

FROM YOUTH TO AGE THROUGH  
OLD ENGLISH POETRY  
(WITH OLD NORSE PARALLELS)<sup>1</sup>

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In 1986 three monographs on the medieval conception of the ages of man appeared, authored by John Burrow, Mary Dove, and Elizabeth Sears. Far from exhausting this topic, these works have encouraged the critics to delve further into this question by providing them with an adequate theoretical framework. Prof. Burrow is the only one of these scholars who attempts to elucidate the perception that the Anglo-Saxons had in relation to the ages of man, however. After having surveyed numerous texts—including literary works, the Anglo-Saxons' saints' lives, homilies, treatises on astrology, etc.—Burrow (1986: 109) arrives at this conclusion:

their [the Anglo-Saxons'] stress on the moral and spiritual superiority of the old is such that, if we were to follow Philippe Ariès in supposing that every period of history favours or privileges one among the ages of man, the only possible choice for the Anglo-Saxon period would be *senectus*.

I believe that this position requires a more precise formulation when referring to the literary representation of the ages of man. My intentions in this paper are, first, to explore the progress from youth to age as portrayed in Old English poetry; second, to determine which would be the preferred age for the Anglo-Saxons, as far as can be assessed from the extant evidence. In both cases, references are made to the cognate Old Norse literature in order to reinforce the limited evidence in Old English.<sup>2</sup> This discussion is based only on a literary



For þou cnyssað nu  
 þæt ic hean streamas,  
 heortan gephohas  
 sealyþa gelæc sylf cunnige –  
 monað modes lust mæla gehwylc  
 feoð to fetan, þæt ic feor heonan  
 elþeodigra eard gesece. (The Seafarer lines 33b-38)<sup>18</sup>

The benefits resulting from traveling are proverbial and they are also acclaimed in Old Norse poetry, as described in *Háttatali*:

Sá einn veit That one alone knows  
 er víða ratar who roams widely  
 ok hefir fiðlð um farit, and has travelled greatly,  
 hverio geði what kind of mind  
 sýrir gufna hverr. (181-5) each man has.

Moreover, traveling was sometimes presented as guarantee of knowledge. Widstith adduces the vast experience acquired in his many journeys as entitling him to recite his poem with a sense of authority:

Swa ic geondferde feła fremdra londa  
 geond gine grund, godes & ylles  
 þær ic cunnaðe, cnoðle biðaðeð,  
 feomegum feor, folgade wide.  
 Forþon ic mæg singan & secean spell. (Widstith lines 50-53)<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, the authority that this evocation really confers on him is relative, as the evidence of the *Dunham Proverbs* suggests: “Hwon geþeð se þe wide sipað” (p. 295).<sup>20</sup>

Although, theoretically, traveling could provide a good training for the adequate nurturing of youths, its positive impact cannot be taken for granted, as Beowulf informs us: “feorcþe beoð / seþran gesohte þæm þe him selfa deað” (lines 1838b-39).<sup>21</sup> The same feeling is shared in *Háttatali*: “Vitæ er þoþf / þeim er víða ratar” (51-2).<sup>22</sup> Consequently, it is necessary that the young men venturing afar be endowed with certain skills that assist them in coping with adversity, otherwise they will be heading for disaster and probably for death.

The rigors of treading the paths of exile are clearly explained in *The Seafarer*:

Þæt se mon ne wat  
 fægrost limpeð,  
 þe him on foldan hu ic earnnearig  
 winter winnaðe iscaldne sæ  
 winnægum biðforen, wraccan lastum,  
 hiengen hringcelum; hægle scurum fleag. (lines 12b-17)<sup>23</sup>

The harshness of a wandering lifestyle is accentuated by contrasting it with the ease of life at home, where everyday existence is not as stressful and demanding. This topic comes up several times in *The Seafarer* (cf. lines 27-30 and 55b-57), and is also alluded to in *Háttatali* when the challenge of traveling is compared to the easy life at home.<sup>24</sup>

