

BODY, SPIRIT, MAGIC AND RITUAL

BODY, SPIRIT, MAGIC AND RITUAL:
THE CHARMING RELATIONSHIP OF SPIRITUAL AND BODILY HEALTH IN
ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a selection of Anglo-Saxon texts featuring food, medicine and magic circa 975-1100 C.E and explores the ways in which food preparation, spiritual practices and magic were related to eating, spiritual and bodily health. I argue that during this period a context-specific attitude of continuity between magic and prayer, food and medicine was present. The supernatural was not differentiated from, but bound up with speech, the body and eating. A study of these texts grants us access to Anglo-Saxon perceptions of health, spirituality, human relationships and death. In order to discuss this special literary space in history we need to develop a critical language that can convey the spiritual force of words without putting them into binary categories of “Christian” or “Pagan.” Medieval texts resist modern and postmodern literary and historical categorization, making it more important to analyze the significance of overlap than to study the history of these works in isolated disciplines.

This project consists of four sections, each a different framework with which to approach and analyze these texts. These sections are as follows: Part 1) Food and Consumption, Part 2) Magic and Prayer, Part 3) Medicine and Death. A single Anglo-Saxon charm, for example, will receive three separate treatments and analyses. The categories that I have set up will thus work to demonstrate their very non-existence; the same passages can be studied three different ways and simultaneously have three different usages and meanings. My final conclusion functions as a connecting space where I will explain the ways in which this thesis both demonstrates and participates in the fluidity and permeability of these texts. As the separate discourses of food, magic and medicine synthesize in the conclusion, so too will the reader’s categorical understanding of the Anglo-Saxon world.

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Introduction

The ways in which the Anglo-Saxons experienced their mental and physical selves is very different from the ways in which we, in the contemporary Western world, experience our minds and bodies. This project will comparatively explore the ways in which Anglo-Saxon food preparation, spiritual practices and magic were related to eating, spiritual and bodily health. A context-specific attitude of continuity between magic and prayer, food and medicine was present. The supernatural was not differentiated from, but bound up with speech, the body and eating. I am primarily interested in how a study of Anglo-Saxon health can benefit our understandings of contemporary health and medicine. While a study of Anglo-Saxon healing might seem far removed from North America in the early 21st century, it has never been more important as a subject of research. We are in dire need of the micro study of other ways of conducting our mental, spiritual and physical selves. It is important to be aware of and acknowledge that there are ways of diagnosing and treating ailments other than the few dominating our medical discourse. There are other relationships, counter-relationships if you will, involving our bodies, besides that of the doctor and patient. At present, medicalization and professionalization have led to a depersonalised healthcare system that insists upon troubling hierarchical positions of power. Michel Foucault, in particular, has extensively explored the connections between the problematic gaze of the physician and the development of a broader form of social control, that is, self-disciplining subjects (Jones & Porter 11). This performance of power has had huge implications for the way Westerners experience their bodies and highlights many of the inherent problems in the

current Canadian healthcare system. Institutionalized medicine strives for the absence of disease rather than the presence of complete and content persons. Under this regime of medicalization the label “healthy” has simply come to mean the absence of pain rather than the presence of actual health. Because absence is the goal, we focus on whatever part of the body needs “fixing,” rather than treating the problem holistically and acknowledging the entire body of the patient. Even the signifier “patient” strips away the subjectivity of a human being in need of mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. People become objects to be acted upon rather than agents of their own health. We need to acknowledge and remember that our physical bodies have a direct relationship to the body politic. In contemporary liberal states, mental, physical and spiritual health is bound up with the ability to understand and participate in modern politics. Western capitalism relies on perpetual dissatisfaction to market products; satisfaction with health would threaten the economy, as people would purchase less and question politics more. This research paper thus ambitiously extends beyond the Anglo-Saxon; it is focused on health both then and now. It is invested in the possibilities that a close study of Anglo-Saxon healing can offer, particularly the opening up of closed systems and opportunity for people to be more receptive to alternative notions of health and wellness. Part of the difficulty in countering the stronghold that institutionalized medicine has upon North America is the inability to imagine alternatives, the difficulty of shaking the categories that bind us. Micro-studies of alternative methods and counter ideologies are necessary in order to develop new ways of seeing and living in what is currently a toxic environment. It is my hope that this paper will inspire the detailed study of other methods of healing

that can provide insight into how the Western world can begin to construct new ways of living in and experiencing our minds and bodies. In this way I will discuss Anglo-Saxon perceptions so as to move beyond our categorical understandings of health, of ourselves.

This project will make use of three primary sources: Bald's Leech Book (a medicinal text), the Lacnunga (a book of recipes) and selections of the Anglo-Saxon charms (involving ritual and magic). All of these sources are found in a three-volume collection entitled *Leechdoms, WortCunning and Starcraft of Early England* by Thomas Oswald Cockayne. The Anglo-Saxon charms are essentially a series of oral incantations intended to be ritualistically spoken during the collection of medicinal supplies or during the act of healing itself (Jolly 92). Karen Louise Jolly explains in her book, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England*, the way in which “these verbal formulas were performance pieces as well; a trained person acted them out before an audience both visible and invisible, both the patient with friends and family and the spiritual forces addressed in the charm. These “speech acts’...inextricably intertwined with certain physical actions to create a whole remedy” (99). These texts are called *galdor* in the Anglo-Saxon, which comes from the verb *galan*, meaning to chant or sing (Jolly 92). Old English words describing the body thus simultaneously articulated the importance of language, demonstrating how speech was considered to be a product of the body and the body a construct of speech. The Lacnunga and Leechbook commissioned by Bald both contain a series of herbal recipes intended to aid physical, mental and spiritual ailments. The Lacnunga is traditionally treated as a kind of simplistic recipe book, while the leechdoms are viewed as a more complex medical text. This is because Bald's book has a

more sophisticated organization and contains more Christian and classical references.

Jolly emphasizes how this conservative and dated treatment of the *Lacnunga* has resulted in a lack of critical attention to a text that reveals a great deal about Anglo-Saxon medicine. She argues that the *Lacnunga* is actually more comprehensive in that it represents the daily practices of an entire community rather than the selectively copied texts found in the *Leechbook* (Jolly 107).

While there is no shortage of material on Anglo-Saxon medicine, food or magic, these different areas are often examined in isolation from one another. M.L. Cameron's text *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, for example, focuses solely on the medicinal practices of the Anglo-Saxons. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark's work *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages* also undertakes a singular analysis of all things supernatural. While these texts are useful and do important work, interdisciplinary and integrated approaches are needed to better understand the ways in which Anglo-Saxons perceived their minds and bodies. Because medical, magical and food-based texts from this period resist categorization we should, by extension, resist the urge to categorize them. In order to discuss this special literary space in history we need to develop a critical language that can convey the spiritual force of words without putting them into binary categories of "Christian" or "Pagan." Medieval texts resist modern and postmodern literary and historical categorization, making it more important to analyze the significance of overlap than to study the history of these works in isolated disciplines. Pre-Christian practices did not simply end with Christianization but rather continued with revisions and inclusions of Christian discourse. Likewise, social practices in Christian society surrounding magic and

food preparation overlapped with folk practice. Medical writings were integrated with vernacular discourses of spirituality and food, as medicines were essentially recipes made in the home. Non-textual folkloric ideas were also filtered through monastic assumptions in the process of their textualization, as the monastic world was responsible for propagating texts and rendering them authoritative. It is thus only with an acute sensitivity to the complexity of these texts that they can be examined productively. Jolly is particularly sensitive to the many contexts in which the Anglo-Saxon charms existed. She analyzes the charms in conjunction with Bald's Leechbook and the Lacnunga in order to explore the intersection of spirituality and magic.

This essay will do similar integrated work and attempt to destabilize, or at least disrupt, the labels that scholars attach to Anglo-Saxon texts. Admittedly, this is a difficult task, as categorization is required in order to do analysis. Human beings perceive and comprehend the world through systemic classification. This project will work at this challenging task by setting up categories only to reveal their inadequacies. There will be three sections, each a different framework with which to approach and analyze these texts. These sections are as follows: Part 1) Food and Consumption, Part 2) Magic and Prayer, Part 3) Medicine and Death. Each section will analyze *the same* passages from Bald's Leech Book, the Lacnunga and charms. The three passages I have selected to receive detailed analyses are an Anglo-Saxon charm entitled "*Wid ymbe*" (For Catching a Swarm of Bees), a recipe commonly referred to as "Lay of the Nine Herbs," and a leechdom involving the preparation of a drink intended to work against temptations. Rather than choosing specific recipes for an analysis of food, prayers for an analysis of

religion and prescriptions for medicine, these same texts will be studied throughout the body of work. The bee charm, for example, will receive three separate treatments and analyses. The categories that I have set up will thus work to demonstrate their very non-existence; the same passages can be studied three different ways and simultaneously have three different usages and meanings. This unique approach will demonstrate how a context-specific attitude of continuity between food, magic and medicine existed.

Translation will be a large component of this project. The appendix contains the selected texts in both their original and translated forms and can be examined in isolation or consulted as necessary while reading. It is only through the intense process of translating that our present-day categories are revealed as inaccurate. Formal translation focuses our attention on the semantic properties of words, allowing us to determine which terms overlap and which do not. The act of translating also highlights how these texts can be interpreted many different ways, in varying contexts for different people. My personal translation and analysis, for example, differs from Cockayne's and others, even whilst building on the work they have already done. These Anglo-Saxon texts which seem to us to be solely engaged with Anglo-Saxon health and livelihood are much more nuanced and complex. Through translation we learn that these texts are just as equally about us, those translating and reading, and our own cultural moment and investments. To the Anglo-Saxons they provided varying aid depending on the circumstances, the location, the person conducting them and so on. They could provide nutritional, medicinal and spiritual value. History has showed us, however, that they are sensitive to time as well. Cockayne's nineteenth century translation, for example, differs from Grattan and Singer's

in the 1950s, which differs from Jolly's twentieth century work. While these passages are context-orientated they are also more specifically time-orientated. The bee charm, which in an Anglo-Saxon kitchen was useful because it ultimately provided honey, which in a medical context aided ailments, will be useful for a contemporary audience because it demonstrates the ways in which our own nutritional and medicinal practices can overlap. In a twenty-first century context these charms, recipes and leechdoms demonstrate the ways in which alternative medicine and alternate ways of thinking about our bodies are both possible and necessary.

Following the three chapters on food, magic and medicine, there will be a concluding section that will function as a connecting space where I will explain the ways in which this thesis both demonstrates and participates in the fluidity and permeability of these texts. As the separate discourses of food, magic and medicine harmonize in the conclusion, so too will the reader's understanding of the Anglo-Saxon world in terms of taxonomies, and by extension, their own cultural moment. It is only through this kind of synthesis that an intellectual opening up of mental, physical and spiritual possibilities will emerge. We need to squeeze our binary perceptions together into an integrated and dialogical mass, before an exploding of new ideas becomes possible. It is from this space of intermingling and interaction that the birth of alternative paradigms will come.

Chapter One
Food and Consumption: Through the Lens of a Hungry Stomach

Our first taste of Anglo-Saxon culture will come through a consumption of medical, magical and recipe-based texts. The presence of food in such varying contexts demonstrates the ways in which food and eating infiltrated every part of Anglo-Saxon life. Rather than simply a product for consumption, food had other practical applications and also a ritualistic value. Both necessary and useful, pleasurable and spiritual, food was treated with reverence and respect. It is important to understand that the kind of food consumed by the Anglo-Saxons was basic in comparison to twenty-first century Western eating habits. Although there were not the same kinds of edible luxuries, the Anglo-Saxons were grateful for their food and enjoyed mealtimes. Mealtime was an integral component of Anglo-Saxon life. Because most could not afford lighting, food was typically prepared and consumed either during the day or at night by the fire. Evenings were also a convenient time for a large meal because many people worked outside during the day and only had the opportunity to eat briefly at noon. In the winter months the Anglo-Saxons would likely have eaten one large meal earlier in the afternoon as they would have been more focused on indoor tasks and were closer to kitchen supplies. Winter days are also much shorter and eating early would have allowed them to maximize their light supply. Enjoying two meals a day in the summer months would have provided the Anglo-Saxons with the calories they needed to engage in intensive and lengthy outdoor labour. Winter also comes with its own demands, however, and the Saxons needed to ensure that they consumed enough food to keep their bodies warm in cold temperatures (Banham 74). The Anglo-Saxons were thus very needs-driven. While it

seems obvious that one needs to consume more energy to work and heat one's body, it is not something that we think of in the same terms today. Most of us live comfortably enough in the Western world that we do not need to consume extra calories in order to maintain a healthy body temperature. In fact, we are more invested in lessening our calorie intake and losing the luxury weight that we have collectively acquired. While we work all day to earn our grocery money, the Anglo-Saxons were literally working the land to live. There was no meat aisle, nor a produce section or dairy bar. Their day-to-day life was largely centered around planting, growing, producing, cooking and consuming food, as well as the proper storage of food until the end of the seasonal gap in June, when it could be harvested again. It is only when we acknowledge the amount of time and effort that the Anglo-Saxons invested in consumption that we can begin to get an idea of exactly how much they respected mealtimes. This respect was also born out of their intimate physical relationship with foodstuffs. Milking, raising and killing cattle, for example, are very different experiences from opening a bag of milk or purchasing pre-packaged meat. A neo-liberal market economy has stripped away the personal relationship between ourselves and our food, resulting in the mindless purchasing of packaged and frozen products, as if they were born ready to microwave.

In addition to the daily consumption of food and mealtimes, the Anglo-Saxons also participated in the intimate ritual of formal feasting. This kind of meal would have been typically enjoyed by royalty and guilds. There were also Germanic religious feasts and seasonal feasts that marked the consummation of agricultural work (Hagen *Food and Drink* 410). Those feasts associated with agricultural celebration would have been the

only ones the lower class and slaves were permitted to attend. The landowner would have allowed his workers the day off to enjoy food and merriment. The very poor, however, were not likely present at any kind of feasting ritual, except as scroungers looking for uneaten leftovers (*Food and Drink* 409-410). The rich, on the other hand, enjoyed feast days in their very best clothing. The rhymed poem of the Exeter Book conveys the kind of prestige associated with Anglo-Saxon feasting when it describes the “*giestas...lustum glendon*” (guests...beautifully dressed) (qtd. in Hagen *Food and Drink* 411). Their enjoyable meals would have taken place in the *medo-ærne* (meadhall), where drink and food together would have been consumed on long benches and tables. Conversations would have ranged from the mundane to negotiations of business. Many halls have been found during archaeological excavations, including one at Yeavinger over eighty feet long and forty feet wide (Hagen *Food and Drink* 412). A horn was used to summon the guests to seat themselves and everyone washed their hands before sitting down in the finely decorated building to eat. Bards were often present as a form of entertainment, singing poems and amusing the guests.

Class was thus very much a part of Anglo-Saxon consumption, and determined the way in which one ate and experienced daily life. The royal feasts themselves were in fact primarily focused on emphasizing the King’s power and prestige. Rulers used feast days to display the amount of wealth and clout they had, in hopes that they would attract supporters. Attending and eating at the feast signalled one’s declaration of loyalty to the King. Consumption thus acted as a binding contract between followers and those in power. In exchange for their loyal service, followers expected to be fed and provided for

by the King. According to Ann Hagen, “Feasting was functional: by keeping his retainers well fed on a variety of foods, the leader ensured that he had, quite literally, strong supporters. A retainer who ate with the king gained a legal status, but the term *fedesl* used for such an individual occurs elsewhere only in the sense of a fattened animal, and implies special feeding” (*Food and Drink* 409). Kings were thus heavily invested in feasting, as it involved politics just as much as entertainment and pleasure. Feasting was also important as a unifying agent for guilds and their members.

Feasts were also a political venue in that they provided the opportunity to publically display one’s honours and superiority. Seating was determined in order of social rank so that those most valuable to the community received the best service, that is, fine dishes, beautiful cutlery and linen, comfortable candlelight (Hagen *Food and Drink* 413). Warriors were treated with the utmost respect and dignity. Feasting and eating thus not only dictated the life of a working man, but also of those persons who enjoyed wealth and privilege. The king always needed to ensure that it appeared as if he had a plentiful food stock, even if supplies were in short order. As Hagen explains, “the king could not have his status compromised by attending a feast at which the supplies were insufficiently lavish, or the mead might run out” (*Food and Drink* 409). The role that fate and chance played in consumption can thus not be emphasized enough. While class might have separated people and affected the quality of their mealtimes, food itself was one of the ultimate equalizers; everyone needed to eat. Lack of adequate nutrition could result in sickness and death for any person regardless of social standing. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* testifies to an acute awareness of famine, while reminding us of its frequency,

both as a result of the Viking occupation and the Norman invasion, as well as a simple result of bad weather.

With knowledge of Anglo-Saxon consumption, a close analysis of texts involving food can begin. The first text I will be dealing with is entitled *Wid ymbe*, which translates to “Catching a Swarm of Bees.” While this charm does not directly involve a recipe in the traditional sense of food preparation, it is interesting because it demonstrates the close relationship the Anglo-Saxons had to bees and their most important by-product, honey. This ritual was performed in order to prevent the bees from escaping the beekeeper, calling them to stay in close proximity for harvesting. Honey was the primary form of sweetening in Anglo-Saxon times, and was used in many leechdoms and drinks, particularly alcoholic beverages because it helped increase the alcohol content (Hagen *Anglo-Saxon Food and Drink* 147). Honey from humblebees, wild bees and downland honey was believed to be especially potent and powerful because of its rarity (Storms 133). In addition to being a sweetening agent, honey was also used medicinally against cough and pain in the eyes. In a contemporary context honey is used for similar purposes, soothing sore throats through its addition in boiling water or tea. The Anglo-Saxons also mixed honey with ale, milk and herbs in a drink that induced labour and eased birthing pains (Weston 287).

