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*Defining the Elegiac Genre in the Anglo-Saxon  
World: an Analysis of Expressive Speech Acts*

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*To my family and to my love*



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# Introduction

*Oft ic sceolde ana    uhtna gehwylce  
mine ceare cwipan.*

[The *Wanderer*, ll. 8-9b]

The act of *lamenting* about personal pain and suffering, the causes of which may vary from the loss and distance of a beloved one to an impossible love, from sorrowful living conditions to loneliness, seems to be at the basis of each composition of the elegiac genre.

That pain is therefore the characterizing element of elegiac texts seems to have been confirmed also by Todorov (1976), who, in an enlightening study on the birth of literary genres, emphasized that at the origin of the *elegy* genre there is exactly pain, and the need to complain about suffering.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some scholars began to assign to the elegiac genre nine compositions of the 10<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript *Exeter Book* (also known with the name of *Codex Exoniensis*), and some passages of texts belonging to other literary genres. In particular, critics have defined with the expression ‘Old English Elegies’ *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem*, *Deor*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, *Resignation*, *The Husband's Message* and *The Ruin*, distributed in this order within the *Codex Exoniensis* but intermingled with other poems of different generic attribution, along with two passages from *Beowulf*, the *Lay of the Last Survivor* and *The Father's Lament*, and the final lines of *Guthlac B*, a hagiography on the life of St. Guthlac, also contained in the *Exeter Book*.

Together with the most famous Old English epic poem *Beowulf*, and some other poetic texts of the Anglo-Saxon literary context, the Anglo-Saxon elegies are among the most fascinating compositions of the English medieval world. In particular, these texts have always been a source of discussion among critics because of their complexity and



peculiarities. In fact, defining the term elegy within the Anglo-Saxon literary scenario and especially deciding which compositions can be identified under the label of elegy has always been a very complex operation.

Unlike the classical elegy where the *elegiac distichus* – a dactylic hexametre followed by a dactylic pentametre- represents the distinctive element of the genre, the so-called Old English ‘elegies’ do not show a precise identifying metre for the elegiac genre.

In addition to the absence of a distinctive metre, another problem that increases the difficulty in the definition attempt is represented by the apparent lack of a specific term for the denotation of the elegiac genre within the Anglo-Saxon corpus. The same nine compositions of the *Exeter Book* do not appear grouped together within the manuscript, but as mentioned above are intermingled with other texts. As often happens, modern critics are those who create literary genre taxonomies through retrospective analyses, sometimes inaccurate for being filtered by a modern critical eye and for being based on few certainties.

As far as the Anglo-Saxon 'elegiac' genre is concerned, scholars have used two main approaches to the study of Old English ‘elegies’. The first methodology generally consisted in applying the term 'elegy', as understood by the classical and then romantic tradition, to these compositions of dubious classification. As a result, the critics selected and grouped under a single label those texts that had an elegiac character, consisting of precise thematic and tonal features. In particular, the element that seems to be able to act as a glue between all these compositions is the meditative and lamenting tone. However, as will be seen in the second chapter of this work, this elegiac character of classical-romantic derivation brings with it some intrinsic problems when applied to Anglo-Saxon compositions.

A second methodological proposal, instead, would consist in the formulation of the definition of the Anglo-Saxon elegiac genre and in the identification of which elegies would fall within it, starting from the compositions themselves. However, also this methodology, based on the identification of themes, tones, vocabulary and structures common to the various ‘elegiac’ texts, shows a fundamental problem, that of being too subjective. Several scholars have developed different theories, according to the elegiac criteria adopted, sometimes excluding some texts and other times including new ones. Even today, discussions on the Anglo-Saxon elegiac question are still open and leave room for many unresolved questions.

The present work is part of this difficult discussion, in an attempt to understand if it is possible to talk about an Anglo-Saxon elegiac genre and to identify which compositions would fall within this genre. For this purpose, an approach different from the traditional one will be used, taking into consideration not the thematic, tonal and lexical aspects of Anglo-Saxon 'elegies', but rather their pragmatic structure.

Pragmatics, indeed, represents a branch of linguistics focussed on the relationship between language and action, or, in other words on how language is used and organised for certain specific purposes. This discipline is based on the idea that speech and action are tied together, so that every time human beings utter something, they are also performing specific actions. Hence, *expressing emotional states, asserting, predicting, promising, threatening, cursing* and so on are actions performed through language, also known with the term of *speech acts*.

The first steps towards the formulation of the Speech Acts theories were taken during the 50s of last century, with the illuminating assertions elaborated by John L. Austin. However, if Austin might be considered the father of the speech acts studies, his taxonomy of speech acts and theories of discourse have been abandoned by critics for some inaccuracies, and his philosophical analysis has been overcome by new proposals.

Among these, John Roger Searle's theory has been considered by critics the backbone of pragmatics. Indeed, with his studies the scholar systematised the first Austinian theoretical and taxonomical attempts, creating a new precise classification of speech acts based on some precise rules. The scholar distinguished five main kinds of what he called *illocutionary* speech acts: *representatives, directives, commissives, expressives* and *declarations*, which according to Searle comprise all the speech acts that one might perform through language depending on different purposes.

As for the pragmatic analysis of the Anglo-Saxon elegiac corpus taken into consideration here, the study will be conducted on two levels: a micro-structural level, i.e. focussing on the single speech acts recurring at the level of single sentences, and a macro-structural level, i.e. that of the whole discourse. In the first case, Searle's theories and taxonomy will be adopted, in order to observe the different types of speech acts recurring within the elegiac compositions. In particular, we will focus on the quantity and distribution of speech acts within the discourse. The second type of analysis, the one conducted at the macro-structural level, represents the second step of this study. In details, we will no longer look at the individual *illocutionary* speech acts expressed within individual sentences, but instead at the *illocutionary purpose* of a sequence of sentences

or of the entire speech. To do this, we will take into consideration the theory elaborated by Van Dijk (1981), according to whom it is possible to recognize a general *illocutionary force* as well as an *illocutionary purpose* of the entire discourse. In this regard, we will look at the mutual interaction of speech acts, how they are distributed among the text in order to create a final and global *illocutionary force*.

The third and final step will be based on a study conducted by Fournier (2018), who, starting from Van Dijk's theories, tried to create a classification of literary genres according to their final purpose. In particular, the scholar associated the elegiac literary genre to an expressive *illocutionary purpose* which, according to Searlean theory, aims to express the psychological and emotional state of a speaker.

As for the organization of this work, it will be divided into four main chapters. The first chapter will offer a general overview of the themes of the various Anglo-Saxon elegiac compositions. The second chapter will deal with the problem of the definition of the elegiac genre. In the third chapter we will introduce the new methodological approach, and we will deepen the theories on which this study is founded and that have been only briefly mentioned here. Finally, in the fourth and last chapter the Old English elegiac corpus will be analysed by following the tools provided in the third chapter.

To conclude, pragmatics or the study of speech acts seems to play a fundamental role in the literary scenario. Indeed, this kind of approach gives the possibility to understand how language is used, how it is adapted to the purposes that every sphere of human communication requires, and which social actions language performs. Consequently, analysing a text from the point of view of its pragmatical structure, and of its speech purpose, will allow us to demonstrate whether or not it belongs to a specific genre (i.e., in this case to the elegiac genre).



# 1. Presentation of the Corpus considered

Within the rich Anglo-Saxon production of which we have evidence, some composition preserved in the *Exeter Book* manuscript (also known as *Codex Exoniensis*) have traditionally been grouped together under the label of ‘elegies’. Since the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> the term has been used by the critics in order to categorize some poems in the Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus which shared certain characteristics of tone, theme as well as of formulaic language and lexicon. Moreover, some scholars, as Klinck (1984), have also analysed these compositions from a structural point of view, pursuing the goal of finding an Old English elegiac form, or at least some formal features common to all these elegiac poems.

The poems from the *Exeter Book* that have been considered elegies are nine and appear in this order in the manuscript: *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem*, *Deor*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife’s Lament*, *Resignation*, *The Husband’s Message*, and *The Ruin*.<sup>1</sup> However, it is important to highlight that defining the genre ‘elegy’ in the Anglo-Saxon horizon and, consequently, labelling these poems as ‘elegies’ has been a far from trivial operation. Indeed, contrary to the classical tradition where the elegiac metre is well defined and represents the distinctive element of the genre, the Anglo-Saxon poetry lacks a characterising metre for the elegies. As a consequence, since last century, many scholars have been discussing not only on how to label these poems, but also on which criteria might be used to delimit the boundaries of this genre. The debate is still open. Chapter 2 of the present work will illustrate in a deepened way the problem of defining elegy and the different solutions proposed by many scholars.

The current study is thought to be part of this field of research and offers a new attempt to delimit the elegiac genre and to determine which poem might effectively belong to it. For the purpose, other three Anglo-Saxon compositions have also been considered. In details, two passages from the long epic Old English poem *Beowulf* have been taken into account: *The Lay of the Last Survivor* (lines 2247-2266) and *The Father’s Lament* (lines 2444-2462a). In addition to these two texts, another poem from the *Exeter Book* manuscript will be analysed: *Guthlac B* (lines 1348-1379). These poems have been

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the titles were assigned to the poems by the modern critics and that no reference appears in the manuscript.

chosen since, as also supported by Klinck (1984), each of them shows what has been defined “elegiac mood” by Timmer (1942).<sup>2</sup>

For the sake of clarity and in order to help the reader understanding the reasoning of the next chapters, I am going to present in detail the above-mentioned texts (objects of my analysis) in the following paragraphs, providing the reader with a general overview of each single poem.

## 1.1. The *Exeter Book*

As already said, the poems traditionally labelled by scholars as ‘elegies’ are all found in only one codex of the Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition: the *Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501*. Also known as *Exeter Book*, or as *Codex Exoniensis*, this manuscript is considered one of the largest extant collection of the Old English poetry. The codex starts at *folio* 8, being bounded in the first folios (1-7) with other materials, it ends at fol. 130 and is considered a vernacular manuscript of large dimensions, c. 320 x 220 mm (Gameson 1996, 135)<sup>3</sup>. The *Exeter Book* consists of miscellaneous material, both in terms of genre and of subject matter (not only of Christian inspiration, but also related to the traits of pre-Christian tradition). The collection opens with a long, religious poem in three parts, *Christ (I, II and III)*, it continues with two ‘saint’s life’ poem, *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* and with a series of texts of different nature, among which the so-called ‘elegies’ are found, and it ends with a group of riddles (*Riddles 61-95*). It is important to notice that the elegiac compositions are not gathered together in a single and specific group, for they appear intertwined with other poems. Some of the folios towards the end of the manuscript have been damaged by fire so that even some ‘elegies’ like *Resignation*, *The Husband’s Message* and *The Ruin* are seriously affected.

The *Exeter Book* has come down to the present day bringing with it a series of doubts still unresolved and on which many speculations have been made. First thing first, the manuscript’s date of composition is doubtful. Then, another problem is represented by the date of the poems’ initial composition, whether they are one-time compositions or results of a (oral) tradition. Finally, what is uncertain is also the manuscript’s authorship,

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<sup>2</sup> Explanations and details will be offered in the next chapter (see Ch.2, § 2.2.).

<sup>3</sup> For further details on the manuscript’s features see the facsimile edition: R. W. Chambers, M. Forster and R. Flower, ed., *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry* (London, 1933).

whether there was a compiler (or more than one) and a scribal (or more), or whether the two were the same figure.

### 1.1.1. The Date of the *Exeter Book*

The *Exeter Book*'s date of composition seems to go back to the period of the Benedictine Reform in the tenth century. It is traditionally assumed that the codex is identical with 'i mycel Englisc boc be gehwiltum þingum on leoðwisum geworht' (i.e., "a large English book of poetic works about all sorts of things"), a book mentioned in a list of donations (such as books, ornaments, relics etc.) that the bishop of Exeter donated to the cathedral. Having been the bishop of Exeter in the period from 1050 to 1072, it is generally agreed that the manuscript cannot be later than 1072. This date is consequently considered a possible *terminus ad quem*. According to Robin Flower (as cited in Klinck 1992, 13), the volume was probably written in a period of time which goes from 970-990.

A more complicated activity is instead that of identifying the date of composition of each of the single poems contained in the *Exeter Book*. Over the course of the time, several scholars have expressed different opinions on the subject, basing their analyses on different language tests. Among the tests proposed, there is a syntactic test, the so-called *Lichtenheld Test*, and a phonological test proposed by Ashley Amos, based on the analysis of the alliteration of the *palatal and velar g* (1980 as cited in Klinck 1992, 13). It is not intended to go into the details of this kind of analysis, nor will the discussion on the dialects of elegies be addressed here.<sup>4</sup> What is important to report are the results of Amos' analysis: finding alliterative *palatal* and *velar g* and early West-Saxon forms in the elegies demonstrates that they were composed long after 950.

### 1.1.2. The Authorship and the Format

As far as the authorship of the manuscript is concerned, according to the majority of scholars the codex seems to have been written by a single scribe. This hypothesis has been supported by intellectuals like Blake (1962), Klinck (1992) and Sisam (1953a, as cited in Klinck 1992, 21-3). Of opposing view was, instead, Flower (1933, 83) who wrote of several different hands, claiming that "there is, despite the general identity of letter forms, such variety in the quality of the script that we must suppose several scribes to

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<sup>4</sup>See Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies a Critical Edition and Genre Study*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 13-20.

have been employed on the writing". Yet this assumption has been strongly rejected by other scholars, as Klinck (1992, 21-6), who, following Sisam (1953a), pointed out that the variations in error-types, in punctuation and in spelling which are found throughout the entire manuscript together with the extreme regularity of the hand provide evidence for a single scribe. In addition to that, it seems that the above-mentioned kinds of variations reflect the habits of earlier scribes. As a consequence, the scribe of the *Exeter Book* might have copied a variety of materials without imposing his or her own conventions. In details, according to Sisam (1953a, 97), "[...] it is unlikely that the compilation was first made in the Exeter Book, whose stately, even style indicates that it was transcribed continuously from a collection already made." Therefore, it also seems that, because of the evidence of a mechanical copying, the scribe and the compiler were two different figures. Klinck (1992, 23), in conclusion, proposed and added to this assertion that both the compiler and the scribe were contemporaries "[...] the former working at the behest of the latter".

As far as the format of the codex is concerned, at first glance the global effect for those who leaf through the manuscript might be that of an unordered and global heterogeneity. Instead, as supported by some scholars like Muir (1994) a more careful reading could highlight a likely intentional alternation and organization among every different text. According to Muir:

*[...] the anthologist who compiled the present collection drew his material from other collections available to him and arranged it in a meaningful manner. There is evidence (codicological and literary) to suggest that the anthologist at times adapted his material to give the collection cohesion. (1994, 7).*

Following Muir's hypothesis, the distribution of the texts would not be random but the result of a planning studied in order to create a poetic anthology, alternating groups different in nature, but all in all quite consistent from a thematic point of view.

The arrangement on thematic basis of the content, in any case, would not subsist if Patrick Conner's theory about the fascicular structure based on three booklets (1986) is considered and accepted. The scholar's three divisions of the manuscript are based on a palaeographical analysis of some features. Among the "several kinds of evidence" (Conner 1986, 234) that are singled out there are:

- The first folio of what he identifies as Booklet II (53r) is soiled as if it had been the first of the entire manuscript volume at a time;



- The use of three different grades of limp parchment for each booklet;
- Differences in the ruling techniques;
- Some peculiarities of the handwriting and of the ‘drypoint’ drawings.

Conner’s proposal, however, has not been supported by critics since the proofs provided by the scholar are considered insufficient.

