage Beds, and the Power Structure of Heorot', *Neophilologus*, 84(4) (2000), 629-46; Edward B. Irving, 'What To Do With Old Kings', *Old English Newsletter*, 16(2) (1983), 53 <[HTTP://WWW.OENEWSLETTER.ORG/OEN/ARCHIVE/OEN16_2.PDF](http://www.oenewsletter.org/OEN/ARCHIVE/OEN16_2.PDF)> [accessed 17 December 2021], 53 and Porck, *Old Age*, pp. 177-211, among others.

live up to their heroic potential after their prime, and he thus seems to provide a more ambiguous interpretation of youth.

It would appear that Beowulf, Wiglaf and Hrothgar each illustrate different representations of youthful and heroic behaviour: Beowulf, who was a slothful young man, might show that an ‘inglorious’ youth does not prevent one from becoming a hero; Wiglaf might instead provide a more straightforward depiction of heroic youth and illustrate how it can lead to success and glory; and Hrothgar’s ambiguous portrayal would perhaps demonstrate that this was not always the case, as the tragedies of his old age might suggest that a heroic youth is not always a guarantee of a heroic destiny.

However, in all three cases youth always seems a period of personal and heroic development. The poet also never seems to prefer one example over the others, but all appear as equally possible alternatives, so that they seemingly employ different models of heroic youth to illustrate possible outcomes.

I now intend to argue that these ideas are reinforced and reconsidered through parallels and contrasts which the poet creates between Beowulf, Wiglaf, Hrothgar, and three other characters mentioned in the ‘digressions’ in the poem: Scyld, Beow and Heremod, all of whom seem to provide further evidence of the connection between youth and heroism. These parallels are now considered in order, beginning with Scyld.

4.4 *Scyld*

Scyld, the founder of the Scylding dynasty, is briefly mentioned at the very beginning of the poem, right after the poet states that ‘we’ have heard of the glory of the Spear-Danes, and how their nobles performed brave deeds (1-3):

Oft Scyld Scēfing sceapena þrēatum,
 5 monegum mægþum meodosetla oftēah,
 egsode eorl(as), syððan ærest wearð
 fēasceaf̥t funden. Hē þæs frōfre ġebād:

wēox under wolcnum weorðmyndum þāh
 oð þæt him æghwylc þāra ymbsittendra
 ofer hronrāde hȳran scolde
 gomban ġyldan. Ðæt wæs gōd cyning.

(Often Scyld, Scef's son, from troops of enemies,
 5 deprived many peoples of mead-benches,
 frightened men after at first he was
 found destitute. He experienced consolation for that:
 he grew under the clouds, prospered gloriously]
 until to him each of the neighbours]
 10 across the whale-road [ocean] had to submit]
 yield tribute. That was a good king)).

This passage seems to explain the preceding mention of the Scyldings' glory and prowess: Scyld is a great warrior and conqueror and his victories might be considered as yet another demonstration of ideal heroic behaviour, since as king he was supposed to expand his kingdom and gain wealth from his neighbours through his military prowess; indeed, the poet calls him *gōd*, which was earlier used to describe heroic behaviour in the description of Beowulf's 'inglorious' youth (or, in his case, lack thereof).⁵⁰¹ Bruce noted that these lines constitute 'a fitting prologue, a microcosm of the greater structure of *Beowulf*' which 'adds much to our understanding of the poem'.⁵⁰² In particular, it has been thought that this introduction establishes a clear parallel between Scyld and Beowulf, although the similarities have been limited to the descriptions of Scyld's and Beowulf's heroism, kingships, and their funerals.⁵⁰³

However, these lines might provide a more complex depiction of Scyld than merely as a 'good king' which, I argue, is also important to better understand the meanings of youth in *Beowulf*, as well as the representation of Beowulf's own youth. Immediately after the mention of his military exploits, it is revealed that Scyld was

⁵⁰¹ Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 37.

⁵⁰² Alexander M. Bruce, *Scyld and Scaef: Expanding the Analogues. With a Foreword by Paul E. Szarmach* (New York; London: Routledge, 2002), p. 5.

⁵⁰³ Bruce, *Scyld and Scaef*, pp. 17-8; Howell D. Chickering, ed. and trans., *Beowulf. A Dual Language Edition* (Garden City, NY: Ancor Press, 1977), p. 278.

fēasceaft funden ('found destitute'). It is not clear whether this reference concerns Scyld's infancy, childhood, or youth, as the poet only states that Scyld was found *ærest* ('at first'). Yet, later, in the description of Scyld's funeral, he recalls how Scyld had been sent alone on the waves *umborwesende* (46). The term *umbor*, as Izdebska observes, can refer to babies or older children, hence this reference can be to its infancy or childhood, but not youth.⁵⁰⁴

The poet then says that Scyld *þæs frōfre gebād* ('experienced consolation for that'); 'that' likely refers to his past as a poor foundling, while Scyld's consolation may be the growth he undergoes and the glory he subsequently earns (8-10); *frōfre* appears to have often indicated consolation from God, so perhaps this line implies divine intervention.⁵⁰⁵ Yet, the fact that the poet states that Scyld grew and prospered gloriously *oð þæt* ('until') he scared men, the neighbouring tribes submitted to him and he became a good king, implies that this change of fortune for Scyld did not occur in a single moment, but over a period of time during which he gained more and more glory in battle (like Beowulf), before becoming 'a good king'.

The passage is admittedly ambiguous regarding when Scyld's growth took place, but perhaps it may be argued that it coincided at least partly with his youth, which I also interpret as the period during which he experienced his *frōfre*; the poet uses the verb *wēaxan* ('to grow up'), which was often used to describe human growth, for instance in *Genesis B* and *Elene* (*Genesis B* even uses the same words as *Beowulf*, *wēox under wolcnum*); in Ælfric's homily '1.9 *De Purificatione Sanctæ Mariæ*' it refers

⁵⁰⁴ Izdebska, 'Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens', p. 50; '[U]mbor', in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* <<http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/032496>> [accessed 17 December 2021].

⁵⁰⁵ '[F]rōfor; senses 1; 1a.1; 2(a)', in *DOE* [accessed 17 December 2021].

to the growth of Christ Himself.⁵⁰⁶ It could also indicate that one is entering the phase of youth specifically, and the OE translation of Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, in which the author describes how Guthlac's strength *weox* ('increased') and he *gestipode* ('grew') into *geogoðe*.⁵⁰⁷ The verb *peōn* has a similar meaning, but it can refer to either physical or moral growth: for instance, in *Maxims I* it signified the youth's growth that allows them to become 'firm of purpose' (see 2.1); in *Genesis B*, it is again used together with *weoxan*.⁵⁰⁸

Although it is not explicitly stated that Scyld's growth took place during his youth, the reference to his youth may be implicit, like the description of Beowulf's youth at ll. 2183b-9. Moreover, Bonjour observed that the use of the motif of the 'sluggish youth' by the poet would make it clear to the audience that his description of Beowulf's 'inglorious' period referred to his youth.⁵⁰⁹ Perhaps in Scyld's story the poet resorts to the same motif, since Scyld was a destitute foundling who underwent a change of fortune before finally obtaining glory, a kingdom, and, so to speak, a 'happy ending'. This is a conjecture, but if it were accepted, it would constitute another parallel between Scyld and Beowulf, as

⁵⁰⁶ Ælfric of Eynsham, 'I.9 III Nonas Febrvarii in *De Purificatione Sanctæ Mariæ*', in *The Catholic Homilies: The First Series; Text*, ed. by Peter Clemoes, S. S. 17 (Oxford: Published for the EETS by Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 219-57 (p. 256), ll. 223, 224, 237; 'Genesis B', in *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. by Krapp, p. 52, l. 1702, and 'Elene: The Finding of the True Cross', in *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf*, ed. and trans. by Robert E. Bjork, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* 23 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 141-235 (p. 206), ll. 913b-4a.

⁵⁰⁷ *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Goodwin, ch. II, p. 12.

⁵⁰⁸ '[P]eón; sense I', in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTP://BOSWORTH.FF.CUNI.CZ/031740](http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/031740)> [accessed 17 December 2021]. See 'Maxims I', in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Van Kirk Dobbie, p. 158, l. 49a and 'Genesis B', in *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. by Krapp, p. 52, l. 1702.

⁵⁰⁹ Bonjour, 'Young Beowulf's Inglorious Period', p. 93.

both had to grow into their heroic and kingly roles and underwent a significant personal and heroic growth during their youths: Beowulf had to endure the scorn of the Geats and only became a valiant warrior after experiencing a ‘reversal’, whereas Scyld started out as a foundling and only thrived, eventually becoming ‘a good king’, after he experienced a ‘consolation’.

Indeed, Bonjour remarks that ‘[Scyld and Beowulf’s] youth was certainly different ... in sharp contrast to their glorious careers’.⁵¹⁰ He thus seems to believe that this passage might refer to Scyld’s youth and recognizes that there is a connection between Scyld and Beowulf, although he does not focus on the conception of youth they provide. Therefore, there might be a parallel between Beowulf and Scyld’s less-than-heroic beginnings, as both representations seem to illustrate that one’s unpromising youth did not necessarily prevent them from achieving glory later in life.

Beow, Scyld’s son, analyzed next, offers another description of youth which needs to be considered in relation to the other examples.

4.5 *Beow*

Beow is first described as *geong in geardum* (‘young at home’; 13a), hence his youth is made explicit, unlike his father’s; Anderson, who provided a specific study of Beow, thus seems right in noting that ‘[i]n particular, [the poet] stresses Beow’s youth’.⁵¹¹ However, like Wiglaf’s description as *geong* in section 4.2, this portrayal of Beow is ambiguous, perhaps even more ambiguous than Wiglaf, as it is not clear how old he is; he might be a child in this instance.

⁵¹⁰ Bonjour, *Digressions*, p. 5. He does not say why their youths were ‘certainly different’, but perhaps he refers to how Scyld grew up as a foundling while Beowulf was raised at Hrethel’s court.

⁵¹¹ Anderson, ‘Beow’, p. 633.

Beow was also earlier described as a *frōfre* ('consolation'; 14a) for his people, a term previously used to indicate the beginning of Scyld's 'change' at l. 7, but which here appears to portray Beow as a savior for the Scyldings. The poet's praise is then made explicit when he mentions that Beow was *brēme* — *blæd wīde sprang* — ('renowned — his glory spread widely' —; 18).

But while Beow's youth and glory have hitherto been mentioned separately, the next lines connect the two themes more closely:

20 Swā sceal ġe(ong) guma gōde ġewyrcean,
 fromum feohġiftum on fæder b(ear)me,
 þæt hine on ylde eft ġewuniġen
 wilġesþas, þonne wīġ cume
 lēode ġelæsten; lofdædum sceal
 25 in mæġþa ġehwære man ġeþēon.

(20 So should a young man do good,
 with rich treasure-gifts, in his father's bosom,
 so that in old age [will] again stand by him
 willing companions, when war comes,
 people will serve [him]; by glorious deeds must
 25 among his people, everywhere, one grow up)).

In these lines, youth is made again explicit through the reference to a 'young man', but as observed regarding the *geong mann* in *Maxims I*, it is difficult to determine how old, or rather how young, this man is: the term *guma* means 'man' with no specific reference to age, and it has already been observed that *geong* is rather ambiguous, as it could be used for a boy, a youth or an 'adolescent'.⁵¹² Given the emphasis on heroic behaviour, especially on the need to be generous with gifts and perform heroic deeds, it may be suggested that this *guma* is older than a boy (that is, a child), who may have been too young to carry out these duties, but it is not clear whether he is a youth or an adult. Line

⁵¹² '[G]uma', in DOE <<https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.nottingham.idm.oclc.org/doe/>>
 [accessed 23 March 2023].

On *geong*, see Chapter 2.

20a implies an opposition with old age, which nevertheless does not help to clarify how old the *guma* is, because he might have simply been young in the sense of ‘not old’; but the final lines, which exhort to grow up by performing feats of bravery, might suggest that this encouragement was meant for young warriors who are older than children, but not yet fully-grown adults. Moreover, the *geong guma* might be Beow himself (see below), which may further support this view; Bruce also seems to agree with this interpretation (see below). Indeed, it has been noted in Chapter 2 that the verb *geþeon* (25b) implies growth, often in connection with youth. Yet, this hypothesis cannot be proven.

This maxim, as Bruce observes, establishes ‘a code of conduct’ for young warriors and kings: it seems to show that proper youthful behaviour means adhering to the heroic code.⁵¹³ According to these lines, this entails being generous to one’s retainers, in order to have a band of warriors loyal to their lord, and growing up performing glorious deeds. Ideal youthful behaviour and heroic behaviour thus coincide; moreover, the adverb *swa* (‘so’) implies that the poet is taking Beow himself as an example of ideal youthful heroism.

This ethos might also be applied to some other young characters in the poem, to determine how closely they follow the ideal of heroic youth outlined in these lines. It would seem that Beowulf did not conform to this standard of behaviour during the phase of his ‘inglorious’ youth, nor did he apparently have a retinue when performing his heroic deeds (419-24a), although he came to better personify this ideal following his ‘reversal’. It is likely not a coincidence that Beowulf is described as generous only after his lazy years (1277-83a) and he similarly has a band of loyal retainers when he goes to Heorot

⁵¹³ Bruce, *Scyld and Scaef*, p. 21.

(205-9, 1963b), but apparently not before. When applied to Beowulf, then, this maxim seems to further highlight the heroic development he undergoes during his youth.