Honey, with its multiple nutritional and medical purposes was thus an Anglo-Saxon staple, imbuing beehives and swarms of bees with immense value. The Laws of Alfred indicate that there were high fines for theft of bees. Because bees were not likely domesticated at the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon period, any person who found honey

was entitled to keep it (Hagen *Food and Drink* 147, 152). Welsh Law also demonstrates the value of honey, particularly wild swarms, which were needed to supplement domestic stocks. If a wild swarm was found the owner was to cut the tree on its side and whomever's land the tree fell on was to keep the swarm (Hagen *Food and Drink* 149). Honey was such a vital element of Anglo-Saxon culture that farmers could pay their food rent for the King's feast in honey (Lee 43). Certain guilds also accepted honey for due fees. The Exeter guild, for example, required each member to contribute two sesters of malt and each retainer a sceat of honey (Hagen *Food and Drink* 154). In a contemporary context, this can be compared to the bringing of expensive and rare ice wine to a wedding or social gathering as a gracious gift to the host. Honey, like contemporary currency, was valuable in relation to its bulk and also did not deteriorate quickly overtime (Hagen *A Second Handbook* 363). The Thegns' guild in Cambridge had regulations that stated: "If any guild brother die, all the guildship is to bring him to where he desired, and he who does not come for that purpose is to pay a sester of honey. If any guild brother insult another, he is to pay a sester of honey...if the guild brother does not attend his morning conference (he is) to pay his sester of honey" (qtd. in Hagen *Food and Drink* 154). Honey was so valuable it functioned as a means of correcting social blunders and repaying those inconvenienced by one's ill behaviour. The fact that this particular guild accepted honey in place of funerary obligations demonstrates the respect the Anglo-Saxons had for this sweet food.

The speaker of the charm calls out to the bee and addresses it in supplication. Rather than pursuing the insect he revokes his role as human master and compliments the

bee's work, acknowledging it as valuable. The person conducting the charm explicitly identifies honey as a staple of human life: "Be ye so mindful of my good, / [as] every man [is of] food and estate" (12-13). Here, the speaker reminds his audience that honey deserves respect as it provides both pleasure and sustenance in a way similar to food and shelter. It is particularly significant that this charm contains an attempt to mediate between addressing the bee and the bee itself speaking. The presence of the bee's voice is reminiscent of many of the Anglo-Saxon riddles where the object of inquiry often speaks on its own behalf and calls the listener to determine its identity. The bee is depicted as a confident figure that recognizes the importance of its own contribution to Anglo-Saxon livelihood. There is an acute sense of harmony present in this charm, an acknowledgement and appreciation of the relationship between human beings and animal life that is reminiscent of Indigenous North American traditions. This bee calls "each and every being" to "listen" to its message, to pay attention and mimic its suggested method of catching a swarm. The imperative statement that closes the charm, "Be ye so mindful of my good," carries undertones of a warning, suggesting that a lack of regard for honey will lead to undesirable consequences. As Ann Hagen has suggested in *A Second Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food and Drink*, the "Anglo-Saxons were only too aware on a personal level of the importance of food as 'a primary and recurrent want', recognising more acutely than their descendants that 'our transitory life is sustained by food'" (Hagen *A Second Handbook* 364).

This charm also identifies the swarm of bees as *sigewif*, which translates to "victorious women," a unique way of describing hardworking insects. In Anglo-Saxon

times eating and drinking were understood to be masculine activities, while women were expected to attend to cooking and preparing food and drink. Women served their houseguests and kin and provided nourishment and hospitality (Hagen *A Second Handbook* 354). Through a projection of human roles and relationships onto animal life, the swarm of bees becomes a group of selfless Anglo-Saxon women serving their human family and providing nourishment and comfort. These women, these bees, are recognized for their contributions and willingness to allow others to eat before they themselves consume food and attend to their own needs. The respect and reverence for this tiny insect is thus woven with a veneration of women and all the effort and care they put into their families and ultimately their people. These women are “victorious,” as they conquer the pains of hunger and the desires of stomachs. A kind of battle language is evoked to describe their “war against famine” and the survival of the Anglo-Saxon people. Honey becomes more than a sweetening agent; it is sustenance itself. This charm transforms a swarm of bees into a group of victorious fighting women. Likewise, women are not simply the makers of food, but a vibrant group with the never-ending energy and enthusiasm of honeybees. The fact that the speaker identifies the bee as a “victorious woman,” a warrior carrying a little spear, emphasizes again the way in which this charm is about supplication rather than dominance and control. Humans, in this instance, are at the mercy of the insect that provides them with such a pleasurable and necessary substance. This charm therefore synthesizes earth, animal life and human beings so closely together that it becomes difficult to see where one ends and the other begins.

The “Lay of the Nine Herbs” is essentially a recipe intended to cure illnesses associated with poison, venoms and worms (Jolly 125). While not a traditional recipe intended for the preparation of pleasure eating, this text contains important references and descriptions of herbs. In a world where one could not simply purchase a pharmaceutical or herbal remedy from the local drugstore, the Anglo-Saxons had to concoct their own medicinal recipes in the privacy of their homes. They thus had a very close and personal relationship to the healing process, having made the remedies themselves from ingredients they harvested themselves. The “Lay of the Nine Herbs” can thus be described as more of a prescription, or rather a prescription-recipe. In a contemporary context we often think of these two things, that is prescriptions and recipes, as being mutually exclusive, while they do, in fact, share an intimate relationship. Essentially, a modern-day prescription is just a recipe of the correct types and amounts of necessary drugs. While in the twenty-first century we think of herbal medicine and naturopathy as fields separate or complementary to dominant medical practice, the Anglo-Saxons held no such distinctions. In the absence of state-controlled medicine, in a context prior to the birth of the clinic, medicine was created in the home without regulation.

The first part of the prescription-recipe lists the herbs needed in order to cure, while the second half is instructive, explaining how to prepare and administer the remedy to the infected host, much like a contemporary doctor’s note. The herbs involved are as follows: mugwort, waybread, stune, stithe, attorlothe, maythe, wergule, chervil, fennel, lambscress, nettle, and crabapple. According to Colin Spencer, “[t]he Saxons possessed a formidable awareness of the power of herbs upon human and animal metabolism” (32).

Some herbs used to aid diseases such as chervil, watercress, camomile and fennel became associated with the sacred (Spencer 33). As Debby Banham explains in *Food and Drink in Anglo-Saxon England*, the Anglo-Saxons did not distinguish between herbs and vegetables in the way that we do today. The word *wyrt* was used to describe plants, vegetables and herbs simultaneously, eventually transforming to *wort*, which was used until the seventeenth century (Banham 37). In the same way the Anglo-Saxons did not perceive food, medicine and spirituality as separate, they also understood all vegetables and plants to have an interconnected and interdependent relationship that need not be categorized with specific linguistic signifiers. As Hagen explains, the Anglo-Saxons “did not draw a line between what was cultivated and culinary and what was wild and weedy.” Hagen goes on to compare contemporary perceptions of food with Anglo-Saxon practice: “Today our choice of vegetables and herbs is generally limited to what can be cultivated on a large scale and what travels or freezes well...Our knowledge of what can be eaten tends to be limited to what we can buy as food, or as seeds to grow ourselves” (*Food and Drink* 53). Hagen emphasizes one of the primary differences between contemporary consumption and Anglo-Saxon rituals, that is, the birth of a fast-paced market economy. While we purchase food based on price and convenience, the Anglo-Saxons gathered food based on necessity and the ease of cultivation.

One of the most interesting aspects of this text is the way in which its “healing” ingredients were also commonly used in food in other contexts. Ælfric’s *Colloquy* indicates that chervil was eaten on a daily basis and also alludes to wild chervil, suggesting that certain kinds of chervil were cultivated for consumption (Hagen *A Second*

Handbook 42). Fennel seeds could have been used in guild loaves on feast days and also might have functioned as a special ingredient in particular ‘wort’ drinks, which were essentially herbal teas (Hagen *Food and Drink* 256-57, 231). According to Wilfrid Bonser, mugwort appears to be a species of *Artemisia* (335). Mugwort is referred to in Anglo-Saxon texts that are non-medicinal and nettle may have also been used for nutritional as well as medical purposes. According to Hagen, in an eleventh-century Irish account of St. Columba, the saint questions a woman who is cutting nettles for broth. The woman reveals that she is waiting for her cow to have offspring so that she can eat other dairy products. St. Columba joins her in eating the nettle as an apparent act of self-denial, which suggests that nettles were a food consumed during times of famine rather than eaten by choice (Hagen *Food and Drink* 52). Crabapples were also eaten in contexts apart from medicinal interventions. Along with grapes, apples were requested as a blessing in the coronation service of Æthelred II (Hagen *Food and Drink* 57). Hagen also emphasizes that Irish references to apple trees from the eighth century and onwards are suggestive of their immense popularity (*Food and Drink* 57). Archaeologically, there is evidence for the presence of apples in burial rituals. In a late seventh-century barrow burial at Ford, Wilts., four crabapples were discovered in a bowl with onions (Hagen *Food and Drink* 58). According to Thomas Oswald Cockayne, “[m]any kinds of apples, pears and medlars’ (*manigfeald appelcyn, peran æpeningas*) are recommended for a delicate stomach” (qtd. in Hagen *Food and Drink* 57). The “Lay of the Nine Herbs” classifies this fruit as a herb, demonstrating once again the fluidity of categorical attachments. Depending on the context in which a crabapple was consumed it meant

different things and fulfilled different purposes, whether that be spiritual, medicinal or otherwise.

While in a contemporary context we have a greater tendency to label and attach definitive meanings, there are a few instances where our conception of food changes depending on its context of use. Most often a cucumber is viewed as a healthy vegetable consumed at mealtimes, but occasionally is used medicinally on the eyes to relieve headache and puffiness. Likewise, teabags and tea are consumed for pleasure, for medicinal properties, and occasionally used on the eyes to relieve similar symptoms as the cucumber. In other contexts tea also takes on spiritual and magical connotation in the rituals of tealeaf reading. Bread is yet another contemporary example: this food can transform into the body of the host in a religious setting with the aid of a priest. These foods transform depending on the way in which they are used, and also their location of use. If a vegetable is consumed in a contemporary kitchen it is generally for consumption, while in a spa it might have medicinal value or in a church religious importance.

While some of our foods cross social boundaries and are considered acceptable to be used in a variety of contexts, the “Lay of the Nine Herbs” demonstrates how there is value in breaking down these barriers further. We have a tendency to separate different spaces, that is, the home, “the church” and “the hospital,” in a way that limits the kinds of remedies and rituals used in all three contexts. Essentially we need a context that allows for the fluidity of context itself, a kind of sliding context if you will.

Lacan’s notion of the “sliding signifier” is particularly useful to a discussion of the malleability of contexts. Contexts, like signifiers, can become detached from their

traditional signified, thus opening up the opportunity for new meanings and interpretations. Lacan states that “there is no signifying chain that does not sustain—as if attached to the punctuation of each of its units—all attested contexts that are, so to speak, “vertically” linked to that point” (146). In other words, every word, every signifier has an infinite possibility of meanings that is dependent on its contextual chain and the way in which it is employed. Lacan goes on to clarify through example, explaining the way in which the signifier “tree” can mean a variety of different things depending on its context. If it is used in reference to the Bible it takes on a special kind of Christian symbolism. Trees can also be discussed in relation to storms and their excellent ability as lightening conductors, or even as ways of organizing genealogical information. Lacan explains that “what this structure of the signifying chain discloses is the possibility I have...to use it to signify *something altogether different* from what it says” (147). He goes back to the example of the tree to clarify further: “I need but plant my tree in a locution, *grimper a l’abre*, or even project onto it the derisive light that a descriptive context gives the word, *arborer*, to not let myself be imprisoned in some sort of *communiqué* of the facts, however official it may be, and if I know the truth, convey it, despite all the censors, *between-the-lines* using nothing but the signifier that can be constituted by my acrobatics through the branches of the tree” (147).

While Lacan is asserting that signifiers have an infinite number of meanings because of their infinite number of contexts, I would like to suggest that contexts themselves can be separated from their traditional meanings. Contexts are not as stable as Lacan seems to suggest. According to Lacan’s logic, if the word “boil” was deployed in a

kitchen it might carry connotations of cooking, whereas if it was used outdoors on a humid day it could mean it is extremely hot outside. But what if the kitchen was more than a place for simply cooking? What if this kitchen was also a place of health and medicine-making? What if more than one context was present during the moment the word was spoken? What if these contexts were in dialogue with one another and were mutually dependent on the other's existence? This kind of nuanced contextual complexity was present during Anglo-Saxon times and needs to be further explored in order for twenty-first century health to be actualized. It is absolutely necessary for us to begin thinking of contexts as sliding, as malleable, as multidimensional.

The “Lay of the Nine Herbs” is an excellent example of this kind of context-fluidity. This prescription-recipe simultaneously evokes numerous contexts, including the medical, consumptive and spiritual. It lists, like a traditional recipe, what ingredients are involved and how to prepare them for use: “Mugwort, waybroad...lamb’s cress, attorlathe, / maythe, nettle, crabapple, chervil and fennel, old soap ; / work the worts into dust, mix with the soap and with the apple’s juice. / Work [a] slop of water and of ashes, take fennel, there boil [it] into / [a] slop and mix with egg mixture.” This text is instructive in its tone without being authoritarian. When memorized and spoken aloud, it provided a form of oral direction. According to Jolly, “These lays were more a written record of the oral formulas a healer would memorize in order to remember herbs and their function” (125). She goes on to explain the way in which this text is also a series of chants that trigger the healing properties of the herbs when sung over them during preparation. There is thus a sense that there is inherent value in these herbs that simply

needs human intervention to be released (Jolly 125). The preparers were to work in conjunction with the natural world in order to emancipate the special healing power that could only be evoked by this kind of union between plant and person. The spoken word carried a very heavy weight in Anglo-Saxon times. In conjunction with touch, words were believed to have the ability to alter the properties of certain foods, evoke healing and change personal circumstances. Godfrid Storms emphasizes the way in which the “Lay of the Nine Herbs,” in particular, demonstrates the strong belief in the importance of physical contact during oral incantations. He points to the following part of the recipe as an example: “Sing that charm there on each [of the] herbs thrice before he / works them, and then also on [the] apple ; and then sing in that man’s / mouth and in both his ears and on the wound that same charm, before he / puts on [the] salve” (translation mine). According to Storms, in this section of the text “the charmer ensures contact between the magic power and the object on which the power has to operate” (81). There is a moment of unification between two different senses in this instance, sound and touch, through which a transfer of healing properties and power was believed to occur. An accessible example of this kind of ritualistic interaction involving food would once again be the Eucharist and the relationship between the priest’s spoken words and his touching and holding up of the bread. In many ways, the Eucharist is also performative, typically occurring in front of a receptive audience. “The Lay of the Nine Herbs” was similarly performative in its execution. Although a large crowd might not have been present, the chanting would have likely occurred in the presence of the patient. Lea Olsan has observed that, “unlike epic poetry, riddles, or lyrics, charms are performed toward

specific practical ends...[and] their mode of operation is performative” (qtd in Garner 20). Lori Ann Garner argues in her essay, “Anglo-Saxon Charms in Performance,” that in order to be able to understand prescriptive texts like the “Lay of the Nine,” it is necessary to “apply performance-based approaches that allow us to examine the charms on their own terms” (20). This is a particularly interesting methodology as it calls us to take into consideration an entirely new context that we have not previously considered, that is, the kitchen as theatre and temple. To take this idea one step further, we can imagine the Anglo-Saxon kitchen as a kind of medical-theatrical performance, similar to the kind of surgery-theatres present in contemporary times. Kitchens were places of observation and learning. Garner discusses the difficulty of dealing with the cultural gap between the manuscripts of Anglo-Saxon charms and their original performative contexts, explaining that performance methods are usually difficult to discern (21). She argues that “recorded with and without ritual instructions, with and without incantations, with and without clear lexical meaning, the body of charms as a whole cannot be fully realized on the printed page, but depend on performative context” (22). Regardless, therefore, of the instructions salvaged by contemporary scholars, we cannot recreate the context that this recipe was conducted in. We also cannot anticipate or fully understand the kind of audience response to these texts. According to Garner, “oral traditional art...relies on audience awareness of traditional associations to convey meaning,” and we can thus never exactly imitate the way in which this piece was performed (34). Recreating the context, however, is not the goal. We need to understand the way in which these contexts shape and mould how the text is both understood and received. In order to begin understanding the way in which

these prescription-recipes functioned, we need to acknowledge that the context was not simply the backdrop to their execution, or rather, that context is not simply a location and is bound up with performance, tone, temperature, rhythm and duration also. Context also consists of the ideologies, cultural presumptions, belief systems and values of the Anglo-Saxon people. Understandably, the amount of potential contexts any one recipe can have becomes overwhelming and frustrating. How does one go about sorting out the cultural complexity of these texts? A useful way of dealing with “context overload,” so to speak, is to focus on one identifiable and specific context in detail before analysing another. After fully exploring the way in which that context functions, it becomes easier to see where contexts overlap and bleed into one another. While this thesis performs this kind of exercise on a large scale, let us focus briefly on the performative aspect of this text to get a sense of how it functioned on one level of the everyday.

