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Indice

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Hate Speech and the Dehumanisation of the Other in Anglo-Saxon England: «Wonders of the East» and «Andreas»[1]

Riassunto: La necessità di riconoscere e arginare le diverse configurazioni del "discorso d'odio" è una questione posta al centro del dibattito interculturale soltanto negli ultimi decenni. Nondimeno, le forme di espressione che incitano all'odio basato sull'intolleranza sono facilmente rintracciabili anche in contesti e società cronologicamente distanti. Nella letteratura in inglese antico (IX-XI sec.) il confronto con l'alterità prende forma spesso, anche su suggestione di fonti latine, nella rappresentazione di creature straordinariamente mostruose da isolare e stigmatizzare. In particolare, nella prosa pseudo-enciclopedica delle *Meraviglie d'Oriente* appare indicativo il trattamento riservato a una popolazione di ibridi donna-animale, le quali subiscono una censura morale esplicita, a cui fa seguito un atto di estrema violenza. Analogamente, nei versi del poema agiografico *Andreas* i cannibali Mirmidoni che l'apostolo deve convertire sono connotati come mostri sanguinari, creature infernali, assimilabili, in un raffinato gioco di parallelismi e contrasti, anche agli Ebrei, nemici per eccellenza della cristianità. Attraverso l'analisi e il confronto con le relative fonti, ci si propone di indagare le modalità attraverso le quali forme *ante-litteram* di *hate-speech* possano emergere all'interno di una dialettica conflittuale con l'alterità, soprattutto laddove queste tipologie di discorso rispondono a una volontà di disumanizzazione dell'Altro.

Parole-chiave: antico inglese, *Wonders of the East*, *Andreas*, discorso d'odio, alterità, mostruoso, deumanizzazione

Abstract: The notion of identifying and combating the various manifestations of hate speech represents a concern that has emerged at the core of the intercultural discourse only in recent decades. Nevertheless, these forms of expression, which promote hatred based on intolerance, can be found in societies that are chronologically distant from one another. In Old English literature (9th-11th cent.), even when influenced by Latin sources, the relationship with Otherness is frequently represented through the portrayal of exceptionally monstrous creatures that are depicted as requiring isolation and stigmatisation. In particular, in the pseudo-encyclopedic prose of the *Wonders of the East*, a population of hybrid women is subjected to explicit moral judgment, followed by an act of extreme violence.

[1] This essay is a shared responsibility: Jasmine Bria contributed by writing the introduction and the first section with relative references, while Carla Riviello wrote the second section with relative references. Unless otherwise stated, each author is also responsible for all translations in their section.

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Similarly, in the verses of the hagiographic poem *Andreas*, the cannibals Mermedonians, who must be converted, are connoted as bloodthirsty monsters and as infernal creatures. In a refined game of parallels and contrasts, they could be assimilated even to the Jews, who were the enemies of Christianity par excellence. Through the analysis and comparison with the sources, this paper will aim to investigate the ways in which *ante litteram* forms of hate speech might emerge within a conflicting dialectic with Otherness, in particular, in the extent to which these discourses respond to the intent to dehumanise the Other.

Keywords: Old English, *Wonders of the East*, *Andreas*, Hate-speech, Otherness, Monstrous, Dehumanisation

The perception of a constant threat from external entities – the Outside – that could potentially erode the cohesion of the social order, and the accompanying feeling of uncertainty, is a recurring theme in many of the literary works produced in Anglo-Saxon society from the 9th to the 11th century.

This pervasive portrayal of the Other may reflect, it is true, the apprehensions of a society confronting the prospect of sudden external aggression. The initial contact with the Scandinavians, and in particular the destruction of Lindisfarne Abbey by the Vikings in 793, represents the inauguration of an era of enduring political turbulence[2]: the abrupt appearance of a foreign force from an unknown and threatening Elsewhere resulted in the disruption of a community that was not in a position to defend itself. On the one hand, therefore, this fear of external threats promoted the need, supported by the Church, to build a spirit of ethnic and national cohesion; on the other hand, it also reinforced any prejudices about seeing foreigners as threatening, and possessing a capability for bloody violence comparable to that of monstrous beasts. Against this background, Old English literature employs a range of nuances and modes of representation to portray foreigners as a source of disturbance and danger that must be stigmatised and destroyed.

This paper will analyse two examples: the prose text *Wonders of the East* and the poem *Andreas*. In both cases, the foreigner – the "Stranger" – is the object

[2] This encounter, which, as is well known, was followed by a repeated series of expeditions of a similar brutal nature, marked a turning point in the island's history. The compilers of MSS D (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. IV) and E (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 636) in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* note that the event was preceded by many dreadful forebodings – «þet wæron ormete ligræscas, & wæron geseowene fyrene dracan on þam lyfte fleogende» (as in MS E, edited by Irvine 2004: 42) 'these were excessive lightnings, and fiery dragons were seen flying across the firmament'. In a letter to Higbald, bishop of Holy Island, Alcuin of York laments the desecration of the site and the violent pillaging that ensued: «pagani contaminaverunt sanctuaria Dei et fuderunt sanguinem sanctorum in circuitu altaris, vastaverunt domun spei nostret, calvaverunt corpora» (*Alcuini Epistolae*, 20,6-8), 'the pagans have desecrated God's sanctuary, shed the blood of saints around the altar, laid waste the house of our hope and trampled the bodies of the saints like dung in the street' (trans. Allott 1974: 36).

of what might be defined as a form of *ante litteram* hate speech[3]. Although depictions of the foreigner as aberrant and dangerous are already present in their respective Latin sources, the two Old English texts in question appears to accentuate the process of demonising and dehumanising the Other through the use of expressions of contempt and hostility. In particular, the generally descriptive and neutral narrative cataloguing of extraordinary creatures and peoples in *Wonders of the East* seems to be interrupted specifically in order to include an explicit moral judgement on a population of hybrid women[4]. Similarly, in *Andreas*, the cannibal Mermedonians are portrayed as bloodthirsty monsters and infernal creatures. The poem's intricate use of parallels and contrasts ultimately associates the monstrosities of the Mermedonians with the Jews, who were regarded as the primary adversaries of Christianity.

These texts appear to enter into a dialectic conflict with the concept of Otherness. This is evident in the extent to which their discourses respond to the urge to dehumanise the Other, whether identified as foreigner, as follower of a different religious belief, or as female.

1. *Wonders of the East*

Wonders of the East is the traditional title given to a teratological treatise written in the Anglo-Saxon area[5], and ultimately deriving from the Late Antique tradition of the *Letter of Pharasmanes* – a fictional epistle describing the places visited and the creatures seen by the sender, Pharasmanes I, King of Iberia (now Georgia), on a journey through an imaginary East[6].

[3] It is only in recent decades that intercultural debate has raised the question of the different configurations of hate speech, mostly in relation to contemporary society. Nevertheless, as Brown puts it (2017: 427) the term is used to describe phenomena «that, in all likelihood, have also been present throughout human history beginning with the earliest multiethnic societies of the ancient world, that is, the expressive dimensions of identity-based envy, hostility, conflict, mistrust and oppression». Thus, with due differentiation, «forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance» – as defined by the Council of Europe's Recommendation No. R. (97) 20 – are equally traceable in chronologically distant societies, such as Early Medieval England.

[4] It is important to note that, in contrast to other cases of monstrous races that were popular in medieval Europe, there is no specific denomination ascribed to this particular race. As they are described as human-animal hybrids, it seems appropriate to refer to them as 'hybrid women'.

[5] The Old English text is also known as *Marvels of the East*; the Latin text is usually identified as *De rebus in Oriente mirabilibus*.

[6] Probably written in Greek in the 2nd century, the *Letter* was most likely translated into Latin between the 4th and the 7th centuries. This core text was later expanded and translated throughout Europe. The extant versions of the epistle can be divided into two main groups according to the initial letter used in the transliteration of the name of the sender, P or F. *Wonders of the East* belongs

As it stands, the English branch of the tradition has been preserved in two languages – Old English and Latin –, in three manuscripts and thus in four variant states. The oldest known copy of the Old English text is found in the Nowell Codex (i.e. ff. 94-209 of London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv, c. 990-1020), popularly also known as the *Beowulf* manuscript and easily the most famous collection of texts concerned with monstrosities and Otherness in the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition[7]. This version of the text includes thirty-two marvels, accompanied by illustrations that are used to visually depict the creatures described in the text. A further copy in Old English is found in a miscellaneous codex that includes various works of naturalistic and scientific interest, London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. v/1 (mid-11th century)[8]. Covering thirty-six marvels, this text is copied together with a parallel version in Latin and corresponding illustrations. Another Latin version of the text, with twelve more marvels, is preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library 614 (12th century)[9]. Moving away from the epistolary context of the original Greek tradition, *Wonders of the East*, as a treatise, can be read as an attempt to organise the multifaceted diversity of the world into the mode of a compilation, with a particular focus on the representation of monstrous peoples[10], in the style of the ancient travel literature of Ctesias (5th-4th century BCE) and

to the so-called P group. For a detailed description of the relationships between the two groups, cf. Knock (1981: 25-26) and Lendinara (2014: 36-39).