Anderson believes that Beow's glorious youth entails a contrast with Beowulf's 'inglorious' one. He sees this as depending on the different 'traditional typescenes' from which each characterization derives: Beow typifies a 'boy-wonder', while Beowulf illustrates the typescene of the 'sluggish youth', but argues that Beow and Beowulf represent the same model of kingship.⁵¹⁴ However, it has been suggested that they can also be read as illustrating different models of youth: Beowulf appears to represent an 'inglorious' conception of youth, whereas Beow seems to be the 'perfect' young warrior, as he is described as heroic from the beginning, although the poet never explicitly portrays him as superior to Beowulf or any other young character.

A similar consideration can be made regarding Scyld: the poet mentions that Scyld 'grew under the clouds' (8a) and 'lived gloriously' (8b) until he submitted neighbouring tribes (9-11). If these lines refer to his youth, as I argued above, then he seems to have at least partly followed the maxim at lines 20-25, as he grew up performing 'glorious deeds', although it is not stated whether Scyld had a band of retainers. However, it should be remembered that Scyld started as a foundling and, like Beowulf, he may have started to perform heroic feats only following a change of fortune in his youth: it thus seems that in the case of Scyld the maxim again highlights how one can become heroic despite their unheroic youth, in contrast to Beow's ideal example of heroism.

Hrothgar, instead, seems to have also been a paragon of heroism in his youth, like Beow, as he was described as a successful young warrior with his own band of retainers, and, after the construction of Heorot, he is also described as giving out treasure (80b-81a), all of which is in accordance with the first half of the maxim. However, Hrothgar

⁵¹⁴ Anderson, 'Beow', pp. 637-40.

does not seem to have adhered to this heroic ideal in his old age, hence he actually seems to be a foil to Beow: both Beow and Hrothgar were loved by their people (54a, 862-3) and ‘famed’ (55a, 345a) kings, but Beow seems to still be an effective king in his old age, as he did not suffer any *hȳnðo* (‘humiliations’; 475a) such as Grendel’s attacks, and was described by the poet as *gamol ond gūðrēoww* (‘old and fierce in battle’; 58a, although Hrothgar is described similarly at l. 1042a). Therefore, Beow, as far as the audience can see, seems depicted as a perfectly heroic warrior throughout all of his youth, contrary to Beowulf and Scyld, and remains so during his kingship, unlike Hrothgar.

This leaves Wiglaf: he also performs heroic deeds in his youth, although he is not explicitly described as generous and it is not said whether he had loyal retainers after becoming king. However, he seems by far the most similar to Beow, as neither are ever ‘inglorious’ or unheroic, distinguishing them from all the other examples. Like Wiglaf, Beow appears to be flawlessly heroic and to personify a model of ‘perfect’ heroism, to the point that his example is used to epitomize proper youthful behaviour; moreover, both also succeed their ‘fathers’ as kings (Wiglaf is adopted by Beowulf and succeeds him as leader of the Geats; 2729-32a, 2800b-1). Therefore, if Beowulf’s youthful behaviour is paralleled by Scyld, then Wiglaf’s may be foreshadowed by Beow, and perhaps provides another representation of heroism, according to which one’s heroic behaviour in youth can indeed lead to glory.

Besides Scyld and Beow, however, there is one last example that needs to be considered, which concerns another ancient king of the Scyldings called Heremod.

4.6 *Heremod*

Unlike most kings in the poem, like Beowulf (2390b), Hrothgar (863a) and Hygelac, Heremod was not a good king. The poet first describes him after recounting the story of

Sigmund and the dragon, which the *scop* tells in Heorot after Beowulf fights Grendel (874-900): the poet mentions that Sigmund had prospered *siððan Heremōdes hild sweðrode,/ eafod ond ellen* (‘since Heremod’s battle had abated,/ [his] strength and courage’; 901-2a).

Heremod thus immediately seems an unheroic king, who does not possess the requisites of a ruler: as made clear by Scyld’s description above, a lord and king was supposed to be courageous and skilled in battle, and Heremod is explicitly not. The poet then adds that Heremod was given up to the Etins (902b-4a) and that *[h]ine sorhwylmas/ lemede tō lange* (‘the violent emotions of sorrow/ crippled him too long’; 904b-5a). It is not stated what caused these ‘emotions of sorrow’; *sorhwylm* is used only once afterwards in the poem and the entire corpus, in reference to Hygelac’s concern for Beowulf’s fate in Denmark (1993a), and in this instance it seems to have a positive meaning, illustrating Hygelac’s affection for his nephew. On the contrary, the reference to Heremod should perhaps be read in connection with his banishment, as either resulting from it or as the cause that led to it, in which case Heremod would have brought about these ‘emotions of sorrow’ in others, hence *sorhwylm* might here have more negative connotations. This interpretation is supported by the following line, as the poet adds that *hē his lēodum wearð,/ eallum æpellingum tō aldorċeare* (‘he to his people became, to all the nobles, a mortal grief’; 905b-6a). This reference seems to clarify that Heremod deserved his fate, as the *hapax legomenon aldorċeare*, made up of *ealdor* (‘life’) and *caru* (‘sorrow’), implies that something sorrowful in his past is at issue.⁵¹⁵

The following lines, however, provide a more nuanced description of Heremod:

swylċe oft bemearn ærran mælum
 swiðferhþes sið snotor ċeorl monig,
 sē þe him bealwa tō bote ġelȳfde,
 910 þæt þæt ðēodnes bearn ġeþēon scolde,

⁵¹⁵ ‘[E]aldor-caru’, in DOE.

fæderæþelum onfōn, folc ġehealdan,
hord ond hlēoburh, hæleþa rīce,

(also they often mourned, for in former occasions,
the departure of the one of violent mind, many wise men,
who believed in him as deliverance from evils,
910 that the chief's son must prosper,
take his father's noble qualities, rule the people,
their treasure and stronghold, the heroes' kingdom,)

The poet reveals that Heremod had not always been 'a mortal grief' for his people: the Scyldings had previously had high hopes for him. Perhaps, this reference to the 'former occasions' may be an allusion to Heremod's youth (see also below).⁵¹⁶ The adverb *ærra* does not seem to have indicated youth specifically, but it could refer to 'an earlier period' or even (albeit substantivized) to '[...] the earlier state (of a person)'.⁵¹⁷ Given that characters' youths in the poem are described either explicitly (Wiglaf, Beow, Hrothgar) or implicitly (Beowulf and Scyld), this hypothesis seems possible, although it cannot be proven.

The wise men's expectations that Heremod, as a prince ('chief's son'), would 'prosper' (*geþeon*, earlier used for both Scyld and young Beow), then protect and rule the kingdom and the treasure, seem to convey another representation of ideal heroic conduct: indeed, they recall the maxim about proper youthful behaviour which the poet expressed about Beow (20-5) and may further suggest that these lines referred to Heremod's youth. There might thus be a contrast between the promising prince Heremod was as a young man, who seems to have been considered as a model of youthful heroism like Beow, and the unheroic king he later became.

Heremod's actions are then employed to convey a comparison between him and Beowulf, as while the latter was *frēondum ġefæggra; / hine fyren onwōd* ('more celebrated

⁵¹⁶ See the following footnote.

⁵¹⁷ '[Æ]rra, ærest; senses A.2.a, A.2.a.i.b', in *DOE*.

by friends; wickedness undid him [Heremod]'; 915). The term *fyren* is used elsewhere in *Beowulf*, often to describe Grendel's attacks (101a, 164a, 811a), hence it may describe Heremod as monstrous, and it might also have been meant to stress proper heroic and kingly conduct indirectly, by condemning Heremod's barbarity: a good king would never commit such an atrocity.

Heremod and Beowulf's behaviour has already been considered, for instance by Bonjour, as a deliberate contrast by the poet, with regards to both their youths and kingships.⁵¹⁸ The trust that Heremod's nobles had in him, before he failed their expectations, cannot help but bring to mind Beowulf's situation as a young man, which was the opposite. Heremod started out as a promising prince who had the trust of his advisers and then proved himself to be a wicked ruler, whereas Beowulf used to be a lazy youth scorned by his people and his lord but who grew up to be a heroic king. This contrast suggests once again that the references to Heremod's past actually refer to his youth.

If this were the case, despite their opposite developments, the descriptions of Beowulf and Heremod's youths would also show that one's youth is not always a guarantee of one's destiny. This same consideration can be applied to Scyld as well, since, as suggested above, he may also have been an unpromising youth who then became a heroic and famed king, in contrast to Heremod's promising youth and unheroic kingship. However, as seen below, Beowulf and Scyld are not the only characters with whom Heremod might be compared.

⁵¹⁸ Bonjour, *Digressions*, pp. 6, 25, 27 48-9, 55. See also Bonjour, 'Young *Beowulf*'s Inglorious Period', p. 90.

The next mention of Heremod, by Hrothgar, after Beowulf has defeated Grendel's mother, describes how Heremod betrayed the hopes and trust of his advisors upon becoming king:

... Ne wearð Heremōd swā
 1710 eaforum Ecgwelan, Ār-Scyldingum;
 ne gewēox hē him tō willan, ac tō wælfalle
 ond tō dēaðcwalum Deniga lēodum;
 brēat bolgenmōd bēodgenēatas,
 eaxlgesteallan, oþ þæt hē āna hwearf,
 mære þēoden, mondrēamum from.

(... Heremod was not so
 1710 to the sons of Ecgwela, to the Honour-Scyldings;
 he grew not to their pleasure, but for destruction
 and for the slaughter of the people of the Danes;]
 he killed, enraged, his companions at table]
 shoulder-companions, until he alone departed,]
 1715 chief distinguished by evil deeds, from human joy]).

Heremod's crimes are here elaborated, as the poet explains that he killed his own retainers and subjects. The adjective *bolgenmod* ('enraged') is often used in OE poetry to describe monsters or monstrous individuals: in *Andreas*, it twice refers to the cannibal and heathen Mermedonians, in *Guthlac A* it indicates the devils tormenting Saint Guthlac, in *Daniel* it denotes the evil pagan Nabuchadnezzar, and, perhaps more tellingly of all, it is used earlier in *Beowulf* to describe Grendel as he prepares to slaughter the men in Heorot (709a).⁵¹⁹ Heremod, then, is again being described as inhuman (as already implied by the term *fyren*, 915b): perhaps his cruelty was meant as a perversion of heroic behaviour, of the commendable desire to kill one's enemies, whereas Heremod kills his retainers, instead of protecting them as a king should, showing his immorality.⁵²⁰ In light of this, the adjective *mære*, which is often translated in a positive sense as 'great, excellent, etc.',

⁵¹⁹ See 'Andreas', p. 6 l. 128a, p. 37 l. 1221a, in *The Vercelli Book*, ed. by Krapp; *Guthlac A*, in *The Guthlac*, ed. and trans. by Roberts, p. 100 l. 557; 'Daniel', in *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. by Krapp, pp. 111-32 (p. 116), l. 209.

⁵²⁰ Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 44.

was here more likely used to convey a further condemnation of his actions, and thus had a negative sense.⁵²¹

The statement that Heremod ‘grew not to their pleasure, but for destruction ...’, in which the poet uses the verb *weaxan*, already used to describe Scyld’s glorious growth (8a), may be another reference to Heremod’s youth. If it is, then Heremod’s youth would also have been an important period in his growth, as for the other examples hitherto examined; but in his case, it is because Heremod underwent a transformation from a promising young prince into a tyrant, rather than into a heroic and selfless warrior like Beowulf.

The next and final lines about Heremod draw more attention to his development:

Ðēah þe hine mihtig God mægenes wynnum,
eafeþum stēpte, ofer ealle men
forð gefremede, hwæþere him on ferhþe grēow
brēosthord blōdrēow, nallas bēagas ġeaf
1720 Denum æfter dōme; drēamlēas ġebad
þæt hē þæs gewinnes weorc þrōwade,
lēodbealo longsum. Ðū þē lār be þon,
gumcyste onġit;

(Though him mighty God with joys of strength,
exalted with strength over all men,
further advanced, yet in his heart grew to him
the bloodthirsty treasure of the breast, not at all did he give rings
1720 to Danes for glory, he lived joylessly
so that he suffered the pain of torment
harm which affected the people for a long time. You learn by this,
understand manly virtue;)

The poet earlier described how the ‘wise men’ of the Scyldings had high hopes for Heremod, but these lines further emphasize that Heremod indeed used to be more virtuous, as he even enjoyed God’s favour and was blessed with great strength (like Beowulf), until his blood-lust started to grow within him. The poet’s statements that

⁵²¹ ‘[M]ære; sense I’, in Bosworth-Toller, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*

<[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/22175](https://bosworthtoller.com/22175)> [accessed 17 December 2021].

Heremod ‘lived joylessly’ and ‘suffered the pain of torment/ harm which affected the people for a long time’ may recall his first description (904b-5a), and might clarify that the ‘emotions of anxiety’ which had crippled Heremod for a long time were his own doing and caused by his own cruelty. Hrothgar’s advice to Beowulf to ‘understand manly virtue’ seems to imply once again that Heremod’s actions do *not* constitute proper heroic behaviour, as the aged king seems to tell Beowulf to learn from Heremod’s mistakes (1723b-4a, 1758-61a).