Having already discussed the significance of spoken word and touch, it is important to emphasize the way in which verbal incantations were sung or chanted rhythmically. In a way, the person preparing the salve was performing a kind of soothing song for their patient. In addition to releasing the inherent healing properties of the herbs, this chanting would likely have eased the worried mind of the patient, much like a lullaby. As John D. Niles has expressed, “healers were singers, it seems” (qtd. in Garner 30). One can also imagine the performance of verbal transmission, that is, one herbalist passing on this information to another through chant. The musicality of “The Lay of the Nine Herbs” should thus not be understated. The relationship between listening and eating, between rhythm and consumption was an important one in Anglo-Saxon times. At

feasts, for example, a minstrel would often play a lyre and sing poetic accompaniment while the guests were enjoying their meal. According to Hagen, “Harping must have been a common pastime at feasts since it is used as a metaphor for feasting. The poetic epithet for the harp/lyre was ‘the wood of joy’ (*gleobeam*), suggesting association with the pleasures of the feasting hall” (418). While men consumed bread, mead and politics they were simultaneously soothed by the sounds of the minstrel. Consumption, and the “Lay of the Nine Herbs” more specifically, were thus sensual performative experiences that engaged in touch, speaking, hearing, listening, tasting and moving. The performance of this particular herbal recipe, unlike much contemporary theatre for example, engaged both the performer-healer and the patient-audience in dialogue. This is in stark contrast to contemporary physicians who simply administer treatments rather than engaging in intimate, sensual and dialogical performance-remedies. We tend to accept the ‘scientific content’ of prescriptions and treatments on the same level of faith as this. The “Lay of the Nine Herbs” exists, therefore, as a nutritional theatrical production that achieved very real physical results. While many of the Anglo-Saxon medical texts are often dismissed as purely “superstitious,” the kinds of performances seen in the “Lay of the Nine Herbs” and the bee charm demonstrate their important contributions to people’s daily health. Garner explains the way in which the song-like command in the swarm charm, “Settle ye, victorious women, descend to [the] ground,” was more than a simple aesthetic utterance. She explains that, “through the mutual reinforcement of physical and verbal elements, the charm provides what modern science would accept as a valid means of controlling bees while at the same time providing a way of reestablishing order in the natural world

through the poetic incantation” (30). These performances were not simply for entertainment value; they got things done. The bee charm and the “Lay of the Nine Herbs” yielded positive physical results that aided the Anglo-Saxons in both the healing process and the acquiring of valuable consumptive materials. Present in these song-like performances was also a sense of unification with nature. In the “Lay of the Nine Herbs,” in particular, the healer directly sings to the plants they are preparing: “Thou be mindful, mugwort, what thou mentioned, / what thou rendered at [the] mighty announcement / Una you are named, eldest of herbs... And thou waybread, herbal mother, / Open from the east, mighty within.” The herbs in this prescription-recipe are addressed performatively, and are presumed to be more than a receptive audience. The person preparing the salve chants to the plants in expectation of their participation and interaction. There is a sense of supplication and respect present in this recipe as well, as the healer appeals to the mighty herbal mother for protection and aid. Each herb is individually addressed and told why it is appreciated by the healer: “This herb [is] called Steem...She standeth against poison, she dashes away pain. / Stithe she is called, she withstands poison, / She expels wrath, casts out venom.” These herbs are spoken to as if they are valuable and necessary members of the Anglo-Saxon community. This kind of appreciation demonstrates the close relationship the Anglo-Saxons had with the natural world. For the Anglo-Saxons all the world was quiet literally a stage that could be performed to and also participate in performance, including herbs and food. The herbs in this recipe, in fact, take on the “role” of fierce warrior (Jolly 127). They are described as nearly invincible forces to be reckoned with that protect against almost every kind of

ailment from different kinds of poison to blisters. They also collectively guard “against [the] enemy’s hand and against terrible danger, / [and also] against witchcraft [of] evil beings.” The healer chants about these herbs using intense battle language and also, at one point in the recipe, refers to the battle-heavy *Æsir*: “Thou remember, Maythe (Camomile), what thou disclosed, / what thou accomplished at Alorford” (Jolly 127). This idea of performance also highlights the wonderful poetic framework of the text itself. The verbal remedy is linguistically eloquent and sophisticated in its execution. When appealing to waybread the healer speaks: “Open from the east, mighty within. / Over thee chariots creaked, over thee queens rode, / Over thee brides called out, over thee bulls breathed hard. / Thou withstood all this, and withstand.” This passage cleverly employs the use of repetition, specifically “over thee,” to instil a rhythmic cadence that is song-like. The use of alliteration is also present. The speaker emphasizes that “chariots creaked” and “bulls breathed hard.” While repetition and alliteration would have undoubtedly aided in the succinct memorization of the remedy, there is also a sense that these poetic devices were employed to make the recipe pleasurable to speak and listen to.

The poetic and song-like trappings of the “Lay of the Nine Herbs” contrasts with the final text of analysis, that is, the drink against temptations found in Bald’s Leechbook. The singing involved in this leechdom is specifically spiritual in nature: “Lay them [the ingredients] under the altar, / Sing nine masses over them.” There is also a distinction in this text between water and holy water, demonstrating the way in which a natural substance was believed to be able to change and take on new physical properties with a verbal ritual. While the drinking was an important part of Anglo-Saxon livelihood,

consuming the Holy Spirit was another experience entirely. The co-existence of Germanic spirituality with these kinds of Christian elements will be further discussed in the next chapter on magic and religion. At present, I would like to focus on the kinds of food and herbs used in the leechdom in order to get a sense of the way in which the Anglo-Saxon kitchen participated in the protection against temptations and threats.

Allow me to first explain what “temptation” means in the context of this passage. This particular text addresses the temptation of the Devil and also mental dislocation. In other words, it is working to prevent the Devil from physically tempting his victims, and also to cure persons apt to participate in unchristian behaviour. It simultaneously addresses elf-trick and Lent disease, otherwise known as Typhus. Although this is one coherent leechdom, there are three separate remedies at work here, all of which address the above afflictions using different methods. They are essentially a series of treatments, the first being the least invasive and the last being the most physically demanding (Jolly 155). The main ingredients of this leechdom include: betony, bishopwort, lupin, githrife, attorlathe, wolfscomb, yarrow, haransprecel, strawberry plant, cloved wenwort, earth rime, bramble apple, polleian, wormwood, butter, libcorn, a series of different roots, ale, salt and cucumber. This list contains a variety of herbs, roots, fruits, vegetables and dairy. The sheer number of necessary items is phenomenal, not to mention the preparation time that would have been involved. We need to take into consideration that people had to grow and gather their own food stocks before they even began to make home remedies. While the number of different ingredients is impressive, this text is also important because it is the first one we have encountered that primarily focuses on liquid and

drinking. Consuming beverages had a very specific and important place in Anglo-Saxon culture. Having enough drink to satisfy guests was a primary concern at feasts. According to Hagen, “drink was as important as the food” (417). The most popular beverages consumed were mead, ale, fermented fruit drinks and wine. Beverages containing milk were less popular because of their simple taste and fruit juice was not consumed often because it was only available during certain times of the year, in addition to the fact that it took a great deal of effort to make. Water was most interestingly regarded as the least enjoyable liquid and was associated with the poor or those leading the religious and ascetic life (Hagen 199). Alcoholic drinks, in particular, were associated with pleasure and widely consumed, making drunkenness a common problem. Because of the high cost of these drinks, however, they were most often enjoyed by the wealthy and prestigious. Hagen reveals that drunkenness occurred so often that large households created rules and regulations to govern unacceptable and dangerous behaviour (199, 417, 244). In meadhalls, where drunken fights had a greater risk of breaking out, there were fines for brawls that resulted in murder. While the king provided unlimited amounts of alcohol for his men in gratitude, he needed to be able to maintain the harmony that feasts were supposed to instil (Hagen 417, 227). Even ecclesiastics were notorious for getting too drunk, despite the fact that scripture did not approve of this behaviour. Both church and lay festivals were a common place for drinking, the happy and boisterous environment of which encouraged many people to participate in consuming too much (242-244). The emotional and physical response many people have to drinking alcohol should also not be underestimated. As a depressant, drink encouraged people to relax and respond more

emotionally to situations they would have otherwise been unaffected by. Alcohol's ability to make a person's mind and body respond in alternative ways provides one explanation as to why it is so often included in medicinal recipes. The text against temptation includes ale in its preparation: "Make all the herbs thoroughly well clean / and pound and put them in ale, wrap up, let stand for a night's time." Considering the fact that this portion of the leechdom is focused on creating a purgative drink, soaking the ingredients in mead was likely intended to make the concoction more successful in inducing vomiting. Soaking objects of importance in liquid is an essential element of this text. In the first half of the leechdom, the healer is supposed to give the patient "a full cup at night to drink while fasting, / and put the holy water on all the food that he eats." Alternatively, the second remedy suggests the preparer "put a tub full of cold water, / drop thrice into it some of the drink. Bathe the man in the water." In the former, we see a special relationship between the holy water and the food itself, while in the latter the human body is engaging with the other ingredients of the leechdom. These remedies were thus full body experiences that integrated different physical elements together, that is, food, drink and bodies, in order to achieve optimal results. They also combined the use of both drink and salve. The bath, which involves the drink and the balm, addresses the patient's external self, while the purgative beverage that follows is attentive to his internal body (Jolly 155). Together the beverage and ointment are a powerful concoction against temptation. This is also the first text we have encountered that directly addresses eating food, rather than just including edible items as a list of ingredients. According to Jolly, the inclusion of elf-trick and Typhus in the second remedy, "confirm the connection between physical ailments

requiring herbs and spiritual attacks requiring herbs of power” (155). More interestingly, these two different remedies are seeking to cure the same ailment using entirely different, but complimentary, methodologies. The former involves a fast to clear out the system of the patient before they fill their bodies up with the goodness of the holy-soaked food. The latter begins by bathing the patient in a tub of regular water, the least valued nutritional liquid, before feeding him holy drink and nutritious food and then having him vomit what he has eaten. While both the fast and the purgation are ways of cleansing the system, the first remedy is more invested in filling the body up with positive energy, rather than physically dispelling the ailment. The religious overtones are stronger in this first remedy, evoking the idea that the Holy Spirit can fill the emptiness that a fast would leave. The second remedy, much more invasive, is engaged with physically expelling the sickness of the afflicted individual. The last and final remedy solely involves vomiting as a kind of final and most extreme resort.

From a religious framework fasting was viewed as a method of purification from gluttony and disobedience, a way of repaying the Lord for Adam’s great sin in the garden. Fasting was also believed to free humans from consuming earthly pleasures and create the opportunity for their union with angels and religious truth. It was also said to have controlled peoples’ sexual appetites (Hagen 393). The idea of expelling the bad, through either fasting or purgation, and filling up with foods good for your body is a useful one. People in the contemporary world, for example during Ramadan, still participate in fasts that, in addition to their spiritual significance, are intended to cleanse the body and spirit. Christians also participate in fasting during Lent and on other Holy

days throughout the calendar year. There are also, however, those people who suffer from body dysmorphia and refrain from eating, not to fill the body up with positive forms of energy, but to simply stay empty in order to achieve an impossible “ideal” body image. Anorexia’s partner, bulimia, works at keeping the body empty not by withholding but by daily purgation. With these kinds of troubling and dangerous conditions on the rise, it is elemental that we adopt a new way of thinking about the purpose of “cleansing.” While this Anglo-Saxon text uses fasting and purgation as forms of remedy, the Western world is creating the conditions that allow these practices to develop into illness. While there very might well be value in cleansing the body using these methods, a neo-liberal market economy is laying the foundations for people to use them as a means of control in a world where they seemingly have none. Anorexia and bulimia become opiates for those having difficulty understanding and controlling their own bodies in the modern world. Something is very wrong here. Much of this comes from a lack of knowledge about the ways in which our bodies function. One would think that in a boundariless world of mass communication, people would have access to information that could help them. Many people, intelligent people, lack the critical language necessary to be able to fully access and utilize this information. Our boundaries and categories are simply too tight. Medical journals most often do not read in lay language. Certain health magazines are restricted for private or corporate access and those that are available to the public are trying to sell us gym memberships with ridiculous images of idealism on their covers. These same gyms tell us to fill up on creatine and purge with too much exercise. We are living in a time when people are seeking their own remedies on the internet and through chat rooms,

trying to find and develop a language that will help them care for themselves. Medical institutions are failing to care for their patients in a way that is up to their standards. Even alternative medical practices are often subsumed by the market economy and are spit back out to us in self-serving and less threatening forms, like mass-produced yoga mats and Wicca how-to guides from book store conglomerates like Chapters. The Anglo-Saxons knew themselves, knew their bodies and minds better than we know ours; in the absence of money and financial gain, personal health had less competition. While we cannot simply be rid of a market economy, we can develop conditions that allow people to authentically learn about health. Embracing an alternative medical system and incorporating it into the institutionalized system would provide people with the mental and spiritual support they need to maintain a healthy lifestyle. This leechdom, and the Anglo-Saxon model more generally, demonstrate that there *are* alternatives even when it seems as if there are not. We simply need to purge ourselves of a learned body idealism, and of ridiculous and bogus “medical” information, before we can fill up on those things that make us healthier human beings.

Chapter Two

Magic and Prayer: From the Perspective of the Supernatural and Miraculous

The Anglo-Saxon medical texts offer the contemporary world a framework for envisioning alternative spiritualities in addition to alternative methods of consumption.

This chapter will focus on the presence and intersection of Christian spirituality and Germanic folk beliefs, that is, the nonchristian beliefs of the Scandinavian religion.

Before engaging in a detailed analysis of these texts I would first like to explore what magic and prayer meant in Anglo-Saxon England. According to author Valerie Flint of *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*,

magic may be said to be the exercise of preternatural control over nature by human beings, with the assistance of forces more powerful than they. This combination of human and superhuman power will sometimes employ strange instruments and is always liable to produce remarkable and unaccustomed results. Thus we may expect an element of the irrational, and of the mysterious too, in a process that deserves to be called magical (3).

This traditional definition of magic is not satisfying, especially in relation to Anglo-Saxon medical texts. While the healer did maintain a degree of power, it was not so much a control over nature but a working in conjunction with natural forces. Flint's use of the words "strange" and "irrational" make magical experiences become ones of queer novelty. The Anglo-Saxons, for example, would not have thought of their instruments as "strange" or their results as "irrational." There is a marked difference between irrationality and having faith in something that is unknown or unexplainable in language.

Nöth's definition of magic is much more useful in this regard. He claims that

The magician's semiotic fallacy is based on his neglecting the principle of independence between the sign and the 'thing' referred to. The sign and the 'thing' referred to are not considered as independent entities but as something forming an undifferentiated unity. In magic, this confusion of the dimensions of

‘object’ and ‘sign’ is accompanied by an additional assumption ; it is expected that a manipulation of the sign (more exactly a signifier) causes a simultaneous transformation of the ‘thing’ (qtd. in Cameron 131).

It is thus this linguistic fallacy, that is the inability to acknowledge the independence of the signified from the signifier, that allows magic to flourish and transform. Through its merging of signifiers with the signified it can alter the corporeal world. This linguistic system allows spoken words to become and engage with physical experience. This process is far from “irrational” or “strange” and becomes difficult to discuss in language because of its stronghold over it. We do not have an adequate vocabulary for describing those circumstances where what has been said is precisely what is, no ambiguity involved. Our signifiers do not inherently bleed into the signified in the way they did in an Anglo-Saxon medical context. Words and the physical entities they referred to had a close semiotic relationship. Magic was thus not some sort of external, bizarre entity present in the healing arts, but rather embodied everyday language and experience. Ben Highmore suggests that the “everyday is also the home of the bizarre and mysterious...[or rather that] [t]he non-everyday (the exceptional) is there to be found in the heart of the everyday” (3). It is therefore not magic that is exceptional or bizarre, but the Anglo-Saxon everyday itself. While Highmore is speaking specifically in regards to modernity and its effects on daily experience, his reflections are particularly useful for a discussion of Anglo-Saxon healing. Highmore explains that “the everyday offers itself up as a problem, a contradiction, a paradox: both ordinary and extraordinary, self-evident and opaque, known and unknown, obvious and enigmatic” (16). The Anglo-Saxon everyday had the same kinds of contradictory elements. It was both familiar and

unfamiliar, miraculous and normal. There is a tendency when studying Anglo-Saxon daily life to romanticize those instances when magic became involved. We need to recognize that magic was an elemental part of Anglo-Saxon faith and an integral component of day-to-day life, just as eating and sleeping were. Any culture in any given moment has elements of the extraordinary present in daily activities, and the Anglo-Saxons are no exception. To identify magic as a singular and strange beast that operated in the realm of some kind of charming fantasy is to distort and disrespect Anglo-Saxon experience. The non-everyday is found in the everyday things we all do, including eating, believing and healing. The Anglo-Saxon everyday just happened to consist of an interesting combination of magic and Christian prayer. England was in a process of conversion and in the seventh century Germanic hierarchical structures were dissipating with increasing speed. Despite this erasure at the political level, Scandinavian folk practices were still operative at the level of the everyday. According to Jolly, “The animistic character of Germanic belief prior to Christianization, with its emphasis on nature, holistic cures, and worship at wells, trees and stones, meant that it was hard to counteract on an institutional level of organized religion” (45). She explains that people were still wearing amulets and worshipping at what were considered to be “pagan” religious sites. Germanic and Christian beliefs thus synthesized at the local level, creating an environment of interaction between two diametrically opposed faiths. Jolly argues that it is the “mixture of traditional herbs and Christian symbols (the cross, holy water, and prayers) found in the charm remedies [that] indicates a collaboration between the domestic and the religious spheres, between the laity and the local priests” (45).

Godfrid Storms explores the magical practices and folk beliefs that contributed to this interesting intersection of spiritualities. He explains that the Anglo-Saxons borrowed their magical knowledge from a variety of sources, including Greek, Irish, Hebrew and Latin (1). Although his book *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, published in 1976, is dated and a bit conservative at times, Storms has done a great deal of analytic research that helped increase the momentum of studies in this area. Some of his more useful reflections include his attention to how the medical texts are based on the ideas of magic power, symbolic representations, and homoeopathic and contagious magic (6). He argues, however, that everything else involved in the ritual act, that is, the reference to special colours, use of iron, administering of drinks, chanting and so on, are secondary or accidental (6, 36-37). While I disagree with this secondary assertion, his explanation of the way in which the Anglo-Saxons practiced medicine is worth exploring. Storms makes use of Frazer's "laws of thought" in order to articulate the two primary kinds of magic found in the Anglo-Saxon remedies. Frazer identifies these laws as follows:

First, that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and, second that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact severed. The former principle may be called the Law of Similarity, the Latter of Contact or Contagion. From the first of these principles, namely the Law of Similarity, the magician infers that he can produce any effect that he desires merely by imitating it: from the second he infers that whatever he does to a material object will affect equally the person with whom the object was once in contact, whether it formed part of his body or not. Charms based on the Law of Similarity may be called Homeopathic or Imitative Magic. Charms based on the Law of Contact or Contagion may be called Contagious Magic (qtd. in Storms 40).