[7] The Codex comprises an acephalous life of Saint Christopher (ff. 94r-97v), *Wonders of the East* (ff. 98r-106v), the Old English version of the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* (ff. 107r-131v), *Beowulf* (132r-201v) and *Judith* (ff. 202r-209v). The criteria behind its composition have long been associated with an interest in monstrosities (cf. Sisam 1953: 96; Orchard 1995: 28-57) and the representation of the Elsewhere (cf. Howe 2008: 177-194). In a more recent interpretation, Thomson (2022: 104-126) posits that the overarching theme of the Codex is the portrayal of difference. In particular, the three prose texts can be understood as 'fantasies of otherness' (104), in that they depict encounters between the Self and the Other. For a comprehensive description of the Nowell Codex, although Malone's (1963) presentation remains valid to this day, see also Fulk (2010: vii-xxv).

[8] This large, illustrated codex features a calendar (ff. 2r-19r), lists of popes and bishops (ff. 19r-22r), and genealogies of kings and emperors (ff. 22r-23v). It is of greater significance, though, for the inclusion of a variety of educational texts on temporal measurement, astronomy, and geography, including Ælfric's *De Temporibus Anni* (ff. 24r-28v) and Priscian's *Periegesis* (ff. 57r-73r); *Wonders of the East* is copied on ff. 78-87v; cf. McGurk *et al.* (1983: 4-108).

[9] The text of *Wonders* contained in this manuscript is an indirect derivative of the extant Latin text in Cotton Tiberius B. v/1. For a thorough reconstruction cf. Gibb (1977: 5-13) and Knock (1981: 81-91). It is thought that a single Latin version, believed to have arrived in England no earlier than the 7th century, is the common ancestor for all the insular versions of the text. The Old English texts, neither of which descends from the other, are separated by at least one witness from the first translation into Old English. For further details, cf. Knock (1981: 57-154) and Lendinara (2002: 177-181 and 2014: 40-42)

[10] Howe (2008: 151-194) provides a comprehensive investigation of the thematic composition of the different codices, offering a detailed analysis of how perception of the text can be influenced by the specific context of the manuscript.

Megasthenes (4th century BCE), or the encyclopaedic works of Pliny the Elder (ca. 25-79).

The scrutiny devoted in the text to semi-human peoples, who exhibit behaviours and customs that do not always align with Western norms, raises several questions about the perception of the foreign, particularly in terms of whether or not such people are regarded as belonging to the human species. Many of the peoples represented in *Wonders* are human-animal hybrids and, as such, are, indeed, situated at the threshold of humanity.

Early medieval Christian culture considered that all individuals, irrespective of any physical or cultural distinctions, should be regarded as inherently equal in their humanity. As is clearly elucidated in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* (16, viii-ix), there are no physical abnormalities that can exclude any 'rational mortal animal' from being part of God's plan. Nevertheless, there existed a perception that certain categories were somehow less human than others. The Plinian races presented in *Wonders* generally seem to be regarded as human, though their humanity is constantly questioned. The text usually distinguishes creatures that belong to the animal kingdom – *wildeōr*, such as Lertices (chapter 14)[11] and Catini (chapter 28) – from those that are considered human in spite of their monstrous characteristics. These latter are mostly introduced by expressions such as «þær beoð men acende» ('there are generated men') (chapters 8, 11, 12, 13, and so on). A substantial number of creatures depicted in the text are, indeed, introduced as human, but a specific adjective modifies their quality: they are "bestial humans". This specific category of humanity is a concept developed in the Western thought as early as Ancient Greece, in its discourse about difference and marginalised figures in society. The free Greek, male citizen would be the default norm in the fifth century BCE *pólis*, while those who deviated from this norm – women, slaves, barbarians and animals – would be perceived, in a pattern of analogy, as included in a general Other (DuBois 1991: 122-123)[12]. Thus, bestial men are the result of the overlapping between the ideas about slaves, who were regarded as being on a

[11] Chapters are numbered according to Orchard's edition of the text, published as an appendix to his study *Pride and Prodigies* (1995: 173-203). Subsequent references and quotations refer to the same edition, except when otherwise stated. The treatise has been studied and edited extensively: cf. Cockayne (1861: 33-39 and 62-66), Rypins (1924), Gibb (1977) and Knock (1981), who provides a synoptic edition of the *Letter of Pharasmanes* tradition in its entirety. In addition to the above-mentioned text by Orchard (1995), there is a recent edited version by Fulk in his work *The 'Beowulf' Manuscript* (2010: 15-31). Mittman and Kim (2013: 39-71), in their critical analysis of the manuscript, provide a diplomatic edition of the text in the Nowell Codex.

[12] The existence of the category of 'monstrosity' serves as a means for testing the category of humanity. As Oswald (2010b: 7) puts it, the monster «takes the category of humanity, and exploits its boundaries and explores and challenges its integrity». On the role of the monster in Western thought from Antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages, cf. also, among others, Williams (1996), Friedman (2000) and Verner (2005).

par with animals, and barbarians. This semantic contiguity enabled the development of ideas regarding the bestiality of foreigners (Volpato 2014: 7-8; Salisbury 2011: 133). Thus, the monstrous quality attributed to the populations represented in *Wonders* can be traced back to a perspective that reduces the Other to an animalistic entity; that is, it can be interpreted as an organic outcome of ethnocentrism, first common in the ancient world view and later inherited by medieval Christian Europe, which perceived all other populations as inferior[13].

The use of animal associations and metaphors to refer to otherwise human creatures can be regarded as a cognitive strategy employed to negate the humanity of others; that is to say, it can be conceptualised as a form of dehumanisation. The term 'dehumanisation' can be used to describe both a psychological process and a social issue, and it is perhaps best understood as a process of rejecting the humanity of the Other, whether an individual or a group, by introducing an asymmetry between those who are perceived to possess paradigmatic human qualities and those who are judged to be wanting in or be completely devoid of them (Volpato 2014: 6)[14]. Dehumanising strategies, including the utilisation of expressions of contempt, serve to categorise the Other as a representative of an incomplete humanity. The "animalisation" of the Other can develop in two ways: those belonging to groups deemed subhuman can be regarded as domestic animals, whose exploitation is beneficial to society; or, as in the case of *Wonders,* they can be associated with harmful animals, meaning that, their existence must be eradicated. The metaphoric connection Stranger-Animal-Monster engenders a fear of the unutterable or the unknown, intensifying the perception of the threat posed by the enemy group to an intolerable degree (Volpato 2014: 18-20). Consequently, the use of dehumanising language induces a proclivity towards perpetrating acts of extreme violence. Those who are morally excluded are perceived as entities that are undeserving of moral consideration, and it is therefore regarded as acceptable, appropriate, and even ethically proper to harm them.

Perspective itself in *Wonders of the East* is dehumanising; a negative connotation is inherent in the representation of the foreigner as monstrous. Nevertheless, the treatise typically does not use directly dehumanising language. Instead, it presents the peoples encountered through a form of discourse that appears to be detached and descriptive. The text is divided into small paragraphs that seem to follow a common pattern. For each creature mentioned, the text informs the reader about the geographical location (even if this information is vague or not related in any way to reality), provides a brief physical description of them and, sometimes,

[13] On the links between ethnocentrism, Macrobian maps and the emergence of the concept of monstrous races cf., in particular, Friedman (2000: 37-58) and Mittman (2006: 35-44).

[14] As a consequence of this psychological process, dehumanised people are generally seen as vulgar and amoral, and also as unable to function in society. On this issue, cf. Haslam (2006: 252-264).

gives a specific denomination. In certain instances, a reference is made to habits that are perceived to be distinctive. Beyond this fundamental structure, the text does not generally provide any context for explicit moral considerations.

Exceptions to this usual pattern are limited to two instances. Chapter 18 describes a group of people famous because they were able to conquer one-hundred and ten kings. Here the text offers a brief judgement on their "barbarous" nature. They are not described in terms of any physical monstrosities, so their abnormality presumably lies in their cruelty in subjugating other peoples, since the text refers to them as «ða wyrstan men ⁊ þa ellreordigestan» 'the worst and the most barbarous people'[15].

The other – crucial – morally charged intervention in the descriptive treatise can be found in chapter 27. The text here depicts a population of hybrid women who are openly subjected to moral judgement and destined to death as a consequence. These women are part of the bestial humanity that generally populates the treatise. Exceptionally tall and white as marble, they are also characterised by an accumulation of body parts that can be traced back to a number of animals – they appear to be hybrids, having parts like a boar, a camel and an ox. As it says in the Latin text:

> Et alie sunt mulieres ibi, dentes aprorum habentes, capillos usque ad talos, in lumbis caudas boum, quae sunt altae pedum .XIII., specioso corpore quasi marmore candido, pedes habentes cameli, dentes asininos. (*Wonders of the East*, chap. 27)

And similarly in the Old English version:

> Ðonne sindon oðre wif ða habbað eoferes tucxas ⁊ feax oð helan side, ⁊ on lendenum oxan tægl. Þa wif syndon ðreotyne fota lange ⁊ heora lic bið on marmorstanes hwitnysse. ⁊ hi habbað olfenda fet ⁊ eoferes teð. (*Wonders of the East*, chap. 27)
>
> [Then there are other women who have boar tusks, and hair down to their toes, and an oxtail by their loins. These women are thirteen feet tall and their bodies are of the whiteness of marble. And they have camel's feet and boar's teeth.]