It has already been observed that the idea of a promising youth who then fails to live up to his heroic potential is in stark contrast to the ‘inglorious’ youths of both Beowulf and Scyld. However, there is another character who has a similar, although not identical, development: Hrothgar. Scholars already recognized that Heremod also constitutes a foil to Hrothgar; however, while they considered Heremod’s youth when comparing him with Beowulf, they have hitherto focused on Heremod and Hrothgar as kings.⁵²² But as seen above, Hrothgar is introduced as a promising young warrior, with his own retinue of young retainers; he is also generous towards them (80b-1a), seemingly personifying the ideal of youthful behaviour conveyed by the maxim about Beow (20-5), in stark contrast to Heremod. Yet, he then fails to live up to the heroic ideal when he becomes older, both physically and mentally.

Concerning Heremod, it is not said whether he had his own companions growing up or if he performed heroic deeds as advised in the maxim about Beow (20-5), but as described in the previous excerpts, he had been formerly virtuous and was, like Hrothgar, considered a promising prince. While the poet seems to suggest that Hrothgar’s failure was due to his old age, as Hrothgar himself seems to imply later in this same speech (1753-5a, 1766a), Heremod’s was explicitly a moral failure, caused by his own

⁵²² Bruce, *Scyld and Scef*, p. 21; Bonjour, *Digressions*, pp. 6, 25.

wickedness (1740-52). The fact that these lines about Heremod are spoken by Hrothgar (his descendant, another king of the Scyldings) only makes their parallelism more evident, and suggests that both exemplify a similarly ambiguous conception of youth.

This is not to say that Heremod may not also constitute a contrast to other characters: besides Beowulf and Scyld, he might also be considered as a foil to Wiglaf and Beow, who always remained heroic in their youth, and in Beow's case, throughout his kingship (while the poet only describes the very beginning of Wiglaf's reign). The connection between Heremod and Hrothgar, as illustrated by their youths, seems to recall that between Scyld and Beowulf and Beow and Wiglaf.

Yet, in my view Hrothgar and Heremod's parallel is more complex, as while the previous correspondences tended to reinforce the same ideas about youthful heroism (for instance, that an unheroic youth does not prevent one from becoming a heroic warrior in the future, as shown by both Beowulf and Scyld), in the case of Hrothgar and Heremod their examples stress both the similarities and differences between the two characters. Hrothgar and Heremod might be said to demonstrate that one's heroic youth does not guarantee that one will still be heroic later in life; but, as I observed above, Hrothgar's failure due to his physical decline seems presented as more acceptable than Heremod's fall because of his bloodlust, as shown by the fact that only Heremod is explicitly criticized in the poem (915b), while Hrothgar is often praised as a good, wise and generous king (130a, 131a, 190b, 345a, 862-3, 1042a, 1046-8a, etc.), despite his shortcomings. Heremod's violence towards his subjects might thus indirectly highlight Hrothgar's virtues, as Hrothgar did nothing as despicable as killing his own subjects and was generous to them (80b-1a).

Therefore, Heremod's description presents similarities and differences with Beowulf, Scyld, Wiglaf, and Beow; however, as another king of the Scyldings who failed

to live up to his youthful potential, he seems more closely connected with Hrothgar and appears to further highlight how a heroic youth does not necessarily entail glory later in life. On the other hand, it has been argued that Heremod's downfall also highlights Hrothgar's good kingship.

4.7 Conclusion

It can be concluded that *Beowulf* is a poem in which youth and heroism are repeatedly intertwined, as suggested by the representations of different characters. Beowulf had a sluggish and unheroic youth before he became a valiant and heroic warrior; this was not, I argued, an attempt to emphasize his heroic virtue or, conversely, an inconsistency, but might have been meant to demonstrate how even a lacklustre young man could experience a turnaround and become a heroic warrior. On the other hand, Wiglaf is heroic from the very beginning and continues to obtain glory until the end of the poem, becoming king, while Hrothgar constitutes a third model of youthful heroic behaviour, as he used to be a successful warrior before declining in old age.

It has also been argued that the poet further reinforces these representations of heroic youth by creating parallels and contrasts between these three characters and three kings from the distant past: thus, Beowulf and Scyld may exemplify an 'inglorious' interpretation of youth, as both show that even an unpromising young man can achieve glory; Wiglaf and Beow, instead, might convey a more straightforward example of a young man who embodies warrior ideals from the beginning, and grows to be an equally heroic king, providing a 'glorious' conception of youth. And finally, Hrothgar and Heremod would demonstrate that a heroic youth is not always a guarantee of a heroic destiny, as they fail to live up to their heroic potential when they become kings, illustrating an ambiguous idea of youth.

I focused on these parallels to draw attention to their supposed similarities — for instance, that youth is repeatedly described as an essential stage in one's personal and heroic growth — and to argue that each conveys a different representation of youth with regards to the heroic values of the poem. However, I also noted that each model can be understood in relation to the others, although the poet does not seem to prefer one over the rest.

Therefore, these various descriptions of youth and young people in *Beowulf* appear to demonstrate that youth is an important theme, which helps to appreciate the complexity of the conception of heroism in the poem.

Chapter 5

Youth and Young People in the *Vita Bonifatii* and *The Wanderer*

At first sight, the *Vita Bonifatii* and *The Wanderer* do not seem to have much in common. The *Vita* is a saint's life, while *The Wanderer* is usually considered as an elegy (or a wisdom poem); the former is about an historical missionary who was martyred in Frisia in the eighth century, while the latter is widely interpreted as a literary account of the suffering of an exile; one aims to glorify Boniface and provide Christian teachings, while the other describes the misfortunes of a lonely warrior to provide a general reflection on the human condition and encourage the audience to seek solace in God.⁵²³ It may thus seem that it would have been better to examine the *Vita Bonifatii* alongside the other saints' lives in Chapter 3, as these texts all belong to the same hagiographic tradition, and in this way it would have been possible to highlight the Christian values they convey and the ways in which the hagiographers engage with the saints' youth.

The choice to include the *Vita Bonifatii* and *The Wanderer* together may thus be questioned, mainly for the fact that they deal with different themes and (likely) different audiences, which means that it might be difficult to develop a coherent argument that could apply to both texts, and, indeed, suggests that they provide different depictions of youth as well.

Why, then, have the *Vita* and *The Wanderer* been included together in the same chapter? What do they have in common? I considered these two texts together because I

⁵²³ Lawrence Beaston, 'The Wanderer's Courage', *Neophilologus* 89(1) (2005), 119-37 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11061-004-5672-x>> [accessed 18 January 2022], p. 120; Robert E. Bjork, 'Sundor æt Rune: The Voluntary Exile of the Wanderer', in *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. by Roy M. Liuzza (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 315-27 (p. 315).

argue that, despite their differences, which need to be taken into account, they share a similar depiction of youth, one which is distinct from that analyzed in previous chapters (as a period of growth). This is why the *Vita* is discussed here, rather than in Chapter 3 alongside other saints' lives: while Willibald uses the same hagiographic ideas I mentioned in Chapter 3 (like the *topos* of the *puer senex*, for instance), and uses Boniface's youth to convey Christian values and a model of Christian behaviour, Boniface's youth is different from the youth of Guthlac, Chrysanthus and Daria, in that it is not understood as a period of growth. In this sense, it is more similar to how the wanderer's youth is presented in *The Wanderer*; although, of course, it should be remembered that the themes conveyed by the wanderer and Boniface's youths are distinct, and need to be understood within their respective textual contexts. Yet, this chapter aims to show that juxtaposing *The Wanderer* and the *Vita Bonifatii*, while keeping in mind their similarities as well as their differences, will shed light on another interpretation of youth which, I suggest, also has an important textual function and contributes to the meanings of both texts, demonstrating that there was more than one way to represent and employ youth in EME literature.

I focus first on the *Vita* (5.1) and then on *The Wanderer* (5.2), to determine what ideas of youth they illustrate, how these conceptions contribute to the aim of each work, and what they can reveal about the interpretations of youth in EME texts.⁵²⁴

⁵²⁴ The edition of the *Vita Bonifatii* used herein is: '*Vita Bonifatii Auctore Willibaldo*', ed. by Wilhelm Levison, in *Vitae Sancti Bonifatii Archiepiscopi Moguntini, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in Usus Scholarum Separatim Editi* 57, pp. 1-58, available at: <[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/TA79JVCD](https://tinyurl.com/TA79JVCD)> [accessed 18 January 2022], henceforth *Vita*. The edition of *The Wanderer* is: '*The Wanderer*' in *The Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Dobbie, pp. 134-7. Translations are mine. References are given as in-text citations by line or page number.

5.1 *Willibald's Vita Bonifatii*

Saint Boniface, formerly named Wynfrith, was born in Wessex around 675; he began his religious career at Exeter, but is mostly known for his missionary work in Germany and Frisia, where he was martyred by pirates in 754.⁵²⁵ Boniface was also made Archbishop of Mainz, founded monasteries (like Fulda, in 744), supported the takeover of the Carolingian dynasty in Frankia, strengthened the role of the pope in the Frankish and German churches, presided over church councils, and promulgated the Rule of Saint Benedict.⁵²⁶ He was also a teacher, preacher, and wrote treatises on Latin grammar and metrics as well as poems based on Aldhelm's works.⁵²⁷

Boniface has also left a considerable number of letters which he exchanged with popes, archbishops, bishops, abbots, abbesses, nuns, priests, kings, and laymen, across England, Germany, Frisia, Frankia and Italy in the course of his remarkable life, and which shed much light on his character and the events of his time.⁵²⁸ Because of his well-

⁵²⁵ James Palmer, 'Saxon or European? Interpreting and Reinterpreting Saint Boniface', *History Compass*, 4(5) (2006), 852-69

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2006.00350.x> [accessed 18 January 2022], p. 852; Rudolf Schieffer, 'Boniface: His Life and Work', in *A Companion to Boniface*, ed. by Michel Aaji and Shannon Godlove (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 9-26 (pp. 9-10).

⁵²⁶ Palmer, 'Saxon or European?', p. 852; Schieffer, 'Boniface', p. 20.

⁵²⁷ Schieffer, 'Boniface', p. 10.

⁵²⁸ Thomas F. X. Noble, 'Introduction', in *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, trans. by Ephraim Emerton. With a New Introduction and Bibliography by Thomas F. X. Noble (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. vii-xxxv (p. xxxiii); Schieffer, 'Boniface', pp. 9, 11. On Boniface's correspondence, see for instance Bill Friesen, 'Troubled Relations: Parallels Between the *Vita Bonifatii Prima* and Bonifatian Epistolary', *The Mediæval Journal*, 4(2) (2014), 1-20 <[10.1484/J.TMJ.5.103236](https://doi.org/10.1484/J.TMJ.5.103236)> [accessed 18 January 2022]; Christine E. Fell, 'Some Implications of the Boniface Correspondence', in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. by Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 29-43; and Shannon Godlove, 'In the Words

known accomplishments (and, above all, his violent martyrdom), Boniface became a revered Christian figure (albeit more so on the Continent than in his homeland), and was thus also an ideal subject for a saint's life.⁵²⁹ There were six *vitae* written about the saint in the medieval period; this section is concerned with the first *vita*, composed around 760 in Mainz by an English monk called Willibald (d. after 768).⁵³⁰

As Friesen points out, the first critics of the *Vita Bonifatii* were rather harsh.⁵³¹ For instance, Emerton dismisses it as 'a conventional saint's life'; Levison considers it 'incomplete and inadequate', and Greenfield, rather curiously, states that the *Vita* was 'not far removed from hagiography'.⁵³² This last comment, in particular, suggests that early scholars evaluated the *Vita* purely as an historical source.⁵³³ However, academics have since started to recognize its value and merits as a literary text.⁵³⁴ Holdsworth (writing in 1980) and Wood (2001) employ it as the basis for their reconstructions of Boniface as a monk and missionary, respectively, although they also acknowledge that the *Vita* was primarily intended as a hagiographic text, through which Willibald meant to

of the Apostle: Pauline Apostolic Discourse in the Letters of Boniface and His Circle', *Early Medieval Europe*, 25(3) (2017), 320-58

<[HTTPS://ONLINELIBRARYWILEYCOM.EZPROXY.NOTTINGHAM.AC.UK/DOI/PDFDIRECT/10.1111/EMED.12214](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/ezproxy.nottingham.ac.uk/doi/pdfdirect/10.1111/emed.12214)> [accessed 18 January 2022].

⁵²⁹ Palmer, 'Saxon or European?', pp. 859-60.

⁵³⁰ Schieffer, 'Boniface', p. 9; Shannon Godlove, 'The First *Life* of Boniface: Willibald's *Vita Bonifatii*', in *A Companion to Boniface*, ed. by Aaji and Godlove, pp. 152-73 (p. 152).

⁵³¹ Friesen, 'Troubled Relations', p. 4.

⁵³² Emerton, *Letters*, p. 4; George W. Greenaway, *Saint Boniface: Three Biographical Studies for the Twelfth Centenary Festival* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1955), p. 35; Levison, ed., *Vita Bonifatii*, p. 54; cited in Friesen, 'Troubled Relations', p. 5.