Storms rightfully points out how this analysis does not account for the entire ritual or its context. There is no consideration, for example, of time, place, fasting, oral chanting and

so on. This said, Frazer's detailed account is a useful way of thinking about magic as we enter a more intimate conversation with these texts. Storms also suggests that the magical act is an inherently powerful one bound up with the idea of the Old English *cræft*, which translates as power, strength, skill, cunning, knowledge, remedy, prescription and force (37). This word encapsulates the ways in which the Anglo-Saxon healing arts functioned. Healing was a tool that needed to be learned, one that required wisdom, patience and foresight to wield. Becoming a healer or learning a particular remedy was in many ways like becoming an apprentice, similar to a carpenter. This was, until very recently in human history, the way anyone learned to do anything: he or she found a person who knew how to do the desired skill and learned from them. *Cræft* carries the connotations of needing both the practical hands-on skills and also the craft-of-mind, the intelligence to complete the remedy. *Cræft* is also creative and spiritual. In a world full of chance and in an unpredictable environment that could not be tamed, the Anglo-Saxons employed *cræft* to create a space where humans and nature could co-exist and interact on more intimate level. The Old English word to describe the idea of a fixed fate is *wyrd*, which essentially means "to shape." It is derived from the past participle of the verb *weorþan*, "to become," and therefore means "what has already happened" and, by extension, "what has happened, a course of events," and from that to "what cannot be changed" and "what was destined to happen." Susanne Weil, who has studied *wyrd* and free will in *Beowulf*, also identifies the use of the term *gescipe*, meaning "that which is shaped" or "destiny." She points out that the verb *sceppen* means "to destine" and that a word frequently used for the Lord in Anglo-Saxon texts is *Sceppend* which translates to "Shaper." According to

Weil, the “motif of *wyrd* as the implacable arbiter of men’s struggles resounds throughout the Anglo-Saxon canon like a perpetual minor chord...the singers of the canon were always aware that the events of their lives had been ‘shaped’ by a force (or forces) beyond their control” (94). Although some scholars, like Storms, have argued that magic is solely a way of exercising power over nature, over forces like *wyrd*, I suggest that magic is more involved with the unification of these forces with human beings. Magic rituals and remedies offered a venue for active participation with the natural world and gave the Anglo-Saxons a certain degree of authority in their own lives. Rather than being simply spoken to by *wyrd* or a god-figure, they could speak back and engage fate in an open dialogue, into potential negotiations. In *Beowulf*, *wyrd* often spares those who are not doomed if their courage is maintained. A person therefore enters *wyrd* on the level of what they do, anyway. Magic was thus a positive force intended to heal and provide opportunity, rather than to negate or cause people pain and illness. Although “dark magic” existed, it would likely have been used for specific circumstances like lessening the skills of a rival or altering someone’s emotions (Meaney 25). The Anglo-Saxon prescription-remedies are thus born out of an environment that is invested in both folk values and Christianity, polytheism and monotheism.

The most remarkable part of these texts is the ability for these two different worldviews to co-exist and interact with one another peacefully. The Germanic people quite readily accepted Christianity, and for some time synthesized both faiths into a unique blend of folk-Christianity. Although monotheism eventually become dominant, it is this period of cross-over and intersection that demonstrates the possibilities of

alternative spiritualities and the fluidity of belief. The contemporary world has a tendency to box people into categories based on faith alone: Christian, Muslim, Jewish, the list could continue for pages without any consideration of a Christian-Muslim or a Jewish-Christian. This kind of hybrid identity simply cannot exist in the binary-obsessed environment in which we find ourselves. The Anglo-Saxon healing texts alternatively suggest that authentic healing comes through exploration and expansion of these limited categories. Because these texts resist categorization, I will refrain from using the word “pagan” to identify Germanic and Scandinavian folk-beliefs. This signifier creates the opportunity for “Christianity” to be juxtaposed with “Paganism” in a way that is both troubling and inaccurate. The term “paganism” also carries connotations and presumptions that are ignorant, incorrect and offensive to a spirituality that was just as authentic as that of the Christian faith. As my analysis will demonstrate, both of these spiritual frameworks are genuine expressions of belief that cannot be indefinitely separated as their discourses bled into one another.

Wið ymbe is the first text to be analyzed through the framework of spirituality. This prescription-remedy contains strong ritualistic qualities, specifically the action of throwing dirt and speaking afterwards. This movement, which works in conjunction with the verbal supplication, occurs twice in the bee charm. While this text might seem very practical and thus removed from the context of magic and religion, this is far from the case. According to Storms, “magic is principally a practical concern, the magician cannot do without a ritual, and so we may say that ritual is an integral part of magic...the threefold purpose of the magic ritual, [is] getting hold of the power, transmitting it to the

spot where it is required and utilising it” (40-41). The person working this charm would therefore have been focused on providing supplication to the bees through the ritualistic act of moving and speaking. Through these actions a magical energy would inspire the bees to congregate into a swarm for easier catching. After the flight of a new queen, bees often land in a swarm and build a hive, so the first person to get there might encourage them to stay rather than fly somewhere else, which they might also do after resting. It is important to remember that ritual, in an Anglo-Saxon context, was an integral part of spirituality and belief. According to Jolly, “Ritual actions can be read as ‘texts’ with just as much meaning as printed words. The popular mind ‘thinks with things’ (ritual actions, objects, icons) rather than abstract constructs, and this kind of material thinking can lead to just as much internalization of ideas as being able to explain them in conceptual terms” (23). She goes on to explain how illiteracy is often associated with a lack of critical and abstract thinking and a belief in the “superstitious.” Jolly refutes this elitist notion and argues that Anglo-Saxon thinking does not block authentic religious experience. The idea of ritual as text disrupts our contemporary framework of scholarly analysis. While we are accustomed to studying movies, comic strips and photographs as texts, it is not often we study entire rituals as such. The ritual is a multifaceted medium that involves visuals, oral incantations, movement and touch, unlike the purely visual element of a book. The ritualistic text is operative on a number of different levels, making it difficult to assess and study. Jolly’s idea also opens up new opportunities to see the book in a different framework: If rituals can be read as texts, can traditional texts be read as an exercise in ritual? Are books only visual in nature? One could study the contexts in which novels are

read out loud, either privately or in group settings, and analyze the importance of this ritual. What, for example, do books mean when they are read verbally in different contexts, to children, to the sick and healing in hospitals, to the elderly, to ourselves? Is there any contemporary relationship between text, ritual and healing?

While we have explored *Wið ymbe* as a ritual that participates in folk beliefs, to what extent does it also engage with Christian spirituality? Bees have had a historically close relationship to Christianity from very early on in the church's foundations. Austin E. Fife explains that "the bee emerged among Christians as a symbol of the soul, since the life of the hive became a model of the ideal Christian society, and since beeswax served for centuries as the only substance worthy of the candles that were burned before Christian altars and images of the Saints" (154). While the Anglo-Saxon bee charm does not specifically evoke Christ, subsequent charms involving bees call on the Lord with frequency. Fife suggests that all bee charms likely have pre-Christian origins and were altered and adapted by those involved with the church during the time of conversion (156-157). Rather than addressing the bee as *sigewif*, these later texts summoned the insect in the name of the Holy Trinity, that is, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost (Fife 154). Therefore, while this text does not contain explicit references to Christian doctrine its formula was adopted by the church, demonstrating the way in which Scandinavian folk-beliefs were not diametrically opposed to Christian faith. The contents of this bee charm were respected enough to be incorporated into a Christian framework, ritual and all.

This ability to adopt Germanic practice so freely, speaks to the close relationship between folk magic and religion, both of which share the act of ritual. Many spiritual experiences that occur in the Church, like the Eucharist, are magical in quality, while magic practices like we have seen in the “Lay of the Nine Herbs” are imbued with spiritual value. The lines between religion and magic are thus blurry, and because the physical rituals themselves are so similar in nature, labels of “Christian” and “Germanic” are determined by context alone. Fife suggests that the context of *Wid ymbe* has been misdiagnosed by scholars and that this text is, in fact, a charm against witchcraft rather than a swarm charm. He draws attention to the strangeness of the request “against injury and against vacant mindedness, / and against the great tongue of man” and questions the relevance of this statement to the gathering of bees. Fife argues that the prose introduction and first four lines are concerned with dark magic, and that the title was likely displaced. With these parts of the text excluded, the charm is simply a secularized version of Christian swarm charms (Fife 157). Although this analysis is intriguing, I refute the idea that the inclusion of this request is out of place and automatically indicates that this text is about witchcraft. Honey could be viewed as a substance that prevents these kinds of ill fortunes because it keeps men happy and healthy and thus defers conflict among them. While I disagree with this particular conclusion, Fife’s research demonstrates the many ways in which the Anglo-Saxon medical texts can be interpreted. Depending on how one reads the context in which the passage is found, in this case, whether or not the introduction and first four lines belong, alters the reading of the remedy. There are thus a multitude of possibilities for different analyses within each text.

Direction is also an important component of Anglo-Saxon medicine and Christian healing practices. The fact that the speaker of the charm throws dirt “over thy right hand [and] and under thy right foot” is significant. The left side has been associated with ill fortune for centuries. The Romans, for example, believed that Vesta turned to the left when announcing unfavourable divinations and also that the ‘evil genius’ occupied the left. In the classical period the left hand was also associated with theft (Bonser 224). In a specifically Christian context, the Devil is associated with hovering over the left shoulder (Bateson 241-242). Some people still practice the ritual of throwing salt over their left shoulder after it is accidentally spilled in order to keep evil forces away. The colloquialism “over the left shoulder” is also still used in a contemporary context to indicate disbelief, negation or insincerity (Webster’s Dictionary). According to Storms, the Anglo-Saxons associated the left side with dark magic: “In white magic the magician turns about with the course of the sun because he needs its favourable influence, but in black magic the evil-doer stresses his rebellion against, and his independence of the sun-god by turning about against the normal course of the sun, that is, the left, by doing things with his left hand” (90-91). The right hand, by contrast, is associated with all things holy, Jesus being the right hand of God. The fact that pre-Christian people and Christians both put faith in these directional associations demonstrates how these two different religions shared similar beliefs. In the bee charm, the healer grabs earth from the ground and specifically gives precedence to the right side before speaking his request. Because positive associations with the right and negative associations with the left have been subscribed to prior to Christianity, it is difficult to say the exact connotations it carries in this text. It is

obvious, however, that it provided some sort of positive and physical reinforcement of the verbal supplication offered by the charmer. According to Storms, “The action of throwing up earth by the right hand and catching it under the right foot is not an ordinary one, and it is entirely magical. It is intensified by the words that accompany it” (134). Storms argues that the use of the word *funde* implies that the healer strove for this earth, and that the ritual action of throwing it with the right hand under the right foot imbues it with magical power: “The words explicitly state that the action is not accidental but intentional, and that the power resulting from it is not to be ignored” (135).

Storms also points out the significance of addressing the bees as *sigewif*, victorious women, explaining that the Anglo-Saxons believed that spirits lived inside bees and that they needed to be treated with equal respect. In many ways they were like a deity on earth that just so happened to have the body of an insect. Bees have long been thought to have more intelligence than other animals, and the close relationship that the Anglo-Saxon had with this creature is demonstrative of their close spiritual connection with the natural world. In the final lines of the text the speaker asks the bees to behave like mankind, calling them to be thoughtful of their value to Anglo-Saxon livelihood, that is, food and estate (Storms 134-135). The fact that the charmer calls for protection from injury, vacant-mindedness and the large tongue of man, also indicates that this text has magical value. Magic remedies were not often used for physical dangers like wild animals or foes, and were most often evoked for intangible hazards (Storms 136). By way of conclusion, *Wid ymbe* participates the most in Germanic folk beliefs out of the three texts undergoing analysis in this project. The “Lay of the Nine Herbs” has far more

overlap in terms of Scandinavian and Christian values. In addition to being the most lengthy text, it is also most spiritually complex.

The “Lay of the Nine” is intriguing because of its invocation of Woden, also known as Odin, “the father of all...the director of battle” (Dunn xv). As one of the leading Scandinavian gods he commanded the valkyries who chose whom was to be killed in battle. He was also believed to know the past, present and future as the god of knowledge (Dun xvi). Most English kings claimed that Woden was their ancestor in traditional dynastic fashion and remnants of his cult can still be found in England in the form of village names such as Woodnesborough in Kent and Wormshill near Sittingbourne (Stenton 100). Woden’s name is also preserved in the day of the week, Wednesday. The god Tyr corresponds with Tuesday, Thor (Woden’s son, god of thunder) with Thursday and Friga with Friday (Jolly 28, Dunn xvi). The Anglo-Saxons also worshipped the sun and the moon, in addition to other spirits that were believed to reside in trees, wells and stones (Storms 6, Jolly 28). J.H.G Grattan and Charles Singer offensively argue in *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine* that the Scandinavian deities are stripped of their unique attributes in English contexts, citing the *Lacnunga* as an example of this occurrence: “Woden has no Valhalla and is no All-Father, but rather a noisy supernatural warrior” (57-58). While the names of the folk gods only appear a select amount of times in the prescription-remedies, their personalities are far from removed. Although Christianity was quickly gaining popularity, the Germanic gods and the meanings attached to them did not simply dissipate. This was a period of overlap, and the converging of Christian spirituality and Scandinavian beliefs did not immediately lessen

the importance of a figure like Woden. The “Lay of the Nine Herbs” is rather an exercise in what Jolly refers to as “Germanic-Christian synthesis” (28). She explains that language is one site where this kind of synthesis can be witnessed: “The personal and reciprocal relationship between a lord and his vassal in Germanic society became a model for the personal relationship between God and a believer, who was frequently portrayed as a warrior for God” (28). Jolly identifies the word *hlaford* as the precursor to the modern term “lord.” *Hlaford* translates to mean “bread-source” and reflects the relationship between the Germanic lord as the provider of life and his devoted retainers. This concept was easily transferred to the Christian notion of Jesus as the Lord, who was the source of life through his body, represented through bread. Christ’s disciples are also depicted as thanes, the Anglo-Saxon warrior-like aristocracy (Jolly 28-29). In the “Lay of the Nine Herbs” the herbs themselves take on the qualities of faithful retainers. Storms draws attention to how each herb has its own stanza where its value, might and amazing feats are described (193-194). Each herb is figured as a loyal and competent thane of their lord Woden:

Una you are named, eldest of herbs. / Thou [are] mighty against three and against thirty, / thou [are] mighty against poison and against flying venoms / thou [are] mighty against [the] loathed that travel through [the] land / And thou waybroad, herbal mother...Over thee chariots creaked, over thee queens rode, / Over thee brides called out, over thee bulls breathed hard. / Thou withstood all this, and withstand ; / So thou withstood venom and flying poison / and [the] enemy that travels through the land.

The relationship between the herbs and Woden is thus similar to the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. Woden’s personal history also parallels Christ’s. Both figures were crucified on the wood of a tree, and it is for this reason that the Germanic people

considered the oak tree to be holy. While Christ gave Christians the Gospel, Woden was believed to be the spiritual father of the Germanic charms. The knowledge of inscribing and reading of runes was also attributed to Woden (Storms 43, 33). In the following passage from a poem entitled “Sayings of the High One” Woden describes his crucifixion experience and explains how he acquired great wisdom:

Odin said: I know that I hung on a high windy tree / for nine long nights; / I had a spear wound- that was Odin’s work- / I struck myself. / No one can tell about that tree, from what deep root it rises. / They brought me no bread, no horn to drink from, / I gazed toward the ground. / Crying aloud, I caught the runes; / finally I fell. / Nine mighty songs learned from the son / of Bolthorn, Bestia’s father, / and I came to drink of that costly mead / the holy vessel held. / Thus I learned the secret lore, / prospered and waxed in wisdom; / I won words from the words I sought, / verses multiplied where I sought the verse. / You will find runes and read staves rightly, / the strong magic, / the mighty spells / that the sage set down, / that the great gods made, / wisdom of Odin (Terry 34).

Woden essentially sacrifices himself for his people, for the knowledge of the runes.

Storms emphasizes how this narrative proves that the Germanic deities were just as subject to magical forces as humans were (33). Woden is able to discover unlimited knowledge only through spiritual sacrifice and a magical ritual involving the drinking of mead from a holy vessel.

In the “Lay of the Nine Herbs” Woden is fulfilling a very specific function. The prescription-remedy explicitly states that “[A] worm came slithering, he slit open a man; / Then Woden took nine glorytwigs, / Then smote the adder, that it flew in nine [pieces]. / There apple and poison (the crabapple) ended [it].” Woden thus enters the charm as the saviour of humankind. He joins his loyal retainers against the attack of the hostile snake and its venomous poison and flying infections. The “glorytwigs” referred to are nine wooden twigs from the sacred oak tree with the runes of the plant names inscribed into

them (Storms 195). With these blessed objects, Woden attacks the threatening animal. The serpent or *wyrm* is of particular symbol importance both in Germanic folk belief and Christian spirituality. The Anglo-Saxons also used the term *dracon*, meaning “dragon,” to refer to animals of the serpent variety. The *wyrm* and *dracon* were associated with intangible spiritual illness, the cause of which was often mysterious. Tapeworms, a result of poor sanitation, were known to cause a number of health problems. Anglo-Saxon medical texts are full of references to worms and the attempts to dispel them from the body (Jolly 129-180). The presence of the worm in both the physical world and the Anglo-Saxon consciousness made it easily absorbable by the Christian faith. As Jolly explains, “Because they [worms] were part of popular folklife and because they involved unseen powers, they required appeals to spiritual power through rituals. These Germanic afflictions by their very nature, then, are the most subject to Christianization” (130). When we think of the worm as a *dracon*, a reptile-like serpent, images of the Garden of Eden, temptation and the falling of man are immediately evoked. Like the Germanic *wyrm*, the Christian serpent and Devil are associated with similar invisible powers that negatively affect people’s mental and spiritual health (Jolly 129). The inclusion of the crabapple in this text is also important. In Germanic folk belief the crabtree contained mythical properties that could be utilized against infection (Storms 43). In comparison, Christians associated the apple with the poisonous sin that Eve encouraged Adam to commit. The fact that Woden carries *nine* glorytwigs is also significant because this number was considered to be imbued with spiritual power. Recall that it was “for nine

long nights” that Woden was hung from a tree and “nine mighty songs” learned after this experience (Terry 34).

While Woden is the first deity included in the charm, it is Christ who gets the final word. Only a few lines after Woden’s appearance, the Christian god appears: “Chervil and fennel, two very mighty, / these herbs [the] wise Lord created, / Holy in heaven, when he hung. / [He] established and sent [them] into seven worlds, / [For a] remedy for all unlucky and blessed.” Storms explains that the last three herbs have likely been altered by a Christian reviser. The crabapple is likely original, but is only discussed for a few lines and the last two herbs have been removed and replaced by chervil and fennel, which were imported plants. Storms claims that the reviser who altered this section of the text was aware of the value of each herb’s narrative and “invented a Christian legend that they were specially created by the Lord as He hung on the cross, so that the parallel is there again, though the atmosphere is different: they are not powerful by virtue of their own but because they were created at a specific moment by Christ, at that very moment namely when He earned God’s favour and grace for all men” (195).