[15] The adjective *ellreordig* – here used at the superlative case – ultimately derives from the substantive *reord* 'speech, tongue, language', combined with *el (ell, æl)* denoting something which is 'other, different, foreign' (*TOE*, *s.v. ell),* and the suffix *-ig* indicating an adjective (Bosworth – Toller*, s.v. ellreordig*). Literally, it denotes somebody who speaks a strange or a foreign language, a language felt as 'other'. Yet, it generally occurs in prose as a translation for Latin *barbarus* – with its onomatopoeic Greek origin imitating an indistinguishable sound – and thus tends to assume a negative connotation. See, for example, the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (II, 20): «oðer was þæm hæðnum reðra ⁊ grimra, forðon þe he elreordig wæs» 'the other was more cruel and more savage than the heathens, because he was a barbarian'. As a noun, it occurs in *Andreas* 1081a*,* referring ironically to Matthew and his followers from the distorted perspective of the Mermedonians (cf. North – Bintley 2016: 270-271).

The treatise generally presents its marvellous peoples as male-centred[16]; chapters 26-27 are, instead, a couplet of chapters describing two ethnic groups composed solely of women. Thus the first of these chapter (26) depicts a group of bearded women, who wear horse's hide as clothes and use tigers and lions in their hunts, rather than hounds. In both occasions, the depictions seem to focus on the double liminality of these female populations: they both challenge gender norms and display a closeness to animality. Nevertheless, the new species encountered in chapter 27, hybrid as it is, it is the only one in the text to be treated with explicit contempt.

The main textual divergence between the insular *Wonders* and the corresponding chapters in the continental tradition of the *Letter of Pharasmanes* involves the figure of Alexander the Great and his reaction to the hybrid women. There is no Alexander in any of the F-group texts. The killing of the members of this genus of monster, when mentioned, is attributed to simple soldiers. On the other hand, while some P-group texts mention the Macedonian leader as the persecutor of some of these women[17], *Wonders* emphasises the death of the entire population, and also adds a line that serves to somehow "justify" Alexander's actions through a form of dehumanising speech:

> quarum multae ex ipsis ceciderunt pro sua obscenitate a magno nostro Macedone Alexandro quia illas uiuas adprehendere non potuit, occidit, ideo quia sunt publicato corpore et inhonesto. (*Wonder of the East*, chap. 27)

> For heora unclennesse hie gefelde wurdon fram ðam mycclan macedoniscan Alexandre. Þa he hi lifiende gefon ne mihte, þa acwealde he hi for ðam hi syndon æwisce on lichoman ⁊ unweorþe. (*Wonders of the East*, chap. 27)

> [They were killed by Alexander the Great of Macedonia for their impurity. He could not take them alive, so, he killed them, because they are unworthy and shameful in their bodies.]

Alexander, here, takes on the role of the traveller from the West, representing the reader's point of view, which does not recognise any form of humanity in the peoples encountered in the East. The Western perspective sees these women as a danger that must be eliminated, a form of the Other incompatible with the idea of what it means to be human.

[16] The terms *mann*, *mannkind,* frequently employed in the text to introduce the Plinian races, are used in Old English to define human beings irrespective of gender. However, the illustrations in the three manuscripts frequently depict the male primary sex characteristics of the creature in question, which suggests that the monster was generally perceived as masculine. Cf. Oswald (2010a: 4-8).

[17] Cf. Faral (1914: 209-210); Pitra (1884: 649); Knock (1981: 933-940).

Strategies of *Othering* what was perceived as a threat are not unusual in Anglo-Saxon society in the 10th and 11th centuries. Kathryn Powell (2001: 143-165), for example, links Alexander's action in this passage in the *Wonders of the East* to King Æthelred's demand that all Danes on English soil be killed. An order that has gone down in history as the St Brice's Day Massacre of 1002, and is recorded as such in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS C*[18] entry:

> on þam geare se cyng het ofslean ealle þa deniscan men þe on Angelcynne wæron: ðis wæs gedon on Britius mæssedæig, forðam þam cyninge wæs gecyd þæt hi woldan hine besyrwan æt his life ⁊ siððan ealle his witan ⁊ habban siþþan þis rice (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS C*, 1002)[19]
>
> [in this year the king ordered that all the Danes who were among the English be slain: this was done on the day of Saint Brice, because the king had been told that they wished to attempt on his life and subsequently on that of his advisors and thus conquer this kingdom]

Powell proposes that if the order was carried out as it appears to have been[20], it was due to the support it received in the imagination rather than its utility as a defensive tactic, and that it should not be interpreted simply as a response to Danish aggression against "king and country". The historical representation in the *Chronicle* thus suggests that the Danes, perceived from an Anglo-Saxon perspective as a threat «who existed solely to deprive them of their every enjoyment – life, land, wealth, power – and who were unworthy of human sympathy» (Powell 2001: 157), had become the victims of an ideological construction that transformed a foreign population into a homogeneous Other. The Danes were no longer considered human or morally equal.

In similar terms, the text in *Wonders of the East* appears to posit the idea that these women represent a specific threat, a threat so dangerous that it justifies their violent and immediate elimination. Indeed, the text uses a particular set of expressions that work to support a generally negative view of these women, as a homogeneous Other deserving of degrading and dehumanising treatment.

According to the Latin text, Alexander is driven to kill this monstrous race because of the obscenity of their bodies («pro sua obscenitate»). Added to this, the women are said to possess a «publicato corpore» – a body that has been 'made

[18] Also known as the *Abingdon Chronicle,* this manuscript is currently housed in the British Library (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. I). The text was mostly compiled during the mid-11th century, with further sporadic additions occurring later.

[19] Text from O'Brien O'Keeffe 2001: 89.

[20] In a charter of 1004 with which the king restored the monastery of St. Frideswide at Oxford, it can be surmised that, at least in Oxford, the order was zealously carried out. The charter can be read in the cartulary of the monastery edited by Wigram 1895: 2-3.

public, prostituted' (*OLD*, *s.v. pūblĭco*) – and the passage also emphasises their lack of 'honesty' («inhonesto») – which is to say, in this context, their depravity.

Although the quoted text from Orchard (1995: 200) edit the Old English text in favour of a perfect adherence with the Latin text, both Cotton Vitellius A. xv (f. 105v)[21] and Cotton Tiberius B. v/1 (f. 85r)[22] use *micelness* 'largeness' in lieu of Latin *obscēnĭtas*. The discrepancy may be attributed to a confusion between the vertical strokes of the initial letters in *micelness* and *unclǣnness* (the probable original reading, which would have been more closely aligned with the Latin *obscēnĭtas*)[23].

Thus, the Old English version of the text introduces a set of connotations linked to the danger arising from the women's exaggerated dimensions[24], but it simultaneously preserves their perceived indecency, through the use of *ǣwisc* and *unweorþ* (for the Latin *pūblĭcatŭs* and *ĭnhŏnestus*) to define the specific characteristics of these women's bodies.

OE *unweorþ* can designate something that is devoid of intrinsic value or merit, as well as something that is 'unworthy' or 'undeserving'. Indeed, the word was frequently employed to render the Latin adjectives *ūīlis* and *indignus*[25]. As a simple adjective, *ǣwisc* occurs solely in this passage; it seems to have a range of meanings including 'shameless, indecent; foul' (*DOE*, *s.v.*), thus implying a lack of modesty. Elsewhere, it is used as an element in compound words, particularly *ǣwiscmōd,* meaning 'ashamed, disgraced'. It is associated with lechery in both *Genesis A* and *Precepts*. In *Genesis A* 896a (*ASPR* I), it is used to refer to the figure of the tempting woman. After Eve persuades Adam to eat the forbidden fruit, she is characterised as «ides æwiscmod», which can be translated as 'indecent woman' or 'woman with an immodest soul'. In *Precepts* 37a (*ASPR* III), *ǣwiscmōd* is used to describe the man who prefers the company of strange women («fremdre meowlan», *Precepts* 39a) to that of his wife. It also seems significant that the Old English

[21] See f. 105v, on lines 16-17: «of hyra micelnesse hy gefylde wæron».

[22] See f. 85r, on lines 14a-1b: «for heora mycelnyssse hie gefelde syndon».

[23] See also Gibb (1977: 171), Knock (1981: 757) and Fulk (2010: 28). In Anglo-Latin texts, *obscēnĭtas* is often, (indeed, usually) glossed by *unclǣnness* and its variants. In the Old English glosses in Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* and the *Liber Scintillarum, unclǣnness* is used in relation to sexual incontinence. Cf. Gwara (2001: 632) and Rhodes (1889: 88, 102, 137). Similarly, the adjective *unclǣne* occurs in the Latin glosses for *pollūtus* and *immundus* in contexts aimed at underlining the impurity of the body as in (once again) the glosses of the *Liber Scintillarum* (cf. Rhodes 1889: 88, 98) and in the Old English versions of *Leviticus* (cf. Marsden 2008: 133).

[24] On this point, cf. Powell's (2001: 150-151) argument about the choices made in the visual representation for this chapter in the Nowell Codex.