⁵³³ Friesen, 'Troubled Relations', p. 5.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*

celebrate Boniface's accomplishments and sanctity.⁵³⁵ In 2014, Friesen provided a stylistic and linguistic comparison between Boniface's *Vita* and his letters, finally adopting a literary approach to the *Vita*, although he does not consider the text on its own. Lastly, in the most recent re-assessment of the *Vita* (2020), Godlove remarks (correctly, in my view, considering its critical history) that the *Vita* was always considered as an important historical document; yet (as far as I am aware) she is the first to examine the *Vita* as a literary and hagiographic work in its own right, as she begins her analysis with a brief stylistic and structural discussion before focusing on its portrayals of Boniface as missionary and reformer, and also considers important episodes like Boniface's cutting down of the oak of Jupiter and his martyrdom, although she does not seem to consider the themes and aims of the text.⁵³⁶

Like Friesen and Godlove, I also intend to study the *Vita* as a saint's life rather than as an historical work (since, regardless of its historicity, it is a saint's life). I focus on the description of Boniface's youth in chapter 2 of the *Vita* (section 5.1.3), before he becomes a missionary, which does not seem to have been hitherto considered in detail, to determine how youth is conceptualized in the text and whether it contributes to its purposes.⁵³⁷

Before doing so, however, I first consider the Prologue of the *Vita* (section 5.1.1), and the description of Boniface's childhood in chapter 1 (5.1.2). Both are useful to my analysis, as in the Prologue Willibald describes the aims and audiences of his text, hence the Prologue might explain why Boniface's youth was written as it was, and for whom,

⁵³⁵ Christopher Holdsworth, 'Saint Boniface the Monk', in *The Greatest Englishman: Essays on St. Boniface and the Church at Crediton*, ed. by Timothy Reuter (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1980), pp. 47-67 (p. 49); Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelization of Europe, 400-1050* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), p. 58.

⁵³⁶ Godlove, 'First Life', pp. 154-71.

⁵³⁷ Godlove briefly discusses the Prologue in *ibid.*, pp. 152-4.

whereas Willibald's account of Boniface's childhood illustrates how he discovered his spiritual vocation, and may thus help to contextualize his youth.⁵³⁸

5.1.1 *The Prologue of the Vita Bonifatii*

In the Prologue, Willibald explains that he was commissioned to write Boniface's *Vita* by Lull, Boniface's disciple and his successor as Archbishop of Mainz, and Meginhoz, Bishop of Würzburg (p. 1), another friend of Boniface's, and for those clergymen in Tuscany, Gaul, Germany or Britain who had heard of Boniface's *fama miraculorumque chruscatio* ('fame and brilliance of miracles', p. 2).⁵³⁹ Boniface's reputation, and the fact that Willibald wrote the *Vita* only a few years after the saint's martyrdom, for people who were already familiar with Boniface's achievements, meant that the hagiographer had to provide a portrayal which did justice to such a great saint.

Willibald is aware of this, as he writes that he modelled his *Vita* on the lives of the early saints and he made sure to include truthful events, based on the direct testimony of his patrons and Boniface's own disciples (pp. 2-3). Adhering to hagiographic conventions and declaring that a saint's life was based on authoritative and reliable sources were both common strategies used by hagiographers to illustrate their subjects' sainthood, as were depictions of miracles, considered as a demonstration of God's favour on the holy man (or woman).⁵⁴⁰

It must be remembered that saints' lives were meant to demonstrate that the subject was worthy of sainthood, and to provide spiritual instruction to the audience (see chapter

⁵³⁸ The fact that Willibald divides Boniface's life into childhood and youth (and adulthood, from pp. 11 ff.) suggests that he, like Felix and Ælfric, is applying a division of the 'ages of man' to his work.

⁵³⁹ Godlove, 'First *Life*', pp. 152-4.

⁵⁴⁰ Noble and Head, 'Introduction', in *Soldiers of Christ*, pp. xv, xviii.

3).⁵⁴¹ The first purpose is evidenced by Willibald's statement that he was ordered to *beati viri vitam praecelsasque eius virtutes et cultum pietatis atque abstinentiae robor praesentibus ac post secuturis saeculis ... demonstrare* ('... show the life of the blessed man and his pre-eminent virtues and his observance of piety and the strength of his abstinence to the present and subsequent ages', p. 3). Willibald thus seems to have meant to present Boniface as a perfect Christian, which would justify his claim to sanctity. I translated the verb *demonstrare* as 'to show', but it could also mean 'to demonstrate', that is 'to give evidence (of [something])', which may further prove that he also meant to provide evidence of Boniface's holiness.⁵⁴² The fact that Willibald mentions that the *Vita* was for 'the present and subsequent ages' (p. 3), while he had earlier addressed it to Boniface's friends and disciples, implies that he had a much wider audience in mind, and also intended to immortalize Boniface for future generations.⁵⁴³

Willibald has so far discussed his aim to prove Boniface's sanctity; but then he adds that he also wished to

... ex tantae rei relatione profuturum legentibus praebens exemplum, dum hiis quisque instruitur formulis et ad meliora profectus sui perfectione perducitur.

(... provide from an account of such a great matter an example which will be useful to the readers, since each of them is instructed by these models and is led to better things through his own completion, p. 4).

These lines reveal that Willibald is not simply interested in providing information about Boniface, perhaps because, as noted above, the audience was likely already familiar with the main events of Boniface's life. Additionally, this passage implies that the *Vita* was

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., pp. xvii-xviii; see ch. 3.

⁵⁴² '[D]emonstrare; senses n° 1 and 2', in *DMLBS*

<[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/DEMONSTRARE](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/demonstrare)> [accessed 18 January 2022].

⁵⁴³ Godlove, 'First *Life*', p. 153.

also a means to guide the audience, in the present and the future, towards moral and spiritual self-improvement, which was another common aim of hagiography.⁵⁴⁴

More specifically, this excerpt seems to show that the *Vita* had a deliberate moral, didactic and practical purpose. Its moral and didactic aims are suggested by the terms *exemplum*, *formula* and *instruere*: *exemplum* was often used in hagiography to indicate the ideal Christian behaviour illustrated by a saint which the faithful should strive to follow; *formula* was similarly used to describe a model of ideal spiritual conduct, while the verb *instruere* could also convey moral instruction.⁵⁴⁵ On the other hand, Willibald specifies that this instruction would also be ‘useful’, and lead the audience ‘to better things’, hence it also appears to entail an improvement in their own lives.

The Prologue of the *Vita*, then, shows that Willibald meant to recount Boniface’s virtuous life and behaviour to the audience, which included both his friends and disciples as well as future generations, in order to prove Boniface’s sanctity and enrich the audience personally and spiritually; consequently, this also means that the description of Boniface’s youth should be taken as part of the strategy to exemplify Boniface’s virtues and provide moral and spiritual teachings.

However, the saint’s youth should first be understood in relation to his childhood, discussed next, which provides an initial demonstration of his suitability for sanctity and helps to understand better Boniface’s youthful portrayal.

⁵⁴⁴ Noble and Head, ‘Introduction’, p. xviii.

⁵⁴⁵ ‘[E]xemplum; sense n° 3 (esp. b)’ <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/EXEMPLUM](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/exemplum)> [accessed 18 January 2022], in *DMLBS*; ‘formula; sense n° 8’ <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/FORMULA](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/formula)> [accessed 18 January 2022], in *ibid*; ‘instruere; sense n° 5’ <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/EXEMPLUM](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/exemplum)> [accessed 18 January 2022], in *ibid*.

5.1.2 *Boniface's Childhood*

The main subject of the first chapter of the *Vita* is succinctly expressed in the title, *[q]ualiter in infantia [Bonifatius] Dei servitium inchoavit* ('[h]ow in [his] childhood [Boniface] started the service of God', p. 4). As in most depictions of saints' childhoods, this was likely meant to show how the saint began his spiritual growth and that he had been worthy of sainthood since his earliest years, as noted by Hill.⁵⁴⁶ Although I am concerned with Boniface's youth, Boniface's childhood also needs to be briefly considered, as this is, in one specific and important respect, different from other, conventional representations of saintly children, and this difference also serves to understand better Willibald's depiction of his youth.

After again stating his aim to recount Boniface's character and blessed life (p. 4), Willibald provides an account which seems mostly based on hagiographic conventions: he describes how Boniface is his father's favorite child and has already, at four or five years of age, overcome the desires of the flesh and thought more about *aeterna* ('the eternal things', *ibid.*) than the things present, and *Dei se servitio subiugare studivit* ('desired to subjugate himself to the service of God', p. 5).⁵⁴⁷ This portrayal of Boniface as an unusually faithful child, already aware of spiritual matters and of his Christian vocation, is an example of the hagiographic *topos* of the *puer senex*, which was often employed by hagiographers to convey the exceptional nature of their saints and their suitability for sanctity at an early age, as already seen in the case of Saint Guthlac's childhood in 3.1.⁵⁴⁸ Hill explains that the recurrence of hagiographic motifs in EME

⁵⁴⁶ Hill, 'Childhood', p. 142.

⁵⁴⁷ Noble, 'Introduction', p. xviii.

⁵⁴⁸ On the *topos* of the *puer senex*, see ch. 3.

saints' lives is due to the hagiographers' 'relative lack of information', but it is also a way to show the audience that their saint was chosen by God.⁵⁴⁹

So far, the *Vita* indeed seems no more than 'a conventional saint's life', as despairingly noted by its early critics.⁵⁵⁰ However, Willibald explains that Boniface's father was strongly opposed to his decision. He repeatedly tempts him to choose the pleasures of the world rather than the rigorous dedication at the monastery, first by making the boy his heir, then with long discussions and flattery; finally, he tempts him with earthly riches, but all to no avail (pp. 5-6). The more his father tries to thwart him, the more determined Boniface becomes to pursue his spiritual ambition, and to devote himself to the study of the Bible (p. 6). As Willibald observes, *vir iam Deo in pueritia plenus* ('[the man [was] already full of God in [his] childhood', *ibid.*). This statement seems to encapsulate the entire meaning of Boniface's childhood, and of many saints' childhoods in general: to show that he was, even then, worthy of sainthood.⁵⁵¹

This contrast between Boniface and his father seems a common depiction of a spiritual temptation of the saint: by withstanding his father's attempts to persuade him to abandon his belief in God and desire to become a monk, Boniface, even as a child, proves his faith and shows that Christians (or perhaps monks specifically) should reject earthly pleasures, and thus first provides an example of proper Christian behaviour for the clerical audience of the *Vita*.

This depiction by Willibald is, at first sight, similar to other scenes of saintly temptation, like in the 'Passion of Chrysanthus' (3.3.1), in which Chrysanthus's father Polemius tries to convince his son to abandon his faith, to no avail. But this scene, as such

⁵⁴⁹ Hill, 'Childhood', pp. 142, 143.

⁵⁵⁰ See footnotes 9 and 10 herein.

⁵⁵¹ Hill, 'Childhood', p. 142.

scenes often do, occurs during the saint's youth.⁵⁵² This is likely because of the indirect influence of patristic authors' interpretation of youth as a period of moral and spiritual uncertainty, in which the young person is especially vulnerable to the sexual urges of his body, as well as to material pleasures (1.4).

To my knowledge, Boniface's is one of the only two depictions of a saintly temptation which takes place during the saint's childhood rather than their youth; the other is Ælfric's passion of 'Saint Agnes, Virgin'. Thirteen-year-old Agnes is called a *cild* ('child'), yet she (like the older Chrysanthus) is tempted, unsuccessfully, to abandon Christianity through sexual advances, flatteries, threats, and the offer of expensive clothes.⁵⁵³ However, Agnes remains a *cild* throughout her *Passio*, whereas Willibald also recounts Boniface's youth, yet he nevertheless chooses to describe Boniface's temptation in his childhood. Willibald has already shown his knowledge of common hagiographic conventions, hence this may have been a conscious decision, perhaps to further emphasize Boniface's portrayal as a *puer senex*, since he withstands a threat to his faith when younger than most saints. This description, then, may show that Willibald was willing to engage with hagiographic motifs for his own ends, and as suggested below, it may also help to explain Boniface's youthful portrayal.

Boniface's father is then punished by God with a deadly illness (another common *topos* in hagiography), which leads him to accept his son's decision, and when he dies, Boniface is finally able to enter the monastery of *Ad-Exancestre* (Exeter) under the guidance of abbot Wulfhard (p. 6).⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵² For another example, see 'B., *Vita S. Dunstani*', pp. 24-6.

⁵⁵³ *LS* I, pp. 170-3.

⁵⁵⁴ Divine punishment through illness also occurs in the *Vita S. Dunstani*, pp. 26-8.

The depiction of Boniface's childhood establishes that he was worthy of sainthood from an early age, and he is already portrayed as an example of faith and spiritual resolve, as shown when he withstands his father's temptations, in accordance with Willibald's didactic aims for the *Vita*. Willibald then continues to highlight Boniface's virtues in the next chapter about his youth, while also engaging with different connotations relating to the interpretation of youth in EME texts.

5.1.3 *Boniface's Youth*

The chapter about Boniface's youth is, just as the previous one, introduced by a title: *[q]ualiter adolescentiae incentiva primitus frangeret et omnibus bonis inhereret* ('[h]ow he for the first time shattered the temptations of youth and clung to all the good things', p. 7). *Adolescentia*, as I explained in Chapter 1, means 'youth', but specifically refers to youth as a period of growth, hence it takes place between one's childhood and adulthood, and cannot, to my knowledge, include childhood and early adulthood like *geogup* (see 1.2). However, *adolescentia* remains nevertheless ambiguous, as it is not altogether clear how old Boniface is here, as it is not stated whether Willibald's conception of *adolescentia* is based on Isidore of Seville's, which lasted from ages 14 to 28 (see 1.3).