Following Sisam’s observations on the *Exeter Book* arrangement, Klinck (1992) supported the idea that there was not an overall plan for the entire manuscript. Instead, what one might spot is a division of the manuscript in two parts: a first half up to fol. 76a containing long poems on religious content, and a second half consisting of a series of short poems on both religious and secular compositions. The first part of the anthology seems to show a certain homogeneity and possible gatherings of the poems. The second part, instead, contains compositions (including the ‘elegiac’ texts) that are more difficult to classify. Overall, they have been considered ‘wisdom literature’ (Klinck 1992, 25). As already said, the elegies are not gathered in a single group as well as there is no reference to the elegiac genre in the manuscript but appear intertwined with other poems. To conclude, Klinck observed that the elegiac compositions are placed beside both homiletic poems and riddles underling that they show similarities with both, in that from the homilies they take a meditative character, whereas from the riddles the *ethopoeia* practice.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.1.3. The Nine Elegiac Texts: a brief overview

In the following paragraph the plot and the general meaning of the traditionally-called elegies of the *Exeter Book* will be summarised, without focussing on the criticism about each poem which will be deepened in Chapter 2.

As already said, the poems from the *Exeter Book* that have been considered elegies appear in this order in the manuscript: *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem*, *Deor*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife’s Lament*, *Resignation*, *The Husband’s Message*, and *The Ruin*. For the sake of clarity, it is important to specify again that in the codex

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<sup>5</sup> The term ‘ethopoeia’, ἠθοποιία from the Greek ἦθος (character) and ποιέω (to make; to do) must be distinguished from ‘prosopoeia’ προσωποποιία from the Greek πρόσωπον (face, ‘persona’) ε ποιέω, in that even though both the terms indicate an activity of personification, the former represents the personification of the character, the thoughts and the style of the ‘persona loquens’, whereas the latter focus more on giving voice to the ‘persona loquens’. *Prosopopeia* is for instance used in the personification of unanimated objects. See Francesco Berardi, *La retorica degli esercizi preparatori: Glossario ragionato dei Progymnasmata*. (Georg Olms Verlag, 2017), 154-5.

there is not a specific and single gathering of these compositions which instead are scattered among other poems.

The first ‘elegy’ in order of appearance and probably one of the most famous Old English ‘elegies’ is represented by a poem which is entitled *The Wanderer*. The poem is a monologue (a form shared with the majority of the other elegies as it will be shown) narrated by an exile, a solitary man (‘*anhaga*’ line 1) deprived of his previous delight and now living in a wretched condition, forced to sail the cold northern seas alone. The poem starts with a religious commentary on God’s mercy depicted as the only way to security and consolation for an exile (lines 1-6). The monologue of the wanderer, the *eardstapa* (line 6), begins at line 8, where the wanderer, once member of a comitatus, reports that after the death of his lord and friends, he had been left alone and had to leave his homeland. From the moment of his departure he had to “tighten his mind in laces” (line 21), hold back his feelings and lament alone, both because he no longer has friends and because he knows that reticence is the most respectful virtue for a noble man (lines 9b-23a). In this first part of the monologue the *eardstapa* alternates narrations of his own life with gnomic assertions. During his voyage, he has also sought a new lord to remedy his grief but the attempt was unsuccessfully. His sorrow is also cause of his dreams, when he, worn out by sadness, falls asleep and dreams of his glorious past days (lines 39-44). But this consolation is only transient since when he wakes up, he finds himself alone (lines 45-48). By contemplating his pain, he realises that in the earthly life there is nothing that can cure his sorrow. Everything is transient and therefore a man has to be wise and stoic. The wise man must understand that everyone and everything on this earth are evanescent and one day the whole world will resemble the ruin of defeated lands and reigns. An apocalyptic depiction immediately follows to underline that the Lord will destroy everything that is mortal. The wise man who has recognised this reality will soon meditate on the mortality and life’s transience by uttering a series of rhetorical questions<sup>6</sup>. His monologue ends asserting again that anything lasts on this world:

*Her bið feoh læne; her bið freond læne;  
her bið mon læne; her bið mæg læne –  
eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð.* (ll. 108-10)

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<sup>6</sup> The rhetorical questions used by the poet of *The Wanderer* recalls the Latin “ubi-sunt” Latin formula to indicate nostalgia and in details a status of meditation on death and transience.

The poem is concluded with a new religious commentary on the Father-in-Heaven's mercy which is the only and real consolation for a man.

*The Seafarer* consists of 124 lines and it is again an account of a man alone on the sea. In the first half of the poem (1-64a), the speaker narrates his personal experiences from his past sufferings on the sea (1-12a) to his desire to depart again for another voyage, despite all the difficulties of a sea-life (33b-64a). In details, after having graphically described his past pain on the sea with a series of images of him suffering from hunger, cold, loneliness, anxiety and danger, he introduces a figure of a-man-on-the-land used to contrast his own lot with the joy of who stays on land. This figure is repeated many times throughout the poem (lines 12b-15, 27-30, 55b-57). Despite the pain of the sea-voyage, the speaker, as every seafarer, longs for another voyage and even the blossoming of life in springtime urges them to depart (lines 48-52) for the *wælweg* ('whale's way', line 63). The second half of the elegy sees a transition from the personal narration to impersonal reflections on the transience of earthly life. He suggests, as *The Wanderer* does, to live a life in wisdom, not focussing on the earthly things which are unstable but on reaching God's eternal glory. The world described in this poem appears as a degenerating and ephemeral reality, just as the life of each man is (80b-96). In a gnomic passage, the speaker suggests that the wise man should fear the Lord and behave righteously. The poem ends with a homiletic exhortation to think about our eternal home and how to reach it.

*The Riming Poem* takes its name from a stylistic feature of the poem, that is the fact that the first verse or half line not simply alliterates with the second half line as it is usual in the Old English verse, but even rhymes with it. As scholars generally claimed, the uniqueness of this poem in the Old-English poetic corpus is also synonym of obscurity and sometimes impenetrability, since the author, in order to fulfil this stylistic purpose, uses rare and nonce-words (Klinck 1992; Greenfield 1986). It is possible to find the poem divided in two halves, as for the previous 'elegies'. The two halves create a contraposition between the speaker's formerly life full of delight and joys, for probably being a chieftain, (lines 1-43) and his present sorrow and pain (43-79). The contrast is introduced by the word *nu* at line 43. It is important to notice that this present condition of decadency is associated, as in the above-mentioned texts, to the transience of the earthly life in general. The poem ends with a homiletic exhortation to seek the joy in the heaven and in God's mercy which are not ephemeral.

*Deor* is a 42-line poem divided into six stanzas and characterised by the repetition of a refrain, 'Pæs ofereode, þisses spa mæg' ('that passed away, [and] so will this'<sup>7</sup>), at the end of each stanza. The recurrence of this refrain and the division in stanzas makes *Deor* a unique poem in the Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus. Tuggle (1977, 229) has claimed in this regard that: "One of the more notable features of the old English poem *Deor* is its division into uneven stanzas which deal with adversity of some sort and which end, in all but one instance, with the refrain 'Pæs ofereode, þisses spa mæg'". It has been suggested that the form of *Deor* was influenced by Norse skaldic poetry (Klinck 1992). Indeed, some ninth-century skaldic poems have similar strophic forms and some of the references to Germanic legend in the poem were probably known from Scandinavian sources. In addition, some Latin compositions have also been suggested for the refrain, but none of these are very convincing according to Klinck. *Deor* has been, very often, at the centre of debates between critics and writers who have dealt with ancient Anglo-Saxon literature and whose studies had led to the formulation of different opinions about the poem in structural, linguistic and content terms. In Chapter 2 some of these issues will be addressed with the purpose to show the difficulties in defining the elegiac genre only through a content and thematic analysis of the compositions. As far as the content of *Deor* is concerned, stanzas 1-5 contain references to heroic and mythical characters that are part of the ancient and rich Germanic oral tradition. Various interpretations about the possible intertextual links of the poem with the Germanic heritage have been formulated, focussing the analyses on particular key words (such as proper names) present in the text (Murgia 2012). What is evident is that each stanza presents cases of pain and misfortune that eventually find possible positive conclusions, expressed by the refrain. The voice which describes them is that of Deor, singer of the King of Heodenings, previously loved by his lord for his art. Yet one day, the cantor Heorrenda, much expert and skilful in singing, took his place and all those favours that belonged, before, to Deor (lines 35-42). As stated by Mandel (1977, 2), it is uncertain whether or not the name of the scop is in fact Deor. A possibility is that his name was, in fact, Deor at the court of the Heodenings and then he might have changed his name by becoming a monk or a priest (Malone 1937 as cited in Mandel 1977, 2). According to Mandel, Deor narrates in the first two stanzas the story of *Weland the Smith*, well preserved in the thirteenth-century Norse *Volsunga saga*. Weland, after being abandoned by his wife, is hamstrung by King Nithald of

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<sup>7</sup> Translation from Stanley B. Greenfield and Daniel G. Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 295-6.

Sweden and Deor reports in the first six lines his sufferings and pain. The second stanza instead focusses on Beadohild, the daughter of Weland's captors, whom Weland makes pregnant after having killed her brothers. The third stanza (14-17) is very obscure and debated because of the two possible emendations, at line 14, of the name *Mæðhild*. Some scholars emend *Mæðhild* others prefer *mæð hild*. The former emendation recalls two Scandinavian ballads: the Norse *Folkeviser* and the Icelandic *Fornkvaedi*. The latter emendation would instead refer to the story reported by Snorri Sturluson in Chapter 57 of *Snorra Edda*, about the king Hogni and his daughter Hilda<sup>8</sup>. The fourth stanza presents the story of Theodoric, who, according to Malone (as cited in Mandel 1977), could be Theodoric the Frank, or as supported by the majority of scholars, Theodoric the Ostrogoth. The fifth stanza refers to Eormanric a fourth-century tyrant who forced his people to suffer for a long period of time. After the five exempla of physical, psychological and social sufferings, Deor reflects on the inscrutable providence of God (lines 28–34), who has the power to control and to change the good and the evil. The poet concludes by reporting his own misfortune, that, according to Mandel, is a perfect exemplum of God's willing firstly to give and then to deprive human beings of joy. Again, as in the previous poems, the theme of the inexorable transience of the earthly life seems to be addressed. To conclude, as far as the refrain is concerned, it has raised several doubts and debates, in particular because of the ambiguity of the demonstrative pronouns '*Þæs*' and '*þisses*'. The different interpretations about the refrain have brought scholars to interpret the whole text under different points of view, diverging from the traditional idea of *Deor* as an elegy (as it will be shown in Chapter 2, §2.3 pp.47-9).

The following three 'elegies' (*Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's message*) not simply relate to the human misfortunes and to the transiency of life, but also focus, in particular, on the sufferings and pains provoked by the separation from beloved ones.

The first text is represented by *Wulf and Eadwacer*, an enigmatic poem which, also because of its particular position in the manuscript where it precedes the first group of Riddles, was considered in a first moment as "The First Riddle" (Greenfield and Calder 1986, 291). Leaving aside for the moment the different interpretation of the poem, *Wulf*

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<sup>8</sup> For a clear synopsis of the two stories see Raimondo Murgia, "Intertextuality of Deor", *Journal of Languages and Culture* 4, no.8 (2012): 132-38.

and *Eadwacer* appears as a lament uttered by a female speaker, whose gender is indicated by the feminine inflection of *reotugu* (“mournful”) at line 10 (Klinck 1992, 47). There are several doubts as far as the number of the characters and their relationship to one another are concerned. According to Klinck, the characters are four: the woman, Wulf, Eadwacer and the woman’s child. The woman begins her lament by uttering that Wulf is likely to be slaughtered by her people if they catch him (lines 1-2). This interpretation is confirmed if the verb “*athecgan*” is translated as “take, consume” as done by Klinck (1992) and Greenfield and Calder (1986). The third line is characterised by an enigmatic refrain “*uneglic is us*”, repeated again at line 8, which several critics have tried to interpret. She laments her separation from Wulf who is on island whilst she is on another. In weeping rain, she sits and thinks about Wulf and the ancient times. She then invokes Wulf’s name in pain. Suddenly she addresses probably another person, whose name is Eadwacer, by saying that their cub is taken away by the wolf in the forest. This might be a reference to Wulf. (Greenfield and Calder 1986, 292). The poem ends with an exclamation: “that is easy torn apart which was never joined our story together” (translation from Klinck 1992, 48). The different interpretations on this poem are the result of the ambiguity of almost each line, starting from the very beginning of the poem till its conclusion. According to Lehmann (1969, 163-5), analysing the structure of the poem it can be suggested that the opening section might be incomplete. In other words, some initial lines, narrating past events about the separation of the speaker from Wulf, might miss, making the interpretation of the pronouns “*hine*” and “*us*” a difficult task. Whereas for the pronoun “*hine*” there is a general agreement among scholars about its reference to Wulf (Klinck 1992, 169; Lehmann 1969, 164; Greenfield 1986, 11), as far as “*us*” is concerned, many opinions have been elaborated. Lehmann, for instance, suggested that, in contrast to the dual pronouns “*uncerne*” (line 16) and “*uncer*” (line 19) referring to the speaker and her lover Wulf, the plural “*us*” would refer to her and her husband Eadwacer, underling the fact that, whilst her people will never accept Wulf, she and her husband will. Greenfield believes that Wulf and Eadwacer are instead the same person, so that she, unlike her people, will welcome him. The scholar indeed considered the name of Eadwacer not a proper name but an epithet with meaning of “the guardian of”. Instead Klinck supported the different identities of the two, focussing on the fact that Eadwacer is invoked with a second person singular, whereas she refers to Wulf always in third person. In addition, their names would suggest an antagonistic situation between a “wolf” and a “watcher” (Klinck 1992, 175). Another interpretation is offered by Osborn (1983,

174-88). Osborn disagrees with the majority of scholars by claiming that this poem is not a sexual triangle among Wulf, the speaker and Eadwacer, but it might be, instead, a mother's lament for his child Wulf. It is her opinion that the poem shows a typical Germanic custom to ensure peace between tribes with a marriage. According to this particular exogamous relationship<sup>9</sup>, the son born from that union was usually sent to the mother's people to forge loyalty. Yet, since sometimes this bond did not work, the speaker might be probably worried here about her child's destiny. Scholars have also tried to identify possible intertextual links within the Germanic culture. In particular, some have recognised in this poem the Signy-Sigmund tale (Schofield 1899 as cited in Lehmann 1969, 154). Others have found analogies with Wulfdietrich B or the Hild story. According to Imelmann (as cited in Lehmann 1969, 155-7), the poem together with *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message* could be fragments of an ancient lost composition about Odoacer, the 5<sup>th</sup> century Saxon king. Other speculations about the figure of Eadwacer have been done in the course of the time and also Lehmann offered his own interpretation explaining how probably different stories, comprising that of Theodoric the Great, were confused and merged in the same poem.