At this point, I would like to recapitulate the two stages by which young men attain wisdom, in order to make a comparison between them. The first stage is characterized by the transmission of social principles that the youngster will have to put into practice from then on. These teachings provide them with rules for good or sensible behavior. For instance, the father in *Precepts* advises his son not to be hasty of speech: “Wærwyrðe secal wistfaest hæle / breostum bycgan, nales breatþme hlud” (lines 57-58).<sup>25</sup> The Wanderer states his familiarity with this proverb:

Ic to soþe wat  
 þæt biþ in eorle indryhten þeaw  
 þæt he his feollöcan faeste binde,  
 healde his hordcofan. (lines 11<sup>a</sup>-14<sup>a</sup>)<sup>26</sup>

He, subsequently, declares his acceptance and application of this principle: “swa ic moðsefan minne sceolde / (...) fetecum sælan” (lines 19 and 21b).<sup>27</sup>

Second, there is also a very distinctive feature that characterizes the two phases: the degree of social interaction involved. The young boy who associates himself with a savant establishes with him a very close and comforting relation that gives him a feeling of security. Conversely, when the time comes later for him to train himself in wisdom, the youngster faces a solitary learning experience; thus, at the end of *The Wanderer*, whose protagonist also walked the “wraccan lastum”, we read: “Swa ewarz snottor on mode, gesæt him sunðor æt rune” (line 111).<sup>28</sup> This solitude is their constant companion all the way through their personal voyage, and impregnates all their experience, as is clear from the Wanderer’s words:

sohte seledreorig sinceþ brytan,  
 hwær ic feor oþþe neah findan meahþe  
 þone þe in meoðhealle minne myne wisse,  
 oþþe mec freondleasne fefran wolde,  
 wætan mid wyrrnum. (lines 25-29a)<sup>29</sup>

The third point of comparison refers to the degree of involvement of the youths in their learning experience. When they join an instructor they are merely receiving his teachings passively. By contrast, the wanderer has no choice but to attempt to solve the problems posed during his journey himself. If we add to these considerations the fact that the traveler has no assurance of success in his mission,

it seems natural that the association with a sage should be thought to be more desirable. The Wanderer himself remembers with nostalgia his period of union with a wise man: "Forþon wat se þe sceal his wineðryhnes / leofes larcwudum longe forþolian" (lines 37-38).<sup>30</sup>

The Old Icelandic literature offers a testimony of great value for a fuller appreciation of the development of the youths as described above:

Nú er annan vegg þeira lífi er upp vaxa með fǫður sínum ok þykkja yðr einiskis háttar hía yðr; en þá er þeir eru frunnaxtra, fara land af landi ok þykkja þar mesthátar sem þá koma þeir, koma við þat út ok þykkisk þá höfðingjum meiri.<sup>31</sup>

The servant woman who pronounces these words here explains the social dimension of the two stages mentioned above: while the youths are under the tutelage of an elder—in this case their father—they play a low-key role. The return of the youngsters from distant lands marks the completion of a rite of passage; they are then regarded as adults and acquire greater social prominence. There is no similar statement in the Old English literature that would provide us with this kind of insight. Nonetheless, from the texts examined, it seems to me that there is absolute consonance with the ideas held in *Hrafnhelli's saga*.

Thus far, it may seem that *juventus* was an age for training and education to which all youths would devote themselves exclusively. In contrast, on the path to wisdom young men would have to overcome the temptations of their age,<sup>32</sup> and also the dangers menacing their existence.<sup>33</sup> This is a turbulent and unstable age in which it is very easy to turn away from the right path, a fact that causes the concern of mothers, as Solomon points out:

Heo ðæs aſan sceall	oft and gelome
gimme gretolan,	bonne he geong fareð,
hafað wilde mod,	wertige heortan,
seān sorgfulne,	slided geneahce,
wetig, wilna leas,	waldres bedæled. (lines 37-38) <sup>34</sup>

The father in *Precepts* cautions his son against the vices that may imperil his youth:

Druncen beorg þe	ond dollic word,
man on mode	ond in mupe lyge,
yrre ond æfeste	ond idese lutan. (lines 34-36) <sup>35</sup>

The pernicious effect that vices have on the road to wisdom is clearly averred in *Hávamál*, in relation to lust for women it says that

heimska or horskom	foolish from wise
görrir höfða sono	makes the sons of men
sá inn mæddi munr	that powerful desire

(94<sup>4-6</sup>)

Indulging in drunkenness has similar consequences:

þviat fara veit,	since he knows less,
er fleira drektr,	when he drinks more,
sins til geðs gunni. (12 <sup>4-5</sup> )	the man about his own wits.