The adjective *incentivus* instead means 'tempting', but here it is substantivized, so that it more properly means 'temptations', which were often of a sexual nature.⁵⁵⁵ The title suggests that Willibald employs the well-established patristic connection between youth and sin, specifically lust. The verb *frangere*, meaning 'to break', or more properly in this case, 'to shatter', appears to signify that Boniface overcame his youthful and sinful

⁵⁵⁵ '[I]ncentivus; senses 1 and 2', in *DMLBS* <<https://logeion.uchicago.edu/incentivus>> [accessed 18 January 2022].

desires and to demonstrate the strength of his belief.⁵⁵⁶ Willibald seems to introduce a contrast between Boniface's behaviour as a young man, which is in accordance with Christian teachings, and common youthful behaviour, which is implied to be sinful; in this way, he may have meant to show his audience that they too, like Boniface, needed to reject sinful temptations, and to describe him as a perfect Christian youth.

In the second half of the title, Willibald adds that Boniface *omnibus inhereret bonis* ('clung to all the good things'): the verb *inhere* seems to suggest an effort on Boniface's part, implying that youth was not usually associated with 'good things', and it might also show his agency in rejecting the passions of youth in favour of preserving his morality and faith. This description again seems to emphasize the opposition between the *omnibus bonis* for which Boniface strives and the *adolescentiae incentiva* ('temptations of youth') mentioned in the first half of the title. Therefore, it appears that while youth itself is depicted negatively (although it is not explicitly criticized), Willibald presents Boniface's youth as a virtuous alternative to usual youthful conduct, which is presented as immoral, albeit again implicitly.

This virtuous depiction of young Boniface seems to build on the virtuous description of his childhood. The hagiographer continues to present Boniface as an ideal Christian model when he describes how he, at the beginning of his monastic life, devoted himself to *sanctimonia* (p. 7). This term can be translated as 'holiness', but also as 'virtue ... (w. implications of chastity)' and, by the same token, 'profession of chastity'.⁵⁵⁷ It is not clear what meaning Willibald preferred, but considering the frequent association between youth and lust in Christian thought, the connotations of chastity seem

⁵⁵⁶ '[F]rangere; sense 1', in *ibid.* <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/FRANGERE](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/frangere)> [accessed 18 January 2022].

⁵⁵⁷ '[S]anctimonia; senses n° 1, 2 and 2.b', in *DMLBS* <[HTTPS://LOGEION.UCHICAGO.EDU/SANCTIMONIA](https://logeion.uchicago.edu/sanctimonia)> [accessed 11 May 2021].

particularly suitable to describe the youthful piety of a future saint and martyr, and may have shown the audience the need to remain chaste, which was an essential requirement for the clergy.⁵⁵⁸

Willibald then mentions how Boniface, after completing the phase of childhood, reached the *puerilis ... decore aetatis* ('beauty of youth', *ibid.*). Since Willibald had earlier implied that youth, in general, should be considered as immoral, it seems to further underscore Boniface's virtuous youth and to differentiate it from common, sinful youth.

This distinction, and the exceptional nature of the young saint, are further highlighted through a series of praises of young Boniface: Willibald mentions his *magna ... mentis et ineffabili gravitate* ('great ... and ineffable gravity of mind', p. 7) which he develops thanks to heavenly grace so that he *ditatus est multarum castimonia virtutum* ('was adorned with the chastity of many virtues', *ibid.*). Moreover, Willibald states how Boniface followed *exemplar sanctorum praecedentium* ('the example of the earlier saints', p. 8) and *venerabilium instituta patrum* ('the teachings of the venerable fathers', *ibid.*), underscoring his spiritual worthiness by comparing his behaviour to the ideal conduct of Christian authorities; and the more he progressed in his spiritual education, the more *ad profectum aeternae beatitudinis ... eum cottidiana eius studia iugi ludis litterari meditatione die noctuque incitavere* ('his daily studies ... in continuous meditation day and night in literary training incite him towards the increase of eternal blessedness', *ibid.*). Boniface is thus repeatedly described as an exceptionally faithful and studious young man, which may have been meant to show both that, despite his youth, he is a perfect Christian, and how young monks should behave.

⁵⁵⁸ See Anthony Davies, 'Sexual Behaviour in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in *This Noble Craft: Proceedings of the Xth Research Symposium of the Dutch and Belgian University Teachers of Old and Middle English and Historical Linguistics, Utrecht, 19-20 January 1989*, Costerus 80, ed. by Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), pp. 83-105 (p. 83).

These praises of Boniface are then followed by a description in which Willibald clarifies the contrast between Boniface's virtuous youth and the common, sinful youth which was so far implicit: he explains that Boniface's studies

contra infestas diabolicae suggestionis persecutiones, quae tenerum sepe apud mortales iuventutis florem ceum nebulosae quadam caecitatis caligine obtegere solent, mirabiliter protexere, ita ut etiam propter indesinentem diuturnae sollicitudinis eius curam et sempiternam sanctarum legum examinationem inlecebrosa in eo adulescentiae incentiva et carnalium desideriorum impetus primitus inpingentes, domino Deo auxiliante, maxima ex parte sedavere.

(had marvelously protected [Boniface] against the harmful attacks of the incitement of the devil, which often envelop mortals in the tender flower of youth with darkness as if it were a cloudy blindness, so that also because of the unceasing, constant solicitude of his with the care and eternal examination of the holy laws [Boniface] previously sedated the seductive temptations of youth and the attacks of carnal desires towards him with the help of God in the greatest part, p. 8).

As observed in the introduction (1.2), the mentions of youth in this excerpt are vague, perhaps even vaguer than the mention of *adulescentia* at the beginning of the chapter. At least, the first instance of *adulescentia* implied that it was understood as a period of growth and took place between Boniface's childhood and adulthood, while in this passage *adulescentia* and *juventus* seem to be used together, as synonyms. But it was noted in sections 1.2 and 1.3 that, despite the fact that they can both be translated as 'youth', *adulescentia* and *juventus* often have different meanings, as the former more properly refers to youth and the latter to adulthood. It is thus not clear how they should be considered here: is Willibald talking about youth or adulthood? I believe that these lines are about youth, given that *adulescentia* can only refer to youth, and that they convey a common criticism of youth as vulnerable to temptation (see below). However, this hypothesis cannot be demonstrated with certainty, because this passage is ambiguous: it includes an unusual use of *juventus* as a synonym of *adulescentia*, and, moreover, there are no specific references to how old Boniface is at this point, hence it is not altogether clear how Willibald understands *adulescentia* and *juventus*. He seems more concerned with conveying different models of youthful behaviour rather than explaining what he means by 'youth'.

Indeed, here Boniface's youthful behaviour is praised, but it is also contrasted with common youthful conduct, which is openly criticized, unlike at the beginning of the

description of his youth. However, Boniface's spiritual perfection should not be surprising, because he, unlike other young saints like Chrysanthus, did not need to withstand spiritual and moral temptations during his youth, having already demonstrated his spiritual worthiness as a child, when he rejected his father's enticements to turn away from religious life in exchange for worldly riches; in other words, he has already proven his suitability for sanctity. This change allows Willibald to present Boniface as a model of faith and dedication, as shown by his assiduous study of the Bible, a description which seems to contribute to the didactic, spiritual and practical aims of the *Vita* which he outlined in the Prologue.

Conversely, Willibald's description of how young people are usually 'blinded' by the attacks of the devil implies that 'normal' youths, on the whole, may not be able to withstand spiritual and moral temptations by the devil. Indeed, Willibald describes the conduct of young people in the gnomic present, as if he were conveying some well-known, universal truth, whereas he praises Boniface's behaviour in the past tense, which seems to underscore his uniqueness. On the one hand, then, this contrast seems to highlight Boniface's suitability for sanctity and presents him as an example of faith and dedication, while on the other, the association between youth and lustfulness is made clear, and further suggests that youth itself might perhaps be consciously depicted as immoral in the *Vita*, while also conveying a criticism of lust in itself.

In the *Vita*, Boniface continues to study in the monastery until, after growing out of his youth, he goes to Nursling, where thanks to his knowledge of the Bible he becomes an excellent teacher (pp. 8-10, ff.), and then makes the fateful decision to become a missionary (pp. 15-16, ff.). In the text Boniface thus remains an exemplary monk throughout his youth (and until his death). As pointed out previously, Chrysanthus as well became a saint after withstanding several sexual and material temptations in his youth.

But in contrast to Boniface Chrysanthus still grew spiritually throughout his youth, only gaining sainthood as a *wer* ('man'; see 3.3.1).

Moreover, Boniface does not appear to mature during his youth, because he does not need to. He does not learn important spiritual lessons or strengthen his faith, as Guthlac and Chrysanthus do: indeed, he continues to behave as virtuously as he did in his childhood, and Willibald seems more concerned with employing Boniface's perfect example to illustrate ideal Christian behaviour to the audience, especially the need to study the Bible and reject sexual temptations, and to highlight Boniface's spiritual worthiness. I would thus argue that Willibald employs a different interpretation of youth than as a period of growth as depicted in the previous chapters.

So, how is youth considered in the *Vita*? Although the *Vita* is written in Latin, I have observed that *adolescentia* and *juventus*, as Willibald uses both, may have some of the same connotations and meanings of *geogub*, although the Latin terms are not exactly equivalent to *geogub*, as the latter, for instance, could also include infancy and childhood, while *adolescentia* and *juventus* did not.⁵⁵⁹ I have also noted that the idea of youth as a stage of development is only one of the conceptions of youth provided in the corpus (1.2); according to the *DOE*, one of these is the 'quality or condition of being young: youthfulness'.⁵⁶⁰ Some of the examples provided in the *DOE* include the mention in Wulfstan's homilies of a *cild* who cannot speak because of his *geoguþe*, and therefore cannot confirm his own baptism; or a passage in the anonymous legend of the Seven Sleepers (included in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*), in which the emperor Decius exhorts the former sleepers not to waste their youth being tortured for their faith, in an attempt to

⁵⁵⁹ See Izdebska, 'Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens', p. 58.

⁵⁶⁰ '[G]eogub; sense B', in *DOE*. Note that in this example *geogub* has a more general sense, as it refers to infancy, as suggested by Izdebska. Izdebska, 'Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens', p. 58.

convince them to renounce Christ and worship him (of course, to no avail).⁵⁶¹ Arguably, *geogub* is understood in a wider sense in Wulfstan, as it overlaps with the phase of *cildhad*, while it has positive associations in the Legend as a period to be enjoyed; yet, in both cases it does not entail any personal development. Likewise, Boniface's youth is static, not dynamic like Beowulf's (4.1) or Guthlac's. Willibald's description thus suggests that there was more than one way to understand youth in EME literature.

The same can be said about the description of 'common' youth: although in the *Vita* young people are described, first implicitly and then explicitly in the last excerpt, as vulnerable to sin, especially lust, there is again no indication that they will grow out of this phase and mature. Willibald never excuses young people for their moral weakness, and his depiction of youth emphasizes the patristic association between youth and sin. This is in stark contrast to the depiction of youth in other texts analyzed in the previous chapters, such as *Maxims I* (chapter 2) and *Guthlac A* (3.2), both of which depicted youth as a necessary, but temporary period of maturation during which young people tend to make mistakes and even commit sins, from which they can learn and become wiser.

However, this idea of youth as 'youthfulness', albeit different from the idea of youth as a period of growth, also conveys important literary themes. As I argued throughout this section, in his description of Boniface's youth Willibald repeatedly shows that he is a learned and faithful young monk who is immune to the temptations of youth and thus worthy of sanctity, and in this way he also makes him a model of Christian behaviour for his monkish audience, showing them that they must reject lust and devote their attention to the Bible. Even Willibald's criticism of young people may contribute to the didactic

⁵⁶¹ 'Sermo ad Populum', in *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. by Dorothy Bethurum (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 225-32 (p. 226), l. 27; *LS I*, p. 498. In this instance, *geogub* may again have a general sense, as it could also be considered as 'the time prior to maturity or adulthood', which can be confused with the idea of youth as 'youthfulness'. See '*geogub*; sense A', in *DOE*.

aims of the *Vita*: despite the fact that they are not given hope for redemption, by providing a description of common youthful sins, Willibald shows the audience the consequences of their mistakes and encourages them to study the Scripture, in the manner of Boniface, because, he writes (p. 8), if they do not, they will fall prey to the deceptions of the devil and to lust, while their minds will be clouded by darkness.

It can be seen that in the description of Boniface's youth Willibald establishes a repeated contrast, first implicit and then explicit, between Boniface's virtuous youth and the sinful youth of common people, which runs throughout the chapter. This highlights Boniface's faith and dedication, thus foreshadowing his holiness, while warning the audience against the temptations of the devil. But Willibald also provides a different representation of youth as a state of youthfulness, and he employs it to demonstrate Boniface's sanctity and provide a model of Christian behaviour for the audience; hence, this interpretation still contributes to the didactic, moral and practical aims of the *Vita*. This analysis of Boniface's youth, then, reveals that youth could be understood and employed in different ways in EME literature. Moreover, it has also demonstrated that the *Vita* is a carefully crafted saint's life, in which Willibald often engages with, and even at times re-interprets, hagiographic conventions, and it thus deserves to be considered as a literary text rather than only as an historical source.

The next example, concerning youth in *The Wanderer*, provides a similar depiction of youth, although it conveys different textual values.