Both *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament* represent the only two compositions among the traditionally-defined 'elegies' of the *Exeter Book* to have a female speaking voice. *The Wife's Lament* is also the second of those three above-mentioned poems focussed on the grief provoked by the separation from a beloved one. Its great allusiveness has generated various interpretative difficulties, among which there were some doubts about the gender of the narrating voice. Although today the majority of critics agree that the composition is a monologue delivered by a female persona, lamenting her conditions for being separated from her husband, some scholars suggested the presence of a male voice. In particular, the first scholar to support this idea was Thorpe (1842 as cited in Klinck 1992, 177). Nowadays, instead, the critics seriously take into consideration the feminine inflexions in the first lines, such as "*geomorre*" ('sad') (Klinck 1992, 49). Walker-Pelkey (1992), viewing the *Lament* as a Riddle rather than an elegy, proposed as narrator an inanimate object, a sword suffering for the distance of his lord. Other scholars, then, interpreted the narrating voice as that of a dead person for the fact that she speaks

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<sup>9</sup> See also Janemarie Leucke, "Wulf and Eadwacer: Hints or Reading from *Beowulf* and Anthropology", in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. Martin Green (Rutherford, London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), 190-200.

from a “earth-cave” (Klinck 199, 49). As far as the narration is concerned, the poem begins with a direct reference to her being a victim of sufferings and pain (1-5). From line 5 to 28 the speaker focusses on the narration of past events that have led her to the present miserable condition. In particular her present troubles began with the departure of her husband, whose reasons are unspecified. The separation from the lover triggers a series of unhappy events, making her alone, deprived of every right and without a point of reference (she is indeed “*wræca*” and “*wineleas*”). This is particularly true if we consider the exogamous context typical of the Anglo-Saxon world. Then, the woman refers to the man’s kin which plotted to separate the couple and which probably triggered the husband’s departure. The narrating voice continues by saying that her husband ordered her to take residence elsewhere but the reasons are uncertain. It could be claimed that, being alone and friendless, the husband suggested the woman to find a place more secure or that, as suggested by Klinck (1992, 50-1), he cruelly commanded her to do so. Indeed, some elements from the narration seem to support this view: the narrating voice reveals that she was deeply disappointed to have realized too late that the man who seemed so compatible with her character was concealing her true identity, formulating evil thoughts behind a happy attitude (lines 17b-20). Then, in the following five lines (21-25) she turns her mind to the past thinking back to the promises of love exchanged with her beloved. At lines 27-28, the protagonist, giving us further details of her sad life, reveals that she was ordered to take up residence in a hole in the ground located in a grove (“*eorðscraefe*”), under an oak tree. The causes of this confinement remain unknown. From line 29 a change of style in the poem, from narrative to reflective, is recorded: the female speaker elaborates a reflection on her anguished present state. The lines 30-32 are dedicated to the description of the gloomy landscape surrounding the old room in the ground. In this sad dwelling, at lines 33-34 the woman complains about the absence of her beloved and contrasts her loneliness and unhappiness with the joy of the lovers who share a bed on earth. Then, at lines 38-41 as in the initial part of the composition, the protagonist dwells again on the countless sufferings that have upset her existence. With line 41 the reflective section ends and the focus of the composition moves to a final gnomic consideration, speaking in third person. She refers to a young man, her husband according to Klinck (1992, 51), whose conditions and destiny are probably crossed by sufferings and pain exactly as it is for her. She imagines her husband destined to live alone in a dark and desolate room against a hostile winter landscape, just as she is forced to spend the rest of her days in a hole in the ground under an oak tree. The poem ends with a “cry that speaks



for all unhappy lovers: ‘Woe to him who must with longing wait for his dear one!’” (Klinck 1992, 51).

The 118-line poem *Resignation* has been sometimes regarded as two separate fragments (*Resignation A* and *Resignation B*) of two different compositions. At the basis of this idea there is the fact that going throughout the poem it seems to be an abrupt change in style and tone, moving from a prayer mode to a narrative one. According to Bliss and Frantzen (1976 as cited in Klinck 2017) the integrity of *Resignation* is also challenged by an apparently missing page after folio 118, which ends with line 69 of the text. Consequently, the presence in the past of a page now missing might mean further space for the conclusion of a poem and the beginning of another one. In details, *Resignation A* appears as a clear prayer, a penitential Psalm, whereas *Resignation B* shows various similarities with other two texts, *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, by sharing themes and vocabulary typical of an elegiac lament. In *Resignation A* the first-person voice presents himself as a sinner, guilty of evil acts and actions that would not allow him to receive God's love. However, he repeatedly asks through a series of imperatives to be saved by the Lord, he assigns himself to divine grace (lines 1-9) and implores God to save him from evil and from the devils who would like to lead him on another path (“*laðne sið*”, “horrible journey”, line 53). *Resignation B* seems to be a narrative monologue in which the speaker recounts the pain and the sufferings that he has always had in the course of his life as punishment from God for his own sins. From the very beginning of this second part, the speaker declares himself ready to start an exile journey that some have identified as a *peregrination pro amore Dei* or towards the heavenly life (Greenfield 1986, 289). Similarly to the conclusions of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, the poem ends with his hope of amelioration in the heavenly life and in the meantime, -the speaker says with a gnomic conclusion- he must accept the fate he cannot change. Klinck (1987b) contrary to Bliss and Frantzen supported the integrity of the poem, in particular by focussing on various similarities between *A* and *B*. The scholar, indeed, claimed, first of all, that there is no abrupt passage from the first section to the second one, but, instead a gradual development from a penitential prayer to exilic lament. In details, she noticed that the penitential and exile themes are present in both the parts: the speaker in both *A* and *B* has offended God for his deeds and thanks Him for the punishment that he deserved; the speakers longed for a journey towards him in both the parts (lines 41-42a *A*; lines 70-76a, 84a, 88b, 96b-99a *B*). The journey seems to become concrete later but he lacks of money and of friends that can help him accomplishing his desire (100-4). Of the same opinion is

also Bestul (1977), who claimed that the whole poem (i.e. part *A* and part *B* together) is a confessional prayer inspired by the Benedictine Reform of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

The third and last composition, among the elegies of the *Exeter Book* which focusses on the sufferings provoked by the separation from the beloved one is represented by *The Husband's Message*. For the condition with which the text has come down to us, for the illegibility of some words and for the lack of clarity of the runes inside the text also this poem is quite enigmatic. What is certain, however, is the fact that unlike the other poems that have been traditionally considered 'elegies', *The Husband's Message* has an optimistic tone (Klinck 1992, 60). In fact, the poem does not narrate present sufferings, but it shows that the pain due to the separation from the beloved one belongs to the past, and, in addition, it sends a message of hope of a possible imminent reunion. Certainly, however, the poem shows typical elegiac motifs such as the theme of exile, of the sea-journey and of the separation from the dear ones. However, the difficulties that might derive from the previous conditions seem to be over. In this elegy it is not the husband who speaks directly but a messenger whose nature has been much discussed. Given the damage of the text, it is impossible to state with certainty whether it is a human messenger or a talking object, a rune-stave. The messenger, after a brief and enigmatic presentation of himself/itself (1-9), conveys the message from a prince ("peoden", line 29) who, after being driven away because of a feud and forced into exile, has now solved and overcome the difficulties of the past and asks the woman to join him. The poem has very often been associated to *The Wife's Lament* by scholars who have seen the two compositions as two sides of the same coin. In details, Swanton (1964 as cited in Klinck 1992, 59) considered the two poems from a religious allegorical point of view, by claiming that *The Wife's Lament* represents the voice of the Christian Church longing for a new reconciliation with Christ, and that *The Husband's Message* is the Christ's reply affirming their eternal union. On the other hand, the elegy's enigmatic character, the proximity with Riddle 60, which immediately precedes the poem, and some features which seem to link them have brought some voices of the critics considering the two compositions being part of the same poem. Among them, Kaske (1967 as reported by Klinck 1992, 59-60), interpreted the poem, together with *Riddle 60*, again from an allegorical point of view by considering the messenger as the Cross conveying a message from Christ to the Church.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Klinck (1992, 59) reported other studies about the two poems together which address the relation of the two poems by identifying different tales from the Germanic background.

The last composition of the *Exeter Book* which has been traditionally labelled with the term of 'elegy' is *The Ruin*. Being also one of the last texts of the manuscript, the poem presents not a few damages, due to the fire accident that affected the book. As a result, several lines of the text are incomplete and difficult to interpret. However, what is certain is that *The Ruin* is an impersonal description of a city in ruins, in which, unlike the other elegies, the first-person voice is missing. With the other elegiac compositions, however, the poem shares some fundamental themes, such as the transience of earthly life and of material and human things. In this case, the transience of earthly life is represented by a city in ruins, whose description alternates with the evocation of a glorious and shining past of the city itself. The description of the city takes place through the eyes of the narrator who seems to have it in front of him, almost providing us with a photograph of the ruin. Scholars have much discussed about what city *The Ruin* depicts. Some wanted to recognize Bath, others Hadrian's Wall, Chester and finally Babylon, the city that appears in the Apocalypse of St. John. However, unlike *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, *The Ruin* does not end with eschatological tones but with a look at the glorious past, almost as a consolation for the desolated present (Klinck 1992, 63). Doubleday (1972), instead, proposed a further interpretation of the poem. According to the scholar, the poem might have been influenced by three works, Augustine's *De civitate Dei*, Orosius' *Historiae adversus paganos* and Gildas' *De excidio et conquest Britanniae*, which fall within the tradition of the philosophy of history. In details, this would mean that the poem goes beyond providing a description of the ruined city and its glorious past, but, just like the other three works mentioned above, it would also provide the why and the reason behind its fall. Doubleday argued that the motives are given implicitly in the last part of the poem. From line 32b till the end of the poem the scholar identified three main descriptions: the description of the citizen in the glorious past; the description of the citizen's typical action (lines 35-7); the description of the elaborate hot bath of the city. These three elements would correspond to three sins respectively: the pride of life; the lust of the eyes; the lust of the flesh. As a consequence of the abundance of these three lusts in the previously glorious city, God's wrath would have been triggered, and the destruction of the city would have been a necessarily punishment.

## 1.2. Three further Compositions: *Guthlac B*, *The Lay of the last Survivor*, *The Father's Lament*

The nine lyrics mentioned above represent what is conventionally meant by the Anglo-Saxon elegiac canon. However, instances of elegiac poetry can be also found in poems belonging to another literary genre, that of the epic. The most significant examples are part of the heroic poem *Beowulf*, particularly in the verses framing the so-called *The Lay of the Last Survivor* (2247-66) and *The Father's Lament* (2444-62). What these lyrical fragments seem to have in common with the compositions of the *Exeter Book* is certainly the individual and personal tone, the recurrence of certain themes such as the decadence of life, the futility of earthly things, the death, the separation from beloved ones or more generally that elegiac mood identified by Timmer (1942), which seems to be a cultural characteristic of the Germanic world. Harris (1988, 90), in addition, after having defined the term "formal elegy" to indicate "a dramatic monologue spoken by a figure originally from heroic story who tells, in the first person, about the joys and especially the griefs of his life, 'expressing an attitude toward [his] experience'" states that this terminology can also be extended to poems that have little to do with elegy. This is the case, according to the scholar, of the two fragments contained in *Beowulf*.

*The Lay of the Last Survivor*, found in Part II of the poem, represents the lament of a last survivor at the time of the burial of all the treasure that belonged to his people (treasure that will soon become the property of the dragon faced by Beowulf). The speaker begins his lament by entrusting to the earth what once belonged to his warrior companions, for they are all dead. The lament is based on a continuous contrast between a glorious past and a present of loneliness, recalling in particular the elegy *The Wanderer* in lines 10-13 in which the speaker expresses his loneliness and abandonment because of his fellows and his lord's death. Lines 2261-2267, then, recall another theme often repeated in the *Exeter Book* elegiac texts, that of the transiency of life.

Part II of *Beowulf* contains also a second possible-to-be-defined elegiac fragment, *The Father's Lament* (lines 2247-2267). These lines are part of a speech pronounced by Beowulf during the preparation to the combat against the dragon, in which he recounts part of the history of the Geats. He focuses in particular on the story of King Hrethel and of his three sons, and on the death of the eldest, Herebeald, accidentally killed by his brother Hygelac. Beowulf compares King Hrethel's grief over the loss of his son and the impossibility of revenge to the sorrow of a father who lost his son on the gallows, who,

as Herebeald, can only mourn his loss and remember his son. This fragment, unlike the other elegies, is not a first-person-voice narration but, as already mentioned, is part of Beowulf's direct discourse, who imagines and reports a lament in third person. However, what is considered elegiac is certainly the mourning for the death of and the separation from a beloved one, as well as the positive and pleasant remembering of the past clashes with a present of pain and abandonment.

A third and last composition that comprises an elegiac fragment is represented by *Guthlac B*. The text is found inside the *Exeter Book* together with another poem, which immediately precedes it, entitled *Guthlac A*. Both the compositions are hagiographies which narrate and celebrate the deeds and the death of St. Guthlac, a Christian Mercian saint. *Guthlac B* is particularly focussed on the last days of Guthlac's life and on the moment of his death, as to be also known as *The Death of Saint Guthlac*. The whole poem appears mainly as a dialogue between Guthlac and one of his disciples. Towards the end of his life Guthlac orders his young disciple to reach his sister after his death and to bury him. Broken-heartedly for his master's death, the disciple travels quickly by sea to Guthlac's sister, thus fulfilling Guthlac's wishes. The poem ends abruptly leaving the message that the young servant will continue his journey accompanied by sufferings and sorrow. The closing of the poem, in particular lines 1348-1379, has traditionally been considered elegiac rather than a consolatory ending typical of the hagiographic genre (Powell 1998, 500). Powell, in attempting to highlight the presence of an elegiac mood in the whole hagiography, without however wanting to define *Guthlac B* as an entire elegy, stressed those fundamental elements and themes that seem to make these last lines elegiac: from the theme of the exile and of the sea-journey, going through abandonment, to the theme of death, which for the disciple, as a typical insecure human being, is not a consolatory moment, as it is for Guthlac (and for every saint), but a cause of suffering.



## 2. The Old English Genre *Elegy*

When the elegiac genre is considered and studied within the Anglo-Saxon context, a definite, complete and unambiguous definition of the genre seems impossible to be found. Over time, there have been several significant changes in the trend of criticism, so that, from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until today, different critical positions have succeeded one another and/or clashed in the attempt to define the Old English elegiac genre and to study the single so-called ‘elegiac’ compositions.

Despite the difficulties and the constant debates, the interest in defining the Anglo-Saxon elegiac genre has always been predominant and keen. Genre study, indeed, by gathering works which show shared qualities and common features, represents a substantial approach to literary texts for the appreciation of their own uniqueness. Northrop Frye (1957, 247), a Canadian theorist of literary criticism, claimed that “the purpose of criticism by genres is not so much so to classify as to clarify such traditions and affinities, thereby bringing out a large number of literary relationships that would not be noticed so long as there were no context established for them”. In other words, the interest in genre study relies on the need to consider a work of art in a larger context, in order to identify all those features and facets that would otherwise be impossible to gather.

However, defining what a genre is represents another source of problems and debates. As a consequence, the specific and particular study of the Anglo-Saxon elegiac genre results being inserted into the more general genre debate, whose history is long and very complex.

In the following paragraph a general overview of the genre theory discussion will be provided in order to highlight the complex panorama of genre definitions into which the already complicated elegy study is situated.

### 2.1. The Genre Theory: Literature Review

Even though the substantial function of genre study in defining every kind of human discourse has always been recognised by scholars, the genre concept and its meaning have always been the focus of multiple discussions. Genre history, indeed, appears to be

complex and obscure. David Duff (2000, 1-24) in the introduction to his 2000 anthology about modern genre theory provides the reader with a concise picture of the genre theory evolution and of the main related problematics. The scholar indicates the origin of the modern genre theory in the European Romantic time, in particular in Germany during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. During this period of time, indeed, some of the most important voices of the German Romanticism and literature started to challenge the Aristotelian tripartite division of poetics, which had been considered the substantial doctrine for any kind of literature discourse since Renaissance and Neoclassicism. Aristotle's doctrine about literary genres can be found in his *Poetics*, one of the earliest treatises to focus on literary theory. *Poetics* was composed by Aristotle for oral lectures with the didactic function to instruct future orators in every kind of poetry and in the ways of poetic composition. However, the core position of the treatise is occupied by the *tragedy*, emphasized in a blatant way by the author since considered a perfect form of *mimesis*, addressing high society. Over time, as it will be seen later, many scholars wanted to see in Aristotle's *Poetics* references also to two other main literary genres, *epic* and *lyric*, making this triad (i.e., *tragedy*, *epic* and *lyric*) the foundation of any literary theory. Each of these three literary genres would have its own precise function, a specific audience and a characterising metre. Important scholars of modern criticism have likewise supported the truthfulness of the Aristotelian triad: among them Austen Warren and Mikhail Bakhtin (1942; 1938 as cited in Genette 1992, 3-4). Indeed, the former claimed that Aristotle was already aware of the three different genres: *epic*, *drama* and *lyric*, and that these three genres were distinguished on the basis of the imitation criterion. The latter supported the superiority of Aristotle's theory on any other modern genre thesis. In contrast to these positions, Genette (1992) claimed that the triad should not be traced back to the Aristotelian doctrine. Instead, the tripartition of the genres would be the result of a wrong attribution to Aristotle and the confluence of at least two theories (Plato and Aristotle's theories) originated in the classical Greece. Genette demonstrated how this misunderstanding arose, by retracing the evolution of literary theory. In the Latin world, Quintilian identified seven different poetic genres, including the *ode*, which, according to him, is the only manifestation of lyric poetry. Consequently, *lyric* does not seem to have a central place at Quintilian's age. The first attempt to insert lyric genre in the Aristotelian system of genres seems to go back only to the Middle Ages. Until the advent of Romanticism, however, poets, treatises, philosophers have for centuries considered *Poetics* as the highest aesthetic authority, looking at its discourse to legitimate new



genres. As claimed by Genette (1992), Aristotle's assertions and hints were turned into a dogma since Renaissance. With the Romantic Revolution, things started to change radically: the artist's originality was exalted, whereas the composition through standardized models was condemned. *Poetics* started to be read in a different and new way: no longer as a treaty of rigid rules, but as the first theoretical reflection on literature. Among the members of the Jena circle, and in particular with the figure of Friedrich Schlegel, a second main idea about genre theory arose and spread. For the first time, genres ceased to be considered static and immutable across the time, and a new historical character started to be attributed to genres. As a consequence, universal rules and criteria which found their roots in Aristotle's doctrine were considered no more appropriate for the analysis of nineteenth-century works and genres. Schlegel, as already said, was probably the main voice of this new development in genre field to the point of arguing that it is not possible to talk about genres since each work is different and unique (Duff 2000, 5).