While these kinds of alterations and revisions were intended to instil a particular Christian belief system, it should be stressed that they were not done in extraordinary malice or with an aggressive plan to convert. The Germanic religion offered as much to Christianity as Christianity offered to folk beliefs, and there was not some sort of aggressive authoritarian church forcing itself onto the Germanic people, who rather embraced new ideas with an open mind. While it is easy to romanticize the “colonization” of the Scandinavian faith by the Western, an overly dramatic history

simply does not exist and it is the nuanced overlap that makes this conversion process such an important one. Jolly draws attention to the presence of Germanic spear imagery and the references to combat and retainers that permeate the text, integrating with Christian elements in an unusual synthesis. She argues that the “inclusion of Christ in a parallel function to Woden, as sympathetic magic and an appeal to a past event of power, demonstrates an awareness of a shift in the scheme of power toward a Christian orientation” (128). While I thoroughly support Jolly’s work and agree with most of her analyses, she goes on to argue that the “Lay of the Nine Herbs” is more of a “highly conservative folklore” than pagan in any sort of religious sense (128). I refute this idea and do not see why this prescription-remedy cannot be read as a Germanic spiritual text. This is not to say that folklore does not play an integral part, but rather that it is possible for religion and mythology to exist side by side.

Speaking of conversion and this interesting intersection of faiths, it is important to acknowledge the integral part Christianity played in recording and documenting Scandinavian folk beliefs. These texts are more than remedies and a simple display of Christian and Germanic spiritual overlap; they are our only record of the Germanic religion at all. As Storms articulates, “In most cases such pagan customs have been partly Christianised, which is a cause of thankfulness as well as regret, for it is pretty certain that without the Christianisation that they would have hardly been written down” (7). A fascinating “double-edged sword,” so to speak, therefore exists. If it were not for the attempt to convert, there would be no texts for us to engage with and no sense of what was. While Christianity might have inserted itself into this culture, and written over it,

there would be no extant Germanic prescription-remedies if it were not for this process. This is a particularly compelling historical moment for scholars, because we can *only* study the overlap and have no record of the beginning. Academically, we need to start in the middle, that is, during conversion. The puzzle of what was Germanic religion cannot be completed with any accuracy and will never be known. This is unsettling for some academics, in a profession where it is our job “to know.” A study of Anglo-Saxon medicine thus disrupts not only our singular ideas of what a religion can and should be, but also our scholarly methodology. These texts force us to take new approaches because they refuse our traditional paradigms. They show us that there is value in studying *only* the middle and that meaning can be discovered in places where some of the pieces are missing.

To complete a discussion of the “Lay of the Nine” it is important to analyze other spiritual components of the text that do not directly involve religious figure-heads, that is, Woden and Christ. Grattan and Singer identify a number of foreign elements in this text that have been borrowed from other magical and medical traditions. While I earlier criticized Grattan and Singer for their offensive depiction of Woden, there is still value in their work. Because there has not been a great deal of research in this area it is necessary to refer to older sources that sometimes border on the conservative and anthropological. If we are to make use of the important research Grattan and Singer have completed, we need to do so comparatively with attention to its historical context and misinterpretations. The lack of critical engagement with Anglo-Saxon remedies speaks to the urgency with which they are in need of scholarly attention. It would be shameful if the study of Anglo-

Saxon culture solely became an exercise in “*Beowulf* studies.” Without undermining the immense historical and cultural value inherent in *Beowulf*, it is necessary for scholars to begin studying those Old English corners and crevices that are in need of research. With these considerations in mind, Grattan and Singer argue that the “Lay of the Nine Herbs” contains traces of Roman folk-beliefs, in addition to the Anglo-Saxon. The lines “He [the Lord] established and sent [them] into seven worlds, / [For a] remedy for all unlucky and blessed” reflects the Roman notion that every herb provides its own specific remedy. This idea may have been developed by Pliny, who wrote that “Nothing...has been created by Nature without some purpose to fulfill” (qtd. in Grattan & Singer 54-55). Grattan and Singer explain that this Roman belief would have been attractive and easy to adapt to a Christian context. The “seven worlds,” which refers to the seven spheres of heaven, also explicitly references classical astronomy (Grattan & Singer 54-55). These cultural echoes of the Roman belief-system are significant because they demonstrate the way in which faith builds on faith. Most ideas are not simply born from some kind of cultural vacuum that is separate from preconceived notions of spirituality. This prescription-remedy thus demonstrates that spirituality is dialogical, that is, that it communicates with other belief systems, both past and present. The relationship between different religions is rarely straightforward; acceptance is more complicated than one might think and intolerance and condemnation are not simple. Also, religious faiths do not simply “borrow” tropes and narratives from past and existing religions. To “borrow” implies that the thing or idea being lent only exists for the person borrowing, and also that it will eventually be returned. There is rather an ideological conversation that occurs before idea-adoption and

integration can begin. In relation to the “Lay of the Nine Herbs” specifically, Grattan and Singer explain that “[t]his charm was peculiarly persistent and widespread...Jacob Grimm demonstrated it in Norwegian, Swedish, Scottish, and Danish folk-lore, with the personal names tending to change from Pagan to Christian. It has been recorded in Gaelic and there is a similar charm in Sanskrit *Artharva Veda*” (53). In the Latin versions of this text, Mercury takes the place of Woden and wields a wand with serpents carved into it that is responsible for casting lots (Grattan & Singer 53-54). While conversion experiences can be wrought with hierarchical relationships and forced devotion, and although religion has been the instigator of many unnecessary wars and deaths, spirituality also has a history of peaceful sharing. This prescription-remedy demonstrates that religious beliefs have, and continue to be, adopted and shared by people from different faiths. In a contemporary climate, where we are bombarded with negative information it is important to first acknowledge and then remember that spirituality has, and always will be, fluid. This is the first step towards moving away from mere tolerance of one another and toward a more nuanced acceptance of our spiritual lives. This is also the first step towards complete acceptance of those who do not subscribe to an “accepted” set of religious belief-systems.

The final text for analysis through the lens of “magic and prayer” is, once again, the leechdom against temptation. As previously discussed, this text is intended to prevent seduction of the Devil and also mental dislocation. In addition to aiding against these problems, it was also believed to cure elf-trick and typhus. The text is thus working on two different levels: the spiritual and physical. The charm promises to ward off moral

temptation and intangible dangers, and also corporeal diseases and entities, demonstrating that the Anglo-Saxons believed in an intimate connection between the physical body and one's spiritual self. The physical Christian Devil, in particular, was believed to have a close relationship with a person's spiritual demons. Jolly further explains that temptation, which seems to be a predominantly spiritual or moral ailment from a modern perspective, is treated with a combination of natural and spiritual components. She emphasizes, however, that "the early medieval Christians this manuscript represents did not see the two as separate. Just as they tended to see spiritual power in natural objects, they saw natural objects as capable of influence in spiritual matters. Christian ritual thus easily accommodated folklore in this set of remedies" (156). The presence of Christian and Germanic beliefs in this text consequently makes it a useful site for exploring the ways in which both of these faiths communicated with one another.

Before analyzing the overlap and dialogue between the two, I will first identify exactly what Christian and Scandinavian elements are operative here. The enemy-Devil or "fiend" is the first most identifiable Christian figure of the text. He was believed to be the embodiment of evil and was thought to work both invisibly and visibly in a way similar to God and his repertoire of angels. While he could not control nature, as this was strictly within God's jurisdiction, he manipulated people through delusions. The Devil was also believed to cure only those ailments that he personally inflicted, with the hopes of taking souls upon healing. The church condemned the practice of folk magic because of its associations with evil, and by extension "the fiend" (Jolly 86). This is significant in light of the fact that this leechdom was considered acceptable despite its "magical" and

ritualistic elements. To a modern reader, Christianity and the presence of incantations and elves are in harsh opposition to one another but this was far from the case in Anglo-Saxon England. As M.L Cameron argues, in his book *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, “it was not magic *per se* which was forbidden, it was *pagan magic*” (emphasis his, 158). Cameron goes on to cite the *Poenitentiale Ecgberti*, which explicitly states that it is only folk magic that is condemned: “Truly it is not permitted for any Christian person that he practice idle divination...nor the gathering of herbs with no charm except with the Paternoster and Creed, or with some prayer which belongs to God” (158). Felix Grendon reflects in his essay “The Anglo-Saxon Charms” that while

[t]he Church might refuse to sanction incantatory practices... it could not eradicate them while its own servants believed in fiends and evil spirits. Priests did not at all question the existence of the heathen gods: they merely denied their divinity, and ranked them as demons. Nor were there many to dispute the power of these demons or the efficacy of superstitious remedies. Therefore Pagan charms had to be met by Christian charms; and wherever heathen names of deities were used, authorized canonical names had to be substituted (144).

The leechdom against temptation therefore does not deny the existence of elves, but rather acknowledges the presence of the Christian Devil in an attempt to balance folk and Christian beliefs in a way that did not undermine church authority. The references to Christian mass and Holy water are also ways of inserting Christian ritual into traditionally Germanic folk-rites. Singing mass over the necessary ingredients and using Holy water to prepare the food made the practice of folk magic completely justifiable and acceptable in a Christian context. Grendon’s argument also explains the dominant presence of Christ in the “Lay of the Nine Herbs.” While Christ did not replace Woden entirely, he was the last figure to appear and speak in this recipe.

The predominant Germanic folk figure in this text is the elf and his ability to make people ill with “elf-trick.” The Anglo-Saxons believed that elves were a petite people that preferred living in places of waste and refuge. They were thought to shoot persons walking by with their dangerous arrows, although they preferred domestic animals, explaining why there are numerous recipes that address how to cure horses that have been shot by elves (Bonser 159-160). Despite their ill deeds, Storms insists that they were also believed to help people and provide favours on occasion. The word *ælfsciene*, for example, translates to “bright as an elf” and many names in Old English such as *Ælfred* and *Ælfric* indicate that they were not purely evil creatures (Storms 51). Jolly also emphasizes that while *Beowulf* categorizes the elf with other monstrous creatures, a number of suffixes and prefixes indicate that the word *ælf* was associated with positive aspects of nature. She lists the following compounds as indicative of this: sea-elf, down-elf, wood-elf and field-elf (Jolly 133-134). Bonser further explains that the *ælf* figure does not have a fixed gender identity, although it is usually male. While some Anglo-Saxon prescription-recipes address warding against elves, elf disease or even water elf disease, this leechdom was intended to specifically aid “elf-shot.” Elf-shot was believed to occur when the elf’s arrow actually pierced skin and entered the body of the victim (Bonser 162).

This text against temptation magnificently combines the satanic Devil figure with that of the elf. Not only do the two compliment one another, they merge together creating an entirely new entity that is simultaneously both Germanic and Christian. These two forces, although different, were both external and unseen. They tried to provoke injury

and ill fortune using similar methods. The fact that most elf disease remedies are closely related to madness, demon possession and metal ailments is no coincidence (Jolly 135). As Bonser explains, “the heathen and the Christian causes are classed together and therefore curable by the same charm” (Bonser 163). Even the language of this leechdom works to blur the lines between the Devil and the elf. The use of the term “fiend” is relatively general, and while it is implied through reference to Christian symbolism that the term is referring to the Devil, it can easily be read as a signifier for the elf. Towards the end of the first section we are told that “[t]his salve / is good against every temptation of the fiend, and [for] / elf-trick and for Lent disease,” which officially determines for those unsure readers and listeners that the devilish fiend and elf are separate beings. It is entirely ambiguous up until this moment, however, and despite this interjection by the church, the word “fiend” is still ambivalent. The meek attempt to separate the two was simply a matter of church logistics and the necessity of making this kind of ritualistic practice acceptable. As Jolly eloquently articulates,

Amoral creatures such as elves were gradually “demonized” to fit into the Good-Evil paradigm of the Christian moral universe. This process enhanced their similarity to demons. Their invisibility, their malicious attacks, and the need to ‘charm’ them away all took on new meaning in Christian eyes so that elves began to resemble the fallen angels who seek to inflict internal and permanent harm on humans and their works, demons for Christian ritual to exorcise (136).

The idea of exorcism and the expelling of evil forces are present in this leechdom. The final and most aggressive remedy against temptation involves an emetic that was used to instil vomiting and the ejection of illness.

In addition to synthesizing the figure of the Devil and elf together this text also contains a combination of the use of Holy water and regular water. The healer is

instructed to “take a tub full of cold water, drop thrice into it some of the drink [which contains Holy water]. Bathe the man in the water.” When we take into consideration that water was considered to be the least valuable liquid and was associated with the poor, Holy water takes on new connotations. This passage unifies Christian water with the Germanic, lending it and the patient bathed in the substance a sense of sacredness and spiritual cleansing.

Lastly, the leechdom against temptation also implicitly evokes Woden and his nine night long crucifixion. In the section of the text that describes the Christian mass over an altar, the number nine is used: “Lay them [the herbs] under the altar, / Sing nine masses over them.” This religious ritual is therefore not only Christian but also Germanic in tone and content. Although the mass immediately conjures images of Christ, Woden is equally present in this moment because of the reference to his sacred number, combining the two figure heads into a unique amalgamation. The leechdom against temptation therefore speaks to the way in which Anglo-Saxon texts, and beliefs, were flexible. While the Germanic people did not want their faith disrespected, there was also a lack of clear and defined rules as to what was an acceptable addition or inclusion. The lack of binary categories created an environment in which two different religions could come together in a non-violent way. Rather than an authoritarian imposition of Christian faith, there was compromise and dialogue. We also need to keep in mind that while Scandinavians adopted Christian ideals, the Germanic religion also had a huge impact on the ways Christians believed. Jolly explains that “[e]arly medieval conceptions of demons reflected not only Christian ideas of evil but also Germanic views of spiritual agency, in art and

story...Numerous illustrations...show demons, often with arrows attacking people or with pitchforks prodding folks into hell, represented in a uniquely Anglo-Saxon way by a monstrous dragon mouth” (136-137).

This kind of religious overlap is both interesting and useful for consideration in a contemporary context. While I am not suggesting that people renounce their faith or make room for inclusions of beliefs they are not comfortable with, there is something to be learned from this kind of spiritual flexibility. Being open to new ideas and different ways of believing is important to both tolerance and complete acceptance of one another’s religious ideologies. We need to exercise our minds to be flexible, in a way similar to how we prepare our bodies to be less rigid. The definition of “flexible,” according to the dictionary, is first and foremost “capable of bending easily without breaking” (*New Oxford American Dictionary*). It is therefore possible to be versatile and listen to ideas out of our comfort zones without “breaking” our own belief systems. The Anglo-Saxon prescription-remedies demonstrate that there is room for this kind of elastic environment in the contemporary world.

Chapter Three
Medicine and Death: Approaches Involving Healing and Passing

The third and final perspective through which I will analyze these texts is that of healing and dying. These prescription-remedies are an important site of ideas about life and death. They are focused on healing the wounds of the living, while appealing to those forces that were believed to attend to those who had passed. Before engaging in a close reading of these remedies I will first provide a brief synopsis of Anglo-Saxon medical practices for the purpose of context. It is difficult to understand the climate of Anglo-Saxon healing because it is so different from a twenty-first century Western context. We take for granted many of the remedies, drugs and health services that North Americans have daily access to. Failing eyesight can be easily corrected by contact lenses or glasses, toothaches can be resolved with one painless visit to a dentist and small cuts are relieved with antibacterial ointments that prevent larger infections (Bonser 6). In the contemporary Western world, we are free from the burden of working to prevent and treat illnesses that the Anglo-Saxons were forced to confront. A lack of systematised local hygiene and sanitation meant that diseases were able to thrive, grow and spread with greater frequency. Pestilence and plagues were common problems, with some epidemics wiping out large numbers of people and paralyzing the lives of entire generations (Bonser 51-53). In times of peace they were likely spread by travelling monks, and in times of war would have been shared by soldiers. According to Bonser, the Anglo-Saxon epidemics can be divided into five different periods. The first outbreaks took place in the middle of the sixth century, the second began in 664 and continued for approximately half a century, the third in the latter half of the eight century, and the

fourth and fifth were hunger pestilences that occurred during the Danish invasions and the reign of Edward the Confessor (Bonser 57-58). In order to confront these large threats, the Anglo-Saxons used prognostics and divination to determine what lay in their future. Healers studied the sky and gleaned information about what was to come from the constellations, the moon and comets. They also studied human dreams and their potential significance to events going on in a person's life (Bonser 8). Augury, which involved the interpretation of omens, was often used as a form of divination. The sounds, flight patterns and formations that certain animals participated in were thought to be indicative of future happenings. Ælfric discussed the use of auguries "from birds, or from sneezings, from horses, or from dogs" (Ælfric qtd. in Bonser 152-153). The Anglo-Saxons would also cast lots, which involved cutting twigs from trees and turning them into wands that could be used for prediction. The modern word "lot" is derived from the Old English *hlot*, which translates to "portion" or "share." It is from this Old English word that the term *hlyta* comes, which refers to a diviner who casts lots to provide predictions (Bonser 152-153). Prognostics thus had a close relationship to the Anglo-Saxon conception of *wyrd* or fate. These rituals were used to determine things like recovery time, which days a patient's body could handle blood letting, or even the sex of a unborn child. While often used to aid medical decisions, prognostics were also used to determine someone's character, decide when it would be best to travel, help access agricultural cycles and even determine how and when to catch thieves (Bonser 8). The Anglo-Saxons also used a device called the "Sphere of Apuleius" in order to predict whether or not an illness would

result in death. Peter Murray Jones, author of *Medieval Medicine in Illuminated*

Manuscripts, explains how this instrument worked:

All that is needed is a table of the alphabet, with each letter assigned a numerical value. Then for each letter of the patient's name a number can be read off, and to the total is added the day of the moon on which the patient fell sick. The final total is then divided by thirty, and the remainder is found either among the numbers signifying life, or among those signifying death. These last numbers are usually ranged round a sphere, the top half of which represents life, the bottom half, death (51-52).

The Anglo-Saxons also put faith in trees, wells, stones and fire, which they believed were capable of purifying (Bonser 136-139). Once prognosis and diagnosis of a patient's illness had taken place, the healer began preparing the remedy. Sometimes this would involve preparing a salve, creating a drink, the use of leeches or even surgery. While healers were generally skilled in a variety of different treatments, the laws of King Æthelberht of Kent indicate that there were also professional leeches that focused solely on this practice (Bonser 5). Surgery involved blood-letting, cupping and cauterization, but is mentioned only a few times in the leechbook. This is because surgery was considered to be a handicraft that could be traditionally passed from generation to generation in a way similar to an apprenticeship. Rather than recording surgical information in a book, this skill was taught practically (Bonser 98). Like spirituality as discussed in the previous chapter, medicine also had an intimate relationship with magic. Bonser explains that, "magic...was associated with most branches of medicine" and can be traced back to classical authors like Pliny (8, 7). Many illness were ascribed to intangible creatures like elves, dwarfs and evil spirits.