5.2 *Youth in The Wanderer*

The Wanderer, included in the *Exeter Book*, is one of the most discussed of OE poems; in particular, there has been much debate regarding the number of speakers in the text.⁵⁶² Currently the majority of scholars, including Greenfield, Klinck, Bjork, and Beaston, among others, seem to agree that there are two speakers: a narrator, who speaks at the beginning and the end (ll. 6-7, 111), while the rest of the poem (ll. 1-5, 8-110, 112-5) consists of the reflection of one speaker.⁵⁶³

The Wanderer is usually classified as an ‘elegy’, alongside other poems such as *Deor*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wife’s Lament*, *The Husband’s Message*, and *The Ruin*.⁵⁶⁴ Greenfield defines an elegy as a short poem which ‘treat[s] of universal relationships ... between man and woman ... and between man and time ... , in a hauntingly beautiful way ...’.⁵⁶⁵ Most elegies are in the first person and ‘emphasise at least in part the speaker’s state of mind arising from his reflection on the contrast between past and present conditions’.⁵⁶⁶ Likewise, Heyworth observes that elegies are ‘backward looking’ and

⁵⁶² For a brief discussion of the main issues concerning the poem, see Lawrence Beaston, ‘The Wanderer’s Courage’, *Neophilologus*, 89 (2005), 119-137 DOI:10.1007/s11061-004-5672-x [accessed 18 January 2022], pp. 119-20.

⁵⁶³ Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), p. 31; Beaston, ‘The Wanderer’s Courage’, p. 119; Stanley B. Greenfield, ‘The Old English Elegies’, in *Hero and Exile: The Art of Old English Poetry*, ed. by George H. Brown (London: Hambledon Press, 1989), pp. 93-123 (p. 98).

⁵⁶⁴ The genre of ‘elegy’, like ‘wisdom poetry’ (see chapter 2), is a later classification, which may not reflect contemporary interpretations; moreover, elegiac themes are also found in other texts which are not properly elegies, such as *Beowulf*. See Fulk and Cain, eds., *A History of Old English Literature*, p. 259.

⁵⁶⁵ Greenfield, ‘Old English Elegies’, p. 93.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

focus on ‘a satisfying and favourable past’ in contrast with ‘an unhappy present’.⁵⁶⁷ This opposition between past and present thus seems an important element of the elegies, and of *The Wanderer* in particular, as it is the root from which stems the speaker’s contemplation.⁵⁶⁸

These mentions of a ‘past’ seem to imply that in *The Wanderer* the speaker’s past is only described vaguely: it is indeed unclear when some of the earlier events of the speaker’s life took place (see for instance ll. 6b-7 below), as it is not stated. However, in the following analysis I examine two descriptions, the first of which, at ll. 34a-36b, depicts a memory which explicitly takes place during the speaker’s *geogub* (35a); the other (41a-44b) is a dream (see l. 45a) which is similar to the first scene, and although the poet does not say so, it may also, possibly, refer to the speaker’s youth.

To my knowledge, only Hill recognizes that the speaker specifically ‘laments the lost joys of his youth’, but he does not explain how or why he does so.⁵⁶⁹ It thus remains to be seen how these descriptions of youth are represented in the poem and whether they have any textual significance. In the following analysis, the two excerpts are first examined in turn, to determine how youth is depicted on its own and what ideas it conveys (5.2.1); then, they are examined in relation to other lines in the poem (5.2.2), which seem to reference and re-interpret the previous descriptions of youth, and which should thus be taken into account, as they may help to understand the meaning and function of ll. 34a-36b and 41a-44b in the poem.

⁵⁶⁷ Melanie Heyworth, ‘Nostalgic Evocation and Social Privilege in the Old English Elegies’, *Studia Neophilologica*, 76(1) (June 2004), 3-11
<[HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.1080/00393270410027057](https://doi.org/10.1080/00393270410027057)> [accessed 18 January 2022], pp. 3, 5.

⁵⁶⁸ Greenfield, ‘Old English Elegies’, p. 98.

⁵⁶⁹ Thomas D. Hill, ‘The Unchanging Hero: A Stoic Maim in *The Wanderer* and Its Contexts’, *Studies in Philology*, 101(3) (2004), 233-49 <[HTTPS://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/4174790](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4174790)> [accessed 18 January 2022], p. 233.

Two other important features of *The Wanderer* also need to be considered, in addition to the contrast between past and present: the importance of wisdom, and the shift from a personal to a universal perspective. Shippey notes that *The Wanderer*, like most elegiac poetry, ‘describes the process of acquiring wisdom’, and it has indeed been classified as a wisdom poem as well as an elegy.⁵⁷⁰ Greenfield suggests that the poem conveys ‘a progress in wisdom from futile hope of earthly amelioration to realisation that all *lif is læne*’, which he sees as an important lesson for the audience.⁵⁷¹ This wisdom would thus be a spiritual realization, and the poem would ultimately be about the speaker’s spiritual growth.

This development also entails a change in the speaker’s perspective. Klinck remarks that *The Wanderer* is about ‘an eschatological movement ... from personal suffering, through meditation on transience, to a contemplation of the eternal’, and Greenfield similarly observes that it is this ‘shift in focus from personal to impersonal that develops the main theme’.⁵⁷² Taken together, these interpretations suggest that *The Wanderer* is concerned with the speaker’s spiritual development towards wisdom, understood as the awareness that earthly life is fleeting and that one needs to look for spiritual, not earthly, stability, which entails a contrast between his past and present and a change from a personal to a more general outlook. I now turn to the text to examine how the descriptions of youth contribute to these ideas, and whether they have a meaning of their own.

⁵⁷⁰ Shippey, *Old English Verse*, p. 67.

⁵⁷¹ Greenfield, ‘Old English Elegies’, pp. 98; see also Bjork, ‘*Sundor æt Rune*’, p. 315 and Klinck, *Old English Elegies*, p. 31.

⁵⁷² Greenfield, ‘Old English Elegies’, p. 100, Klinck, *Old English Elegies*, p. 226; see also Bjork, ‘*Sundor æt Rune*’, p. 315.

5.2.1 *The Wanderer's Youth*

The descriptions of the wanderer's youth occur after the narrator has already introduced the speaker and described the circumstances of his exile. *The Wanderer* famously begins with an *anhaga* ('solitary man', 1a) who awaits mercy from God and miserably walks the *wræclastas* ('paths of exile', 1b-5a), lamenting the inevitability of fate (5b). *Anhaga* and *wræclastas* are common terms to describe an exile and its predicament, hence they first illustrate his lonely existence.⁵⁷³

Furthermore, this *eardstapa* ('wanderer', 6a) is *earfeþa gemynding* ('mindful of hardships', 6b) and of *wraþra wælsleahta, / winemæga hryre* ('the angry slaughters of enemies, / the destruction of kinsmen', 7). *Earfop* specifically denotes an 'affliction suffered as a condition of earthly life'. For instance, in *Resignation*, another elegiac poem in the *Exeter Book* in which the speaker also seeks the mercy of God, calls himself an *anhoga* (89b, as well as *earm*, 'miserable', 89a and *wineleas*, 'friendless', 91a; see below for *The Wanderer*), and similarly laments that he cannot inhabit the earth without *earfopum* (112-3).⁵⁷⁴ As *The Wanderer* is usually thought to be about the speaker's spiritual growth and his realization of the fleetingness of this world, this term may imply that at this point he is still focused on his earthly concerns.

The speaker then explains that there is no one alive to whom he can communicate his grief (9b-11a) and he has to, following an excellent custom, bind his *ferðloca* ('heart', 11b-4), as he is deprived of his homeland (20b), he is far from his kinsmen (21a), and he had to bury his lord (22b-3a); now he is travelling over the icy ways, looking for a *sinces brytta* ('giver of treasure', i. e. lord) who knew his people or could console the friendless man, and entertain him in the mead-hall with *wynnum* ('joys', 23b-9a). The fact that the

⁵⁷³ Bjork, 'Sundor æt Rune', p. 317.

⁵⁷⁴ 'Resignation', in *Exeter Book*, ed. by Krapp and Van Kirk Dobbie, pp. 215-8 (p. 218).

wanderer is still grieving for his past suffering and is ‘mindful’ of his misfortunes implies that he does not seem to be able to leave his past behind, as reiterated by lines 29b-33b.

This is further shown by the adjectives used to describe his state of mind: he is *modcearig* (2b), *earmcearig* (20a), *wintercearig* (24a) and *seledreorig* (25a). The second element *cearig* which occurs in most of these compounds means ‘anxious’, so with *mod* it means ‘anxious at heart’, with *earm* (‘wretched’) ‘wretched and anxious’, and with *winter* ‘sad from age or from the gloom of winter’.⁵⁷⁵ The first two convey the emotional impact which his past still has on the wanderer, whereas winter was a common metaphor for hardship and loneliness in OE poetry, and Bosworth-Toller’s reference to the sadness from age can be better understood following the excerpts about the speaker’s youth.⁵⁷⁶ *Seledreorig* is instead an *hapax legomenon* made up of *sele* (‘hall’) and *dreorig*; the latter means ‘suffering anguish’, ‘agitated’, but perhaps here it signifies ‘wretched, miserable’ like *cearig*, hence ‘miserable for the hall’.⁵⁷⁷ This reference to the hall recalls how the speaker was looking for a lord who knew his people and who could console or entertain him in the *meadu-halle* (23b-9a).

At the beginning of the poem, then, the wanderer is repeatedly presented as a lonely exile who is still plagued by his past. The poet also introduces the image of the hall and emphasizes the speaker’s grief for the loss of the hall and his lord. But to understand why these references are important to the speaker, and in the poem, it is necessary to turn to the first description of his youth:

Gemon he selesecgas/ ond sincpege,
35 hu hine on geoguðe/ his goldwine
wenede to wiste./ Wyn eal gedreas!

⁵⁷⁵ ‘[C]earig’, and ‘earm; senses A; A.1; A.1.a’, in DOE; ‘winter-cearig’, in Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* <[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/35941](https://bosworthtoller.com/35941)> [accessed 18 January 2022].

⁵⁷⁶ Greenfield, ‘Old English Elegies’, p. 99.

⁵⁷⁷ ‘[D]reorig; senses 1; 1.a; 1.b’, in DOE.

(He remembers the hall-men and the acceptance of treasure,
 35 how in his youth/ his gold-friend [generous lord]
 entertained at feast./ Joy perished entirely!)

This scene describes a youthful memory of a feast in the hall, when the speaker was still part of the community of warriors under his lord's command. Unlike the previous mentions of the speaker's past, all of which were about death or loss and took place at some unclear point in the speaker's life, this seems a happy memory, as the speaker associates it with joy (36b), and is explicitly a memory of his youth.

However, as observed in the introduction (1.2) and in other similar mentions of characters' youths, such as in *Guthlac A*, it is not clear how old the speaker is in these lines. Given that the speaker seems to be a warrior (considering the references to the 'hall-men' and his lord), he likely was older than a child, but it remains to be seen whether the speaker was in his youth, understood as the period between childhood and adulthood, or in his early adulthood (as *geogub* could refer to both, and also include infancy and childhood).⁵⁷⁸ Another possible reference to his youth is made later (ll. 41-44), which is a dream taking place in *geardagum* ('the old days'), but it is not stated when these 'old days' occurred; however, a maxim at ll. 64-66, about how a 'man' (*wer*, used for an adult man) can only gain wisdom after he has lived for many years, may suggest that the speaker was not yet an adult man at this point, many years before.⁵⁷⁹ Of course, this hypothesis cannot be proven, hence it seems as if this passage provides another demonstration of the ambiguity of *geogub*.

⁵⁷⁸ Izdebska, 'Weapon-Boys and Once-Maidens', p. 58.

⁵⁷⁹ '[W]er; sense II', in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* <<https://bosworthtoller.com/35342>> [accessed 23 February 2023]. See also sections 3.2 and 3.4.1.

It appears that, at least at first sight, youth is here presented as a joyful period in the speaker's past, in which he had not yet experienced the hardships of life. This memory is also firmly placed within the heroic social context, as the speaker took part in the ritual of gift-giving in the mead-hall, through which a lord maintained the loyalty of his retainers.⁵⁸⁰ As Hume observes, in EME literature the hall was the centre and symbol of society, representing social stability and one's belonging within a community; which is why, now that the speaker is no longer part of that world, he still yearns for the hall and the happiness and stability it represented.⁵⁸¹ Indeed, the speaker earlier lamented how he is still looking for one who knows his people and could comfort the friendless man or entertain him with *wynnum* ('joys', 23b-9a); tellingly, he also described himself as *seledreorig* (25b). Since the speaker is still yearning for the 'joys' of the hall, and in this passage he says that 'joy' has perished entirely (36b), it seems that for him happiness is only in the past, and is trying (to no avail) to regain it by re-creating the same circumstances of his youth in the present. This first description of youth, then, seems to illustrate the opposition between an idealized past and a miserable present which, as Greenfield and Heyworth remark, is a defining feature of the elegies.⁵⁸²

The second description I consider is brought about by *sorg ond slæð* ('sorrow and sleep', 39a): it is a painful dream, in which the speaker embraces his *mondryhten* ('lord') and lays his hands and head on his knee (41a-43a), back in *geardagum* ('the old days'), when he *giefstolas breac* ('enjoyed the ceremony of gift-giving', 44). As mentioned

⁵⁸⁰ Kathryn Hume, 'The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3 (1974), 63-74 <[HTTPS://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/44510649](https://www.jstor.org/stable/44510649)> [accessed 18 January 2022], p. 64; see also Chapter 4.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-6.

⁵⁸² Greenfield, 'Old English Elegies', p. 94; Heyworth, 'Nostalgic Evocation', pp. 3, 5.

above, it is not clear when these ‘old days’ were, but I suggest that this scene should be considered in relation to the speaker’s youth (whenever this was) like the previous one, as both seem to refer to the same happy time in the speaker’s life, when he still lived in the hall with his lord and fellow warriors.