[25] Cf. Bosworth – Toller (*s.v. unweorþ*), which defines the adjective as meaning «of no value; of no dignity, little esteemed; unworthy, not of sufficient merit; worthless, bad, contemptible, despicable, ignoble; ignominious, dishonouring».

glosses in Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* (XXXVI and XLV) attest to the use of *ǣwisc* as a noun, corresponding to the Latin term *obscēnĭtas*[26].

A fruitful approach to interpreting this passage could be to focus on these distinctive adjectives, as the deployment of *ǣwisc* and *unweorþ* might point to a form of discomfort – or *anxiety* – that these women's bodies would cause in anyone who encountered them (Joy 2005 and 2008: 211). Their physical characteristics are already carefully presented in the first few lines of the chapter, yet the text insists on focusing on the indecency of their bodies. That these women were perceived as a sexual menace on at least one occasion is corroborated by the illustration accompanying the text in Cotton Tiberius B. V/1 (f. 85r), which indicates the artist's concern about the positioning of the oxtail. The illustration depicts a white, tall, unclothed figure, covered solely by her long hair. Her animal features are minimised: she has small, unobtrusive tusks and hooves that might be easily ignored. One monstrous aspect that the artist does not overlook, however, is the bovine tail. Although the text indicates that the protuberance is situated by the woman's loins, the picture shows it on the figure's back. This is presumably done to differentiate it from a phallic protuberance and to distance it from the traditional location of sexual desire[27].

Wonders of the East is replete with examples of bodies that transgress the boundaries of conventional notions of humanity, gender, and specific animal species. In addition to the bearded huntresses (chap. 26) mentioned above, these include people with two heads (chap. 11), no heads (chap. 15) and lion heads (chap. 12); anthropophagous giants (chap. 13); dragons (chap. 16); onocentaurs (chap. 17); another cannibal race with the ability to mimic every human language (chap. 20); and so on. However, while in all these other cases – anthropophagi included – the negative connotation has to be deduced from the context (i.e. the other creatures are presented without the text making any explicit moral judgements), the hybrid women of chapter 27, with their boar tusks and an oxtail by their loins, must be exterminated, because they are somehow perceived as being too big, too obscene, too different[28].

Ultimately, the language used to justify Alexander's action serves to underline the indecency of the monstrous women's bodies and rationalise their

[26] In *De Virginate* XLV, the gloss «æwys» is associated with «unclænnys». Cf. Gwara (2001: 542 and 632).

[27] Oswald (2010a: 18-22 and 2010b: 59-63) comments in detail on the hermaphroditic nature of these figures. Cf. also Bria (2023: 142-143).

[28] These monstrous women are impossible to capture and impossible to define within the limits of a precise taxonomy. They are perverse and contaminated figures who, by bringing the subject back to the distinction between male and female, as well as to that between human and animal, embody the "abject", according to the Kristevian definition, an «imaginary uncanniness and real threat» that «beckons to us and ends up engulfing us» (Kristeva 1982: 5).

extermination. If they had been portrayed as ordinary women, Alexander's hostility could be interpreted simply as the ruthless act of a conqueror who, to achieve certain political and military goals, takes away from his opponents – or simply from those who stand in his way – both the right to inhabit their own land and the right to life (Joy 2008: 219-220). Since the text designates these women using forms of expression that underline their position outside the human sphere, they end up being perceived as monsters with a frightening appearance, creatures alien and hostile to society. The animalised body of this particular form of Other – of these Othered women – thus becomes a danger that can only be overcome with complete extermination.

2. *Andreas*

In *Andreas*, the contextualisation of the story is different, but the process of annihilation of the Other is similar. The hagiographic poem recounts the miraculous conversion of the cannibal Mermedonians by Saint Andrew, sent by God to the homonymous distant region to free his fellow disciple Matthew and continue his mission. Within a rich apocryphal tradition (Baumler 1985, McDonald 1990), the episode proposed in the Old English verses shares both plot and narrative elements with a Greek version, Πράξεις Ἀνδρέου καὶ Ματθεία εἰς τὴν πόλιν τῶν ἀνθρωποφάγων, conventionally quoted as *Praxeis* (P), as well as with a shorter Latin version, *Acta Andreae et Matthiae apud anthropophagos*, known as *Casenatensis* (C)[29]. The poetic reworking was probably carried out on the basis of a lost Latin version attributable to this branch of the tradition[30].

Hence, in the sources, the episode is already related to a conversion that nullifies the Otherness, transforming the different into the alike. The Mermedonians, who assimilate foreigners by ingesting their bodies, accept to be assimilated into Christianity and the religious truth of the Eucharist, renouncing their own identity. In line with many hagiographic texts, the primary aim is to celebrate the triumph of faith over paganism, of good over evil: in this opposition, the apostle's victory appears all the more grandiose and extraordinary the more fearsome and terrible his antagonists are. In the description of the Mermedonians, connotative traits converge that correspond to recurrent cultural *topoi* in the representation of the

[29] For the corresponding editions, see Blatt (1930), also for following references and quotations from the two texts.

[30] On the determination of the sources for the poem see Brooks (1961: xv-xviii), Boenig (1991a: xxvii-xxxiv), Biggs (2007: 40-41), North – Bintley (2016: 4-8); on the spread of the cult of the saint in medieval England, a cult which had presumably already begun with the Christianisation of Augustine, see Walsh (1981: 104-107), Hermann (1989: 22), Cataldi (2014).

Other: they inhabit an imaginary Elsewhere[31], practise evil magic and, above all, feed themselves by eating human flesh and quench their thirst by drinking their victims' blood[32].

Within this shared semantic framework, in *Andreas* this population, which is far from the truth of the doctrine, is described with a varied and colourful vocabulary which, compared to P and C, condenses and amplifies the negative connotations attributable to the pagan strangers to be fought and destroyed. In P, the Mermedonians are mostly referred to as ἀνθρωποφάγοι[33] 'men's eaters, cannibals'; they are sometimes described as δήμιοι 'executioners', or ἄνθρωποι ἄνομοι 'lawless men'[34]. In C, the recurrent definition is that of *carnifices*[35], often accompanied by adjectives which emphasise the condemnation and contempt of their behaviour: *pessimi*, *crudeles*, *perversi*, *impii* or, more frequently *iniqui*, also in the superlative *iniquissimi*[36]. However, broadly speaking, in the prose of the two reports these connotations seem to be incorporated in the narrative composition without any particular prominence; the audience is led to participate in the stigmatisation of the cannibals mainly through the narration of the story, the succession of individual events.

In *Andreas*, however, the rules of poetic diction allow and, at the same time, enforce a more precise and detailed representation: the negative connotation is emphasised through the stylistic motif of variation; the repetition, sometimes redundant, expresses all the aspects correlated to the aberrant feeding practices of the cannibals, enhancing their gruesome loathsomeness.

[31] The mission unfolds in one of those distant places where the apostles are to spread the doctrine, as instructed by Christ in the Gospels (Mt 28,19-20; Mk 16,15). On the attempts to identify the place where the cannibals live and the presence of the reference to Mermedonia in the individual versions, see again Blatt (1930: 6) and MacDonald (1990: 7-15).

[32] All this introductory information to the narration is given in both P and C in chap. 1. On the allegation of cannibalism as a recurrent element in the representation of the stranger, the enemy, see above all Arens (1979).

[33] Chap. 1 and *passim*.

[34] More precisely, the noun δήμιοι is used to define the men who enter the prison where Matthew is held (chap. 3: 36, 11 and 13), as well as the Mermedonians when they want to eat the corpses of their compatriots (chap. 22: 74, 31); whereas the construct ἄνθρωποι ἄνομοι is employed in direct speeches: by the prisoner Matthew who asks the Lord for help (chap. 2: 34, 12); by the apostle's fellow prisoners, miraculously freed by Andrew, who exhort him to escape with them and not to remain among 'lawless men' (chap. 21: 72, 6); and finally by Andrew when, in turning to God to prevent the Mermedonians from eating the corpses of the prison guards, begs him to stop the hand of the lawless (chap. 22: 74, 30).

[35] Chap. 1 and *passim*.

[36] For example, in chap. 2, this adjective describes, in this order, not only the inhabitants of the city (35.2), but also the practice of welcoming strangers by gouging out their eyes (35.3), the magic potion with which they drug their victims (35.3), the city where they live (35.12); or, in chap. 20, when Andrew notices the terrible conditions in which Matthew and the other prisoners lived, the adjective is used to refer both to the Mermedonians and to their ignominious actions (71.5 and 10).

Similarly to the fictional Widsið, the anonymous poet opens his own *wordhord*, his 'store of words'[37], and employs the themes, images and vocabulary of heroic poetry to recount the various confrontations between the apostles Matthew and Andrew, supported by God, and the Mermedonians, instigated by the devil. These are battles between two *comitatus*: the usual ethical values – solidarity, cohesion between individuals, courage in facing the enemy, pride, absolute loyalty and devotion to the leader – animate the defenders of Christianity, while their opponents' values appear to be overturned or emptied of meaning[38].