In his work, Bonser includes a meditation on the difficulty of studying Old English medical terminology. He argues that many of the terms used to refer to the body and illness are unclear:

The nature of the complaint and the definition of the part affected are often vague in the extreme. For instance, the word *innod* signifies merely the inside of the body...the word *hrif* is also used vaguely of the interior of the body, and it may be translated ‘belly’ or ‘womb’ according to the sex of the subject...the word *hreðer*, breast, appears to have been used metaphorically rather than anatomically...*Líc* is a general word signifying the body, or, more often, a corpse. The compound *lic-hama*, on the other hand, usually refers to the living rather than the dead body...The word *bán*, a bone, derivatives *bán-cófa* (bone repository), *bán-sele* (bone hall), and *bán-hús* (bone house), all three signifying the body, and also *bán-loca*, that in which the bones are locked or enclosed, namely the skin (10-11).

Bonser goes on to discuss a number of other signifiers that he claims are also vague and argues that “the lack of precision makes the prescription worthless” (10). While I disagree with Bonser’s conclusion, his analysis of the way Old English functions draws attention to its fluidity. What might seem like vague signifiers to a contemporary reader are actually context-specific words that operate differently depending on the situation in which they were used. These are terms that are heavily compacted and contain a great deal of information that is difficult to extract without the entire context. *Hrif*, for example, means two entirely different things depending on the sex of the individual, while *lic* can refer to both a living and dead body depending on when, where and how it is spoken. Bonser’s quickness to judge Old English for lack of clarity and his disregard of the essential role of context also demonstrates the way in which modernity demands a language that is clear, direct and extremely specific. While this specificity can be beneficial, we have a tendency to assume that it is always and absolutely necessary, and by extension, that its absence signifies “unscientific” and unworthy diagnoses.

Contemporary alternative remedies that utilize language in a way more similar to Old English—that is, which rely on context to give the word its fullest meaning—are often treated as secondary. In actuality, a word that lacks specificity has the potential to mean much more than a traditional medical signifier wed to its signified. Because language is so integral to the articulation and comprehension of disease and illness, an acknowledgement that terminology about the body can be more fluid is crucial. If we welcome this kind of context-fluidity in language, we can begin to think of our bodies and our health in more fluid and less categorized ways.

The Old English word *lic* also reveals the way in which the Anglo-Saxons viewed the human experience of living and dying, that is, as inextricably connected. Death was a daily part of Anglo-Saxon life. In addition to epidemics and fatal illness, people frequently died from fatal battle-wounds. According to Bonser, “The Anglo-Saxon period was one of continual warfare. Warfare and the devastation it caused was followed by epidemics of famine and disease” (4). Western communities in the twenty-first century do not have a direct and daily correspondence with the forces of death and the presence of grief in the same way the Anglo-Saxons did. We have a tendency to either repress thoughts of dying entirely or refuse to think about them until the situation arises, never at once considering death to be a kind of reciprocal relationship. With the constant presence of death in their lives, the Anglo-Saxons could not simply disregard their mortality. In accepting death and embracing it they were able to enjoy life to its fullest capacity. North Americans are generally afraid of death and it is this presence of morbid fear that prevents people from engaging with death as process, death as experience, death as

natural. In a world where we do not have to look at the dying everyday it is easy to ignore this process of life and create euphemisms to describe it. It is because of our fear and unwillingness to engage in dialogue with death that it shocks us and tears us down when it does occur. When death is not a part of our daily lives, when we do not have language to discuss it, it becomes a foreign entity that attacks us at inconvenient times. Allan Kellehear, author of *A Social History of Dying* explains that

Dying – as a shared set of overt social exchanges between dying individuals and those who care for them – is increasingly unrecognised in institutional settings outside hospital or health service settings in both global or domestic contexts. Public recognition, even some personal recognition of dying, has become an abstract political affair now severed from its earlier biological, psychological and interpersonal moorings...Large proportions of our dying are now commonly hidden away from our communities. We do not easily witness the massive numbers of our dying in nursing homes, in developing countries with great poverty, or in totalitarian moments in our recent history. Institutionalisation that physically removes people, narrow self-interest, competing policy priorities, or broad media uninterest often block our view. Even when we occasionally do glimpse these images, many choose to avert their gaze (253).

The Anglo-Saxon remedies demonstrate the way in which death needs to become a part of daily rhetoric in order to be fully understood and embraced. Dying is not something that should assail us when we least expect it, and rather needs to be considered a process of life, and a beautiful one at that.

While *Wid Ymbe* does not explicitly involve death or healing, both are very much ingrained in this text. As previously explained in the chapter on food and consumption, the Anglo-Saxons used honey in many of their herbal remedies. It was commonly used to aid cough and eye pain and was also mixed with ale, milk and herbs in order to induce labour and ease the birthing process (Weston 287). Honey was often used as a means of making medicinal remedies more palatable and was also a good way to preserve the

remedy once it had been concocted (Bonser 429). Because of its use as a medical agent, honey had a close relationship to Anglo-Saxon health. It not only eased people's pain but was also used to make the remedies more enjoyable. It played an important role in birth, intimately connecting it to the beginning of life. Honey was also administered to the terminally ill and dying. This substance was therefore present at birth, during daily life in the preparation of food and medicine, and also in the final moments of death. Honey occupied a unique position of being present during all three stages of a person's life and was utilized in a variety of different ways, in different circumstances. This speaks to the malleability of Anglo-Saxon contexts. The Anglo-Saxons did not limit the use of honey to one particular sphere and experimented with its properties in alternate settings. The twenty-first century tendency to categorically label substances like honey and connect them to one particular area of life, like the kitchen, limits the potential of natural remedies. Because of its special relationship to the journey of human life, honey was respected and valued immensely: "Be ye so mindful of my good, / [as] every man [is of] food and estate." Honey was so important to Anglo-Saxon nutritional and medicinal health that it was revered as much as one's food and home. The tone of supplication in this text also reveals the way in which the Anglo-Saxons tried to please bees in order to ensure that bee colonies were content, healthy and producing quality honey. This makes sense when we consider that human health was essentially dependent on bee health, once again emphasizing the close relationship the Anglo-Saxons had with the natural world. In addition to its nutritional and medicinal value, honey was also a primary form of exchange and was used to pay rents and guild fees. There was thus a kind of reciprocal

relationship that existed between bees and human beings. As Bonser explains, “The importance of bees—and of healthy bees—cannot therefore be too strongly stressed” (428).

The fact that the speaker identifies the bees as *sigewif* also reveals much about the role of women in the Anglo-Saxon healing process. In the first chapter I discussed how this reference to “victorious women” speaks to the important role women played in providing their families with nourishment. Through the lens of medicine and healing this signifier takes on slightly different connotations. Anglo-Saxon women, like bees, were “victorious” in their ability to treat horrible illnesses and wounds. Battle language is evoked here and women become warriors with spear-like stingers capable of fighting a “war against disease.” Much like this life-giving insect, women were believed to have a special ability to help sustain life. While there is little information regarding rural healers, it is safe to assume that many were female. Women have had a long historical relationship with aiding those sick and in need. Jolly explains that the “idea of women as healers arises out of the problematic evidence of condemnation of women’s magic and witchcraft; nonetheless it is highly likely that lay healers were in many cases women” (103). The fact that these medical texts have been recorded by literate monastic communities is not indicative of a lack of participation on the part of women. This, rather, speaks to the shift from healing by women and lay wisemen to clerical wisemen as medicine became more institutionalized (Jolly 103). The childbirth charms that are present in the *Lacnunga* suggest that women had complete jurisdiction over at least this element of Anglo-Saxon health (Weston 280-281). L.M.C. Weston argues that many

female remedies and charms, in addition to those involving birth, have been orally passed down, eventually making their way into medical manuscripts. She explains that,

[w]hile such empirical remedies escape their original gendered social context once they are transcribed into a manuscript, the metrical childbirth charms—indeed any remedies incorporating ritual or otherwise requiring performance—retain more of their gendered speaking voice and their connection to an oral tradition... The very presence of oral ‘texts’ in a manuscript marks them as appropriated; so does the existence of women’s texts in an otherwise male context. They are by no means pristine remains of a primary oral tradition... We can, nevertheless, hear a woman’s voice behind the words that the charms record (282).

Weston goes on to explain that these “female echoes” could have made their way into the *Lacnunga* through a variety of means and suggests that this might have been the initial result of a female scribe or double monastery. The “Lay of the Nine Herbs” is also demonstrative of the important role women played in Anglo-Saxon healing. Waybroad is depicted as the “herbal mother” of the nine herbs, while the rest are gendered as female. This speaks to the intimacy between women, nature and health. It is these female herbs which heal a number of different ailments with a warrior-like vehemence similar to the “victorious” fervour found in the bee charm. While waybroad is the natural mater figure, she also fiercely “withstood venom and flying poison / and [the] enemy that travels through the land.” Steem also “standeth against poison, she dashes away pain” while stithe “she withstands poison, / she expels wrath, casts out venom.” The text continues like this with passionate and colourful language, depicting strong female characters that fight off dangerous threats. Caring for and protecting people in a maternal way was thus not necessarily associated with passivity and could include more aggressive behaviour.

Anglo-Saxon women, by extension, were viewed as powerful in their convictions, healing with a sense of authority and purpose.

This discussion of the nine herbs brings us to a closer analysis of the “Lay of the Nine” remedy and the ways in which it participates in Anglo-Saxon medicine. This text, as previously discussed, was primarily used to protect against nine poisons and nine flying venoms. It was also intended to aid against a series of different kinds of blisters and worms, in addition to providing protection against enemies and witchcraft. Many different diseases were thought to come from poison, which was associated with snakes, reptiles and toads. While most snake-lore was imported from Southern Europe, the “occurrence of so many prescriptions against the bites of adders and other reptiles may also perhaps indicate the extent to which this country was infested by them in Anglo-Saxon times, before it was cleared and drained and cultivated” (Bonser 282). This text, in particular, demonstrates the importance of colour to Anglo-Saxon conceptions of the body and healing. After the nine herbs have been introduced, we are told that they can protect “against the red poison, against the smelling poison, / against the white poison, against the purple poison, / against the yellow poison, against the green poison, / against dark poison, against the blue poison, / against the brown poison, against the crimson poison.” Rather than simply stating that the nine herbs are powerful against all or many forms of poison, the speaker chooses to specifically identify these different colours. This is because colours were believed to contain magical power, each with its own special function (Storms 102). Red was associated with blood; plants with red roots or blossoms were often used to help stop haemorrhaging. The colour red was also believed to aid in

the expelling of demons. Yellow was thought to be connected with the liver and jaundice, and white was associated with iron deficiency and anaemia. While yellow skin was thought to be indicative of a liver problem, the colour was also used to treat liver disease in the form of a herb called yellow-wort (Bonser 218-219). Colours were also believed to be gendered, red representing males and green symbolising fertility, nature and women. Blue was also connected with a sense of femininity, but carried more spiritual connotations than green (Bonser 220). The Anglo-Saxon body was therefore colour-coded and the threats, in this case poisonous, were classified with a corresponding pigment. Apart from blood, in a contemporary context we do not associate different parts of our bodies with specific colours. While this might seem like a simplistic method of conceptualization, it is actually quite complex. With this methodology the Anglo-Saxons could connect the natural world, that is, flowers, poisons and berries, with specific parts of their bodies and the potential positive and negative effects the substance in question could have on their systems. This is comparable in the modern world to knowing that “red means dead” in a forest setting. We are encouraged not to consume any sort of foreign red berry as it is potentially dangerous. It is significant that the Anglo-Saxons used the same colours, the same language, to identify both favourable and unfavourable medical conditions. A colour like red, for example, if found in a flower could help expel a demon, but if encountered in a poison might be associated with blood-loss. The fact that it was perfectly acceptable to use the same language to describe disease and remedy suggests that the Anglo-Saxons did not view nature as a force that benevolently or maliciously acted on human beings. It was rather *wyrd* that determined how the natural

world operated and who would and would not be inflicted with illness. Comparatively, contemporary physicians reserve two different kinds of language for positive and negative health concerns. We do not have a set of descriptive terminology, like the Anglo-Saxon colour system, that bridges the gap between disease, healing and the natural world. This colour system eliminated the kind of problematic distinctions and hierarchies that exist in medical language today. More importantly, this colour categorization was accessible to everyone. Both laypersons and healers would have known the significance of the different colours and their relationship to their health and disease. This enabled all Anglo-Saxons to be able to conduct some kind of diagnosis themselves, even if they eventually needed the medical intervention of a trained healer. Storms comments that the “greatest danger from the poisons and the infections [in this text] comes from man’s ignorance, and now that he knows them he can prepare his defence and pass on to the attack, after the example of Woden” (195). The “Lay of the Nine Herbs”, in many ways, is a pedagogical tool that teaches the Anglo-Saxons about different kinds of threats and how to best protect themselves. The colour categorization is one of the tools that positioned the Anglo-Saxons in a place of knowledge about their bodies, rather than naivety. We need a system or set of language that does similar work, rather than situating *all* medical information in the realm of the hospital. Instead of printing texts like “The Idiot’s Guide” series that attempts to explain medical signifiers to a presumably stupid mass audience, we need to create a new language altogether. People are not idiots and do need a pamphlet or book that explains in “simpleton terms” how to go about understanding their own bodies. If medical language was not so exclusive in the first

place, or if there was at least an alternative set of terms that could be shared and employed by both physicians and patients, North Americans would be healthier people. We need to develop a discourse that can operate on both the institutional and everyday level in order to ensure that people are more healthy and less exploited.

The “Lay of the Nine Herbs” also reveals important information about Anglo-Saxon conceptions of disease. While ailments were often attributed to external magical forces, there was an acute understanding of the integral role nature played in human health. The Anglo-Saxons recognized that wind and water, for example, were major figures in the transportation and healing of illness. The reference to *onflyge*, flying venom, demonstrates a knowledge of air borne ailments. Storms explains that “infections, *onflygan*, were supposed to enter through the ears and the mouth, so that the remedy against them was also sung into the mouth and the ears of the patient” (196-197). In the text we are told that “these nine herbs have power against nine exiles from glory...If any poison come flying from east, / or any come from north, / or any from west, over humankind.” The flying infections were therefore believed to be carried by the wind and into the orifices of ill-fated persons. Grattan identifies this appeal to the four cardinal points, that is North, South, East and West, as specifically Northern in origin. The Northern method of naming winds can be found in eighth century Latin Anglo-Saxon glosses (55). Audrey L. Meaney explains in his essay “Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture” that the reference to flying poison alongside descriptions of sores and swelling suggests that the Anglo-Saxons understood that *onflygan* was an airborne bacterial infection (16). After the reference to the power of wind, the flying venoms are

washed away by water and blown away by wind through the power of Christ: “Christ stood over [the] ill ones of his own kind / I alone know running rivers, / and the nine adders they behold ; All weeds must now give way to herbs, / seas slip apart, all saltwater, / When I this venom blow from thee.” The Anglo-Saxons therefore understood that infections that occurred as a result of airborne illness could be treated with the help of water. Grattan explains that Anglo-Saxon associations of water and cleansing had much in common with baptism, a ritual that was common long before the popularity of Christianity (55-56). Water was viewed as something that spiritually purified, in addition to physically cleaning. The “Lay of the Nine Herbs” thus figures wind and water as two key figures in the transmission and curing of disease. This again demonstrates the way in which nature was perceived as a force that could either benefit or impair individual health. While the Anglo-Saxons had a relatively good conception of disease origins and cures, many of their remedies are often rejected by contemporary scholars because of the inclusions of Scandinavian folk beliefs and magic. Garner explains that there is a tendency in medieval scholarship to dismiss the potential curative power of metrical charms including the “Lay of the Nine” because there is always more attention granted to their poetic value (27). She argues that academics need to be “careful not to dismiss the incantations of Old English charms (even those that may appear to be gibberish or nonsense) as superstition, peripheral to the healing process” (30).

The battle language that runs through the “Lay of the Nine Herbs” also reveals much about Anglo-Saxon perceptions of the body and the experience of death. As

previously discussed, the herbs in this text are figured as faithful retainers battling against the threats of disease and illness:

Una are you named, eldest of herbs. / Thou [are] mighty against three and against thirty, / thou [are] mighty against poison and against flying venoms / thou [are] mighty against the loathed that travel through [the] land / And though waybroad, herbal mother, / Open from the east, mighty within. / Over thee chariots creaked, over thee queens rode, / Over thee brides called out, over thee bulls breathed hard. / Thou withstood all this, and withstand ; / Thou withstood venom and flying poison / and [the] enemy that travels through the land. / This herb is called Steem...She expels wrath, casts out venom. / This is that wort, that fought against worm / She [is] mighty against the enemy that travels through the land.