Iniquitous behavior therefore prevents the acquisition of wisdom; this situation can only be reversed in very special cases. A manifest example is furnished by *Guthlac A*. The protagonist of this poem led a sinful life during his youth:

Hwæt we hyrdon of	þæt se halga wer
in þa arestan	aldri gelufade
freccessa fea. (lines 108-110) <sup>36</sup>	

Nevertheless, Guthlac enjoyed the continuous supervision of an older angel who chose to stand by him during those moments when the influence of evil was most intense, "geornast grette 7 him giefe scalde" (line 357).<sup>37</sup> Guthlac's later religious and pious attitude was rewarded by God when Guthlac was of advanced years:

ða was agongen	þæt him God wolde
after þrowinga	þonc gegyldan
þæt he marrythad	mode gelufade;
scalde him snyttu	on sefan gehygdum,
mægenfaſte genynd. (lines 470-474) <sup>38</sup>	

The stage in which a young man completes his training extended over a prolonged period. There are exceptional cases, however, in which the learning process is brought to a halt before the end of his young age. Then, we find youths endowed with the traditional attributes of older people. This topos of the *puer senex*, or aged youth, is recurrent in hagiographic texts, in which the alteration of the normal *causans aetatis* has its origin in divine intervention.<sup>39</sup> This theme is also found in literary texts and there are also some witnesses in Anglo-Saxon literature which have been widely studied (see Burrow 1986: 103). The description of a *puer senex* is found in *Anhrens*, where God appears to St Andrews in the form of an expert sailor:

Du eart scola geong,	
wigendra hleo,	nalas wintrum frod;
hafast þeh on fyrhðe,	farodlaecnde,
corles ondsware.	Aeghwylces canst
worda for woruðde	wislic andgilt. (lines 505 <sup>h</sup> -509) <sup>40</sup>

Here the youth's strength of mind, typical of an *eorl* or old man, is emphasized. Nevertheless, God's direct participation makes any further comment unnecessary. Likewise, in *Beowulf*, our hero is described in the same terms, and Hirothgar alludes to the inevitable intervention of the supernatural to comprehend Beowulf's unsurpassed eloquence:

Pe þa wordewydas                    wígtígg Dritten  
 on sefan sende;                    ne hyrde ic smortorlicor  
 on swa geongum feore            gumnan þingian.  
 þu eart mægens strang            ond on mode frod,  
 wis wordewidal (lines 1841-1845)<sup>41</sup>

Another instance of transcendence is provided by *Widsith*, where the premature *fortitudo* of Offa is highlighted, not his *sapientia*:

ac Offa geslog ærest monna,  
 criht wesende, cynetrica mæst.  
 Nanig efeneald him eorlscipe maran  
 onorette. (lines 38-41)<sup>42</sup>

Those who have successfully passed through their juvenile period with no extraordinary divine help will next enter a new stage in their lives. Its characteristics are explicitly described in *The Fortunes of Men*:

Sum secal on geogube	mid godes meahnum
his eorðsíp	ealne forspildan,
ond on ylðo eft	caðig weorþan,
wunian wyrdagum	ond welan þicgan,
mapnas ond meodufal	mægburge on,
þas þe anig fira mæge	forð gecwaldan. (lines 58-63) <sup>43</sup>