To conclude this brief excursus about genre study until Romanticism it is important to mention the position occupied by those genres not included in the *lyric-drama-epic* triad because of their non-mimetic character. Elegies, odes and sonnets are three of this group of genres considered inferior for the lack of an imitative feature. What these compositions generally express are the author's feelings, thoughts and prayers. As Genette reported in his essay, the tendency in the pre-Romantic criticism was that of considering the literary texts through an Aristotelian optic, that is, to seek a criterion of imitation also in non-mimetic genres. Nowadays, instead, critics seem to be more oriented to renounce to Aristotle's dogma and to "proclaim the equal dignity of a nonrepresentational utterance" (Genette 1992, 22).

A crucial turning point for the genre criticism occurred in the first three decades of the twentieth century in Russia, with a new school of literary theory known as Russian Formalism. Among the most important and distinctive principles elaborated by the group, it is important to mention at least two main theories<sup>11</sup>. First of all, the idea that genres represent what moves the literary history occupied the central core of their philosophy (Duff 2000, 7). Secondly, Formalists supported the existence of a hierarchy of genres, characterised by central and peripheral positions (Duff 2000, 7). Following this idea, genres seem to occupy specific positions depending on extraliterary factors and on social

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<sup>11</sup> For more details see David Duff, *Modern Genre Theory* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 6-8.

changes. Indeed, a genre would have a central position and a predominant role whether it is relevant in the social context in which it arises.

Russian Formalists' theories particularly influenced other twentieth-century important personalities in the field of genre study. Among them there was the Russian literary critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin whose theories cover a wide range of literary issues and genres debates. In particular, as will be seen in Chapter 3 (§ 3.1. p.54-5) of the present work, Bakhtin focussed the attention on the nature of "speech genres" and on a substantial difference between the so-called "primary genres" and "secondary genres" (Bakhtin 1986). The former are simple genres which take form in ordinary communication, the latter are more complex genres which develop in complex communicative context absorbing the primary genres. More details and explanations will be provided in the following chapter, together with the studies conducted by the Franco-Bulgarian scholar Tzvetan Todorov, whose works create a substantial link between Bakhtin theory of "speech genres" and the speech-act theory, which is at the basis of this study.

To formulate a genre theory based on the idea of mutability and dynamicity over time, that, as we have seen, has its roots in Romanticism, is also the Scottish critic Alastair Fowler (1982). In his essay, Fowler argued that genres are subjected to a changing process over time, known with the term of 'generic modulation' which consists of the expansion of original genres into broader generic systems, also known as modal entities. For instance, the genre 'elegy' may expand into an 'elegiac mode' in the course of the time. In details, the scholar distinguished some main terms: *mode*, *kind*, *constructional type*, *genre* and *subgenre*. For the sake of clarity, brief definitions of this terminology will be offered:

- *modes* are distinguished for their contents;
- *constructional types* are identified on the basis of external features (i.e., structure);
- *kinds* are based on both internal and external features. In addition to that, *kind* seems to correspond in Fowler's theory to the traditional idea of *genre*;
- *subgenres* are based on both internal and external features. In details, what differentiates a *subgenre* from a *kind* is represented by the content changes that *subgenres* may show.

According to Fowler, the most evident difference between what he calls *mode* and *kind* relies on the fact that the former cannot exist on its own, meaning that in general for each existing *kind* there also are corresponding *modes* (Fowler 1982, 108). Therefore, there are

*comic texts* and also *comedies*, *homiletic texts* and also *homilies* and as far as the object of this study is concerned, there might be *elegiac texts* and *elegies*. Moreover, an *elegiac text* is not necessary an *elegy*, since an *elegy* needs to have, according to Fowler, specific internal and external features, whereas an *elegiac text*, or an *elegiac mode*, shows only internal *elegiac characters*. Following this theory, Old English Elegies might be divided in ‘real’ *elegies* (i.e., *kinds*) and *elegiac texts* (i.e., *modes*), which might be *subgenres* of the *elegy genre*.

In his analysis of some oral poetic traditions, in particular of South Slavic, Greek and Old English, John Miles Foley (2003) introduced the term “ecosystem” to define oral generic compositions. In other words, the scholar compared oral genres to organic systems, since, as in nature, constituents of a system are subjected to continuous influences on one another. This “cross-species fertilization” is also known with the term of “leaking” (Foley 2003, 78). An important example of ‘leaking’ offered by the scholar concerns the Anglo-Saxon elegies, in particular one of the texts found in the *Exeter Book: The Seafarer*. First of all, Foley supported the general idea that Old English ‘elegies’ do not have close analogies with the classical tradition of elegy (as will be deepened later in the next paragraph). According to the critic, the Anglo-Saxon ‘elegies’ would constitute a genre on its own, which shares some characteristics with the wider poetic ecosystem (Foley 2003, 98). Indeed, Foley underlined that not only may a text share some features with genetically related compositions, which belong to the same ecological system, but also with genetically non-related works, which may show a similar diction and similar themes. As far as the *Seafarer* is concerned, the cross-fertilization might be found in a series of elements and motifs, among which Foley identified the ‘Joy in the Hall’ theme, that according to him cannot be ascribed to a single genre. This traditional motif was probably taken from the Old English poetic tradition by the author of the *Seafarer* because of its being part of the audience knowledge and culture, and, as a consequence, it would constitute a “bedrock upon which the poem as edifice is built” (Foley 2003, 101). The motif is used in this poem in order to underline the difference between life in society and life spoiled off human things, a life voted to the spiritual reward.

The studies conducted by Fowler and Foley are just some of the many attempts at genre definition that characterize the debates of modern literary criticism. Despite these difficulties and multiple discussions, defining a genre is an important task. Indeed, as already mentioned, identifying common characteristics, from a lexical, thematic or formal point of view, allows a more complete understanding of a text. The complexity of

defining a genre is often increased by the fact that there are no traces of genre awareness in the literature taken into analysis. Applying categories and taxonomies retrospectively is therefore not a simple task and the lack of certainties opens the door to debate and criticism. When the English ‘elegies’ are taken into consideration, the difficulties for the definition of the Anglo-Saxon elegiac genre and for the classification and grouping of some compositions into this genre increase considerably. In the following paragraphs the main problems related to the definition of the Anglo-Saxon elegy will be taken into consideration. In particular, in paragraph 2.2. various attempts to define the Anglo-Saxon elegy will be analysed. In paragraph 2.3. the main criticisms against the grouping of the nine essays of the *Exeter Book* under one name will be analysed.

## 2.2. Defining Anglo-Saxon Elegy: Themes, Tones and Formulaic Language

The elegies categorization uncertainty in the Anglo-Saxon world depends on a series of problematics peculiar to the Old English elegiac texts. The first obstacle to the definition of the Anglo-Saxon elegy lies in the fact that, unlike classical elegiac poetry, it seems not easy to identify and distinguish a unique metre for each ‘elegiac’ composition. In its classical form, indeed, the elegy was characterized by a well-defined metre, resulting from the combination of a hexametre and a pentametre, also known with the term of ‘elegiac couplet’ or ‘elegiac distichous’. The Greek term itself, *ἐλεγεία* (in English ‘elegy’, probably deriving from the substantive *ἔλεγχος*, ‘lament, sorrow’), was born to indicate a particular poetic form distinguished for its metre, the distich, rather than for its content. Only over time, the initial varied content and tone became increasingly meditative and melancholic, characterised by a sense of mourning for an unhappy condition.

As far as the Old English context is concerned, there seems to be no evidence that the Anglo-Saxon *scops* denominated the compositions, now defined by the critics as ‘elegiac’, with the term ‘elegy’. As Klinck (1992, 245) demonstrated, the Anglo-Saxon poets would have used in particular the term *giedd* to refer to the ‘elegiac’ texts. Indeed, the noun *giedd* appears in four of the nine *Exeter Book* elegies, in particular in *The Wanderer* (line 55), in *The Seafarer* (line 1), in *Wulf and Eadwacer* (line 19) and in *The Wife’s Lament* (line 1). Moreover, *giedd* seems also to appear in the long heroic Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* (lines 1118, 2108, 2446 and 3150). According to the scholar, the

term *giedd* was probably preferred to others for the purpose of indicating elegiac utterances and discourse (Klinck 1992, 245). The term ‘elegy’, instead, probably started to be used to refer to some Old English compositions (particularly to those survived in the *Exeter Book*) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in particular during the Romanticism. Even though there is no certainty as to who firstly used this term, one of the first scholars was surely Conybeare (1826, 250) who defined *The Wife’s Lament* as an ‘elegiac’ composition, being characterised by an ‘elegiac’ character. However, the Romantics used the noun ‘elegy’ and the adjective ‘elegiac’ without any real critical reflection, but probably moved by the search for the sensitivity of the moment in the Middle Ages. Indeed, these ‘elegiac’ compositions were well suited to the perfect idea of the nineteenth-century elegy as a personal reflection-meditation characterized by a sense of melancholy. Yet the Old English ‘elegiac’ compositions cannot be defined elegy not only in the classical sense, for not manifesting the typical elegiac couplet, but also in the pastoral sense of the later English elegies, based on the model of the eclogue and of the idyll (Klinck 1984, 129-30). Therefore, due to the lack of a specific and well-defined reference to a ‘elegiac’ literary genre in the Middle Ages, the application of the term elegy is nothing more than a retrospective analysis. Similarly, Greenfield and Calder (1986, 281) highlighted that any kind of taxonomy applied to these lyrics is the result of a present reflection, through present eyes and feelings. In other words, scholars extract particular characteristics from certain compositions and define a common basis to which they assign a precise name that can identify and differentiate a particular group of texts from other genres. According to Heinzle (1978 as cited in Klinck 1992, 223), the fact that Anglo-Saxon poets seem to have never classified these elegiac compositions could be due to the “gattungspoetologischen Desinteresse des Mittelalters”.

Besides the lack of the classic elegiac metre and of an Old English term for the designation of the elegiac genre, the difficulty in defining the Anglo-Saxon elegy genre is worsened by the limited number of the ‘elegiac’ texts that survived until present time. The scarceness of the Old English ‘elegies’ together with the uncertainty of the date of their compositions render the evolution of the English elegies difficult to understand, since they also seem not to produce successors in Middle English (Klinck 1992, 225).

The difficult issue of terminology and of genre leaves space for a lack of agreement among intellectuals on which and how many poems can actually be considered elegies. As previously underlined, several scholars have actively contributed to the debate on the Old English elegy issue by proposing different solutions and ideas, sometimes by

incorporating all the elegies, sometimes by adding new ones and sometimes by eliminating some texts up to include only two elegies. Among the different theories, the most traditional position, which started with Sieper (1915), considers all the nine *Exeter Book* lyrics cited above ‘elegies’: *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Ruin*, *The Wife’s Lament*, *Deor*, *Wulf And Eadwacer*, *The Husband’s Message*, *Resignation* and *The Riming Poem*. At the basis of this critical classification there are primarily stylistic and content criteria, which have been chosen to define the Old English elegy genre: the term of Anglo-Saxon elegy generally defines a melancholic composition characterised by the presence of conventional themes, such as the solitude of the *persona loquens*, an exile situation and the contrast between the joys of the past and the sufferings of the present. Moreover, another important contribution to the first drafts of the elegy definition was provided by Kennedy (1936), who, in a translation work of some Old English ‘elegies’, underlined the most substantial difference between the Anglo-Saxon ‘elegiac’ compositions and the later English elegies (i.e., the pastoral elegies). According to the scholar, indeed, “they do not bewail the death or eulogize the life of an individual. They have little in common with modern elegies of the type of Lycidas and Adonais” (Kennedy 1936, 2). Therefore, even though some elegies seem to address the death of one or more individual (as in the case of the *Wanderer*, the *Seafarer*, the *Lay of the Last Survivor* and *The Father’s lament*), death is not the central theme of the elegy but a sort of triggering cause for the unhappy current condition.

In 1942, B. J. Timmer elaborated one of the most interesting theory about the Old English ‘elegies’, which questioned for the first time the traditional gathering and classification of the *Exeter Book* poems, defined ‘elegies’ for their similar melancholic tones and themes of life transience. The scholar, examining the entire elegiac corpus, came to the conclusion that only *The Wife’s Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* can be considered elegies to all effects. According to Timmer, indeed, these two compositions are the best embodiment of what he calls ‘the *elegiac mood*’. The scholar claimed that this particular mood, well summarised with the brief sentence ‘*lif is læne*’ elaborated by Tolkien (1936 as cited in Timmer 1942, 3), is present not simply in the ‘elegiac’ corpus but also in the broader Old English poetry and it can be also found throughout the whole Germanic tradition.<sup>12</sup> According to Timmer’s theory, although the ‘elegiac’ mood

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<sup>12</sup> See also Christine Fell, “Perceptions of transience”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. by Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 172–89.

permeates any 'elegiac' poem, only *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* could be defined elegies "pure and simple" since they show characteristic elegiac elements like "lament over misery, separation from the lord and banishment, change of luck, comparison with the former happiness and longing for love [which] are expressed in a lamenting tone" (Timmer 1942, 36). On the other hand, Timmer claimed that *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem*, and *Resignation* (which he calls *The Exile's Prayer*) are religious didactic poems whose religious content represents a sufficiently valid reason for the exclusion of these compositions from the elegiac canon. Moreover, Timmer (1942, 34-7) underlined that *Deor* cannot be considered an elegy because of its being linked to the heroic matter, exactly as the *Husband's Message* seems to be particularly optimistic in nature to be associated to the melancholic mood of the elegies. As far as the religious didactic poems are concerned, the fact that they show an elegiac mood, primarily translated in the comparison between a former luck and the present unhappiness and secondly in a general pessimism about life, could be due to its usefulness in the spread of the Christian faith. To be more clear, Timmer (1942, 42-4) asserted that in the passage from the heathendom to Christianity the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons appears to be characterised by any kind of martyrdom, difficulty or clash., probably as a consequence of an already weak heathen faith and also because of the ability of Christian individuals to take and to adapt original pagan elements and beliefs for purely Christian purposes. Thence, a Christian would have used the elegiac mood and the misfortunes of the elegiac characters to teach the audience the wisdom of putting their lives in God's hands, and their trust in Heaven, the only place warranting the security and stability, otherwise untraceable on a mortal land (Timmer 1942, 38-9).

In the decades following Timmer's thesis, other scholars have contributed with their research and studies to the debate on the Anglo-Saxon elegy genre and on which compositions to define as such. Among these, Pilch (1964) defined the main characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon elegiac genre, on the basis of which he considered only *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* true elegies. These texts are indeed well suited to his definition of elegy, whose main characteristics are: the form of monologue, being uttered before sunrise, by an anonymous narrator generally elderly and the lack of geographical or historical references. In addition, his definition of elegy includes a detailed description of the typical setting of the elegy (i.e. the harsh and uncomfortable sea landscape with cliffs and storms as opposed to the comfortable hall of the lord). Plich (1964, 211-2) also emphasized the typical

elegiac structure, which appears to be divided into two main parts plus a gnomic conclusion or a prayer.