The text continues on in this Germanic tone as each herb is fleshed out into a character of warrior-like proportions. The familiarity of warfare and the desire to evoke it to describe the power of remedy demonstrates that the battle-ground was not just a poetic metaphor, but a daily reality. John M. Hill explains some of the common themes found in Anglo-Saxon stories of heroism in his book *The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic*. He argues that the “heroic code” normally involves “reciprocal loyalty between retainer and warlord, as especially enacted by the exchange of gifts for services and services for gifts; revenge obligation regarding injury or death, on behalf of kinsman as well as for one’s lord; and fame-assuring battle courage, especially if a successful outcome – battlefield victory – seems impossible” (1). Being courageous was of utmost concern in Anglo-Saxon times. Warriors longed for *lof*, meaning praise or glory, a kind of immortality that could exist among the living through language. A character like Beowulf, for example, lives on through the power of his name and spoken word. Mitchell and Robinson explain in *A Guide to Old English* the way in which a “heroic warrior brought up in this tradition would show a reckless disregard for his life. Whether he was doomed or not, courage was

best, for the brave man could win *lof* while the coward might die before his time” (135-136). Death and violence were thus large and integral components of Anglo-Saxon life. Violence, however, did have a specific context and a special time and place for which it was considered acceptable, that is, on the battlefield. The Anglo-Saxons were not lawless and, in fact, entrenched bodily respect into their law code. The Laws of King Alfred state that “If a man break another man’s ribs within the whole skin, let X shillings be paid as *bót* [compensation]: if the skin be broken and bone be taken out, let XV shillings be paid as *bót*” (qtd. in Bonser 105). While the Anglo-Saxon body was threatened in war, it was protected from harm on the level of the everyday. Even in violent situations, the body was respected and there was an expectation that battle etiquette and decorum would be followed. Mitchell and Robinson emphasize that the moment in *Beowulf* where the poet reflects on *cuþe he duguðe þeaw*, meaning ‘he knew the usages of noble warriors,’ reveals “a respect for well-tried weapons, a love of precious jewels and beautiful things, joy in ships and in warriors marching, in horse races and beer, and in feasting and music in the hall. There was pride too in being a well-governed people” (137). Although the Anglo-Saxons lived in a period of warfare and death, there was also a respect for life and an appreciation of the relationships formed during battle. A knowledge of the *þis læne lif*, meaning “this transitory life,” gave the Anglo-Saxons a greater appreciation of the experience of living. The meadhall was therefore a place of happiness and love that provided a sharp contrast to the violence and death of the battlefield (Mitchell and Robinson 137-138). The ingredients of the “Lay of the Nine Herbs” thus take on the large responsibility of not only aiding against threats but also communicating the entire warrior

ethos of the Anglo-Saxon time period. Embedded in the text's use of battle language are the relationships between retainers and lords, between life and death, the body and violence, happiness and tragedy.

While a language of warfare was easily applied to the experience of disease in an Anglo-Saxon context, contemporary representations of illness often share a similar tone. The North American media is continually pushing the “fight against breast cancer,” the “war on AIDS,” the “battle against bulimia” or the effort to achieve “freedom from disease.” A rhetoric of “us,” those fighting health threats, and “them,” that is diseases, is evoked to describe healing in the twenty-first century. North American bodies have become battle sites where the fight for public funding and international support takes place. This language of war is not limited to the realm of health. The phrases “War on Terror” and “War on Iraq” generated after the tragedy of September 11th have unfortunately dominated the media for the last seven years. Headlines, especially those found on conservative news stations like CNN, are always warring against some external entity no matter how intangible the so-called “enemy” might be. While fighting this “War on Terror” North America, and the United States more specifically, has simultaneously conducted a “War on Drugs,” a “War on Anthrax” and a “War on Crime.” There always seems to be an enemy that needs to be eliminated in order to protect “us” North Americans, from “those” forces that are figured as threatening to our physical and mental health. What is more significant is that in the absence of imminent danger the media is *always* creating crisis. In the summer of 2001, for example, before the attacks in New York City, news stations were spewing stories of dangerous sharks lurking in the waters

of the United States. Headlines that August read: “Summer of the Shark.” The paranoia surrounding sharks was spurred by a few minor incidents that had the potential to become fatal but were not. While more people die every year from being attacked by dogs, snakes, lightning and bees, and although a study conducted by the University of Florida found that shark attacks in 2001 were down in comparison to previous years, American news stations continued to spit jargon about fatal encounters (Radford 197-198). Rather than focusing on things that actually threatened North American health, like Cancer, AIDS, starvation, obesity and pollution, an imaginary health crisis was evoked. One month later a legitimate political and health catastrophe occurred in New York City. Wars on [insert perceived threat here] thus have a tendency to obscure authentic political problems. George Bush has continually asserted that the war in Iraq “is a *real war*, not just another version of ‘the war on drugs’ or the ‘war on crime’” emphasising the way in which North American media is notorious for searching for new enemies to fight (Aitchison 194). Rather than committing ourselves to authentic research on potential threats that affect our bodies and the body politic, we are focused on false or exaggerated enemies. The effect of this battle language is quiet simply fear and paranoia. Any chances at real reflection on U.S. foreign policy and general North American self-image have been squandered and crushed under the weight of fear. The opportunity for us to participate in a dialog with Cancer, bulimia and obesity is shut down by a language that others rather than engages. There always needs to be an enemy-other in order to ensure that people are in a constant state of anxiety that prevents them from participation in both their own health and politics at large.

Therefore, while this kind of battle language might have useful in an Anglo-Saxon context its appropriation by contemporary North America is problematic at best. This kind of language is shutting down the necessary conversations we need to have with illness and disease in order to live with them. Rather than seeing cancer and other diseases as enemies that need to be conquered, we need to begin viewing them as natural, although often sad, parts of life. This kind of battle language also does not make room for those people who have found inspiration in illness. Kris Carr, for example, positively reflects on living with Cancer in her documentary entitled *Crazy Sexy Cancer*, at one point identifying her disease as a tool that has helped her learn and grow: “Cancer has been my guru. It’s been my teacher and it teaches me everyday the hard things and the beautiful things” (Carr). Language that attacks disease as a fiendish outsider does not make room for this kind of special relationship with illness. When we separate signifiers into camps of “us” versus “them” we miss out on the unique intimacies and opportunities sickness can offer. While battle language is filled with hierarchies and problems, it does reveal the way in which our physical bodies are fused with larger political bodies. Phrases like the “war on AIDS” draw connections between personal illness and public politics, the importance of which cannot be stressed enough. Sick people mean sick politics, and likewise, sick politics will result in sick persons. Seeing the private and public, the political and personal as intimately connected is absolutely necessary in creating the foundations of a healthy society.

The final text for analysis through the lens of Anglo-Saxon medicine and death is the leechdom against temptation. As previously discussed, in addition to protecting from

temptations of the Devil and mental dislocation, this text was supposed to work against elf-trick and Lent-disease, otherwise known as Typhus. Elf-trick, again, was believed to spread plague by infecting animals and humans with dangerous arrows. Typhus was associated with fever, delirium, headaches and a purple rash and was the cause of high mortality rates during times of famine and war. This leechdom reveals a great deal about how the Anglo-Saxons approached healing and their perceptions of the relationship between the mind and the body. In addressing the corporeal, the mental and the spiritual, this text demonstrates the way in which all three were intimately connected. There was thus not some sort of hierarchy of treatment. Caring for the body was not seen as more important than providing aid to the mind or the soul. More importantly, if a disease like Typhus needed to be cured the Anglo-Saxons would not simply medicate the body. They rather believed in holistically treating a patient's entire identity, mind, body and spirit. In this leechdom we see this tripartite methodology working in the first section of the text:

Give him [the patient] a full cup at night to drink during fasting, / and put the holy water on all the food that he eats...Pound all the herbs, boil them in good / butter, [and] wring through a cloth. Set them under the altar / [and] sing nine masses over. Smear the man with [this] on the / temples and above the eyes and above the head and the / breast and the sides under the arms.

The body is therefore tended to with fasting, drink, and touch, the spirit with the use of holy water and mass, and the mind through attention given to the temples and head.

Rather than treating one ailment using one methodology, the Anglo-Saxons treated multiple illnesses, in this case elf-trick, Typhus, temptation and mental dislocation, with multiple approaches. The Anglo-Saxons also believed that magical entities like the Devil and elf needed to be treated with remedies that involved the spirit. According to Jolly,

Spiritual forces must be invoked to counteract ailments involving the mind or soul. In this medieval view, human beings are multifaceted creatures with a complex interaction of body and soul, a mixture of matter and spirit in the Neoplatonic scale of being. Because of this duality humans are connected with the entire cosmos, so that they are affected by it and capable of interacting with it and the spiritual forces inhabiting it (146).

The Anglo-Saxons thus lived in a world of interconnectivity and intimately understood the connections between the mind and body, between the body and the world.

The Anglo-Saxon body was also perceived as a magical entity in itself. According to Bonser, “The personal factor is very strong in magic, whether the thing used is blood or spittle, or merely a footprint or an article of clothing” (221). Blood, spittle, hair, sweat, bones, fat, bile and teeth were common ingredients in Anglo-Saxon prescription-remedies, although not present in this particular leechdom (Bonser 221-22). In the “Lay of the Nine Herbs,” however we see the presence of breath: “When I this venom blow from thee.” Medicinal magic was therefore not simply an external force that worked on a person, but rather was also intimately connected with the internal power that each individual body contained. The Anglo-Saxon concept of disease shared a similar duality. Disease was considered to be both caused by external forces and also inner energies. In the leechdom against temptation, disease and evil come from both the outside, that is the Devil and elf, and interior afflictions of the mind. Psychological ailments can therefore cause just as much bodily sickness as pestilence. Sometimes these mental and moral afflictions have a relationship to one another. In this case mental dislocation might be interpreted as a direct symptom of the Devil’s attempts to corrupt and pervert the mind. Reversely, the presence of a fiendish Devil could be read as a psychological manifestation that has occurred as a result of dementia and mental illness. The Anglo-

Saxon elf was also believed to be connected to one's mental health. While considered an external physical entity, it was often associated with nightmares and afflictions of the mind, demonstrating the way in which the corporeal and mental are always interconnected (Bonser 164). Jolly argues that the "variety of treatments available for such physical/spiritual ailments is too easily read by modern eyes as confusion over treatment of nonexistent or misdiagnosed ailments" (156). Within an Anglo-Saxon context, however, diverse prognoses and multiple ways of healing did not necessarily mean misdiagnosis. The Anglo-Saxons put faith into a myriad of holistic remedies that could be practiced simultaneously. Medicinal magic, however, is often dismissed by contemporary readers. Cameron points out the fallacy in this kind of dismissal:

It is clear that the Anglo-Saxons used purely magical remedies as well as rational ones in medical treatments and that some of these magical ones may have given relief to patients. We must try to put ourselves, however difficult it may be, in the place of the medieval patient. Today the physician imparts confidence in his ability to heal by his white coat, his professional detachment, the atmosphere of his consulting room and the framed diploma on its walls. These are as much a non-rational part of the healing process as was the intoning of charms. One approach appeals to a society which boasts of its belief in a world governed by 'scientific' cause and effect and which reads its horoscopes in the daily paper; the other appealed to a society where all things were believed to be at the whim of one god or another, beneficent or malignant, who could be propitiated or threatened by the proper ritualistic approaches. The milieux are different and the rituals are different, but the effect is the same – a reassured patient – so presumably the results should be similar. This is a justification for magical treatments in a society which believes in magic as a ruling factor in the operation of the universe, and if it does not work in our society it is because we no longer believe in magic in quite that way (157).

Cameron's brilliant comparative reflections are atypical of traditional Anglo-Saxon scholarship. Connections between contemporary medical practice and Anglo-Saxon healing are not often made and when they are, they are not done with such insight or

success. Cameron's attention to the way in which the aura of a physician functions similarly to the aura of a healer-magician is useful. In many ways, what he is describing here is a kind of placebo effect, the idea that perceptions of the mind can effectively heal one's physical body. Cameron effectively lends credibility to Anglo-Saxon magic and medical beliefs, whilst criticizing our own tendency to put the utmost faith in the supposedly infinite authority and power of contemporary medicine. We often believe in healthcare without question, without critical thought and without interrogating the larger socio-economic forces that bear down on institutionalized care. Cameron later states that "If modern medicine is willing to admit the possibility of such cures and even to use them, surely the Old English medical charms deserve a sympathetic appraisal as medicine" (Cameron 158). We need to start looking at alternative forms of health and healing and integrate them into our current healthcare system. While institutionalized care is not some kind of "big, bad" entity that needs to be conquered, it does need to be tempered and balanced with alternative ways of approaching human health.

Concluding Thoughts: Breaking Down the Categories

This project, in many ways, has itself functioned like an Anglo-Saxon medico-magical recipe. While I have provided the necessary ingredients and instructions for a new way of looking at Anglo-Saxon and contemporary health, it is you the reader who has cooked and prepared a new paradigm, perhaps many. Each person who encounters this thesis will bring his or her own experience and interpretations to the work in order to create new and fascinating alternative readings. A recipe, as we have seen, is never what is simply written on the page and requires context and individual experience to give it life and transform it into something edible and healing. Now that we analyzed these texts three different ways, focusing on three different methodologies and approaches, I call you to simultaneously merge all three. Make a mixed salad and merge these ideas; add your own spices and let us consume and heal together. We need to ensure that we cook, or rather read, responsibly and not simply consume information and let it pass through our systems. It is essential that we challenge ourselves to retain what we read and garner some nutritional value to benefit ourselves and others. We also need to train our brains to read and interpret information in different ways. How can we expect and demand new ideas if the same approach is always used? This thesis has therefore attempted to offer new and alternative ways of reading and thinking about health. Setting up a series of strict categories only to have them implode in on themselves forces the brain to re-evaluate, reassess and refocus. It is difficult for many of us to get our heads around the idea that things can exist in multiple contexts simultaneously. This said, as I was writing, and likely as you were reading, it was hard not to overlap or connect subject matter. The

categories of food, magic and medicine bleed into one another and become difficult to separate. Why, then, do we insist on categorizing our lives into such limiting models? While the human brain understandably needs boundaries and labels in order to comprehend and organize the world around it, we need to learn how to learn differently so that these categories do not become static and block us from alternative thinking. We are often told as students to “put on our thinking caps” while we are in class. Sometimes this is a “history cap,” other times a “sciences cap” or “languages cap.” Instructors often used this verbal cue to encourage their students to begin thinking within the framework of the class. With this metaphor in mind, is it possible to develop “adaptable thinking caps” that do not need to be put on or taken off depending on the context? This would be a true skill, that is, to acknowledge that categories frame our way of thinking by way of organization, but that it is still possible to work within many contexts simultaneously. We need to teach ourselves how to balance between categories and fluidity, as we cannot have one without the other. Essentially we need to develop skills of context-adaptability. It is in this way that we have far more to unlearn than to be taught. If our minds were more receptive to alternatives, there would simply be more possibility for positive change. The Anglo-Saxon prescription-remedies allow us to imagine differently. This thesis itself is a site of creative, free space where people can experiment with unusual and transformative thinking. While there are many spaces like this in a contemporary North American setting, there are not enough and there need to be more. More importantly, these sites need to be extended to the realm of health and medicine. We need welcoming places in medical institutions where we can explore our minds and bodies without the

fear of being judged or rejected, a place where we can ask questions and discuss answers. It is necessary for us to create a safe space where we can develop the tool of context-adaptability and apply it to healing.

While the format of this thesis first and foremost exposes Anglo-Saxon categories as permeable, the specific content in each chapter has also offered alternative ways of thinking about both Anglo-Saxon health and our own. The study of Anglo-Saxon medical texts is often dismissed because it is assumed to be outdated and thus irrelevant to people living in the 21st century. As my project has demonstrated, this is a false presumption. Nothing is ever too old to study and everything is culturally relevant. North Americans simply need to learn how to be good context-readers and adapters. It is important that we do not fear the application of one cultural moment to the next. Contexts are not allergic to one another and can be respectfully compared and contrasted no matter how different they are. We must also not be afraid to speak about things that we are not completely knowledgeable about. Discussing healthcare and science is not limited to those with expert knowledge in either of these areas. In other words, we can ask critical questions and make important contributions to medicine without being physicians; we can speak about healthy eating without the qualifications of a nutritionist; we can explore what it means to be spiritual without being affiliated with any sort of organized faith. In the following paragraphs I will explore what each chapter of this thesis has offered a contemporary audience in terms of re-learning the way in which we think about our bodies and ourselves.

The first chapter on food offers an alternative way of thinking about the process of consumption and the experience of eating. The Anglo-Saxons had an intimate relationship with what they put into their bodies. They planted, grew, harvested and prepared everything that they ate. In a world of mass processing our relationship with food and the environment have become damaged. In a neoliberal system, food is transformed into a product that we purchase with buying power, not something we love and acknowledge for the nutritional value it provides. We do not spend our day, our lives, next to our food as it grows. We never know where it's been. Food *was* Anglo-Saxon medicine. It is not until we recognize the healing properties of food that our minds and bodies will become truly healthy. Anglo-Saxon prescription-remedies also reveal the relationship between eating and emotion. In the bee charm we witness tones of supplication and a sense of awe for the insect providing honey. The "Lay of the Nine Herbs," on the other hand, retains battle-emotions, a sense of fighting spirit and reverence for courage. The leechdom against temptation is also emotionally charged with feelings of both fear of outside forces and love for the patient who is ill. There is a sense in this text that the healer is making a great effort in caring for the sick individual. In her book entitled *The Sex Life of Food: When Body and Soul Meet to Eat*, Bunny Crumpacker argues that food *is* our sense of home and who we are:

Food is love. Or its absence. Food is also anger, sustenance, deprivation, joy, loneliness, rage, hatred, ritual, surprise, laughter, revenge, history, power, comfort, sex... Food is so tangled into every human emotion from our very beginning that eating must inevitably become an expression of our personalities. We eat in ways that are idiosyncratic, subjective, and irrational... Food is the pleasure of now. Food is what keeps us alive. We're better off not taking it for granted (xi-xii).

If we begin thinking of Anglo-Saxon eating as a methodology we can more easily apply some of what we have learned to a contemporary context. The Anglo-Saxon “method of consumption” can help us unlearn how many of us perceive our food. Anglo-Saxon eating can teach us how to begin seeing food as a key player in our livelihoods that deserves daily respect, reverence and attentiveness.

The section on Anglo-Saxon magic and spirituality is also applicable to the way we believe in a 21st century context. On a practical level, Anglo-Saxon spirituality has itself fostered a series of neo-pagan religions that glean much of their belief systems from Germanic and Scandinavian practices. According to Jean La Fontaine, these groups refer to themselves as Odinists or Heathens and are primarily interested in recreating the pre-Christian faith of north-eastern Europe. Although these sects aim at imitation, their symbols and rituals do not accurately revive Germanic folk-beliefs. There is rather a process of selective appropriation that takes place. There are many different branches of these so-called “neo-pagan” groups and some are more spiritually focused than others. Many forms of heathenism are often associated with right-wing militant groups and are thus criticized for being racist and anti-Semitic, while other sects like the Asatrú Alliance and Ring of Troth are known to be more passive formations that are concerned mostly with positive religious practice (La Fontaine 110-114). Neo-Germanic religions represent a specialized area of scholarship unto themselves, and I mention them here only because it is important to recognize that some North Americans are quite literally attempting to revive and reinvent parts of the Scandinavian faith. While this appropriation and adaptation of Germanic folk-beliefs is one way of bringing these texts into the 21st

century, the prescription-remedies have the potential to do far greater work. We do not need to necessarily need to become worshippers of Odin or a believer in magic in order to value and learn from these texts. Without imitating the Germanic faith, we can appropriate their framework of inclusion. The lack of binary categories in an Anglo-Saxon context fostered an environment that allowed for the peaceful integration of two different belief systems. Although the Germanic faith was eventually absorbed by the Christian, there was a period of time when both religions dialogically shared with one another. Germanic folk-beliefs bled into Christian ideals, and likewise, Christianity lent its ideologies to the Scandinavian worldview. This kind of tolerance and flexibility are tools that would benefit the way we practice belief today.