This is an age of well-being that represents the consummation of the previous stage. Here they find the “*caedes hleotan*” that the father in *Precepts* promises his son as the end result of following his teachings. This brings us to the second purpose in this discussion: the identification of the preferred age among the Anglo-Saxons. As indicated above, Burrow has identified the perfect age of the Anglo-Saxons with *senectus*, though he does so cautiously, due to the scarce textual evidence preserved. He (1986: 108) rules out *juventus*, basing his rejection a negative interpolation in the *Dicks of Catta*, however, and reaffirms the supremacy of old age because of its “moral and spiritual superiority” derived mainly from *sapientia*. Nonetheless, Burrow omits similar allusions that depict old age as evil. In Hrothgar’s opinion, old age is a danger to people’s welfare: “Wunað he on wiste; no hine wíht dweled / adl ne ylðo” (*Beowulf*, lines 1735-1736).<sup>44</sup> Hrothgar even labels it “*atol*” (“terrible”, line 1765<sup>45</sup>). It is therefore legitimate to conclude that, according to the extant evidence, neither youth nor old age represent the Anglo-Saxon acme or perfect age. What then was their preferred age?

We would agree that the excerpt quoted above from *The Fortunes of Men* (lines 58-63) provides a literary representation of the age most privileged and favored among the Anglo-Saxons. Although the author of *The Fortunes of Men* refers to

this age as *ylðo* (line 60), the possible interpretation of this word not only as “old age”, but also as “age, time of life” (Bosworth-Toller 1898: 587-588) must not be overlooked.<sup>45</sup> The latter seems to be the intended meaning, since the text suggests direct continuity from youth, and it is therefore a transitional period between youth and old age, “*vergens actas a iuventute in senium*”.<sup>46</sup> This corresponds with the Latin *gravisitas*, which Isidore defines as “*declinatio a iuventute in senectutem, nondum senectus, sed iam non iuventus*”.<sup>47</sup>

The author’s selection of the generic term “age” confirms Mary Dove’s (1986: 5) appreciation of the unusualness of “any explicit reference in medieval English literature to an age intervening between youth and old age”. Given this, it is appropriate to quote a comment on the ages of man that Ælfric includes in his homily on the Parable of the Vineyard:

Witodlice ures andgites merigen. is ure cildhad. ure cnihthad swylce undermid on þam astið ure geogod. swa swa seo sunne deð ymbe þære driðdan tide. Ure fulfremeda wasstm. swa swa middæg. for ðan ðe on midne dæg bið seo sunne on ðam utemestum rync stigende. swa swa se fulfremeda wasstm bið on filre strenche béonde; Seo nonið bið ure yld. for ðan ðe on noniðe astið seo sunne. and ðæs caldigendan mannes mægen bið wantigende (Godden 1979: 44).<sup>48</sup>

Ælfric calls this intermediate stage “*fulfremeda wasstm*” (completed growth), which is the culmination of the man’s potential at all levels. Ælfric’s terminology coincides with the word chosen by King Alfred in his translation of Gregory’s *Cura Pastoralis* (Sweet 1872: 385); he renders Gregory’s “*perfecta actate*” with the expression “*fulfremede ielde*” (“completed age”), which presents the same connotations of privileged age, although here this occurs in a completely theological context.<sup>49</sup>

The Old Norse literature furnishes us with material coincident with the views identified in the Old English texts. Firstly, both traditions recognize a period that marks the completion of the youth’s development and the beginning of his adulthood apart from his parents. Both literatures avoid labelling the stage following youth with a denotative noun. Instead, the two languages make use of past participles to refer to this middle age: “*frunvaxinn*” (ON), “*fulfremede*” (OE), “*full-orðinn*” (ON), “*full-proskaðr*” (ON), and “*roskinn*” (ON). The same reference can be found in the sagas: “*þeir [Þórólf and Thorstein] óxu upp með föður sínum, þar til er þeir vǫru frunvaxta*”,<sup>50</sup> “*Ózsofr Hafgrímsson uex upp [...] þar til sem hann er full proskadr madr*”,<sup>51</sup> “[...] þar til er Ásmundur var roskin at aldri; þá beiddi Ásmundur fǫrafreña af föður sínum [...]]; fór Ásmundur þá útan”.<sup>52</sup>