About forty years after Timmer's studies, John M. Foley (1983) questioned the nature of *The Seafarer*, traditionally called 'elegy', by proposing a new kind of analysis, no longer focussed only and exclusively on content and tone but also and mainly on *how* the poet (in this case *The Seafarer's* poet) exposes that content. The particular complexity of the poem has led several scholars to give different definitions of *The Seafarer's* genre: from the most traditional, that of the elegy, to *planctus*, and from *peregrinatio* to allegory. According to Foley a solution to these contrasts could be found by analysing the typical diction of the composition. He discovers that *The Seafarer's* diction is characterized by the presence of formulaic language both at the level of the line and at the level of the narrative (i.e., formulaic chunks and formulaic *topoi*) and by the presence of "nonce structures", or non-traditional structures, echoed only in the poem (Foley 1983, 693). Foley renamed these two types of structures respectively as "verbal structures", or elements that are rooted in the poetic and cultural tradition, and "verbal designs", or elements that cannot be found outside the poem itself (Foley 1983, 693-4). In order to better understand this type of diction, it is necessary to consider a poetic work not as static but as dynamic. This particular dynamism, according to the scholar, is created by the poet in order to reach and to guide the audience. Consequently, traditional structures would aim to evoke the poetic tradition, while "verbal designs" would aim to activate the meaning of the poem. In this way, the two modes of meaning refer to two different aspects of the audience: one linked to the tradition and the other open to non-traditional elements. Then, moving on to the genre problem, Foley claimed that it might be not appropriate to consider a single and unique genre for a work of art like *The Seafarer*, which is characterised by the two aforementioned modes of meaning with two different purposes. *The Seafarer* appears to have several sides and shades for its particular diction, so that the poem cannot be reduced to a single genre, but needs to be considered as a "genre-information" (Foley 1983, 699-700).

A collection of essays published by Martin Green in 1983 is then of fundamental importance. This collection brings together a series of studies carried out by different authors on single 'elegies', and also highlights the different ways in which scholars deal with the elegy genre issue. In details, the problem of genre definition is addressed in Green's volume by Joseph Harris and Raymond Tripp, of whose studies an overview and the core of their thesis will be briefly provided.



To begin with, Harris' studies (1983) were primarily aimed at reconstructing the prehistory of the Anglo-Saxon elegy. Following the typical steps for the linguistic reconstruction of Proto-Germanic starting from the extant Germanic languages, the scholar compares the Old English 'elegies' with the poems of the Norse Edda and with other compositions of the Germanic tradition, in order to reconstruct a Common Germanic elegy model that he defined "a dramatic monologue spoken by a figure from a known heroic story who told in the first person about the joys and especially the griefs of his life" (Harris 1983, 48). The scholar identified in *Wulf and Eadwacer* the most archaic text of the elegy genre history and also supported the existence of other three main evolutionary steps. As we approach the fourth stage, we see a weakening of the autobiographical character and the increasingly constant allegorical perspective of the elegy, well represented by the *Seafarer* (Harris 1983, 49). By placing the Old English 'elegies' on a temporal line, the scholar also included the two brief passages from *Beowulf* (i.e., *The Father's Lament* and *The Lay of the Last Survivor*), seen as attributable to the later phase of the first stage. Harris gave particular attention to these two elegiac texts in a 1988 study in which, as already pointed out in the first Chapter of this work (§ 1.2.), he expanded the definition of elegy by including also those compositions in heroic texts that may show elegiac elements (Harris 1988).

Then, Tripp (1983, 57) began his analysis by stating that the speaker of *The Wife's Lament* would be a dead person. Thence, the scholar asserted that at the basis of the *Exeter Book's* compositions traditionally defined 'elegies' there would be the influence of the death song genre and, more generally, that it would be possible to recognise a particular attention to eschatological mysteries, belonging to both Christian-Latin and Pagan-Germanic cultures (Tripp 1983, 60-1). Tripp concluded his essay by pointing out that as for the 'death songs' Odin, "the ancient one-eyed god, crafty and skilled in magic lore, a great shape-changer, and an expert in the consultation of the dead" (Davidson 1964, 140 as cited in Tripp 1983, 64) calls the dead to tell their stories, the poet of the 'elegies' incites the *persona loquens* of the elegy itself to tell their past.

After briefly reviewing the history of the elegiac genre through the theories of some of the most important scholars, it is necessary to draw attention to two of the most influential and most quoted voices in the Anglo-Saxon elegy debate: S.B. Greenfield, pillar of the Old English elegy studies and Anne L. Klinck, one of the leading representatives of modern critics.

In one of his most prominent studies on Old English literature and on Anglo-Saxon elegy genre, Greenfield (1966) formulated his definition of elegy which has become the standard in the field of elegiac studies. The scholar claimed that the Old English elegy might be described as “relatively short reflective or dramatic poem embodying a contrasting pattern of loss and consolation, ostensibly based upon a specific personal experience or observation, and expressing an attitude towards that experience” (1966, 143). From this definition it is clear that an elegiac poem, in addition to being short, should manifest a section focussed on loss and a consolatory part. This statement could arise particular criticism in the reader who approaches some of the Old English ‘elegies’ for the first time, especially considering compositions such as *The Wife's Lament*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, in which a consolatory tone or a glimmer of recovery does not seem to stand out immediately, or even more in *The Ruin*, which seems to lack a personal tone. One would wonder, then, how truly these texts can be considered ‘elegies’. As will be seen in the next paragraph, not a few have provided various interpretations of the *Exeter Book*’s elegies, not only attributing this or that composition to a particular literary genre, different from that of the elegy, but also trying to provide their own explanations for some of the obscurities of these ‘elegies’. Greenfield himself, however, pointed out that these elegies are really heterogeneous and that to apply a specific taxonomy is not a simple and straightforward task. Greenfield and Calder (1986) in their chapter about elegiac poetry analysed the Old English ‘elegies’ from the *Exeter Book* and from the heroic poem *Beowulf*, trying to highlight the main features of each composition, such as the themes and tones that can be considered elegiac. In the present work, the single characteristics of each composition will not be reported, but we will focus mainly on the main and recurring themes. The two scholars spoke in particular of: the exile theme, the *ubi sunt* motif and the ruin theme. Firstly, Greenfield highlighted the most recurrent aspects of the ‘exile’ in the Anglo-Saxon poetry also in a 1955 essay. The scholar identified four main elements characterising the exile state on which Anglo-Saxon poets focussed their attention: ‘status’ of the exile, ‘deprivation’, ‘state of mind’ and ‘movement in or into exile’ (Greenfield 1955, 201). Each of these four aspects seems to be expressed by formulaic chunks, or *formulae*, whose formulaic character results from the fact that they sometimes express even more than one exile aspect and they are used by poets to refer to several different figures, both legendary and historical. As said above, the other two most frequent themes in the Old English ‘elegies’ are the *ubi sunt* motif and the ruin theme, considered perfectly embodied by one of the *Exeter Book* ‘elegies’: *The Ruin*. According

to Fell (1991), at the basis of these two motifs it is possible to find a general interest in and/or preoccupation with transience of life, which similarly to Timmer's thesis is not exclusively typical of the Old English elegies but of the whole Germanic culture. Hence, even Old Icelandic poetry and culture seem to show a particular attention to mortality. As Fell (1991, 186-8) claimed, transience of life was particularly felt by Anglo-Saxons, as well as by any other Medieval people, due to the poor chance of long-term survival. In the *Seafarer* (lines 70-1) the poet writes that:

adl opþe ylðo	opþe ecghete	disease or age or violence
fægum fromweardum	feorh oðþringeð	crush life from the doomed

[Fell 2017, 187]

Life is transitory. Life is mortal and brief. *Lif is Læne*. Everything decays and becomes a ruin. The *ubi sunt* motif, that is to say the reflection on the transience of every human experience, even the most glorious one, seems to be particularly spread in the Western Medieval culture, both Latin and German. In details, the *ubi sunt* is a rhetorical question which appears in a variety of forms in different kinds of poetry and, in each case, it offers a possibility of reflection about the mortality and transitivity of human life and world. According to some scholars, *ubi sunt* has one of the first appearance in the form of *Ubi sunt principes gentium?* ('where are the princes of the nations?') in a passage from the book of Baruch (3:16-19) in the Vulgate Bible. On the other hand, Gordon (1960, 24-5) claimed that the *ubi sunt* passages in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* show several similarities with the Christian-Latin homiletic tradition, which both the poems would have derived from a common source to be found in an anthology known as *Liber Scintillarum*, compiled in the late seventh century (the passage reads: *Dic ubi sunt reges? Ubi principes? Ubi imperatores?*). Another possibility is that the *ubi sunt* theme might find its origin in popular patristic sources which were later crystallised and stylised into a precise pattern. The *Seafarer* itself would have participated in the stylisation of this homiletic motif, reversing in this way the idea that the poem is based on an already formed homiletic tradition. Both poems, *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, manifest the homiletic theme of *ubi sunt* within a Germanic contest and by using elements of the Germanic tradition, such as the Joy-in-the-Hall topos, so that the purely Christian message could reach an audience accustomed to Germanic heroic poetic elements. Hence, it is precisely this union of Christian purpose and traditional elements that made these compositions unique and guaranteed their survival, as also Timmer (1942) pointed out.

So far, a congeries of definitions and studies on the problem of the Anglo-Saxon elegy genre has been illustrated, driven by a need for definition in order to classify these obscure 'elegies'. The meaning of the term elegy is not fixed in the criticism but as changed abruptly over time, as we have seen. One of the most important voices in the last decades of criticism is that of Klinck, who was able to provide an explanation and a detailed description of the true nature of the Anglo-Saxon elegy. The scholar has based her own idea of Old English elegy starting from the nine poems in the *Exeter Book*, extrapolating a definition from the common characteristics which these texts share and that can be related to an elegiac sense (or mood). Conversely, other scholars have applied a definition already formulated on the basis of literatures from other cultures to these texts in order to understand which of them should be included in the elegiac canon. In the attempt of defining the Old English elegy genre, Klinck (1992) claimed that the "essential element" of this specific genre is "a sense of separation". In details, Klinck's definition of Anglo-Saxon elegy genre reports that "Old English elegy is a discourse arising from a powerful sense of absence, of separation from what is desired, expressed through characteristic words and themes, and shaping itself by echo and leitmotiv into a poem that moves from disquiet to some kind of acceptance" (1992, 246). This description is full of meaning, since each word chosen by Klinck is significant for the characterization of the Anglo-Saxon genre elegy, and it is based on in-depth studies and analysis of the themes, structures, lexicon of the texts. As far as the themes are concerned, as said above, the central and crucial elegiac theme is represented by a sense of loss and separation, from which a longing mood arises in the poems. The separation theme seems to occur as separation from beloved ones, families, kin, or from the social position in the world. As for the lexicon, according to Klinck, it is possible to identify recurrent and formulaic phrases and words throughout the Old English elegies. In particular, frequent words are those expressing loss, sorrow, woe and longing, together with those fixed images to indicate isolation by sea or more in general by water, with images of cold and harshness, hunger and loneliness. Klinck also identified words for falling in those poems "which meditate on the destruction of society" (1992, 228), and she highlighted recurrent verb forms in *bi-* for the expression of deprivation.

The scholar also analysed the possible cultural sources at the basis of the Old English elegiac poems found in the *Exeter Book*. First of all, Klinck discounted the idea that elegies might have been influenced by Germanic funeral laments, as suggested by Schücking (1908 as cited in Klinck 1992, 230). Even though no Germanic laments

survived and came down to the present world, *Beowulf* testifies two different kinds of grief at funeral, and in both cases, lament is addressed to a named person as a tribute. This characteristic, according to Klinck, cannot be a prerequisite for an elegiac composition, in which, instead, there is no clue for being performed as a tribute for the funeral of a specific person. On the other hand, Klinck (1992, 231) claimed that elegies might be the result of autobiographical poems originally accompanied by harps and which narrated the misfortunes of the *persona*.

Secondly, the scholar analysed the influence of Christian sources and more in general of Christianity on the Old English elegies. According to Klinck (1992, 231), it is important to remind that these compositions, even though they show some earlier Germanic elements, were composed in a Christian period, they were the result of a society already Christianised and were produced for an audience with a Christian faith. As a consequence, it is automatic that some elegies like *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem* and *Resignation* show Christian elements or a Christian homiletic ending. Some of the themes that seem to have been influenced by Christian Latin traditions are the *ubi sunt* motif, that, as already highlighted, is a characterising feature of religious works, and the *voyage* theme that can be found in *The Seafarer* and in *Resignation* which as Klinck pointed out “recalls the common patristic metaphor of the troubled sea of this world” (1992, 233).

Latin sources might also have affected the compositions of the Old English ‘elegies’, at least from a thematic point of view. Indeed, according to Klinck (1992, 233-4) it is possible to identify in most of the elegies a crucial tendency towards ‘consolation’ which might have been inspired by Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae*.

Lastly, the scholar studied the possible influence of Old Norse and Celtic cultures (Klinck 1992, 238-42). As far as the former is concerned, Klinck found out similarities with Old Norse poems at the level of the form, in particular in the cases of *Deor*, *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Riming poem*. The affinities that the scholar identified are concerned with the rhymed stanzaic structure of the *Riming Poem* and with the refrain found in the other two texts. As far as the Celtic culture is concerned, instead, Old Welsh poetry seems to resemble the Old English ‘elegies’ from a content and tone point of view.

In addition to the typical thematic and tone features of the Old English elegiac corpus, Klinck identified some formal and structural peculiarities shared by the Anglo-Saxon elegies, which however are not sufficient to define these texts as a genre. According to Klinck, indeed, it is important to analyse and take into account the features of a text from

different points of view (i.e., thematic, formal, tone, cultural influence). As far as the formal features are concerned, the most detailed study conducted by Klinck is presented in a 1984 essay in which the author focusses on some of the most recurrent characteristics shared by the elegies. In particular, Klinck claimed that the typical elegiac form “manifests itself in a use of some of the following devices: monologue, conventional introduction of the speaker, gnomic conclusion, repetition of key phrases, repetition of entire lines, and, occasionally rhymes” (1984, 130). Klinck emphasized more often in her work that all the last three characteristics bring the Anglo-Saxon elegies structurally close to the Greek elegiac texts, since the metre adopted is in opposition to the typical epic verse. In other words, as for the classical elegies the elegiac verse derives from the union of the hexametre and the lyrical metre, also in the Anglo-Saxon case it seems to be the result of the long alliterative verse of heroic poetry in combination with lyrical characteristics. As far as the first characteristic cited in Klinck’s definition is concerned, it seems that all the elegies are monologues, except for *The Ruin*. However, Klinck (1984, 131) observed that *The Ruin* manifests not an ethopoetic speaker, as in the case of the other ‘elegies’, but a viewer who seems to describe the ruins of the city as he or she observes them by employing the use of deictics. Klinck, then, noted a very similar introduction in almost all the elegies. More in details, *The Seafarer* (lines 1-3) and *The Wife's Lament* (lines 1-4) show a very similar opening part:

*Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan,  
 sibas secgan, hu ic geswincdagum  
 earfoðhwile oft þrowade,*  
 (Sfr ll. 1-3)

*Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre,  
 minre sylfre sið. Ic þæt secgan mæg,  
 hwæt ic yrmþa gebad, sibþan ic up aweox,  
 niwes oþþe ealdes, no ma þonne nu.*

(WfL ll. 1-4)

as well as *Deor* and *Resignation* present the speaker later but with very similar expressions: *Þæt ic bi me sylfum / secgan wille* (*Deor* line 35); *Ic bi me tylgust secge þis sarspel / ond ymb sib spræce*, (*Resignation* lines 96b-97). What is important to note is that this typical elegiac presentation, generally characterised by the presence of the verb *secgan* as an introductory speech verb for the pains and the misfortunes of the speakers, is opposed to the typical heroic poetry introductory verb *gefrīnan*: the former creates a sense of intimacy and empathy with the speaking voice, whereas the latter simply report events from a remote past. In addition to the similar opening lines, a common ending has been found by the scholar, who underlined the fact that in general the elegies tend to end

with a gnomic conclusion (both from a homiletic and from a secular point of view), expressing wisdom sometimes through *formulae* based on *sceal* and *bid* (Klinck 1984, 132). According to Klinck, the combination of the personal elegiac introduction with this more general gnomic ending creates a characteristic peculiarity of the Old English ‘elegies’. The personal introduction can be sometimes found in other kinds of poetry, as in the *Riddles*, but it is important to consider that there is a substantial difference between an ethopoetic introduction, typical of the elegiac texts and the prosopopeic one that can be found in the riddles<sup>13</sup>. Some of the elegies have been considered riddles for their enigmatic character (a typical characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon and medieval literature), for the personal introduction and sometimes for their position in the manuscript, as occurred for the *Wife’s Lament* and for *Wulf And Eadwacer*. Even though an influence of the riddles elements is not to be excluded in these compositions, it is necessary to note that in the Anglo-Saxon ‘elegiac’ texts there is not preoccupation for the nature of the speaker typical of riddles, but that, instead, attention is paid to the psychology and interiority of the *persona loquens*.