The Germanic reverence and appreciation for nature is also useful for contemporary North Americans. We need to *believe* in nature and acknowledge our intimate relationship to it before we can make any practical attempts at becoming “green” and healing the planet. Many modern governmental and corporate campaigns for “going green” are more concerned with selling products and jumping on the environment-chic bandwagon than actually helping the earth. Absent from much environmental rhetoric are real connections between nature and daily experience, and in its place we see fancy jargon like “flick off,” referring to the shutting off of electrical appliances. While this phrase is arguably clever and perhaps even useful in remembering to turn off our electricity, there is an absence of what follows from this and what goals are specifically being pursued with this slogan. Like people of the Germanic faith, we need to always make these kinds of connections present and visible. Much can be learned from the healer

of *wið ymbe* who had respect for the bee and connected his livelihood with this insect and the natural process of honey making. Honeybees are, in fact, currently dying at record numbers, putting the human population in danger. An American news article entitled “Bee Wary? Honey Bees Disappearing, Food Supply in Danger” reflects that “[s]ince 2006, honeybees began to mysteriously disappear from their colonies destroying nearly a third of US hives – and the rate of decline is increasing, reaching 36 percent last Winter. About a third of our food sources require pollination, and plants cannot grow without it” (*Citizensugar*). The article goes on to explain that loss of habitat, pesticides that interfere with neurological processes and lack of diversity in crop cultures are likely to blame for this occurrence. This is what happens when we lose our sense of attachment to natural processes and forget, or fail to recognize, the interdependent relationship humans have with the planet. The Anglo-Saxon prescription-remedies demonstrate how it is of the utmost importance that we begin attending the church of nature and worshipping the earth.

The final chapter on Anglo-Saxon medicine and death also teaches us how to heal and live in alternative ways. This section demonstrates the way in which prescription-remedies did not categorize the mind, body and spirit as separate entities. Treating patients as whole people rather than in parts leads to greater health on both the personal and public level. The Anglo-Saxon medico-magical texts thus show us that the private body *is* the body politic. If we only cure specific pieces of people we will only effect certain parts of politics. These texts also show us how life and death are interconnected in

a way that does not allow us to simply efface the process of dying. Kellehear explains how, in the contemporary Western world, many

dying people have not recognised themselves as dying people, instead viewing themselves as others view them – as simply ill, disabled or detained people. Modern dying people often desire, or are increasingly being advised, counselled, or forced to play a diversity of substitute roles. In their turn, these alternative roles fail to counter the general cultural drift towards narrow definitions of dying (253).

Denying that dying people are, in fact, dying is not a useful alternative approach to this final experience. We cannot have life without death and we cannot have healing without sickness. Contemporary North Americans cannot be healthy until they embrace illness, disease and death as processes of life. We also need to acknowledge that there is not a “right” time to die. Kellehear reflects how in “many areas of the developing world a ‘natural’ death is one that occurs in old age. Early slow dying and sudden deaths attract moral consternation and community theorising” (232). The Anglo-Saxon prescription-remedies demonstrate the way in which death can happen at any given moment, to any person; death does not discriminate. While this occurrence is often full of despair and is unfortunate, it can and will happen. We therefore need to develop a language that allows us to discuss death in more useful ways, a kind of discourse of death if you will. In order for a discourse of death to be functional, however, it needs to be fully supported by institutionalized medicine, governmental bodies and corporate sponsors, in addition to be practiced in the realm of the everyday. Death needs to be *daily* reimagined and widened as a concept on a personal *and* political level. The Anglo-Saxons have showed us that we will never completely appreciate our time spent alive until we fully understand what it means to die. As Herbie Brennan explains in *Death: The Great Mystery of Life*, “Once

you recognize, deep down, that you could die at any second, a lot of things that hassle you don't seem important anymore. Every worry shrinks into perspective. You'll reorder your priorities, spend more time on things that really matter, set yourself goals that really count. Hard though it may be to believe, you'll have a lot more fun. With Death as your teacher, you'll wake up to liberation" (294). Let us have death as our instructor and, like Kris Carr reflected, Cancer as our guru. Let us find joy in death and beauty in disease.

The Anglo-Saxon prescription-remedies essentially offer us new alternatives in all spheres of contemporary life. They teach us how to eat, believe, heal, live and die differently. In the absence of many counter narratives, these texts offer new ways of looking at the world. This is not to say that there are no other alternatives elsewhere. Other health frameworks and methodologies can be found, both in history and today, but they need to be sought after. Health is not something that will simply come to us without hard work and discipline. We need to learn how to exercise our minds and our bodies, developing the mental vigour that allows us to be receptive to new ideas. We also need to have this strength of mind to ensure we have the will power to push through the neoliberal jargon that tricks us into false health alternatives. By this I mean the marketing ploys, the toys that are sold to us to make it "easier" to become healthy, the diet pills that "help" cure obesity and the Botox that "fights" aging. The "magic bullet" does not exist and we need to learn how to accept the fact that real health takes time and effort and cannot be purchased with buying power. North Americans need to acknowledge that these quick "alternatives" offer comfortable seduction and not long term healing. Although it is acceptable to identify capitalism as the primary reason for preventing us

from being healthy individuals, this does not mean that we can repudiate all responsibility and blame “the system.” While I want people to challenge mainstream representations of the health and the body, I also understand that some of us cannot ask questions as we are not put in a position to do so. There are more often than not political and physical barriers that prevent people from participating fully in their own lives. Race, gender, and socio-economic status frequently determine who is allowed to speak and engage in critical conversation. It is not until these barriers are lifted that true health can be realized. Those of us who have the privilege to communicate, access resources and vocalize our concerns need to do so, and any less action is an abuse of entitlement. We need to work together to learn more about more about our bodies and the various social and cultural components that make up who we are and who we can be as healthy North Americans.

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APPENDIX

Text 1:

Wid Ymbe

Nim eorþan, oferweorp mid þinre handa under þinum swiþran fet, and cweð :
 Fo ic under fot ; ic funde hit.
 Hwæt, eorðe mæg wið ealra wihta gehwilce,
 and wið andan and wið æminde,
 and wið þa micelan mannes tungan.
 And wiþ(uf)an forweorp ofer greot, þonne hi swirman, and cweð :
 Sitte ge, sigewif, sigað to eorþan,
 næfre ge wilde to wuda fleogan.
 Be(o) ge swa gemindige mines godes,
 swa bið manna gehwilc metes and eþeles.

For the swarming of bees

Grab dirt [and] throw [it] over with thy right hand under thy right foot and say:
 I take under foot ; I [am] striving after it.
 Listen, earth can prevail against each and every being,
 and against injury and against vacant mindedness,
 and against the great tongue of man.
 Throw gravel over and above, where they swarm, and say:
 Settle ye, victorious women, descend to [the] ground,
 Never fly wild to the wood.
 Be ye so mindful of my good,
 [as] every man [is of] food and estate.

Text 2:

Nigon Wyrta Galdor

Gemyne ðu, mucgwyr, hwæt þu ameldodest,
 hwæt þu renadest æt Regenmelde.
 Una þu hattest, yldost wyrta.
 Ðu miht wið þry and wið þritig,
 þu miht wið attre and wið onflyge,
 þu miht wiþ þam laþan ðe geond land færð
 Ond þu wegbrade, wyrta modor,
 eastan openo, innan mihtigu.

Ofer ðe cræto curran, offer ðe cwene reodan,
 ofer ðe bryde bryodedon, ofer þe fearras fnærdon.
 Eallum þu þon wiðstode, and wiðstunedest ;
 swa ðu wiðstonde attre and onflyge
 and þæm laðan þe geond lond fered.
 Stime hatte þeos wyrta, heo on stane geweox.
 Stond(eð) heo wið attre, stunað heo (wið) wærce.
 Stide heo hatte, wiðstunað heo attre,
 wreced heo wraðan, weorped ut attor.
 Þis is seo wyrta, seo wið wurm gefehta ;
 þeos mæg wið attre, heo mæg wið onflyge,
 heo mæg wið ðam laþan ðe geond lond fered.
 Fleoh þu nu, attorlaðe, seo læsse ða maran,
 seo mare þa læssan, oddæt him beigra bot sy.
 Gemyne þu, mægðe, hwæt þu ameldodest,
 hwæt ðu geændadest æt Alorforda ;
 þæt næfre for gefloge feorh ne gesealde,
 syþðan him mon mægðan to mete gegyrede.
 Þis is seo wyrta ðe wergulu hatte ;
 ðas onsænde seolh ofer sæs hrygc,
 ondan attres oþres to bote,
 ðas nigon ongan wið nigon attrum.
 Wurm com snican, toslat he man ;
 ða genam Woden nigon wuldortanas,
 sloh ða þa næddran, þæt heo on nigon tofleah.
 Þær geændade æppel and attor,
 þæt heo næfre ne wolde on hus bugan.
 Fille and finule, felamihtigu twa,
 þa wyrta gesceop witig Drihten,
 halig on heofonum, þa he hongode.
 Sette and sænde on seofon worulde
 earmum and eadigum eallum to bote.
 Stond(eþ) heo wið wærce, stunað heo wið attre,
 seo mæg wið þry and wið þritig,
 wið feondes hond and wið færbregde,
 wið malscrunge manra wihta.
 Nu magon þas nigon wyrta wið nygon wuldorgeflogenum,
 wið nigon attrum and wið nygon onflygum,
 wið ðy readan attre, wið ðy rudlan attre,
 wið ðy hwitan attre, wið ðy wedenan attre,
 wið ðy geolwan attre, wið ðy grenan attre,
 wið ðy wonnan attre, wið ðy wedenan attre,
 wið ðy brunan attre, wið ðy basewan attre ;
 wið wurmgeblæd, wið wætergeblæd,

wið þorngeblæd, wið þystelgeblæd,
 wið ysgeblæd, wið attorgeblæd ;
 gif ænig attor cume eastan fleogan,
 odde ænig nordan cume,
 odde ænig westan, ofer werðeode,
 Crist stod ofer adle ængan cundes.
 Ic ana wat ea rinnende,
 and þa nygon nædran behealdad ;
 motan ealle weoda nu wirtum aspringan,
 sæs toslupan, eal sealtwæter,
 ðonne ic þis attor of ðe geblawe.
 Mugcwyr, wegbrade þe eastan open sy, lombescyrse, attorlaðan,
 magedan, netelan, wudusuræppel, fille and finul, ealde sapan ;
 gewyrc ða wyrta to duste, mænge wiþ þa sapan and wiþ þæs æpples
 gor. Wyrce slypan of wætere and of axsan, genim finol, wyl on
 þære slyppan and beþe mid æggemang, þonne he þa sealfe on do,
 ge ær ge æfter. Sing þæt galdor on ælcra þara wyrta þriwa ær he
 hy wyrce, and on þon 4e æppel ealswa ; and singe þon men in þone
 muð and in þa earan buta and on ða wunde þæt ilce galdor, ær he
 þa sealfe on do.

Lay of the Nine Herbs

Thou be mindful, mugwort, what thou mentioned,
 what thou rendered at [the] mighty announcement.
 Una are you named, eldest of herbs.
 Thou [are] mighty against three and against thirty,
 thou [are] mighty against poison and against flying venoms
 thou [are] mighty against [the] loathed that travel through [the] land
 And thou waybroad, herbal mother,
 Open from the east, mighty within.
 Over thee chariots creaked, over thee queens rode,
 Over thee brides called out, over thee bulls breathed hard.
 Thou withstood all this, and withstand ;
 So thou withstood venom and flying poison
 and [the] enemy that travels through the land.
 This herb [is] called Steem (watercress), she grew on stone.
 She standeth against poison, she dashes away pain.
 Stithe she is called, she withstands poison,
 She expels wrath, casts out venom.
 This is that wort, that fought against worm
 this [is] mighty against poison, she is mighty against flying venoms.
 She [is] mighty against the enemy that travels through the land.

Thou flee now, attorlathe (venom hater), the less the more,
 The greater the less, until there is [a] cure for him.
 Thou remember, Maythe (Camomile), what thou disclosed,
 what thou accomplished at Alorford ;
 that never for flying venom gave up a life
 Since for him [a] man prepared Maythe as food.
 This is the herb that [is] named Wergule.
 This sent [a] seal over sea ridges,
 as a remedy for other poison
 These nine protect against nine poisons.
 [A] worm came slithering, he slit open a man;
 Then Woden took nine glorytwigs,
 Then smote the adder, that it flew in nine [pieces].
 There apple and poison (the crabapple) ended [it]
 That she would never stay in [the] house.
 Chervil and fennel, two very mighty,
 these herbs [the] wise Lord created,
 Holy in heaven, when he hung.
 [He] established and sent [them] into seven worlds,
 [For a] remedy for all unlucky and blessed.
 She stands against pain, she dashes against poison,
 she [is] mighty against three and against thirty,
 against [the] enemy's hand and against terrible danger,
 against witchcraft [of] evil beings.
 Now these nine herbs [have] power against nine exiles from glory,
 against nine poisons and against nine flying venoms,
 against the red poison, against the smelling poison,
 against the white poison, against the purple poison,
 against the yellow poison, against the green poison,
 against dark poison, against the blue poison,
 against the brown poison, against the crimson poison ;
 against worm-blister, against water-blister,
 against thorn-blister, against thistle-blister,
 against ice-blister, against poison-blister ;
 If any poison come flying [from] east,
 or any come [from] north,
 or any [from] west, over humankind,
 Christ stood over [the] ill ones of his own kind
 I alone know running rivers,
 and the nine adders [they] behold ;
 All weeds must now give way to herbs,
 seas slip apart, all saltwater,
 When I this venom blow from thee.
 Mugwort, waybread that open from [the] east, lamb's cress, attorlathe,

maythe, nettle, crabapple, chervil and fennel, old soap ;
 work the worts into dust, mix with the soap and with the apple's juice.
 Work [a] slop of water and of ashes, take fennel, there boil [it] into
 [a] slop and mix with egg mixture, then he puts on the salve,
 both before and after. Sing that charm there on each [of the] herbs thrice before he
 works them, and then also on [the] apple ; and then sing in that man's
 mouth and in both his ears and on the wound that same charm, before he
 puts on [the] salve.

Text 3:

Leechdom xli.

Wyrç godne drenc wiþ eallum feondas costungum
 Nim betonican bisceop wyrç elehtran geþrifan
 Attorlaþan wulfercamb. gearwan. lege underþeofod
 Gesinge vive mæssan ofer gescearfa þa wyrta on
 Halig waeter sele drincan on neaht nestig scene fulne
 Ond do þæt hæligh wæter on ealne þone mete þe se man
 Picge. Wyrç gode sealf wiþ feondes costunga. bisceop
 wyrç. elehtre. haran sprece streowberian wire. Sio
 clufiht wenwyrç eorðrima. brembel æppel. polleian.
 wermod. Gecnua þa wyrta ealle awylle on godre
 buteran wring þurh clað sete under weofod singe
 viiii mæssan ofer. smire þone man mid on þa þun.
 wong. and bufan þam eagum ond ufan þæt heafod. and þa
 breost ond under þam earmum þa sidan. Deos sealf
 is god wiþ ælcne feondes constunga and ælfsidenne and
 lencten adle. Gif þu wilt lænian gewitsecne man
 gedo bydene fulle cealdes wælres dryp þriwa on þæs
 drences. beþe þone man on þam wætre ond ete se man
 gehalgodne hlaf. ond cyse. ond garleac ond cropleac ond
 drince þæs drences scenc fulne ond þonne he sie
 bebod smire mid þære sealf swiþe and sibban him
 sie sig wyrç him þonne swiþne drenc utyrnendum.
 Wyrç þus þone drenc nim lybcornes leaf ond celeþo.
 nian moran. ond glædanan moran ond hocces moran.??
 ond ellenes wyrtruman rinde wyl on ealað laet standan
 neahterne ahlyttre þonne ond do buteran to ond
 sealt rele drincan. Þyrç spiwe drenc útyrnendne ním
 reowertig lybcorna berend wel ond gegnid on niþowearde
 celeþonian ond hóccer moran ond twa clure þære clurehtan
 wenwyrte ond hwerhwette niþowearde an lytel . ond hamwyrte
 moran medmicel . gedo ealle þa wyrta swiþe wel
 clæne ond gecnua do on eala bewreoh læt ftandan neahterne

sele drincan scenc rulne.

Against Temptation

Work a good drink against all the Devil's temptations.

Take betony, bishopwort, lupin, githrife,

Attorlothe, wolfscomb, yarrow. Lay them under the altar,

Sing nine masses over them. Scrape the herbs into holy water.

Give him a full cup at night to drink during fasting,

and put the holy water on all the food that he eats.

Work a good salve against temptations of the fiend. Bishopwort,

lupin, haransprecel, strawberry plant,

the cloved wenwort, earth rime, bramble apple, polleian,

wormwood. Pound all the herbs, boil them in good

butter [and] wring through a cloth. Set them under the altar

[and] sing nine masses over. Smear the man with [this] on the

temples and above the eyes and above the head and the

breast and the sides under the arms. This salve

is good against every temptation of the fiend, and [for]

elf-trick and for Lent disease (Typhus).

If thou will heal a wit sick man, put a tub full of cold water

drop thrice into it some of the drink. Bathe the man in the water and let him

eat hallowed bread and cheese and garlic and cropleek and

drink a cup full of the drink and when he has been

bathed smear with the salve thoroughly and when it is better with him,

then work him a strong purgative drink.

Work thus the drink: take leaves [of] libcorn and roots [of] celandine

and roots [of] gladden and root [of] hollyhock

and root [of] elder's rind ; boil in ale [and] let stand for a night

then clarify and warm and add butter and salt and

give to drink. Work a purgative spew drink ;

take forty libcorns, rend them well and rub them on the underside part of

celandine and hollyhock roots and two cloves of the cloved

wenwort and a little part of the underside part of cucumber

and a moderate part of the root of homewort ; make all the herbs thoroughly well clean

and pound and put them in ale, wrap up, let stand for a nights time,

give a full cup to drink.