From the opening verses, the group to which Matthew and Andrew belong is presented as follows:

> Þæt wǣron mǣre men ofer eorðan,
> frome folctogan ond fyrdhwate,
> rōfe rincas, þonne rond ond hand
> on herefelda helm ealgodon,
> on meotudwange. (7-11a)[39]
>
> [they were famous men on the earth, brave leaders of the people and bold in battle, strong warriors, when shield and arm kept helmet safe, on the battle-field, on the fateful plain.]

The Mermedonians, on the other hand, are described as living in a liminal region[40], bound to it by the devil:

> Eal wæs þæt mearcland morðre bewunden,
> fēondes fācne, folcstede gumena,
> hæleða ēðel; (19-21a)
>
> [That whole borderland, that dwelling place of men, homeland of heroes was wrapped in murder, in devilish deceit.]

[37] It is worth recalling how the formulaic hemistich «wordhord onleac» 'unlocked his wordhoard' in the first verse of *Widsið* (*ASPR* III) signals the beginning of the erudite narrative by alluding to the scop's expertise, while in other poems it is employed to introduce speeches given by influential figures; in *Andreas*, in particular, it precedes the words of the saint (316b) and those of Christ (601b), cf. Riviello 2015.

[38] The modalities with which *Andreas'* language and forms of heroic poetry concur to render an hagiographic text in verse have long been the subject of an ample critical debate aimed at assessing the purposes and aesthetic results of the work, also through the identification of links, correspondences or dependencies to *Beowulf* or the Cynewulf poems; in addition to the studies by Schaar (1949), Peters (1951), Irving (1983), see again Powell (2002) and, among more recent contributions and for further bibliographical references, Orchard (2016), North – Bintley (2016: 57-81), North (2018).

[39] For the quotations of *Andreas* I follow the edition by North – Bintley (2016).

[40] On how the marginal position of Mermedonia is emphasised in the poem in relation to the known Christian world, see, among others, Bolintineanu (2009) and Brady (2010).

They use magic to ensnare the victims of their cannibalism (21b-40), so that heroic terms in this context take on a negative connotation: when they are referred to as «hettend heorogrimme» 31a, 'cruel-in-battle enemies', the expression, which is also used for Constantine's glorious army in *Elene* 119a (*ASPR* II), has here a clearly pejorative meaning, since the Mermedonians do not act against enemies to be killed in fair fights, but against helpless victims to be eaten to appease their own bestial hunger.

The narrative then goes on to recount a series of interrelated episodes, in which the same pattern of contrasts is essentially repeated; they are "tangible" events in the global struggle that Christianity must necessarily wage against the pagans, that is, of the indispensable war that a community, convinced of living according to universally righteous – and therefore shareable – principles, must sustain against those who, by opposing or deviating from these principles, threaten to undermine them and must therefore be eliminated.

Thus, as soon as he arrives in the region, Matthew is immediately captured and imprisoned by the local population:

> Þǽr wæs cirm micel
> geond Mermedonia, mānfulra hlōð,
> fordēnera gedræg, syþþan dēofles þegn<as>
> geāscodon æðelinges sīð.
> Ēodon him þā tōgēnes, gārum gehyrsted,
> lungre under linde; nalas late wǽron,
> eorre æscberend, tō þām ōrlege.
> Hīe þām hālgan þǽr handa gebundon
> ond fæstnodon fēondes cræfte,
> hæleð hellfūse, ond his hēafdes sig<e>l
> ābrēoton mid billes ecge; (41b-51a)
>
> [There was great outcry throughout Mermedonia, a gang of wicked men, a throng of damned, when the devil's thanes found out about the noble man's journey. They advanced against him, fitted with spears, protected by shields; they were in no way late the angry ash-bearers on this field of war. There they bound the saint's hands and fastened them with fiendish cunning, heroes ready for hell, and destroyed his head's suns with the sword's edge.]

The wickedness of the Mermedonians is already voiced in the first element of the triple variation: «mānfulra hlōð» 42b[41] 'a gang of wicked men', thus reiterating

[41] The noun *hlōþ* 'band, troop, company, gang' (*DOE*) is always employed in reference to the Mermedonians with a derogatory meaning in the phrase «hæðendra hlōð» 'gang of heathen' also in hemistichs 992b, 1389a, as well as in «beorn hlōð» 1543b, to refer to the crowd of men overwhelmed by the flood and fire in the final section of the poem. See North – Bintley (2016: 221) for the

how closely they are linked to the devil – «fordēnera gedræg» 43a ‘throng of damned’, «dēofles þegnas» 43b ‘devil’s thanes’ –; they are «hæleð hellfūse» 50a ‘heroes ready for hell’[42], who act with «fēondes cræfte» 49b ‘fiendish, devilish cunning’[43]. But the stigmatisation of the Other, the enemy, is also carried out by ridiculing their behaviour: this large group of «eorre æscberend» 47a ‘angry ash-bearers’, armed with spears and protected by shields, move against Matthew as if they were fighting against a fierce, numerous army rather than a single person (45-51), armed only with his faith. Indeed, the scene has recurring elements in other passages of Old English poetry, so much so that it has been appropriately categorised as an «approach-to-battle-type-scene» (Heinemann 1970: 84-88, 95). It is assumed that the depiction of the Mermedonians as Germanic warriors aims to demonise the ethical values inherent in the *comitatus*[44]. In this case, however, the grotesque disproportion between the preparation for battle and the actual execution of the confrontation reveals the actual weakness of the cannibals, hidden behind a merely boasted strength: it is a description that, by showing their ridiculous, vacuous boldness, contributes to the construction of a denigrating image of the Other through irony and mockery[45].

Also in the following verses, the Mermedonians are repeatedly described, sometimes using epithets already suggested, as bloodthirsty cannibals ruled by the devil, pagans moved by bestial instincts, with monstrous costumes and behaviours that stir terror and disgust in the audience; at the same time, however, their fearsome ferocity appears grotesque due to the continual failure of their plans. Portrayed as fearsome warriors equipped to fight dangerous foes, they often set

essentially negative connotation of the word in other poetic and prosaic attestations, including legal documentation.

[42] The compound occurs only another time in *Christ* 1123a (*ASPR* III) to indicate the damned.

[43] On the formularity of the expression, also in the variation «dēofles cræft», see the occurrences catalogued in the *DOEC*. For an analysis of representations and denominations referring to the devil in Old English poetic records, see also Woolf (1953), Paroli (1989), Dendle (2001).

[44] Furuta (2010: 126), for instance, writes: «the poet achieves the task of devaluing Germanic heroic tradition […] and […] succeeds in highlighting the heroic in a negative light and, in turn, reminding an audience brought up on heroic poetry of the exact antithesis of those heroic ideals praised in heroic poetry; that is the saintly».

[45] On irony in the poem, see Irving (1983), as well as Wilcox (2003) whose analysis considers its use as a tool characterising the style of hagiographic texts, later reworked in *Andreas*. Incidentally, in a different contextualisation, Heinemann (1970) and later Herbison (2010: 15-20) also classified as a «mock heroic approach-to-battle-type-scene» the passage in *Judith* 236-291a (*ASPR* III) in which the Assyrian warriors, still unaware of the killing of Holofernes, are described. For a more comprehensive investigation of this topic in the Old English poetic tradition, see Wilcox’s recent publication (2023) as well as Stanley’s remarks (1988: 3, 69) stating, «there is no parody in Old English Literature», merely admitting «moment of *literary* awareness of incongruities or moral or social insufficiencies may lead to touches of parody in works that are not parodies as a whole».

out to confront corpses or single individuals and often fail to get into a physical confrontation with the antagonist.

Thus, the crowd that gathers, anticipating the day when they will be able to eat Matthew and the other prisoners (128b-160)[46], is initially depicted using terms that refers to "battle-imagery":

> Duguð samnade,
> hæðne hildfrecan hēapum þrungon,
> (gūðsearo gullon, gāras hrysedon),
> bolgenmōde, under bordhrēoðan. (125b-128)
>
> [The troop gathered, the heathen greedy for battle crowded in heaps (battle-gear rang, spears rattled), swollen with anger, under shield-covers.]

After this introduction other connotative features are mentioned, such as their proximity to the devil and their anthropophagic ferocity; they are in fact contemptuous of Christian doctrine, blinded by the devil:

> Cirmdon caldheorte, corðor ōðrum getang,
> rēðe rǣsboran rihtes ne gīmdon,
> meotudes mildse. Oft hira mōd onwōd
> under dimscūan. dēofles lārum,
> þonne hīe unlǣdra eafeðum gelȳfdon. (138-142)
>
> [The cold-hearted cried out, crowd pressed on crowd, the fierce leaders did not care about law or Measurer's mercy. Often their minds were taken by the devil's lore, in the dark shadows, when they trusted in the might of the wicked.]
>
> feorh ne bemurndan,
> grǣdige gūðrincas, hū þæs gāstes sīð
> æfter swyltcwale geseted wurde. (154b-156)
>
> [the greedy warriors mourned not for life, how the soul's journey would be settled after death's throes.]

They are «wælgrædige» 135a 'carnivorous', «wælwulfas» 149a[47] 'wolf of slaughter', driven by inhuman, disgusting thoughts and needs:

[46] The custom was that the prisoners would be eaten thirty days after their capture and the administration of the magic potion (see in P and C chap. 3, in *Andreas* 113-115, 134-135a, 147-148).