The ‘elegies’ also show a repetition of words or of phrases, sometimes up to the creation of real refrains, as in the case of *Deor*, *Wulf and Eadwacer* and of *The Wife’s Lament*. However, the presence of refrains is not necessarily a peculiarity of the elegies since other poems might show repeated phrases or sentences, as it occurs in the case of the charms.

The last formal feature that Klinck (1984, 136-7) discusses in her essay is that of the rhyme. Not all the nine elegies manifest a rhyming pattern throughout the whole text, except for one of them which, for its particular rhyming scheme, has also been named *The Riming Poem*. The particularity of the rhyming pattern shown in this elegy is given by the fact that, in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon traditional way of rhyming characterised by the alliteration between the two halves of the poetic line, in two passages of *The Riming Poem* the rhyme occurs at the line end and it is characterised by a repeated verbal inflection. Here, the rhymes seem to have a functional purpose, that is to contrast two phases of the speaker’s life: present and past. In the ‘past’ passage the verbs at the ends of the lines are inflected in past tense, whereas in the ‘present’ passage the rhyme is formed by the repetition of the present tense endings.

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<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 1 (§1.1.2. note 5) for a detailed explanation of the differences.

However, these formal and thematic characteristics are not simply a peculiarity of the elegiac genre, as other genres may also contain these features. What makes a text an elegy is the union of many of these characteristics (Klinck 1992, 11). Moreover, following Todorov's idea that a text can be a manifestation of several literary genres, Klinck (1992, 223-4) stated that even in the case of Anglo-Saxon elegies it is necessary to broaden one's horizons and not just to apply a single genre definition to a poem. This speech made by Klinck (1992, 223-4) is also a provocation for those critics who have firmly classified elegiac compositions of the Anglo-Saxon panorama as "wisdom literature", "planctus", "riddle", "charm", "Freuenlied" etc., moving away from the possibility of a plurality of genres.

### 2.3. Definitions diverging from traditional criticism

In this last paragraph, a critical direction opposite to the current criticism and its attempts to define the genre elegy in the Anglo-Saxon world will be examined. In particular, in the criticism panorama there have been positions of some scholars who have considered the Old English 'elegies' not as a real elegiac genre, but as the starting point for the definition of other genres.

As previously seen, the nature of elegies is ambiguous, as for their origin and the possible cultural influences that underlie them. The designation of this or that culture as the main source has led to a growing complication of the problem of the Anglo-Saxon elegiac genre, and to the formulation of various literary theories. Some elegies have been called *planctus*, others *consolatio*, penitential poems etc., according to the cultural influence that has been identified. As Green (1983, 17-9) pointed out, the period between 1940 and 1970 was characterised by a blooming criticism, rich of different and several studies on the Anglo-Saxon 'elegies' and their mysteries.

To begin with, following the elegies' order of manifestation in the *Exeter Book*, two famous hypotheses about *The Seafarer* will be reported. First of all, in his 1966 book, Henry analysed and defined this Old English composition basing his studies on comparisons with some Celtic texts. According to the scholar, it seems possible to identify in the *Seafarer* some of the most important characteristics of a certain Celtic poetry. In particular, after having distinguished the two voyages of the Seafarer, the second voyage



(lines 33-64) could be understood as a sort of *peregrinatio pro Christo* or *pro amore dei*<sup>14</sup>, a peculiar feature of Irish culture in the Middle Ages (Henry 1966, 19). The second peculiarity concerns, according to Henry (1966, 19), the image of the bird-soul (lines 58-66a) also particularly attested in early Irish poetry. The result of Henry's comparative studies (1966, 20-1) has led the scholar to identify a particular literary genre under the name of *penitential poetry* which includes both Old English and Celtic (i.e., Irish and Welsh) texts.

The second theory that needs to be mentioned is that elaborated by Woolf (1975), which analysed some Old English elegies considering a Latin influence. According to the scholar, the *Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* for their peculiar characteristics might be considered *planctus* compositions (i.e., dirges or laments). More in details, Woolf (1975, 192) claimed that what seems to distinguish an elegy from a *planctus* is represented by the always fictional speakers of the second kind of composition, and by the subject of the poem that in an elegy is represented by death whereas in a *planctus* might be any kind of loss.

To conclude, as Foley (1983, 684) reported, over time many scholars like Anderson (1937-1938), Cross (1959) and Calder (1971) have also attributed to the *Seafarer* an allegorical character.

Now let us consider the second so-called *Exeter Book* elegy: *Deor*. Together with the elegiac composition *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *Deor* is, as previously mentioned, perhaps one of the most obscure poems of Anglo-Saxon culture and more specifically of the elegies in Old English. This elegy, which presents a fundamental peculiarity, namely that of the refrain, and a consolatory echo typical of Boethius' tradition, is full of mysteries: from the ambiguous references to historical and literary figures, from the ambiguous deictics of the refrain to the difficult interpretation that has questioned its elegiac character.

Regarding the numerous interpretations of the genre of *Deor*, one of the most famous theories was elaborated by Bloomfield (1964), who formulated his theory starting from the particular form and structure of the poem itself. In particular, *Deor* presents a stanzaic structure and each stanza is followed by a sort of refrain that reads: '*Pæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg*'. In Anglo-Saxon literature, some prose or semi-poetic charms have normally choruses, while among the elegies *Deor* would be the only real composition to manifest

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<sup>14</sup> The *peregrinatio pro amore dei* in the *Seafarer* was already interpreted by Whitelock as a penitential voyage. See Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies a Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal (etc.): McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 37.

it, except for *Wulf and Eadwacer*. Rejecting the idea that *Deor* is a monologue pronounced by a minstrel named Deor complaining his suffering and hoping for a resolution, Bloomfield (1964, 539-41) proposed to consider *Deor* as a Christianized charm or as a poem that has been influenced by the tradition of charms. As also the scholar claimed, in the course of the time the particular ambiguity and obscurity of *Deor*'s refrain has generated several translations and interpretations. This ambiguous character is given firstly by the word *mæȝ*, sometimes translated as 'may' even though its usual meaning should be 'can, being able to' (Bloomfield 1964, 536). Secondly, great confusion is created by the deictics "*Pæs*" and "*bisses*". Bloomfield (1964, 537) interpreted the refrain as "that passed away, so will this", and claimed that the first demonstrative 'that' could refer to the misfortune described in the preceding stanza. 'This' instead is more problematic for the fact that it is not clear if it refers to the condition of the speaker reported in the last stanza. The last refrain is then the most complicated to be understood since the second deictic in this case, if we consider correct the previous interpretation, should refer for the first time to a stanza which precedes and not succeeds. On the contrary, Bloomfield proposed that *Deor* is in fact a charm or something like a charm whose refrain is used to refer to any social misfortune, and that has a social and practical purpose (Bloomfield 1964, 537). For this practical purpose, charms may be considered as 'action literature', a literature that also does action. They not simply communicate something but also do something, so that they can be considered real speech acts in Austin and Searle's terms or speech genres in Bakhtin's theory (1986). Bloomfield supported his thesis by claiming that *Deor* perfectly fits into a basic charm structure which results being typically characterised by a narrative part narrating past episodes and by a command or request section. The first-person narrator is explained by Bloomfield (1964, 540) as a poetic action which consists in wearing the mask of a singer, whose misfortune was well known by the audience, with the purpose of creating a comparison between past events and a present unhappy situation that needs to be eliminated. Bloomfield concluded by saying that *Deor* represents a sophisticated and Christianised example of a charm, bearing "the major marks of a charm - short narratives referring to a success in the past, a "as X, so Y" structure, commands or wishes, and repetitions" (1964, 540).

Another interpretation of *Deor* was provided by Howe (1985). The scholar stated that the *Deor* should be compared to a catalogue poem or to a short encyclopaedic composition. After defining the main characteristics of a catalogue that distinguish it from a list, he stated that: "The catalogue, whether in prose or poetry, is a practical means for

presenting a great deal of information in discrete sections. In it, each item is noted and described individually rather than related by strict logic to the surrounding items” (Howe 1985, 27). *Deor* seems to fit meticulously into his description of a catalogue, since the poem uses the catalogue structure not as a mere formal feature but as the main pivot of its structure and narrative (Howe 1985, 14).

If on one hand *Wulf and Eadwacer* together with *The Wife's Lament* has been considered the best example of pure Old English elegy by Timmer for the lack of a religious didactic purpose, on the other hand this composition has been defined as a riddle or a riddle-like for “its brevity, its cryptic style, and its use of animals” (Klinck 1992, 49) and has also been called “First Riddle” for preceding the first group of riddles in the *Exeter Book*. An intriguing and intricate riddle theory has been elaborated by Anderson (1983), who, after having analysed *Wulf and Eadwacer* together with the immediately preceding poem in the manuscript *Soul and Body II* and *Deor*, considered the three compositions as a single first riddle. It is possible that the three compositions were initially separated poems which only in a second moment were joined together with a specific intention. According to Anderson (1983 217), the *riddler* of this first riddles of the *Exeter Book* disposed the texts in such a way that the audience had the possibility to discover the solution following a sort of climax towards spiritual truth. The three texts, joined for thematic, formal and graphic elements, seems to narrate three similar episodes of miseries: exile/imprisonment, sorrow and abduction. As any riddle, also the “First Riddle” would have its own solution: the eternal grief, and the eternal death, which are consequences of unrighteous deeds during earthly life (Anderson 1983, 226).

A riddle nature has also been attributed to the so-called ‘elegy’ that immediately follows the group of riddles in the *Exeter Book*, *The Wife's Lament*, by Walker-Pelkey (1992, 265), who interpreted the poem as a lament moved by a sword for the separation from its owner. However, there is not enough evidence to prove the presence of a speaking object and therefore of a not-human speaker. Conversely, as already pointed out in the previous chapter, the majority’s opinion claims that the *persona loquens* of *The Wife's Lament* is represented not only by a human being but also by a female voice. As a consequence of this thesis, the female speaker and the poem’s articulation around the theme of love offer analogies with literary genres other than the elegy. During the 60s and 70s of the last century, indeed, a new interpretative hypothesis arose and spread: some scholars such as Malone (1962) and Davidson (1975) claimed that *The Wife's Lament* was to include among the *Frauenlieder*, also known as “women's songs”, i.e. “songs put in the

mouths of women who gave free utterance to the feelings of the hearts" (Malone 1962, 106). Davidson (1975, 451-62) based his analysis on the comparison of *The Wife's Lament*, as well as of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, with three lyrics in the manuscript Gg. v. 35. considered *Frauenlieder: Veni, dilectissime, Nam languens* and *Levis exurgit zephirus*. However, the comparison offered by Davidson takes into consideration mainly superficial elements of the compositions, such as the female voice, evident both in the texts of the *Exeter Book* and in the late-Latin *Frauenlieder*, and the suffering theme for a distant love. On the contrary, the presence of details such as pain, sadness, hostility of the surrounding landscape, as well as the physical and psychological isolation of the female ego find a difficult place in the *Frauenlied* genre, more often driven by the desire for reconciliation and a more or less strong erotic note.

A further interpretation of the genre to which *The Wife's Lament* might belong has once again been elaborated on the mysterious figure of the narrator's voice. Following Tripp's theories according to which some elegies might have been influenced by death songs, Johnson (1983) believed that *The Wife's Lament* was exactly a 'death song'. At the basis of this hypothesis Johnson (1983, 70-1) finds the mysterious dwelling of the *persona loquens*, who seems to dwell under an oak-tree in an earth-cave (line 28: *under actreo in þam eorðscraefe*). This last term, *eorðscraefe*, could be interpreted as a real grave that ties the speaker to the earth.

The last interpretation that is worth to be reported gather *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message* together as a Christian allegory. Hence, in contrast with Timmer's idea of a pure elegiac composition for the lack of religious content, other scholars read both the poems as a dialogue between the Christian church and her husband, Christ. The former prays Christ for the reestablishment of the lost union, and the latter answers in *The Husband's Message* by confirming the faith path between the bride and the groom (Swanton 1964 as cited in Klinck 1992, 59-60).

The last divergent theories that will be considered in the final part of this paragraph are concerned with other two so-called 'elegies': *Resignation* and *The Husband's Message*. As far as the former is concerned, it is necessary to shortly mention Bestul's studies (1977) on the *Resignation A* and *Resignation B*. As already highlighted in the previous chapter, Bestul's theory is inserted in that school of thought which supported the unity of the two parts of *Resignation*, contrary to those scholars who separated the two texts recognising two different natures. Seeing *Resignation* as whole, the scholar also

defined the nature of the poem, which for Bestul was not an elegy but a prayer composed under the influence of the Benedictine Reform.

About *The Husband's Message*, traditionally considered one of the three love elegies together with *The Wife's Lament* and with *Wulf and Eadwacer*, some scholars have also developed a genre theory which designates the poem as a riddle. More in details, Pope (1979 as cited in Klinck 1992, 27) came to the conclusion that *The Husband's Message* and *Riddle 60* were intended as parts of the same text by the compiler. *Riddle 60*, also known as *Ic wæs be sonde*, shows a non-human speaker probably embodied by a reed-pen whose purpose is to convey a secret message. The riddle has been considered by Pope as a sort of opening section for *The Husband's Message* whose words should represent, following this interpretation, the secret message cited in *Riddle 60*. However, it is not confirmed the presence of the same speaker in the *Husband's Message*, as Klinck (1992, 27) underlined, and as a consequence there seems to be not evident support for Pope's theory. The ambiguity of this so-called 'elegy', however, is undisputable, not only for the similarities with *Riddle 60*, but also for the presence of some runic signs and for its text being damaged.

To conclude, the theories and the hypothesis presented so far offer a series of interpretations about the *Exeter Book* elegiac corpus, which diverge partially or completely from the traditional criticism. As we have seen, each of these theories is formulated starting from specific elements manifested in the texts that seem to suggest the affinity with genres different from the elegy. Such a rigid and restrictive analysis on literary texts, however, eliminates the possibility to understand the heterogeneous nature of the Anglo-Saxon 'elegiac' compositions. As also Klinck (1992, 223-4) suggested, it is crucial to be aware of this heterogeneity, which does not exclude the possibility of defining these compositions elegies but at the same time underlines the influence of probably many other genres and cultures that make the Old English elegy genre incredibly unique.