The problem now is to determine whether or not this stage of maturity was accompanied in the Old Norse literature by the positive connotations pointed out

above. I have isolated two references in *Egils saga* that suggest some sort of predilection for this *grannias*. The book begins by narrating the experiences of Ulf Bjalfason from the Viking expeditions of his youth up to his adulthood, which is depicted in the following way:

Úlfur var maðr auðgýr, bæði at fjndum ok lausum aurum; hann tók lends manns rétt, svá sem haft höfðu langfæðgar hans, ok gerðisk maðr ríkr [...], en stundum var hann á tali við menn, þá er ráða hans þurftu; kunnir hann til alls góðs ráðs at leggja, því at hann var forvitrí (Nordal 1933: 4).<sup>53</sup>

This description is infused with the same air of well-being that was generated by *The Fortunes of Men*. Ulf starts his adulthood by getting married and having two children. Later we learn that his advanced age prevents him from benefiting from the excellent conditions for plunder. His sons, however, have no such impediment because they are of that privileged age — “synir hans vǫru rosknir” (Nordal 1933: 6).<sup>54</sup>

The second instance from *Egils saga* reveals the same perception of old age as a hindrance to the full use of human capacities: “er Haraldr konungr var gamall orðinn, þá réð fyrir Yermalandi jarl sá, er Arnviðr hét; var þar þá, sem mjök víða annars staðar, at skattar greiddusk verr en þá er Haraldr konungr var á létrasta skeiði aldri” (Nordal 1933: 220).<sup>55</sup> King Harald has now passed his stage of full development or his plenitude; he is in his declining years, and is therefore unable to fulfill his obligations as he had in his maturity.

As I stated at the beginning of this paper (see note 2), the views I express in relation to Old Norse literature are not meant to have an absolute and definitive value; nevertheless, one can conclude from the parallels presented so far that both literatures share fundamental ideas on the issue of age.

To summarize, in relation to the development of a young man, we can say that *juventus* was a stage in life in which three contrary components coincided, namely, the need for training in order to become a full member of society, the vices and dissipation that hinder the previous objective, and the dangers that impel the youth's existence. The young man had to be invested with integrity in order to successfully complete this phase. There is a gnomic statement in *The Wigð-Lament* that precisely emphasizes the pre-eminence of a sense of righteousness in the youngest's behavior:

A scyle geong mon	wesan geomormod,
heard heortan geþoht,	swlce habban sceal
blipe geþero,	eac þon broostceare,
sinsorga gedreag,	sy at him sylfum gelong
eal his worulde wyn,	sy ful wide fah
feores folclondes.	(ll. 42-47) <sup>56</sup>

Here the attitude a young man — while “geong caldian” (*Maxims I*, line 8<sup>9</sup>) — should adopt in this age of personal development is described. The adoption of such behavior will prove fundamental in his next age, the well-being of which is totally dependent on his youth. This belief in the determining effect of youth is implicit in this Icelandic gnome: “fær er hvatr; / er hveðaz tekr, / ef í barnrosko er blaundr.”<sup>57</sup>

With regard to the preferred age, the transition period between youth and old age was regarded by the Anglo-Saxons as the perfect age, a stage in which the symptoms of decrepitude have not yet manifested themselves and the training period has been completed. Their preference for *grannias* over *senectus* can be explained mainly by the physical deterioration associated with old age. As *Aelfric* describes: “wiroldlice on caldicum gearum bið ðas mannes wasum geþged. his swura áslacod. his neþ bið gerifod. his leomu calle gewrahte; His broost bið mid siccetungum geþread, and betwux wordum his orþung ateorad.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that this middle age, representing a balance between *sapientia* and *fortitudo*, was the one preferred by the Anglo-Saxons.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article is an extended version of a paper presented in the Medieval Studies Colloquium, Cornell University (February, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> I want to emphasize that the purpose of introducing Old Norse parallels is to supplement the Old English texts with further illustration. Consequently, the exemplification and analysis of Old Norse quotations are not intended to be comprehensive.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. Weber *et al.* (1994: 975). “The joy of young men is their strength; and the dignity of old men their grey hairs.” Translation from *The Holy Bible Translated from the Latin Vulgate: Douay's version* (1914: 673). In order to make this paper more accessible, I append literal translations of the texts in Latin, Old English, and Old Norse. All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

<sup>4</sup> *Super Parabolas Salomonis Allegorica Expositio*, 2.20, PL 91, col. 999. “It says that grey hair means wisdom [...] and elderly men endowed with greater prudence reflect wholesomely about the things that should be done.”