However, this description seems more emotional. According to Klinck, this dream describes a ritual act of obedience between lord and retainer; Gerd Althoff, who studies rituals in medieval Germany, notes that in the act of ‘commendation’, the feudal vassal placed his hands in the hands of his lord; in the High Middle Ages this gesture was replaced by the vassal’s kiss, both of which ‘involved the vassal taking an oath of loyalty to his lord’.⁵⁸³ This could well be a demonstration of the warrior’s obedience to his lord, but the closeness between them, as implied by their gestures, may also suggest that it was meant to convey reciprocal affection.⁵⁸⁴ The collocation *clyppan ond cyssan* appears to convey joy and friendship, often in an equal relationship: in *Andreas*, Andreas embraces and kisses Matthew when he finally finds him unharmed, and in the *Life of St Giles*, Giles kisses and embraces a pious man *mid micelre lufe* (‘with great love’).⁵⁸⁵ It seems to have often been used to express affection between brothers, as in the ‘Passion of Saint Eustace’ (between Eustace’s sons) and in *Genesis* (between Jacob and Isau).⁵⁸⁶ Taken together

⁵⁸³ Gerd Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Early Medieval Europe*, trans. by Christopher Carroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 138.

⁵⁸⁴ Klinck, *Old English Elegies*, pp. 113-4.

⁵⁸⁵ ‘Clyppan; sense 1.a’, in DOE; *Andreas*, in *The Vercelli Book*, ed. by Krapp, l. 1015, p. 31; ‘Appendix I: St Giles: Text’, in *The Old English Life of St Nicholas with the Old English Life of Saint Giles*, ed. and trans. by Elaine M. Treharne, Leeds Texts and Monographs New Series 15 (Leeds: Leeds Studies in English, 1997), pp. 131-47 (p. 134), l. 122. d

⁵⁸⁶ *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch. Ælfric’s Treatise on the Old and New Testament and His Preface to Genesis. Edited from All Existing Mss. and Fragments with an Introduction and Three Appendices Together with a Reprint of ‘A Saxon Treatise Concerning the Old and New Testament: Now First Published in Print with English of Our Times by William L’Isle of*

with the previous references to the speaker's lord, which illustrated how the wanderer was 'wretched' (23b) after burying him (22b-23a), is still looking for a 'giver of treasure' (25a), and, just before this description, lamented the difficulties of having to live for a long time without the teachings of one's *wynedrytnes/ leofes* ('beloved lord', 37b-38a), this description further suggests that the speaker did not only lose his lord and thus his social role as retainer, but he was also deprived of a friend and mentor.⁵⁸⁷ These lines, then, imply that he suffered personal, as well as social losses in his past, and emphasize the grief and loneliness which they still cause him in the present: like the previous youthful memory, this depiction portrays youth as a period of past joy which has now disappeared, but it is contrasted with the pain and sleep (39a) which precede the dream and the loneliness that follows it when the wanderer awakens and he calls himself a *wineleas guma* ('friendless man', 45b), again underscoring the opposition between his happy past and painful present.

Subsequently, it appears that while youth itself may be described positively, as a time when the wanderer still had his lord, his friends, and his place in the hall, which he keeps looking back to and tries to derive some comfort from in his lonely exile, clinging to his youth is also causing his unhappiness as it makes his friendlessness and suffering more acute, and further shows that, for now, he is only concerned with his own misfortunes.

It is not until later that the speaker starts to realize this and move on from his painful past. These descriptions are followed by a reflection in which the speaker first

Wilburgham (1603) and the Vulgate Text of the Heptateuch by S. J. Crawford, ed., ed. by S. J. Crawford (London: Published for the EETS by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1922), p. 167; *LS* 2, p. 210.

⁵⁸⁷ Klinck, *Old English Elegies*, pp. 113-4.

contemplates *eorla lif eal* ('entirely the life of the warriors', 60a). This is the first time he is not focused on his own suffering, which leads him to appreciate that the world everyday *dreoseð ond fealleþ* ('decays and falls', 63b). The speaker has thus started his 'shift from the personal to the universal', as Greenfield notes, which will lead him to understand that *eal lif is læne*: he is understanding that loss and death are a world-wide phenomenon and is distancing himself from his past.⁵⁸⁸ Interestingly, it seems that it is precisely these revisitations of his youthful past (through a memory and a dream) which act as catalysts for his development.

However, it should be noted that the speaker's maturation happens after his youth.

This is illustrated by a maxim, which follows the previous realization:

forþon ne mæg weorþan wis/ wer, ær he age]
65 wintra dæl in woruldrice.

(Therefore a man cannot become wise/ before he has
65 his share of winters in the earth's kingdom).

These lines are important for the understanding of youth in the poem: they suggest that the older one becomes, the wiser they are, as they have gained more experience.⁵⁸⁹ This idea that wisdom depends on one's age and life experience, and the use of the term *wer*, used for adult men, seem to signify that the speaker's growth takes place when he is older, not when he is a young man, since youth, as seen in previous examples, is repeatedly associated with immaturity and inexperience.⁵⁹⁰ Therefore, these lines imply that in *The Wanderer* youth is not presented as a period of development; I suggest that it is instead

⁵⁸⁸ Greenfield, 'The Wanderer: A Reconsideration of Theme and Structure', in *Hero and Exile*, ed. by Brown, pp. 133-47 (pp. 140-1).

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 140-1.

⁵⁹⁰ '[W]er; sense II', in Bosworth, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*
<[HTTPS://BOSWORTHTOLLER.COM/35342](https://bosworthtoller.com/35342)> [accessed 11 May 2021].

interpreted as a state of ‘youthfulness’ as in the *Vita Bonifatii*, since the descriptions of the speaker’s youth are in the past, while his development occurs in the present.

But this might also mean that youth is associated with ignorance: although it was a joyful time for the speaker, it was before he began to appreciate true wisdom, and thus seems represented as a period of blissful unawareness. This, together with the fact that his youthful memory and his dream accentuate his present suffering, further implies that the depictions of youth in *The Wanderer* are not as positive as they first appear. This notion becomes clearer later in the poem, as the elements of heroic society mentioned in these descriptions (the hall, the lord, the retainers, the gift-giving) which previously illustrated the speaker’s youthful happiness, are repeatedly reconsidered. I now examine these depictions in turn, as they might help to contextualize these descriptions of youth in *The Wanderer*.

5.2.2 *The Re-Interpretations of the Wanderer’s Youth*

The first re-interpretation of the Wanderer’s youth occurs after the speaker has realized the decay of the world. He observes that

Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle/ hu gæstlic bið,
 þonne ealre þisse worulde wela/ weste stondeð,
 75 swa nu missenlice/ geond þisne middangeard
 winde biwaune/ weallas stondaþ,
 hrime bihrorene,/ hryðge þa ederas
 Woriað þa winsalo,/ waldend licgað
 dreame bidrorene,/ duguþ eal gecrong
 80 wlonc bi wealle.

(The wise man must understand how spiritual it will be
 when all the wealth of the world stands desolate,
 75 as now here and there through this world
 blown by the wind, the walls stand,
 covered with hoar-frost, the storm-swept dwellings.
 The halls decay, the rulers lie dead,
 deprived of joy, the retainers all perished in battle
 80 proud near the wall).

The references to wealth, the desolate wine-halls and the dead rulers and retinue may recall the gift-giving, the hall, and the affectionate lord in the speaker's memory and dream about his youth. But while he was earlier remembering and dreaming of his dead lord and fellow warriors alive in the hall, to signify his joy and sense of belonging, as well as his grief and longing, in these lines the speaker imagines them as they are: the lord and the warriors have died, while the hall has decayed. The use of the gnomic present makes it seem as if this decay is a natural phenomenon rather than a personal tragedy: the descriptions of the speaker's youth in the hall and the death of his kinsmen and lord were all in the past tense, which further strengthened the opposition with the present. The speaker now does not focus on his reaction to these events, unlike before (as he described himself as 'wretched' after burying his lord, 23b), which perhaps means that the speaker is beginning to accept his circumstances, and is no longer looking back to find comfort in the past. The image of the hall, in particular, seems significant, as while the speaker had earlier remembered and imagined himself in the hall, now he only sees the external wall; Greenfield took this to mean that the speaker has become 'an outsider', no longer part of the mead-hall, and thus of society, as he was in his youth, signifying the speaker's growing awareness of the transience of the world.⁵⁹¹

The image of the hall occurs many other times in the poem, and these occurrences all seem to have this same meaning: for instance, he then describes how the Creator (usually understood to be God) has laid waste to this *eardgeard* ('dwelling-place', meaning the earthly kingdom) until the *eald enta geweorc* ('old works of giants') stood deserted (85-87b), which may further show his understanding of man's helplessness in the face of the vicissitudes of life.⁵⁹² He later reflects on *pisne wealsteal* ('this wall-place',

⁵⁹¹ Greenfield, 'Old English Elegies', p. 101; Hume, 'Concept of the Hall', pp. 70, 72.

⁵⁹² Greenfield, 'The Wanderer', p. 141.

88a) and remembers the many *wælsleahta* ('slaughters', 91a), which seem to recall the 'assaults of enemies' (7a) which he was mindful of at the beginning; but this time, these tragedies are firmly placed in the past and no longer affect him.

The speaker then utters the famous *ubi sunt* passage:

"Hwær cwom mearg?/ Hwær cwom mago?/ Hwær cwom maþpumgyfa?
Hwær cwom symbla gesetu?/ Hwær sindon seledreamas?
Eala beorht bune!/ Eala byrnwiga!
95 Eala þeodnes þrym!/ Hu seo þrag gewat,
genap under nihthelm,/ swa heo no wære.

Where did the horse go? Where did the rider go? Where did the treasure-giver go?
Where did the banquet seats go? Where are the hall joys?
Alas the bright cup! Alas the armour-clad warrior!
95 Alas the king's splendour! How time departed
grew dark under the night's curtain as if it had never been.

This lamentation of the departing of symbols of the warrior and communal life again seems to echo the depictions of his youth: for instance, the references to the feast, the 'hall-joys', the warrior, while the lord is called a 'treasure-giver'. When he recalled his youth, the wanderer mentioned his *gold-wine* (lit. 'gold-friend', i. e. lord, 35b), the *wist* ('feast', 36a) and the 'joys' which have perished (36b). But while these symbols earlier denoted the speaker's suffering and his inability to move on from his past, now they seem to illustrate that he has understood the transience and meaninglessness of human pleasures.⁵⁹³ Indeed, now he wonders if this time (his youth?) has ever been at all. He reiterates these conclusions as he imagines a wall (yet another hall, 97a-8b) where warriors died, which is now left at the mercy of the elements and falls under the shadow of the night.

This image prompts a reflection on the fleetingness of earthly life:

Eall is eafodlic/ eorþan rice,
onwendeð wyrda gesceaft / weoruld under
heofonum.
Her bið feoh læne,/ her bið freond læne,
her bið mon læne,/ her bið mæg læne,

⁵⁹³ Greenfield, 'Old English Elegies', pp. 98, 102.

110 eal þis eorþan gesteal/ idel weorþeð!]

(All is fraught with difficulties in earth's kingdom.

The condition of the fates changes, the world under the heavens.]

Here wealth is temporary, here the friend is temporary]

here man is temporary, here the kinsman is temporary,]

All the frame of the earth will become empty]).

These lines seem to express the same ideas as the *ubi sunt* passage, but perhaps more explicitly: while the two descriptions of the speaker's youth conveyed his focus on the past, this passage implies that now he has placed this grief in a wider context ('*all* is full of hardship in earth's kingdom...') and he has come to understand that loss is a natural result of the transitoriness of this world, not of his own misfortune.⁵⁹⁴ This notion seems to be indicated in the fact that the subjects of these lines again recall his personal losses (wealth; friend; kinsman), which he previously lamented. The speaker now demonstrates his wisdom by recognizing that one's fate is mutable and under the power of God (while he had earlier stated that fate was fixed, 5b), while wealth and companionship, and even the earth itself, are fleeting. Therefore, the poet seems to show that the references to the youth of the speaker represent his personal attachments to earthly desires and are repeatedly re-considered throughout the poem to convey his increasing understanding of the transience of human life.

This is also another demonstration of wisdom, which now allows the wanderer to grow from miserable exile to *snottor on mode* ('the one wise in mind', 111a), which eventually culminates in him turning away from earthly suffering once and for all in the last lines of the poem:

⁵⁹⁴ Greenfield, 'Old English Elegies', p. 100.

... Wel bið þam þe him are seceð, ...
 115 frofre to fæder on heofonum,/ þær us
 eal seo fæstnung stondeð.]

(It will be well for the one who seeks
 mercy for himself,] consolation from the
 Father in heaven, where stability exists for
 us all]).

After longing for the wealth, happiness and friendship of his youth (see esp. 23b-9a) for most of the poem to no avail, after being continuously plagued by his losses and loneliness, and seeking God's mercy (1b-2a) to try and regain his earthly joys, the speaker finally appreciates that the only real, ever-lasting stability is in heaven. His newfound revelation is again expressed through a maxim with a general meaning, in contrast with his focus on his own personal misfortunes at the beginning of the poem, which also succinctly conveys his realization to the audience.⁵⁹⁵

This again shows that the depictions of youth in *The Wanderer* are not as positive as they seem: while youth conveys a contrast between an ideal past and the speaker's exile, clinging to his youthful happiness is also what causes the speaker's grief, as the riches, the friendship of his lord and the companionship of his fellow warriors in the hall, which he lamented and yearned for, are exactly the things the wanderer learns to leave behind, once he understands that human life and joy are fleeting. These features are repeatedly re-interpreted throughout the poem and each time signify his increasing wisdom, understood as the awareness of the unavoidable decay of the world and the need to abandon one's personal sorrow to look towards God.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 99.