### 3. Pragmatic Analysis of Elegies: a new Proposal

#### 3.1. Speech Acts as a Tool of Investigation

So far, we have tried to highlight how problematic it is to define the Anglo-Saxon elegy genre through traditional methods of investigation. In particular, there are two main methodological approaches with which traditional critics have defined the genre ‘elegy’ and identified the main elegiac compositions. The first one applies the traditional definition of elegy, coming from other cultures and other literatures (i.e., from the classical and from the English Renaissance world), to the Anglo-Saxon scenario; the second one tries to extrapolate a definition for Old English elegies from within the elegiac-like compositions. In both cases the analysis dwells mainly on formal, stylistic and thematic elements, clashing with the main problems of Anglo-Saxon texts. As previously said, indeed, these compositions lack of a characterizing metre, have been influenced by several other genres and cultures and above all do not have an Anglo-Saxon term to define them. All these elements make the Anglo-Saxon “elegies” incredibly heterogeneous; and also the theories that arose in order to explain and classify these texts are, as a consequence, particularly heterogeneous. In other words, since there is no suggestion of linearity among the Anglo-Saxon elegiac composition, each scholar has tried in his or her own way to find a certain homogeneity, or at least threads among them. Scholars have elaborated different and several theories; they have classified, often in a contrastive way, these compositions, excluding some of them from the definition of elegy and incorporating others. Therefore, it seems clear that the real problem concerning Anglo-Saxon elegies is of epistemological kind. Indeed, the research methods at the basis of the different theories developed in recent decades would be questioned for the subjectivity of which they are characterised. If, in general, any attempt to taxonomy of literary works is mostly subjective, as also highlighted by Greenfield and Calder (1986, 281) for being a retrospective study made by a modern eye, in front of obscure and enigmatic literary compositions the lack of objectivity may increase considerably.

At this point, after having underlines the dangerousness of traditional methodologies, all too subjective, in the analysis of Anglo-Saxon compositions, the reader may wonder if it is possible to conduct a genre analysis in the most objective way. It is in this niche of the research that the present work is inserted with the intent to propose a new methodological approach for the study of the Anglo-Saxon elegy genre. In particular, a pragmatic type of analysis will be adopted, which, despite having been used only a few times for the study of literary genres, is able to guarantee greater objectivity than traditional approaches. Pragmatics, as a linguistic science, focuses on the relationship between language and action, how language is used, how it is composed and organized for certain purposes. This discipline concentrates on the concatenation of micro and macro linguistic structures, on their reciprocal disposition and recurrence in any kind of discourse, depending on the goal to be reached. In details, pragmatics is based on the assertion that speech and human action are tied together, that every time human beings communicate, they perform different kinds of action.

Among the different scholars who participated in the pragmatics discussion, Bakhtin (1986) in one of his studies about speech genres, recognized in utterance the fundamental unity of communication as action. In particular, he claimed that:

*Language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral and written) by participants in the various areas of human activity. These utterances reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style, that is, the selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language, but above all through their compositional structure.* (Bakhtin 1986, 60)

In every sphere of human communication, therefore, utterances assume particular characteristics, thematic, stylistic and compositional, appropriate to the sphere to which they belong. Bakhtin continues by saying that each area in which the language is used develops utterances with a very specific and characterizing basis, also called *speech genres* (1986, 60). What is important to add now is that these utterances, or *speech genres*, arise for certain functions and conditions of communication, they change over time, but maintain a constant basis that recognizes them as genres. These genres are stored in social memory, they are learned through communication and represent a social tool through which to perform actions.



The adoption of such a pragmatic approach to the study of certain Anglo-Saxon compositions to demonstrate whether or not they belonged to a specific genre (i.e., the elegiac genre) is also facilitated by the fact that Anglo-Saxon society, very close to a primitive culture, perceived language and its forms particularly connected to action. Ong (2002, 31-2) in his detailed analysis of the binomial orality-literacy and of the cultures related to them, emphasized how in some cultures, mainly oral or very close to orality, the word has always been considered an action-word. Words, or in our case utterances, had a great power of action in this type of cultures. Despite the evident presence of writing in the Anglo-Saxon world, the Anglo-Saxon cultural reality, as demonstrated by Amodio (2004), cannot be considered as based totally on the written text and, therefore, as a fully literate reality. The oral component, in fact, is still rooted in the early Middle Ages of the British Isles, and this can be highlighted by the epic in Old English. For a long time, in fact, writing was an imitation of orality because there was no other way to express certain concepts than through oral tradition. Fundamental examples of this strong relationship between action and words are frequently found in the literature that came down to us. For example, at the Battle of Finnsburg, from *Beowulf*, it is said that:

*þæt ðær ænig mon*  
*wordum ne worcum wære ne bræce*  
*ne þurh inwitsearo æfre gemænden*  
*ðeah hie hira beaggyfan banan folgedon*  
*ðeodenlease þa him swa geþearfod wæs·*  
*gyf þonne Frysna hwylc frecnan spræce*  
*ðæs morþorhetes myndgiend wære*  
*þonne hit sweordes ecg syððan scolde.* (1099b-1107)

In this short passage it is highlighted that not simply concrete actions but also words, in particular horrible and impudent words (a probable reference to the *flyting* act) can break a treaty. Another demonstration of action-words also comes from magic formulas and charms, and from riddles whose purpose was not only that of entertaining but also that of creating competitive tones, similar to literary *certamina*.

It is the aim of the present research that of analysing the pragmatics of these particular forms of literary discourse, that some have defined elegies, by focussing on those language-action forms that are called *Speech Acts* in the modern criticism.

### 3.1.1. Speech Acts Theory: Literature Review

Whenever human beings speak, they articulate sounds that have a certain meaning. However, this is not the end of the story. As said above, human beings use language to perform heterogeneous actions related to different purposes, such as expressing psychological states, persuading, declaring, condemning, promising, etc. These actions performed through language are called *Speech Acts*.

A philosophical-linguistic trend born in the first half of the last century has laid the foundations for the so-called theory of Speech Acts that offers important insights and in-depth analyses into this aspect of the language. However, it must be emphasized that there is not a linear and well-defined theory of speech acts. The history of this linguistic branch and of its studies is, in fact, crossed by competing theories, depending on the way in which speech acts were approached. Yet if we go into the theoretical reasons behind these different interpretations, the studies carried out in this field since the 1950s are fundamental in the analysis of language as action<sup>15</sup>.

First steps towards the elaboration of a theory of *speech acts* were taken in the 1950s at Harvard and Oxford with the theoretical assertions pronounced by John L. Austin. The scholar's theories seem to be particularly tributary of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose theories represented important guidelines for the future philosophies of language (Sbisà 1978, 16-8). Together with Wittgenstein's thought, Austin has been considered the forerunner of the pragmatic interests in human discourse, although his ideas have remained only theories and we will have to wait about twenty years for a concrete systematization. The first signs of a movement towards the conception of language as action, or of a performative language can be found in a 1946 essay<sup>16</sup>, where Austin tried to show the language through a pragmatic lens. However, only later, in his *How to Do Things with Words* (1951-55), Austin provided original fundamental suggestions. In details, one of the most important theoretical proposal was the division between *locutionary*, *illocutionary* and *perlocutionary acts*. According to Austin, every time a speaker of a given language utters a speech act, he or she actually performs three acts.

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<sup>15</sup> For a specific review of the main developments in Speech Acts theories in the 60s and 70s of the XX century see the anthology edited by Marina Sbisà, ed., *Gli Atti Linguistici Aspetti E Problemi di Filosofia del Linguaggio* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1978).

<sup>16</sup>J. Wisdom., J. L. Austen, J. L. Austin, and A. J. Ayer. "Symposium: Other Minds." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 20 (1946): 122-97

First of all, the *locutionary* act is the act of producing a speech, and it is composed of three other acts that co-occur in its realization: the phonetic act, which means uttering sounds; the phatic act, which consists of producing "tokens of phonemes, morphemes, and other linguistic structures" (Sbisà 2013, 23); the rethoric act, that is uttering words with meaning.

Then, when speakers of a language perform a *locutionary* act, they also choose how to express this act. There are different ways of expression: we can say something with the strength of a question, with the strength of a statement, as a promise and so on. These different ways of saying a *locutionary* act, the different forces with which something is expressed, the values they have, represent for Austin the second type of act, the so-called *illocutionary* act (Austin 1962 as cited in Sbisà 1978, 66-8). An illocution, therefore, is not the act of expressing something, but the act *in* expressing something. The illocutionary act is embodied in the locutionary act, and the illocutionary force of a given locutionary act is expressed by various devices, such as verbs, known as performatives, lexical elements, intonation and punctuation. According to Austin, an *illocutionary* act has always direct consequences or effects. In particular, the correct execution of an illocutionary act occurs if and only if reception or uptake is assured. In addition, an illocution enters into force when it produces effects that do not deviate from the natural course of events. Austin gives an explanatory example with the verb "to name". By saying "I name this ship Queen Elizabeth" (Austin 1962 as cited in Sbisà 1978, 77-8), the natural effect, once the message is received, will be to start calling this ship with the name of the Queen and not with the name of another equally important character. As a third and final effect, Austin introduces the concept of soliciting a response.

The effects provoked by the *illocutionary* acts (i.e., to ensure reception, to produce natural effects, and to solicit a response) are, however, to be distinguished from the consequences produced by a third type of act that the scholar calls *perlocutionary* act (Austin 1962 as cited in Sbisà 1978, 78). This last act would not always be present, and consequently its effects do not always manifest, unlike the effects of the illocutionary act. A *perlocution* would then consist of producing effects as *persuading* and *convincing*, or a perlocutionary continuation. For instance, warning a person may create a continuation such as alarming or frightening a person.

In the last part of *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin introduced for the first time a classification of the speech acts. This first attempt at taxonomy of acts, however, is not a true classification. The scholar himself, indeed, is aware of the limitations of his theory:

his taxonomy includes marginal cases and class overlaps, and it is mainly based on the analysis and classification of performative verbs. Austin gathered the illocutionary acts into five main groups:

1. Verdictives: these types of acts express judgements and include verbs such as estimating, evaluating, analysing, calculating etc.
2. Exercitives: these types of acts influence decisions and include verbs such as: naming, ordering, commanding, advising, begging, announcing etc.
3. Commissive: these acts commit the speaker to a certain line of action and include performatives such as promising, guarantying, swearing etc.
4. Behabitives: these acts include reactions to certain events and are expressed by verbs such as apologizing, welcoming, cursing etc.
5. Expositives: this last class includes verbs used in the organization of discourse such as affirming, denying, answering, reporting, objecting, deducing etc.

This classification has now been mostly abandoned by critics as it presents several inaccuracies. As a result, there have also been many criticisms of Austin's theory over time<sup>17</sup>. Nevertheless, Austin proposed a real revolution and revaluation of ordinary language in pragmatic terms. Even the premature death of the scholar probably contributed to leaving his work unfinished and to opening up fundamental speculative scenarios. An overcoming of Austin's philosophical analysis and a continuation of his theories is represented by the studies and the concrete systematization of John Roger Searle's philosophy of speech acts.

Searle is considered to be the main exponent of the philosophy of language. The scholar, in fact, starting from Austin's studies that influenced him at least in the early stages of his research, soon developed his own theory that goes beyond Austin himself and that is based on the need to create a philosophy of language. For Searle, it is this discipline and not linguistics that must speculate on the foundations of language and on the relationship between words and the world (Searle 1969, 3-4). Searle conceives language not only as an action but also and above all as a social activity, a tool of communication through which human beings interact and operate among themselves. Speech is seen as a form of behaviour and as such is governed by fundamental rules. As

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<sup>17</sup> Among these is recent the reformulation of the Austinian theories by Marina Sbisà, of whose theories it is surely fundamental to remember her own classification of the illocutionary acts, which are divided into four main classes: *exercitive illocutionary acts*, *commissive illocutionary acts*, *verdictives illocutionary acts* and *behabitives illocutionary acts*. See Marina Sbisà, *Linguaggio, Ragione, Interazione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999), 93-129.

a consequence, each speech act, seen as the fundamental unit of language, is correctly and successfully performed if and only if certain specific conditions, or rules, are respected. The rules to which language acts must be subject are for Searle of two types: the *constitutive* rules and the *regulative* rules (Searle 1969, 33-42). The former are those rules necessary for the performance of an activity (which, in fact, depends on them, as in a soccer match there are very precise rules on which the game itself is constituted). The latter are instead rules that are not necessary for the performance of an activity but that regulate it, such as the norms of behaviour in interpersonal relationships. For Searle, the rules that are at the basis of the language are all rules of a *constitutive* type since speech acts are performed following certain precise rules.

According to Searle, it is necessary at this point to distinguish four different types of speech acts:

1. *Enunciative acts*: the speaker utters words, morphemes, sentences and does so in a correct and complete sense;
2. *Propositional act*: the speaker refers to something or someone and also predicates a quality or state of it;
3. *Illocutionary act*: this is considered the main speech act, which, following Austin's theory, is an act in saying something;
4. *Perlocutionary act*: this act consists of the effects and consequences produced on the hearer.

Of these speech acts, the *propositional* act and the *illocutionary* act are at the centre of the analysis conducted by Searle. The speech act for excellence is considered the *illocutionary* act, of which Searle sought to identify the main rules at the basis of its realization. The scholar examined in particular the act of *promising* as an example for other *illocutionary* acts, as it is very formal and well defined. In order to identify the basic rules, it is necessary to ask what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for it to be successfully realised. More in details, Searle (1969, 63) identified five main rules:

1. Rule: This rule is also known with the term of *Propositional Content Rule* and claims that *Promise (Pr)* needs to be uttered in the context of a sentence *T*, whose utterance predicates a future act (*A*) of the speaker *S*;
2. Rule: This is a *Preparatory Rule* and claims that *Pr* needs to be uttered only if the hearer *H* would prefer that *S* does *A* rather than not doing *A*, and only if *S* believes that *H* would prefer that;

3. Rule: This is the second *Preparatory Rule* and claims that *Pr* needs to be performed “only if it is not obvious to both *S* and *H* that *S* will do *A* in the normal course of events”;
4. Rule: This is known as *Sincerity Rule* and it assumes that *Pr* needs to be performed only if *S* intends to do *A*;
5. Rule: The last rule is called by Searle *Essential Rule* and it claims that “The utterance of *Pr* counts as the undertaking of an obligation to do *A*”.

As already mentioned, therefore, if all these five rules are realized, the success of the illocutionary acts is guaranteed. In his studies, Searle not only theorized a philosophy of acts but also systematized the analysis of the different types of acts and defined a new taxonomy. In particular, the scholar distinguished five groups of illocutionary acts that he named *representatives*, *directives*, *commissives*, *expressives* and *declarations*. This taxonomy will be explored in the next paragraph.

### 3.1.2. For a Taxonomy of Illocutionary Speech Acts

Before proceeding with the discussion on the taxonomy developed by Searle, it is necessary to make a clarification. As already mentioned, among the four speech acts distinguished by the scholar, two are the acts on which Searle's attention is focussed: the *propositional* act and the *illocutionary* act. In order to understand how these two kinds of acts differ, let us take this series of sentences as an example:

- 1) Sara is studying.
- 2) Is Sara studying?
- 3) Sara, study!
- 4) Would that Sara studied.

In the four sentences, the speaker performs actions that are common to all of them: he or she refers to someone and predicates something about it. The four utterances, therefore, indicate the same propositional act (*p*), that is (*Sara is studying*). The different syntactical realization (the affirmation, the question, the order, the wish) indicate instead the *illocutionary* act or the force with which the propositional act is expressed. This force, or more in general this *illocutionary* act is indicated with *F(p)*. In particular, Searle stated:

*From this semantical point of view, we can distinguish two (not necessarily separate) elements in the syntactical structure of the sentence, which we might call the propositional indicator and the illocutionary force indicator. The illocutionary force*

*indicator shows how the proposition is to be taken, or to put it another way, what illocutionary force the utterance is to have; that is, what illocutionary act the speaker is performing in the utterance of the sentence. Illocutionary force indicating devices in English include at least: word order, stress, intonation contour, punctuation, the mood of the verb, and the so-called performative verbs.* (Searle 1969, 30)

Performative verbs, i.e. those verbs that directly express an illocutionary act, can be either explicit or implicit. When a performative is explicit, the verb also explicitly expresses the *illocutionary* act that accompanies the proposition (e.g., by saying “I promise that I will study”, it is explicitly expresses that this utterance is a *promise*). In many cases, however, the illocutionary act is not explicitly expressed by a performative verb, since there might be no need for it, and it might be easy to understand what kind of force there is at the basis of the proposition. It is important to note in this regard that in the Anglo-Saxon period, as pointed out by Kohnen (2000, 315-7), there was a great frequency of explicit performatives. By comparing Anglo-Saxon texts with Latin sources, Kohnen noted, in fact, that very frequently where in Latin there was no performative verb in Anglo-Saxon texts, instead, a performative was present. Kohnen traced this peculiarity to the fact that the Anglo-Saxon culture was mainly oral and as such was characterized by more oral performative formulas than the “well-established, literate Latin world” (2000, 316).