<sup>5</sup> *Epistulae*, ep. 52.3.2, p. 416. “Almost all the powers of the body are changed in aged men, and while wisdom alone increases, all the rest fade away.”

<sup>6</sup> “A warrior must show loyalty; a man must have wisdom” (trans. Shippey 1976: 77). All quotations of Old English poetry are from *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* (eds. Krapp and Dobbie 1931-53) when no other specific edition is mentioned. Reference to the editor will only appear in the first occurrence of the work.

7. "A sick man needs a doctor. A young man is to be taught, to be encouraged and prompted to know things well, until you have made him manageable" (trans. Shippey 1976: 67).

8. "Good advice is the most useful thing" (trans. Shippey 1976: 71). Cf. *Hávamál*, 63<sup>a</sup>: "þviat óðrigdra vin / fær mædr aldregi / en manvit mikit" (ed. Helgason, 1955a, vol. 1, p. 16) ["For a man cannot obtain a more reliable friend than great judgment"].

9. Another instance of the transmission of wisdom from an old and sage person to a young man can be found in the so-called Hrothgar's sermon in *Beowulf* (ed. Klaeber 1950) (lines 1700-84 (cf. Hansen 1982)).

10. "This is how the father — a man of experience with an intelligent mind, a man who had grown old in good qualities—this is how he taught his noble son, giving him sensible advice, so that he would get on well" (trans. Shippey 1976: 49).

11. Howe (1985: 142) suggests the Book of Proverbs as a possible model for *Precepts*. Howe also affirms that "the order of the ten entries in the catalogue corresponds roughly to the order of human life; both follow the common, three-fold division of youth, maturity and old age" (1985: 145). This interpretation seems far-fetched to me, and Howe (1985: 150-151) himself is aware of its weakness. The progression in the teachings that Howe verifies corresponds to the evolution of the youths during his first formative period under the tutelage of a wise man, but there is no explicit or implicit correlation with the ages of man.

12. "But always choose as an adviser for yourself someone who is resourceful in precepts and examples, whatever his status happens to be" (trans. Shippey 1976: 49).

13. "But why will a man not be eager in his youth to gain himself a valuable lord and a champion, to pursue wisdom, to struggle for sagacity?" (trans. Shippey 1976: 97).

14. "And be generous in counsel to these boys".

15. "Train yourself in wisdom" (trans. Shippey 1976: 51).

16. "And an old man knows most things, a man made wise by distant years, who has experienced a great deal before" (trans. Shippey 1976: 77).

17. "Assuredly no man can become wise before he has had a great many years in the world". This view is corroborated by Hrothgar: "ic his gfd be þe / awwæc winturum frod" (*Beowulf*, 1723<sup>b</sup>-24<sup>a</sup>) [I, wise with winters, have told this tale for your sake].

18. Ed. Gordon (1966). "And so, the thoughts beat upon my heart, now that I myself am to explore the deep seas, the tumult of the seaways. The desire of my mind urges the heart on every occasion to set out, so that I may seek far from here the foreign land".

19. Ed. Malone (1962). "Thus I travelled through many foreign lands over the wide land. I experienced there good and evil: parted from my kindred, far from my kinsmen, I served widely. Thus I can sing and tell my story" (see Howe 1985: 179-180).

20. Ed. Amgart (1981). "A little boasts he who travels widely".

21. "Distant lands are better sought by one who is himself of worth".

22. "Wits are needed for those who travel widely". Desks offers a discussion of this parallel (1996: 126-128).