[47] The adjective *wælgrædig* is a *hapax*, while the noun *wælwulf* also occurs in *The Battle of Maldon* 96a (*ASPR* VI) where it indicates the Vikings and aims to dehumanise the 'enemies', to depict them as wolves greedy for the flesh of corpses (Blake 1965: 334; Robinson 1976: 32-33); North – Bintley (2016: 100, 225-226) point out how, in *Andreas*, the use of this epithet may also

[…] hīe bānhringas ābrecan þōhton,
lungre tōlȳsan līc ond sāwle,
ond þonne todǣlan duguðe ond geogoðe,
werum tō wiste ond tō wilþege,
fǣges flæschoman. (150-154a)

[they thought to break up bone-rings, to separate quickly body and soul, and then to share out the doomed man's flesh to the old and young hosts, as a meal and a pleasant food for the men.]

wæs him nēod micel
þæt hīe tōbrugdon blōdigum ceaflum
fira flæschoman him tō foddorþege. (158b-160)

[they had great need to tear to pieces with bloody jaws the flesh of men for their fodder.]

But Andrew will free Matthew and the others before the set day (990-1057), disappointing the expectations of the cannibals:

Þā gesamnedon sīde herigeas
folces frumgāras; tō þām fæstenne
wærlēasra werod wæpnum cōmon,
hæðne hildfrecan, tō þæs þā hæftas ær
under hlinscūwan hearm þrōwedon.
Wēndan ond woldon wiðerhycgende
þæt hīe on elþēodigum æt geworhton,
weotude wiste, him sēo wēn gel<ē>ah,
syððan mid corðre carcernes duru
eorre æscberend opene fundon,
onhliden hamera geweorc, hyrdas dēade. (1067-1077)

[Then the troops gathered from afar, the first spears of the people. The faithless host with weapons came to the fort, the heathen greedy for battle to the place where the captives earlier had suffered under the darkness of the prison. The men with hostile

have been suggested by Christ's words to the disciples: «Ecce ego mitto vos sicut oves in medio luporum» (Weber – Gryson 2007: Mt 10,16, cf. also Lk 10,3), especially considering that in P and C, in a dialogue between the two apostles (chap. 19), Andrew reminds Matthew of their Lord's statement. The two words share the first element *wæl* 'of destruction in war, slaughter, carnage' (Bosworth – Toller, *s.v.)*, which is particularly productive in the formation of compounds. In the poem, the adjectives *wælrēow* 1211a 'cruel in slaughter' and *wælgīfre* 1271a 'keen for carrion' (see *infra*) are also used to describe the Mermedonians – in an earlier occurrence (372a) the term denotes the seagulls in the description of the miracle of the storm – and again *wælgrim* 1415a 'grim as death' in reference to Andrew's torture, as well as the noun *hapax wælwang* 'plain of slaughter' 1226a, to indicate the place where the cannibals head for battle (see *infra*).

purpose expected and wanted to obtain food from the strangers ordained as their meal; that hope deceived them, when the angry ash-bearers with their armed band found the prison door wide open, the hammered work unclosed, the guards dead.]

And this «wærlēasra werod» 1069a 'faithless host', these warriors once again defined «hæðne hildfrecan»1070a, as in 126a[48] 'heathen greedy for battle', «eorre æscberend» 1076a, 47a 'angry ash-bearers', and «wiðerhycgende» 1072b 'men with hostile purpose', will find an empty prison.

The following proposal – to draw lots among the Mermedonians and eat their flesh – also fails at the will of the Lord who renders their swords useless at Andrew's request. In the opening scene of this section, which repeats the same pattern, the assembly of the Mermedonians is presented as a military meeting, a gathering to which brave fighters arrive ready to face any danger:

beornas cōmon,
wīggendra þrēat, wicgum gengan,
on mēarum mōdige, mæðelhēgende,
æscum dealle. (1094b-1097a)

[the men came, a throng of war-farers, coming on horses, proud on their steeds, deliberating together, exulting in spears.]

Actually they have to perform a rather simple procedure, albeit abhorrent in its purpose:

lēton him þā betwēonum taan wīsian
hwylcne hira ǣrest ōðrum sceolde
tō foddurþege fēores ongyldan;
hluton hellcræftum, hæðengildum
teledon betwinum (1099-1103a)

[They allowed themselves to be directed by a divining stick as to who among them would first have to offer his life unto the others for food-taking; they cast lots with hellish arts, they calculated among themselves with heathen rites.]

The stigmatisation of this horrific plan underlines how the cannibals belong to contexts that are enemies of Christianity: the *hapax hellcræft* 1102a expresses their 'hellish art' and the act performed is referred to as *hæðengild* 1102b 'heathen rite'. In this sense, the disparity between the preparation of a large group for the fight and the condition of the opponent becomes apparent:

[48] The compound occurs twice more only in *Beowulf* (Fulk – Bjork – Niles 2009) to designate reckless warriors (2205a) as well as the hero himself (2366a).

Þā wæs rinc manig,
gūðfrec guma, ymb þæs geongan feorh
brēostum onbryrded. (1116b-1118a)

[Then there was many a warrior, many a man greedy for the fight, excited in their breast for that young life.]

Hæfdon ǣglǣcan
sæcce gesōhte; sceolde sweordes ecg,
scerp ond scūrheard, of sceaðan folme,
fȳrmælum fāg, feorh ācsigan.
[…] þrymman scēocan,
mōdige maguþegnas, morðres on luste,
woldon ǣninga ellenrōfe
on þām hysebeorðre heafolan gescēnan,
gārum āgētan. (1131b-1143a)

[The ferocious opponents had sought for the fight; the sword's edge, sharp and hard in the storm of battle, stained by fire-marks, must demand his life by the hand of harmers. […] In majesty they hurried, the proud warriors, eager for murder; the strong men wanted, by any means, to break open the head of the young man, to destroy him with spears.]

In a concentric spiral of horrific actions and desires, the starving Mermedonians turn their murderous fury on the young man whom the elderly father, already destined by lottery to die, offered in his stead[49]. The increasing tension of the scene is provided by the pressing violence of the protagonists referred to by the variation «rinc manig, / gūðfrec guma» 1116b-1117a, by the noun *ǣglǣca* 1131b, or by the verse in which the alliteration underlines how these «modige maguþegnas»1140a 'proud warriors' are «morðres on luste» 1140b 'eager for murder'. But even in this case, God prevents the crime:

Hine god forstōd,
hālig of hēhðo, hæðenan folce;
hēt wæpen wera wexe gelīcost
on þām ōrlege eall formeltan,
þȳ læs scyldhatan sceaðan mihton,
egle ondsacan, ecga þrȳðum. (1143b-1148)

[God, holy from on high, defended him from the heathen people; he commanded that the weapons of those men should all melt away like wax during the fight, so

[49] In a typological interpretation, the sacrifice of the young Mermedonian paradoxically refers to the sacrifice of Christ; cf. Casteen (1974: 78), as well as Godlove (2009: 152).

that the evil foes, the loathsome adversaries, could not harm him with the power of their sword blades.]

The pagans, despite their fierceness, «scyldhatan»1147a 'evil foes', «egle ondsacan» 1148a 'loathsome adversaries', are still overwhelmed by the divine prodigy.

There is a similar narrative structure in the long section devoted to the tortures that the Mermedonians, instigated and led by the devil, inflict on Andrew. They are repeatedly depicted as a host of warriors in the imminence of battle:

āhleopon hildfrome heriges brehtme
ond tō weallgeatum wīgend þrungon,
cēne under cumblum, corðre mycle
tō ðām ōrlege, ordum ond bordum. (1202-1205)

[the bold in war men leapt up, with the roar of an army, the warriors thronged to gates in the city walls, keen under banners, in an armed band to the battle, with spears and shields.]

[…] com werod unmæte,
lyswe lārsmeoðas, mid lindgecrode,
bolgenmōde; bæron ūt hræðe
ond þām hālgan þær handa gebundon,
[…] Þær wæs sec<g> manig
on þām welwange. wīges oflysted
lēoda duguðe. (1219-1227a)

[[…] a measureless throng came, shameful counsellors with a troop of shield-bearers, swollen with fury; they swiftly bore him out and bound the saint's hands. […] There was many a warrior in that people's host, on the field of slaughter, eager for battle.]

Also referred to as «dēormōde» 1232a 'daring', «stærceferþþe» 1233b 'men of hardened hearts', connotations normally used to celebrate positive heroes[50], they repeatedly fetch the saint from prison:

Đā cōm hæleða þrēat
tō ðære dimman ding, duguð unlȳtel
wadan wælgrīfe. weorodes brehtme. (1269b-1271)

[Then a troop of heroes came to the dim prison, no small host advancing eager for slaughter, to the clamour of the crowd.]

[50] Again, Irving (1983: 231) appropriately speaks of «mock-heroic-usage».

As we know, the terrible torture inflicted on Andrew will not undermine his faith and even his body will be miraculously healed from his wounds.