5.3 Conclusion

Despite their differences with regards to audiences and themes, the *Vita Bonifatii* and *The Wanderer* are revealing in the light of the representations and uses of youth in EME literature. In both texts, youth is not understood as a period of growth as in previous chapters, but rather, I have argued, as a ‘state’ of youthfulness, which does not entail personal development: Boniface does not need to mature in his youth, as he is already spiritually perfect, while young people are sinful by nature and cannot withstand the temptations of the devil, and in *The Wanderer* the speaker undergoes his maturation towards wisdom when he is no longer a young man.

This conception of youth also has important functions in both texts and contributes to their purposes: in the *Vita*, youth is employed in a repeated contrast between the exceptional example of Boniface and common, sinful youth, in order to demonstrate Boniface’s holiness and to encourage the audience to read the Bible to avoid falling into sin; in *The Wanderer*, youth, while positive in itself, when considered in the larger context of the poem represents the ties that bind the speaker to his grief and exile, which he eventually frees himself from, and illustrates the need to turn to God to overcome personal suffering.

This idea of youth as ‘youthfulness’, alongside the idea of youth as a period of growth, further shows that youth was an ambiguous, complex and multi-faceted topic in EME literature, which could be interpreted and represented in different ways by EME authors, but both conceptualizations convey important textual values and help to gain a better understanding of EME texts.

In the next part, I provide a conclusion to summarize my arguments and suggest how research about youth can be brought forward.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to be the first study of youth and young people in EME literature. My purpose has been to consider how these were understood and employed in EME texts, to show that youth was a complex and important literary theme whose consideration can help to gain a better understanding of EME literary sources. I endeavoured to do so by focusing on two specific interpretations of youth: as a ‘period of growth’ (illustrated in chapters 2-4), and as a stage of ‘youthfulness’ (illustrated in Chapter 5). I now intend to bring together the main findings of this analysis, and to suggest some ideas for further research.

I began this study with a general introduction in Chapter 1. I provided a literature review which demonstrated that a study of EME youth is a timely and necessary contribution to research, given that scholarship has so far focused on childhood or old age in Early Medieval England, while youth has been mainly considered only in later centuries of the Medieval period, or exclusively in connection with childhood.

It has also been shown that there certainly was a concept of youth in EME literature, as demonstrated by the OE and Latin vocabulary for youth and young people, although my linguistic analysis, and the examples taken from primary sources throughout the thesis, repeatedly evidenced that these words are ambiguous, and it remains unclear what EME authors specifically meant by *geogub*, *cniht* and so on; additionally, modern terms like ‘youth’ and ‘young man’ are equally vague, and it is not possible to determine how they correspond to the OE and Latin terminology. Contemporary attestations of the *topos* of the ‘ages of man’, however, suggest that one way to understand youth was as a period of growth between childhood and adulthood.

A subsequent overview of patristic interpretations of youth has illustrated how EME depictions and uses of youth were probably indirectly derived from the Church Fathers (although this was likely not the only influence), who brought together Biblical and Classical ideas and interpreted youth in different ways, including as a ‘period of growth’ and as ‘youthfulness’, and employed them to convey Christian teachings.

Finally, I explained my intent to provide a literary, thematic, and functional analysis of youth in wisdom poetry, hagiography and heroic verse, to determine how youth and young people were described and how their descriptions contributed and were adapted to their textual contexts. Indeed, while I argued that the portrayals in this thesis refer to youth, understood as a specific period between childhood and adulthood, rather than childhood or adulthood, it should be recognized that this ambiguity regarding the portrayals of youth and young people occurs in all the texts included in this study and is never clearly explained or solved, hence I believe that it should be taken into account; this is also why, rather than trying to define what was meant by ‘youth’ and ‘young people’ in these sources, as not enough information is given, I focused on two specific conceptions, derived from close textual analysis: that of youth as a ‘period of growth’ and as ‘youthfulness’, and tried to determine how each was represented and employed in the texts.

After providing the background of my research, it was necessary to show how youth could be conceptualized and employed in a text. I did so in the following chapter (Chapter 2) on *Maxims I*, in which the poet describes youth as a period of growth, during which the young person gained understanding, maturity and self-awareness, and employs it to convey a specific depiction of wisdom (as a personal identity to be developed during youth) which must be shared among men. Therefore, *Maxims I* clearly exemplifies how youth could function as a theme, and how it could contribute to the aims of a text.

In Chapter 3, I considered how youth and young people were represented and employed for the purposes of hagiography, that is, to demonstrate the saint's holiness and convey Christian teachings. While the first aim is common to all the works in the chapter, their teachings vary according to the concerns of the author: in the *VSG Felix* employs Guthlac's youth to show that one can always rise above their sins and be redeemed, while in *Guthlac A* this message is also juxtaposed with the need to reject worldly riches to go to heaven, which might have shown that man can always strive for and obtain redemption. Lastly, in Ælfric's 'Passion of Chrysanthus and His Wife Daria', his positive portrayal of youth and young people helps to illustrate the virtues of faith, chastity, and moderation.

Then, in Chapter 4 I examined *Beowulf* to determine how youth was understood within a heroic context, and how the poet presents different models of youth to convey different representations of heroism: Beowulf and Scyld show that an inglorious youth does not prevent one from becoming a hero; Wiglaf and Beow instead suggest that glorious youths can also lead to a glorious life; and lastly, Hrothgar and Heremod demonstrate that a heroic youth is not always a guarantee of future heroism.

These chapters illustrated how youth could be understood as an essential period of development, during which the young person learnt important teachings and matured, and how this interpretation of youth could be used in different ways and contexts to convey various textual values, such as wisdom or heroism.

But youth was not always conceptualized as a period of growth: in Chapter 5, I focused on the conception of youth as a condition of 'youthfulness' in the *Vita Bonifatii* and *The Wanderer*, which could nevertheless be textually significant. Despite the differences in these two works, like the fact that they conveyed different values and were addressed to different audiences, I have argued that they are also similar, in that they illustrate this same interpretation of youth. In the former, youth contributed to proving

Boniface's sanctity and encouraging the clerical audience to reject devilish temptations and devote themselves to the study of the Bible, while in the latter the speaker's youth is repeatedly reinterpreted to show his growing wisdom, and represents his ties to earthly suffering, which, after learning of the fleetingness of this world, he abandons to look for stability in God. However, in both cases youth does not entail personal development, as Boniface is already spiritually perfect as a young man and the wanderer gains wisdom when he is older, hence youth is presented as a 'static' condition.

All of these examples show that youth and young people were important themes in diverse literary genres; EME authors often engaged with earlier ideas about and depictions of youth; and their descriptions highlight the main themes and purposes of a work. The previous chapters thus seem to prove my argument: youth and young people indeed appear to help to understand the meanings of EME texts, and thus deserve, and even, arguably, need to be studied, not only because of their literary importance, but also because their textual uses contribute to shedding further light on the beauty and complexity of EME literature.

However, the conclusions of this thesis could be taken further. For instance, more research into the depictions of youth in the EME corpus might help to understand better its ambiguous portrayal in the literary sources and to determine what EME authors meant by 'youth' and 'young people'.

Additionally, literature could also provide a context in which to interpret references to young people in the laws, although one should be aware of the limitations of the different types of evidence, like the fact that texts tend to reflect the views of their authors rather than providing a faithful depiction of reality.

This analysis of EME youth could also be the basis for a comparative approach between interpretations of youth in Early Medieval England and in other contemporary

cultures. Work has already been done on Viking youth, for instance, but it may be rewarding to compare the depictions of youth in Norse and EME sources to highlight their similarities and differences, and understand better the conceptions of youth and human growth in both cultures.⁵⁹⁶ Comparisons with contemporary Irish, Welsh and Frankish sources may yield equally interesting results.

Youth may also be considered in relation to other themes, like gender. How did one become a man or a woman in EME literature? Masculinity in EME literature has so far been studied on its own, but scholars also focused on the different roles of women in EME society and their literary representations.⁵⁹⁷ However, the study of youth could

⁵⁹⁶ On youth in Norse texts, see for instance Judith Jesch, ‘‘Youth on the Prow’’, in *Youth in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Goldberg and Riddy, pp. 123-39; Nic Percival, ‘Teenage Angst: The Structure and Boundaries of Adolescence in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Iceland’, in *Youth and Age*, ed. by Lewis-Simpson, pp. 127-50 and Carolyne Larrington, ‘Awkward Adolescents: Male Maturation in Norse Literature’, in *ibid.*, pp. 151-66.

⁵⁹⁷ On masculinity in Early Medieval English literature, see for instance Clare A. Lees, ‘Men and *Beowulf*’, in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Clare A. Lees, With the Assistance of Thelma S. Fenster and Jo Ann McNamara (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 129-48 and Hadley, ‘Masculinity’, in *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies*, ed. by Stodnick and Trilling, pp. 115-32.

On women in Early Medieval England, see Christina Lee and Jayne Carroll, ‘Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of Christine Fell: Introduction’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 51 (2007), 201-5 <<https://doi-org.nottingham.idm.oclc.org/10.1484/J.NMS.3.414>> [accessed 1 August 2021]; Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006); Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England; and the Impact of 1066*, by Cecily Clark and Elizabeth Williams (London: British Museum, 1984); Stacy S. Klein, *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon England* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 2006). On women in EME literature, see Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986) and Paul E. Szarmach, *Writing Women Saints in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

contribute to explaining how masculine or feminine roles and ideals were acquired throughout one's growth.⁵⁹⁸

Finally, youth could also be studied in relation to the concept of family. Studies on the family have hitherto focused on the legal and social conception of kinship and the kin-group; but Crawford in 1999 wrote a chapter titled 'The Family', based on literary and archaeological sources, which examined the place of the child in the family unit and their relations with their parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles, cousins, and foster-family.⁵⁹⁹ This topic has also been explored more recently by some of the contributors to *Childhood and Adolescence in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, but they are likewise concerned with children, and so far no research has been done specifically on young people.⁶⁰⁰ However, the texts previously discussed (like *Maxims I*, for example) suggest that in EME literature young men and women were expected, as they still are today, to become increasingly more independent as they grew older (although, as I explained, they

⁵⁹⁸ Although one should be aware of the difficulty in recognizing young women in EME texts. See my observations on the terms *mæden* and *fæmne* in 1.2.

⁵⁹⁹ Crawford, *Childhood*, pp. 102-21. On the kin-group and kin structure in Early Medieval England, see, for example, Lorraine Lancaster, 'Kinship in Anglo-Saxon Society-I', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 9(3) (Sep., 1958), 230-50 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/587017>> [accessed 1 August 2021] and 'Kinship in Anglo-Saxon Society: II', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 9(4) (Dec. 1958), 359-77 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/587569>> [accessed 1 August 2021]. See also Andrew Wareham, 'The Transformation of Kinship and the Family in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Early Medieval Europe*, 10(3) (2001), 375-99 <<https://doi-org.nottingham.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/1468-0254.00096>> [accessed 1 August 2021] and H. R. Loyn, 'Kinship in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3 (1974), 197-209 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/44510659>> [accessed 1 August 2021].

⁶⁰⁰ For instance, Shu-Han Luo, 'Tender Beginnings in the Exeter Book *Riddles*', in *Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. by Irvine and Rudolf, pp. 71-94; Klein, 'Parenting and Childhood', in *ibid.*, pp. 95-119; Susan Irvine, 'Foster-Relations in the *Old English Boethius*', in *ibid.*, pp. 202-21; Rabin, 'Sharper Than a Serpent's Tooth', in *ibid.*, pp. 270-90.

were still not considered adults, neither mentally, physically, nor socially). This topic would thus offer the opportunity to explore how family relations between youths and their relatives changed throughout the youth's growth to adulthood, and gain a better understanding of the EME worldview and society.

To conclude, what has this study revealed about EME understandings of youth and young people? The depictions of youth and young people analyzed in this thesis repeatedly demonstrate that youth was closely connected with self-realization, self-improvement, and hope; according to EME texts, young people could become saints, kings, warriors, or simply mature men and women, neither wholly good nor bad. They often made mistakes, committed sins, were punished, but then (most of the time) learnt and matured thanks to their failures. As the young person from *Maxims I*, Guthlac, Beowulf and the wanderer fail and learn, they teach us different lessons and values, depending on the type of text and the concerns of the author, from the nature and use of wisdom to Christian teachings and proper Christian behaviour to heroism and heroic conduct. But they also show us that we, too, can likewise fail, even sin, but we can also improve and become a better, more 'mature' version of ourselves. Even 'perfect' youths like Chrysanthus, Wiglaf and Boniface can give us hope, as they provide us with an ideal model to strive towards, while rarer negative examples like Heremod remind us of who we must not become.

Therefore, I believe that, overall, youth in EME literature signifies hope, and being young illustrates human fallibility, but also human potential for redemption and improvement. This message of hope still resonates with us when we read these texts a thousand years later, and shows us how EME authors understood the fragility, ambiguity and hopefulness which characterizes the human experience.

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