23. "That man does not know, whom it befalls most fairly on land, how I, wretched and sorrowful, remained years on the ice-cold sea, in the paths of exile, bereaved of dear kinsmen, hung around by icicles; hail flew in showers".

24. "Dæit er heima hvar" (5<sup>3</sup>) ["Anything will do at home"].

25. "A sensible man must be careful with his words, and think things over in his heart, not be loud and noisy" (trans. Shippey 1976: 51).

26. *The Wanderer*, eds. Dunning and Bliss (1969). "I know as a fact that it is in a grown man a noble custom to bind firmly his breast, to preserve the treasury of his thoughts".

27. "So I have had to bind with fetters my thoughts".

28. "Thus spoke the wise in spirit, he sat apart in secret meditation".

29. "Sad at the loss of the hall, I sought for some giver of treasure, where—far or near—I could find someone in the meadhall who would know my thought, or wished to console me, friendless, to entertain me with joys". Cf. Dunning and Bliss (1969: 61-65).

30. "Indeed he knows, who must do without the counsels of his beloved friendly lord for a long time". For a discussion of line 37, see Leslie (1966: 72-73).

31. *Hrafnkæls Saga Freysgoda* (ed. Jón Helgason 1955b: 31). "Now, for those who grow up with their father, their life is another way, and they seem to you, by your side, of no importance; but when they are grown up, they travel from land to land, and there they seem of the greatest importance; just as when they return, they come home and they consider themselves greater than chiefs".

32. The perpetration of peccadilloes is directly related to young age, mainly to those who are not supervised by an elder, as is suggested in *Guthlac A* (Roberts 1979): "swa bið geogude beaw / þær þas ealdres egsa ne siſyred" (lines 419<sup>a</sup>-20) ["Such is the custom of youth where the fear of an elder does not trouble them"].

33. *The Fortunes of Men* relates the death of many men who are still in their young age: "Sunnum flet gegonged on geogudfære / þæt se endestæf earfedmæccum / weallic weorþeð" (lines 10-12<sup>a</sup>) ["It happens to some unlucky men that the end of their lives comes unhappily in youth", trans. Shippey 1976: 59]. There follows a long enumeration of the varied circumstances that may cause the death of youngsters (lines 12<sup>b</sup>-57).

34. "Time and again she [a mother] will have to weep bitterly for her son, when he is going round as a young man, with a wild spirit, a wicked heart, and a sad mind" (trans. Shippey 1976: 97).

35. "Avoid drunkenness and foolish words, sin in the heart and lies in the mouth, anger and spite and the love of women" (trans. Shippey 1976: 49).

36. "Ah! We have often heard that this holy man loved in his youth many vicious courses". Thomas D. Hill (1981) discusses the relation of youth and age in this poem.

37. "Greeted him most diligently and gave him favor".

38. "Then it befell that God wished to pay him thanks for his sufferings, because he loved martyrdom with his mind; he gave him wisdom in the thoughts of his mind, a steadfast mind".

39. For a formulation of this topos in relation to classical literature, see Ernest Robert Curtius (1953: 98-101).

40. Ed. Brooks (1961). "You are yourself young, protector of men, and not at all old in years; nevertheless, you have the ability, seafarer, to answer like an old man. You know the true significance of every man's words in the world".

41. "The wise Lord sent these words to your mind; I have never heard a man talk more wisely at so young an age. You are strong in your might, wise in your mind and in your

speech". Burrow discusses in depth the question of age in *Beowulf* and alludes to its possible relation to Andreas (1986: 123-34). Premature eloquence is also exalted in the case of Egil, although there is no mention of divine mediation: "hann var brátt máltgr ok orviss", *Egils Saga Skalla-Grimssonar* (ed. Nordal 1933: 80) ["He was soon talkative and expressive"].