Additionally, in a poem that devotes much space to dialogues, the audience perceives the horror aroused by the cannibals not only through the voice of the narrator, but also through the words of Matthew, Andrew, as well as through those of God and Christ, when they provide the apostles with indications, teachings, and reassurances about the outcome of the battle. In these passages the use of heroic vocabulary, of "battle-imagery", does not seem to have any paradoxical value. The ironic aspect of the narration emerges above all in the sections entrusted to the narrative voice, while the authoritative speakers, arguing among themselves, insist on the evil nature of their enemies: the fictional principle requires protagonists who strongly believe in the fearsome ferocity of the Mermedonians.

From this perspective, when God imposes the mission on an initially reluctant Andrew (Godlove 2015), he first informs him that these heathens to be converted are «sylfǣtan»175b, 'self-eaters, eaters of their own kind'. The *hapax* compound is the only term in the poem that refers to the Mermedonians as cannibals *tout court*; it proposes a much more terrible and disturbing image than that evoked by the Greek word ἀνθρωποφάγοι, since it alludes to a frighteningly bestial, self-destructive voracity, directed against themselves as well as against all those perceived as Others, as strangers to their own assembly[51]. Thus God repeatedly lingers over the fierce manifestations of this people who rule with «morðorcræftum» 176a 'murderous practices', and welcome foreigners with fierce hostility (176b-188); he illustrates their fearsome 'strength, ability in battle' with the *hapax beaducræft* 219a, and foretells to the apostle the dangers he will have to face in his mission (216-219). And again, when Christ speaks to Andrew before he enters the city, the inhabitants are referred to as «māngenīðlan» 916b 'criminal foes', «grame grynsmiðas» 917a 'hostile evil-doers'[52].

A further meaningful connotation in the "hateful" representation of the Mermedonians emerges from the dialogues: their tendency to deceit, to betrayal. For instance, Matthew, as soon as he is imprisoned, addresses God and uses the term «elþēodige»[53] 'strangers' with deep contempt. He states:

[51] Throughout the narration, the Mermedonians will also attempt to eat their own people (1089b-1135). In a figural reading of the poem, Earl (1980: 79) duly observes: «The term *sylfætan*, in the context of the theme of spiritual hunger, describes those who derive nourishment from themselves rather than from God and who thereby destroy themselves». On the interpretation of the compound, also see Blurton (2007: 32-33) and Godlove (2009: 145-146).

[52] Here again, the two compound nouns are *hapax*.

[53] It is worth noting that the same connotation is also used to indicate foreigners from the Mermedonians' point of view (16, 26 and *passim*).

‘Hū mē elþēodige inwitwrāsne
searonet sēo*w*að!’ (63-64a)

[How these strangers weave around me chains of evil, a web of cunning!]

He therefore defines his jailers «wærlogan» 71a[54], ‘treaty-breakers’. In his reassuring reply, God takes up Matthew’s words, once again mentioning vile artifices, concocted by unreliable, covenant-breaking men:

Geþola þēoda þrēa; nis sēo þrāh micel
þæt þē wærlogan wītebendum,
synnige ðurh searocræft, swencan mōtan. (107-109)

[Endure the oppression of these people. The treaty-breakers, sinful with treacherous skill, will no longer be able to torment you in bonds of torture.]

Similarly, when Christ addresses Andrew who has just arrived in Mermedonia, in describing Matthew’s condition, he emphasises:

wāt ic Māthēus þurh mænra hand
hrinen heorudolgum, hēafodmaga*n*
searo*n*ettum beseted. Þu hīne sēcan scealt,
lēofne ālȳsan of lāðra hete,
ond eal þæt mancynn þe him mid wunige,
elþēodigra inwitwrāsnum,
bealuwe gebundene. (941-947a)

[I know that Matthew has been hit by the hands of wicked with sword-wounds, your kinsman has been caught in a web of cunning. You must seek him, release the beloved man from the hate of his enemies, together with all the people who are with him there, in the chains of evil of strangers, in the wickedly bounds.]

The double, deceptive nature refers both to the use of those magical practices which the narrator’s Christian ethics stigmatises and devalues by presenting them as perfidious, devious tricks[55], and to the link with the devil, which is defined, in other passages of the poem *wærloga* (613a, 1297a), precisely as the Mermedonians. Similarly, deception, depicted as a skillfully woven web,

[54] It is a compound with multiple occurrences in both poetry and prose. Particularly, in *Genesis* (*ASPR* I) it is employed to refer to the angels who betrayed God by becoming devils (36b), or to the inhabitants of Sodom (1266a and 2411b); in prose, the alliterating word pair «wedlogan and wærlogan» is used by Wulfstan in the redundant lists of sinners destined to hell (cf. redaction E of *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, Whitelock 1976: 65, 172).

[55] On the representation of magic in *Andreas* cf. Riviello (2022: 87-124).

searonet 63a, 943a, *searocræft* 109a[56], and as a sequence of cruel acts ringed in chains, *inwitwrāsen* 63b, 946b[57], seems to envelop and restrain Matthew almost physically. As it is often the case in Old English poetry, the distinction between the figural and the literal levels seems very blurred (Stanley 1956: 414-447); the apostle's painful constriction is emphasised by the compound *wītebend* 108b 'bond of torture' or by the expression «bealuwe gebundene» 947a 'wickedly bounds' which refer to shackles that are both real and metaphorical. The repeated reference to the act of tying, bonding[58], shows the Mermedonians as the agents of an evil that, in addition to violently striking the adversary, aims at insinuating itself in a devious, insidious manner, just like the well-known machinations of that devil who is explicitly identified as the inspirational guide of their behaviour.

In constructing this structured process of demonising the Other, the dialogues also reveal how painful the consequences of infamous words can be. In a typological interpretation of the text, this aspect clearly recalls the martyrdom of the Saviour[59], an event of which Christ appropriately reminds Andrew in the poem:

> þæt mē bysmredon bennum fæstne
> weras wansǣlige, wordum tyrgdon,
> slogon ond swungon. Synnige ne mihton
> þurh sārcwide sōð gecȳðan (962-965)
>
> [Those unblest men mocked me while I was bound fast in chains; they insulted me with words, struck and flogged me. The sinners could not prove any truth with their injurious speech.]

The insulting term is used to strike and hurt just like any instrument of physical torture, but it is still far from the truth, for it is 'injurious speech' *sārcwide* 962a.

[56] The compounds share the noun *searu*, traceable to the root of ie. **ser-* 'to place, to bind together' (Pokorny 1948-1969: 911), which, in Old English, can indicate the ability to produce entanglement, to unite certain elements, or the ability to weave metaphorical plots or deceptions and betrayals.

[57] The noun has no other occurrences in Old English literature.

[58] Reference to the shackles with which the defenders of Christianity are oppressed in a foreign land also appears elsewhere. For example, the scene where Matthew and the other prisoners are rescued by Andrew insists on the image of being freed from the chains: «ond þā gelǣdde of leoðobendum» 1033 'and then he led out of their bonds'; «generede fram nīðe, þǣr hē nǣnig<n>e forlēt / under burglocan ben*d*um fæstne» 1037-1038 'released from affliction, there he left no man behind in the stronghold fastened in bonds'.

[59] Among the main works presenting a typological interpretation of the poem, see Hill (1969), Hamilton (1972), Casteen (1974), Walsh (1977), Earl (1980), Calder (1986), Boenig (1991b).

However, in his human frailty, Matthew shows that he fears the brutality of slander and, in his plea to God, begs Him to also save him from the slanderous speeches he is facing[60]:

Forgif mē tō āre, ælmihtig god,
leoht on þissum life, þȳ læs ic lungre scyle,
[…]
þurh hearmcwide heorugrǣdigra
lāðra lēodsceaðena, leng þrōwian
edwitsprǣce. (76-81a)

[Give me your mercy, almighty God, light in this life, lest I must at length […]
suffer calumny of the bloodthirsty, scornful speech of hostile despoilers of people.]

The equation between verbal violence and physical violence is highlighted by the alliterating construction, which emphasised the syntactic and metrical link between the noun *hearmcwid* 76a 'calumny' and the adjective *heorugrǣdig* 76b 'bloodthirsty'[61]; the second element of the variation, «lāðra lēodsceaðena […] edwitsprǣce» 80a/81a 'scornful speech of hostile despoilers of people', reiterates this identification. Finally, the apostle begs not to die «mid scyldhetum, / werigum wrōhtsmiðum» 85b-86a 'among evil foes, accursed contrivers of accusation'[62].

Similarly, in prison, Andrew expresses to the Lord the same fear about the words of the devil:

ne lǣt nū bysmrian banan manncynnes,
fācnes frumbearn, þurh fēondes cræft
leahtrum belecgan þā þīn lof berað. (1293-1295)

[60] Appropriately, Shaw (1995) observes how the «power of spoken word» has a distinctive prominence in *Andreas*: in the process of translation which re-elaborates Latin hagiographic material into an Old English poem, great emphasis is given to this aspect as compared to the sources. The reference to slander as an additional element of suffering for the prisoners is not mentioned in either P or C.

[61] In Old English the compound is documented only another time, in this poem (38a), when referring to the victims obtunded by the magic potion. If the second element refers to the aforementioned *wælgrǣdig* 135a, the first element *heoru* has only two occurrences in the poetic vocabulary with the meaning of 'sword', but is very productive in the formation of compounds (cf. *DOE* and the accurate analysis of Teresi 2004). Specifically, the poem includes the aforementioned adjectives *heorogrim* 31a, *heorodrēorig* 996a, 1083a, which refer to the corpses of the 'blood-soaked' prison guards, as well as the *hapax heorudolg* 942a, and the noun *heorusweng* 952a, which respectively indicate the violent blows Matthew has already suffered and Andrew will experience in his mission.

[62] While *scyldhata* appears to be a *hapax* in the poem, where it occurs three times (85b, 1047a, 1147a) – again in reference to the Mermedonians – the compound *wrōhtsmiþ* is documented only one more time, in *Guthlac* 905a (*ASPR* II), to indicate the demons, that is, the fearsome torturers of the saint.

[do not now allow the slayer of mankind, the firstborn of treachery insult through fiendish cunning, cover with reproaches those who spread praise of you.]

In turn, the devil recognises the dangerousness of Andrew's words when he urges his followers to silence him by hitting him on the mouth:

Slēað synnigne ofer seolfes mūð,
folces gewinnan! Nū tō feala reordaþ. (1300-1301)

[Strike the sinful man on the mouth, the enemy of the people. He talks too much now.]

The aggressiveness towards the apostle is also expressed on a verbal level; the devil uses «hospword» 1315b 'words of contempt' against him and, to mock his boasted glory, recalls the passion and death of Christ, making the typological reference explicit (1322-1327). Later on, the demons, to whom the devil entrusts the task of annihilating Andrew's strength, also intend to achieve their purpose by using offensive words:

þæt wē bysmrigen bendum fæstne,
oðwītan him his wræcsīð; habbað word gearu
wið þām æglæcan eall getrahtod! (1357-1359)

[that we might insult him in his fast bonds, taunt him about his wretchedness, we have words ready, wholly considered, against that ferocious fighter.]

The destructive power of the words seems to be used by the poet from the perspective of both sides, along a path of rigorous coherence with effective and relevant lexical choices in a balanced interplay of analogies and contrasts. Particularly, in the section where Andrew confronts the devil and his emissaries (1311-1387), the use of certain epithets reveals the irony of paradox. Like the Mermedonians (1131b), the devil is referred to as *æglæca* (1311a), the same noun used by the demons in reference to the saint (1359a) when they tell their leader about the failed attempt to kill Andrew[63]. Similarly, in stirring up the crowd against him, the devil had already called the saint *wiðerhycgende* 1172a, 'a men with hostile purpose', a connotation already attributed to the Mermedonians 1072b; in this section, he refers to him with the noun *gūðfrec* 1333a, 'greedy for the fight', whereas the corresponding adjectival form, in the construction «gūðfrec guma» 1117a, once

[63] Later, the devil will accuse Andrew of using *āglāccræft* 1362b 'magical arts' (Riviello 2022: 111-116). For an analysis of the occurrences and relative meanings with which the noun *æglæca* is employed in Old English documents see Gillam 1961, as well as the additional bibliographical references in *Beowulf* (Fulk – Bjork – Niles 2009: 347-348).

again designates the cannibals[64]. The parallelism of these designations underlines the ridiculous incongruity of the words of the devil and his helpers[65] for an audience that has a clear understanding of the distinction between good and evil. By contrast, in the description of the Jews – mentioned by Matthew (161-167a) and protagonists of the miracle of the statue (706-806) recounted by Andrew during his journey to Mermedonia – the repetition of characteristics also belonging to the Mermedonians identifies, in a single genus, all those who deliberately remain distant from the Christian doctrine (Earl 1980: 72-73, Godlove 2009: 148-150, Riviello 2022: 104-108).

Overall, compared to the linear good/evil polarisation proposed in P and C, in Old English verses the space devoted to the sphere of evil is expanded. The negative representation of the enemy is extraordinarily enhanced. As highlighted by some of the aforementioned examples, the poet proves to be well aware of how the strategies of nominal composition allow for an endless multiplication of word combinations, in order to re-propose synonymous meanings by evoking different images. The Mermedonians, for example, are described as 'doers of evil' *grynsmið* 917a, or 'doers of accusations' *wrōhtsmið* 86a; they are greedy for battle, *gūðfrec* 1117a, *hildefreca* 126a, 1070a, as well as for massacres and corpses *heorogrǣdig* 79b, *wælgrǣdig* 135a, *wælgīfre* 1271a; or some of the so-called "mind-words" *mōd, heart, ferhþ*, *hyge* and their corradicals (Harbus 2002) are used to indicate the state of mind of these daring warriors in compounds such as *bolgenmōd* 128a, 1221a, *dēormōd* 1232a, *caldheort* 139a, *stærceferþ* 1233b, *wiðerhycgende* 1072b.

The succession of connotative nouns and adjectives, simple or compound, *hapax* or with multiple occurrences, marks the pace of the narration with a resounding, almost pyrotechnic cadence, vividly explicating all the elements that legitimise the process of annihilation-assimilation of the Other. These are ruthless warriors, driven by a bestial and bloody wickedness, devoted to deception and falsehood, heathens who show familiarity and closeness to the devil. The use of the heroic vocabulary entrusted to the narrative voice is framed within a double paradox: they have no positive qualities and, at the same time, the insistence on their bellicosity, on the imagery of battle in incongruous contexts ridicules their condition, their actions. Alongside the horror and disgust at the threatening antisocial, destabilising behaviour, the demonisation of the enemy is also achieved through irony. Mockery, however, does not minimise the dangerousness of a population that aims to physically and mentally shackle anyone perceived to be a foreigner, just as it does not render the power of the devil completely inoffensive,

[64] While the adjective is a *hapax* in the poem, the noun is also present in other poetic texts; in *Beowulf*, for example, it indicated the dragon (2414a), while in *Judith* (*ASPR* III) it is used by the Assyrians in the expression «grama guðfrec» (224a).

[65] The comic effect of the scene is analysed by Wilcox (2003: 205-208).

thus not diminishing the need for annihilation; rather, it reinforces the awareness of divine power. The audience understands that the arrogant violence of the enemy is destined to succumb before the truth of the doctrine, that the power of the Mermedonians is only apparent, bogus in substance, the result of their deceitful nature, as repeatedly stated in the direct speeches. Conversion breaks that line of evil that had bound the anthropophagi to the Jews and the devil. By subtracting themselves from the devil's leadership and entrusting themselves to Andrew, the Mermedonians de-cannibalise themselves, they abjure their original identity and, from the point of view of the author and therefore of the audience, switch to the side of the righteous and enter the community of believers.

Monstrous women and Mermedonians represent two distinct types of dehumanised Other, and eradicating their Otherness has different implications. The hybrid women in *Wonders of the East* are perceived as irremediably different because their Otherness extends beyond their behaviours to include their own body, which is a hybrid of animal parts, shameful, and inextricably linked to some form of indignity. As they cannot be captured alive, they cannot be domesticated or integrated in any way. They are unable to exist in human society and thus are killed to remove the threat that their existence represents. Their difference is viewed as essential and irreversible, resulting in a definitive condemnation that does not allow for redemption. Physical elimination is the only way to restore order. In contrast, the Mermedonians of *Andreas* are not wholly excluded, as they remain part of the human species. Their Otherness is not physical; it is mostly perceived as behavioural. More specifically, the pagan Mermedonians live in 'borderland wrapped in murder, in devilish deceit' (*Eal wæs þæt mearcland morðre bewunden / fēondes fācne* 19-20a). But their acts of cannibalism, their magical practices can be replaced by socially acceptable customs through conversion to the Christian faith. And they accept the opportunity offered to them: to give up their antisocial behaviour or to renounce the devil in order to accept the 'correct' rules shared by Andrew and Matthew, to embrace Christianity and 'salvation'. Obviously, this entails the loss, the cancellation of their original identity in favour of a process of total assimilation.

In a sense, the hybrid women and the cannibal Mermedonians represent the two extremes in an ongoing dialectic within the medieval conceptualisation of Otherness. As suggested by Freedman (2002: 1-25), multitude of Others emerged during the Middle Ages, delimited by two opposing tendencies: one that perceives the monstrous Other in an optimistic manner, as «an object of divine solicitude, capable of receiving the Christian message» and one that sees it as simply «cursed» (Freedman 2002: 2).

Othering processes, however, do not differentiate among them, dehumanising language, as seen, can and does apply in both scenarios. Thus, in spite of the differences determined by the textual typology and the subject matter narrated, the assimilation of the Mermedonians into the Christian world in *Andreas* and

the annihilation of the monstrous women in *Wonders of the East* are facets of an identical process, two options that ultimately produce the same epilogue: when the Other is perceived as a threat to one's survival, the amplification of the morally negative connotations progressively constructs the development of a story that justifies even the use of violence, as a necessary means to overpower – eradicate in assimilation or in extermination – the Other.

Therefore, in Anglo-Saxon England, too, the ends and modalities of hate speech seem to be well known. As suggested by Bianchi (2021: 10), hate speech is not simply used to convey contempt and hostility towards groups and individuals, but it serves to proselytise that contempt and hostility by inciting discrimination, hatred and violence[66].

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[66] «Il linguaggio d'odio non solo comunica disprezzo e ostilità contro individui e gruppi, ma anche svolge opera di proselitismo di quel disprezzo e quella ostilità, incita alla discriminazione, all'odio e alla violenza».

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