<sup>42</sup> "But Offa was the first of men to win by battle, while still a boy, the greatest of kingdoms. Nobody of the same age achieved by fighting greater heroism". Here it must be noticed that, according to the Danish and English story, Offa had reached the age of thirty before his combat. See R. W. Chambers (1965: 203, n. 39). Cf. Thorolf: "sninna var hann svá fullkorninn at afli, at hann þótti vel líkðræ med þóttum monnum", *Egils Saga* (1933: 80) ["at an early age he was so full with strength that he seemed well-accomplished among other men"].

<sup>43</sup> "Through the power of God, one must do away with his troubles in his youth, and in the age afterwards be fortunate, live through joyful days, and receive riches, treasures and the mead-cup in the home of his family, as much as any man may continue to have these".

<sup>44</sup> "He dwells in prosperity; nothing hinders him at all, sickness or age". Cf. *The Seafarer* (lines 70-71), where old age is cited among the possible causes of death along with sickness and violence.

<sup>45</sup> As Mary Dove (1986: 5) states, "it is too evident how easily age-nomenclature and differences between (and variations within) traditional and modern divisions of ages can stand in the way of meaningful discussion".

<sup>46</sup> Isidore, *Differentiarum*, 2.20, PL, 83, col. 81. "The age declining from youth into old age".

<sup>47</sup> *Etymologiae*, 11.2.6. "The decline from youth into old age, not yet old, but already not young". Cf. Augustine: "in adulescentia speratur iuventus; et in iuventute speratur gravitas; et in gravitate speratur senectus" (*Epistolarum*, 213, PL, 33, col. 966). See also Joseph de Ghellinck (1948).

<sup>48</sup> "Certainly, the morning of our understanding is our childhood, our adolescence is like the third hour, on which hour youth rises, just as the sun does about that third hour; our completed growth is just as midday, for at midday the sun is ascending to its uppermost orbit, just as the completed growth is increasing to its full strength. The ninth hour is our old age, for on the ninth hour the sun declines, and the might of the ageing man is waning".

<sup>49</sup> Gregory the Great, *Regulae Pastoralis*, 3.25, PL 77, col. 98 c.

<sup>50</sup> *Svarfdæla Saga* (ed. Ásmundarson 1898: 1). "They grew up with their father until they were in their prime".

<sup>51</sup> *Færeyinga Saga* (ed. Halldórsson 1987: 47). "Our Hagrimsson grew up [...] until he was a fully developed man".

<sup>52</sup> *Grettis Saga Ásmundarsonar* (ed. Jónsson 1936: 34). " [...] until Ásmund was of mature age; then Ásmund asked his father for equipment [...] then Ásmund went abroad". See other instances of *roskinn* in *Brennu-Njáls Saga* (ed. Sveinsson 1954: 214, 226, 441).

<sup>53</sup> "Ulf was a wealthy man, both in lands and in movable property; he took the right of a land-holder, as his ancestors had done, and became a powerful man [...]; but at times he had conversations with men who needed his counsel; he knew how to give good advice because he was very wise".

<sup>54</sup> "His sons were in their prime". Cf. *Gudmundar drápa*, 12<sup>a</sup> in *Biskupa Sögur II*, (1862: 190).

<sup>55</sup> "When King Harald grew old, then an earl called Arnvid governed Verraland; it happened then there, as in many other places, that the paying of tribute was worse than when King Harald was in the prime of his life".

<sup>56</sup> "A young man should always be serious of mood, the thought of his heart

firm, he should also have a cheerful attitude, as well as anxiety at heart, a multitude of sorrows, whether he is dependent on himself for all his happiness in the world, or whether he is outcast, in a far-off country".

<sup>57</sup> *Fáfnismál*, 64<sup>a</sup> (ed. Helgason 1955a, vol. 3, p. 63) ["One is little courageous when he becomes old, if he is cowardly in his childhood"]. See Blanche Colton Williams (1914: 25).

<sup>58</sup> "Dominica II in Adventum Domini", in *Aelfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series, Text* (ed. Clemoes 1977: 528). "But in senile years the man's stature is bowed, his neck slackened, his face wrinkled, and his limbs all afflicted; his breast is tormented with sigh, and between his words his breath fails" (trans. Thorpe 1846: 615).

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