Returning to Searle's studies, the scholar symbolized the different types of *illocutionary* acts by substituting *F* with symbols specific to the *illocutionary* forces (1969, 31). For instance:

$F(p) \rightarrow \vdash (p)$  for assertions

$F(p) \rightarrow \text{Pr}(p)$  promises

$F(p) \rightarrow !(p)$  for the orders

How, however, did Searle distinguish and categorise the different *illocutionary* acts? Searle's taxonomy is established on the basis of twelve major criteria which correspond to the main ways *illocutionary* acts differ from each other (Searle 1975 as cited in Sbisà 1978, 169-75). In the present work only three points will be explored in details.

First, *illocutionary* acts vary according to their purpose, or *illocutionary point*. Each *illocutionary* act is characterised by a specific *point*, as in the case of promises, whose *illocutionary point* is that of committing to something for the hearer, whereas in the case of orders the purpose is that of convincing the hearer to do something.

Second, illocutionary acts can be distinguished for their *direction of fit* between words and world. In details, some illocutions, for instance the assertions, tend to adapt the words to the world, whereas others, like promises, tend to adapt the world to the words. This means that when someone asserts, describes, explains, affirms something they use the words to represent the world, the events or the actions; when, instead, someone promises, orders, requires something they are modifying, adapting the world, and the natural course of the events, to their words. In the first case, Searle represented the *direction of fit* with an arrow pointing downward (↓), in the second case, instead, the scholar uses an arrow pointing upward (↑).

Third, another determinant for the distinction of *illocutionary* classes is represented by the *psychological states* implied in the illocution itself. According to Searle, by expressing an *illocutionary* act, the speaker also expresses a specific psychological state, so that when a speaker promises *a*, they *express the intention to do a*; when someone orders *H* to do *a*, they *express the desire that H does a*. This principle is also known as *the sincerity condition*.<sup>18</sup>

The taxonomy elaborated by Searle is fundamentally created by employing these three main criteria of distinction. The scholar took the distance in this way from Austin, whose attempt of classification of the illocutionary acts has been criticised by Searle himself for presenting many imprecisions (Searle 1978, 176-80). Indeed, Searle firstly underlined the fact that the Austinian classification is not a taxonomy of acts but of performative verbs. There are, then, too many overlaps between the classes of acts, as well as there is a great heterogeneity in the classes. Moreover, it seems to lack of a precise principle of differentiation and classification.

On the contrary, Searle proposed a five-class-taxonomy of *illocutionary* speech acts based on the three criteria of differentiation, namely on the *direction of fit* principle, on the *sincerity condition* and on the *psychological states*.

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<sup>18</sup> Searle listed other nine conditions which cooperate in the distinction of the illocutionary acts. These are: *differences in intensity with which the act is presented; differences related to the status of S and H; differences related to the relationship between the utterance and the S and H's interests; differences between the relationship with the discourse; differences between the propositional acts due to the indicators of force; differences between those acts that needs to be always speech acts and those that are not necessarily used as such; differences between those acts that require extra-linguistic institutions and those requiring them; differences between those acts which have a corresponding performative verb and those which have not; differences in the style of the execution*. See John Searle, "Per una tassonomia degli atti illocutori", in *Gli atti Linguistici Aspetti E Problemi Di Filosofia Del Linguaggio*, ed. Marina Sbisà (1978), 173-5.



Representatives. The first class of the Searlean taxonomy includes *illocutionary* acts whose aim is to represent the actual state of affairs. Consequently, the *direction of fit* is words-to-world, as we adapt words to the world, and *the condition of sincerity* is "belief", since the speaker must believe in what they say. Examples of *representatives* are: claiming, guessing, predicting and swearing. Using the symbols introduced previously, Searle symbolically represents the representatives in this way:

$$\vdash \downarrow B(p)$$

where  $\vdash$  is the symbol for the illocutionary force of representatives, and B refers to the psychological state ("belief").

Directives. Their *illocutionary point* is to induce the hearer to do or not do something. In this case, the *direction of fit* is world-to-words, as there is a need to adapt the actions to what is required, while the *condition of sincerity* is "desire" or "wish". *Directives* include: commanding, warning, requesting and daring. The symbols used to indicate the directives are:

$$! \uparrow W (H \text{ does } A)$$

Commissives. The *point* is to force the speaker to do something. The *direction of fit* is world-to-word and the *condition of sincerity* is "intention". Some *commissives* are: promising, threatening. The formula in symbols elaborated by Searle is:

$$C \uparrow I (S \text{ does } A)$$

Expressives. The purpose of this class is to express the psychological state of the speaker. Therefore, these acts do not have a *direction of fit* contrary to the other classes. Its representation in symbols is as follows:

$$E \emptyset (\Psi) (S/H + \text{property})$$

where E indicates the purpose,  $\emptyset$  suggests that there is no *direction of fit*,  $\Psi$  is a symbol for the variety of psychological aspects and (S/H+ property) indicates a property or aspect of the speaker or of the hearer.

Declarations. The purpose of the declaration is to create a correspondence between the propositional act and the world. As a result, there is not a univocal direction of fit but a perfect correspondence between world and words that occurs simultaneously in world-to-words and words-to-world directions. There is no *condition of sincerity* in this case. Its structure is represented in this way:

$$D \updownarrow \emptyset (p)$$

where the direction of fit is bijective and the condition of sincerity is null.

It is also important to note that some members of the *declarations* class coincide with some acts of the first class, that of the *representatives*. This happens when in certain institutional situations the facts are not only ascertained, but also confirmed and established by a competent authority. Saying that "the accused is guilty" a judge is not only adapting the words to the world since the accused is actually guilty, but the authority is also establishing the accused's guilty position. Some *representatives*, therefore, require to be expressed with the *illocutionary* force of the *declarations*, so that there is no doubt about the condition of truth. In this second case there will be a different symbolic representation:

$$D_r \downarrow \uparrow B(p)$$

where  $D_r$  indicates the *illocutionary* purpose of *representatives*, the two arrows represent respectively the *direction of fit* of *declarations* and the *direction of fit* of *representatives*, and B stands for the *condition of sincerity* "belief".

### 3.2. From Speech Acts to Literary Genres

As mentioned in paragraph 3.1, pragmatics, or the science of speech acts, seems to play a fundamental role in the analysis of literary genres. The study of speech acts, especially of *illocutionary* acts, allows us to understand how language is used, how it is shaped and adapted to the purposes that every sphere of human communication requires, and which social actions language (*utterances* for Bakhtin, *speech acts* for Searle) performs. As a form of discourse, literary texts can be explored in the same way, by focussing on the recurrence of specific *illocutionary* acts, on their composition in the text and on their *illocutionary* points. Consequently, a study that demonstrates the recurrence of specific *speech acts* in a group of texts, together with the way in which they are composed, and with the purpose of the speech, might be able to define them as genre-specific acts. As also Fournier (2018, 8) stated, indeed, "thanks to the logic of discourse, one can describe the formal structure underlying literary genres [...]".

However, the analysis of speech acts needs to be conducted on two levels: at a micro-structural level, namely by focussing on the single and individual sentences, and at a macro-structural level, that is the level of the whole discourse. Pragmatic studies have always generally dealt with speech acts from a micro-structural point of view, i.e. taking into account individual sentences. Yet it is possible to include another type of approach

to speech acts, i.e. a macro-structural one that looks no longer at individual acts expressed in single sentences, but at sequences of sentences or at an entire discourse. According to Van Dijk (1981, 99), in fact, the concept of speech act is also applicable to an entire text, in the sense that one can recognize an overall *illocutionary point* at a macro-structural level together with a discourse *illocutionary force*. As Van Dijk claimed, "in such cases, then, it is assumed that we accomplish what may be called a macro-speech-act" (1981, 99). An explanatory example of this approach is the following:

*I am hungry. Do you have a sandwich for me?*

We are faced with a sequence of two sentences, each representing a particular speech act. In detail, the first sentence "I am hungry" is an *assertion*, whose aim is to represent a reality of facts, it adapts the words to the world and has as *condition of sincerity* 'believing'. The second, on the other hand, has the form of a *question*, it has the purpose of asking for something, it wants to induce the hearer to do something and has 'desire' as a *condition of sincerity*. Consequently, it belongs to the *directive* class of speech acts. The analysis of this short speech can go even further. In particular, it can be noted that these speech acts are not completely independent. In fact, Van Dijk (2018, 101) emphasized how the initial assertion has the task of leading to the next request. From here we can understand how a series of speech acts can be functionally correlated and can thus form a macro-structure, a macro speech act to use Van Dijk's terms, which has a global or macro purpose.

Following Van Dijk's theories, Fournier (2018) took a further step forward in the field of literary studies. In particular, considering a literary text a macro-speech act, it seems possible to analyse its overall force and its ultimate function, its *macro-point*. Fournier (2018, 4) used the representation of Searle's *constitutive* rules "X counts as Y in a C context" to indicate how a literary text (X) counts as a given literary genre (Y) in a C context.

According to this logic of discourse, the scholar tried to create a classification of literary genres depending on their purposes or *illocutionary points*. In order to do so, however, Fournier did not follow Searle's taxonomy of speech acts, but took into account the theories elaborated by Vanderveken (1997; 1999; 2001a; 2001b; 2001 as cited in Fournier 2018). In particular, he considered the existence of four main goals as far as forms of discourse are concerned, to which four main *directions of fit* correspond.

Therefore, discourses that have a words-to-world *direction of fit* and whose aim is that of describing the state of things, have a *descriptive* illocutionary point and are known as *descriptions*. Texts that have a world-to-words direction of fit, whose main aim is that of deciding which actions need to be done in the world, possess a *deliberative* goal and are called *deliberations*. Discourses that have instead both the directions of fit and the goal of transforming the world “by saying that it is transformed” (Fournier 2018, 7) have a *declaratory goal* and are known as *declaratory texts*. Finally, those texts that do not show any kind of direction of fit and whose goal is that of expressing mental states have an *expressive* point and are called *expressive texts*.

Fournier proceeded distributing some genre labels according to Vandervaken’s classification, by taking into account the goal and the direction of fit of these genres:

<b>Discursive goal</b>	<b>Direction of fit</b>	<b>Literary genres</b>
Descriptive	Words-to-world	Story, essay, memoires, (auto) biography, historical narratives, etc.
Deliberative	World-to-words	Pamphlet, propaganda, praise, etc.
Declaratory	World-to-words and words-to-world	Recognition of literary text, nomination for literary award, setting of poetic rules, etc.
Expressive	Null	Lyric poetry, praise, elegy, sonnet, etc.

Tab.1: Classification of Macro-Speech Acts according to *discursive goal* and *direction of fit* (see also Fournier 2018,7)

As can be seen in Table 1, Fournier inserted the ‘elegiac genre’ into the fourth class of discourses, that of the *expressive* texts. From this attribution, it is possible to formulate the following considerations:

1. An elegy has as its *illocutionary point* that of expressing the mental state of the speaker;
2. An elegy has a *null* direction of fit.

Consequently:

1. Elegies, as speech, can be analysed as macro speech acts;
2. The composition of the individual speech acts has to aim to express the speaker's mental state or attitude at a macro-structural level.

With regard to this last point, according to the critical tradition the mental state at the basis of an elegy should be “grief”, and its main function should be to lament this particular condition. This seems to be true also for the so-called Old English “elegies”, in which, following Klinck’s definition (“Old English elegy is a discourse arising from a powerful sense of absence, of separation from what is desired, expressed through characteristic words and themes, and shaping itself by echo and leitmotiv into a poem that moves from disquiet to some kind of acceptance” 1998, 246) the pain seems to be caused by the separation from what is desired.

That pain is at the basis of the elegies is also demonstrated by studies conducted by Todorov (1976) and Bakhtin (1986). In particular, Bakhtin's theories about the origin of genres seem to demonstrate that genres would be the result of certain and specific utterances, of which they inherit and maintain the typical expressiveness (i.e., the typical communicative purpose). As a result, utterances of a certain type, used in a specific context for a precise purpose, have common and static characteristics that make them a specific *speech genre*. Bakhtin went on distinguishing between *primary* and *secondary* genres: the former comprises the ordinary *speech genre*; the latter are, instead, literary genres and would derive from the *primary genres* through a process of reworking and complication (Bakhtin 1986, 61-2). However, as said, these would maintain the expressiveness typical of the former. Todorov (1976), took one more step towards the integration of the science of speech acts, stating that literary genres always originate in acts typical of oral human discourse. Following this theory, Todorov affirmed that at the basis of elegy there would be the expression of “grief”.

To conclude, a precise formalisation of expressive speech acts (intended in the present work as both micro-and macro-speech acts) was provided by Guirald et al. in a 2011 research about *illocutionary* acts. In details, the authors identified and described the main *expressive* acts by analysing the basic emotions on which they rely: *joy*, *sadness*, *approval* and *disapproval*. The scholars distinguished:

- 1) The expression of delight: this expressive has as *illocutionary point* that of expressing joy about reaching a goal;
- 2) The expression of sorrow: this expressive speech act aims to express to the hearer the speaker’s sadness about a precise event or outcome;

- 3) The expression of approval: the agent expresses approval to the hearer about a reached goal;
- 4) The expression of disapproval: the agent expresses disapproval to the hearer about an outcome not considered ideal;
- 5) The expression of sorry: this expressive speech act aims to express regret to a hearer, for the hearer not reaching a goal;
- 6) The expression of sympathising: the agent expresses regret to the hearer for the hearer not reaching a goal and the agent has the same goal of the *H*.

To these main expressive acts, the authors added more complex acts derived from emotions like *rejoicing*, *gratitude*, *satisfaction*, *guilt*, *regret*, emotions that are based on the speaker's belief that particular outcomes are their responsibilities.

## 4. The Illocutionary Speech-Acts in the Old English ‘Elegies’

### 4.1. Research Questions

According to the tradition, the *Exeter Book* shows nine poems in verses that would not fall into any other genre classification except that of elegy. As extensively explained in the second chapter of this work, this particular genre assignment dates back to the Romanticism, when attempting to find the elegiac character typical of the classical tradition in these Anglo-Saxon compositions. The postulation of this genre in Anglo-Saxon poetry continues to be based on the sharing of narrative themes, such as the transience or ephemerality of existence, loss and exile, and of a meditative tone. However, as we have seen, there are many questions still open around this 'elegiac' corpus, starting from the very definition of Anglo-Saxon elegy up to the actual number of elegies that can be grouped under this label. In fact, the limits of this classification already appear when the lexical, thematic and tonal criteria of the elegiac character are taken into consideration. These parameters, indeed, would tend to exclude some of the compositions of the *Codex Exoniensis* from the elegiac corpus, like, for instance, *The Ruin* simply for its impersonal tone, or *The Husband's Message*, for the absence of meditative and reflective content.

The uncertainty of the classification of the so-called Anglo-Saxon ‘elegies’ is, then, increased by the absence of the typical elegiac metre recurring in classical compositions, known as the elegiac distich. This particular poetic metre results to be the main method of classification of classical Greek compositions under the name of "elegy". In other words, the elegiac distich is the distinctive element of this literary genre in the classical and traditional world. Those Old English texts that critics traditionally call elegies, on the other hand, do not seem to have any distinguishing metrical feature that would recognise them as a genre. As a consequence, scholars have based their criticism on the recurring themes and tones that might be defined elegiac.

The difficulties related to the definition of the elegiac genre in the Anglo-Saxon world, however, are not limited to these, as it has already been analysed previously. The Anglo-Saxon tradition in fact seems not to present (at least according to what has come down to us from the past) any term for the distinction of this group of texts, or for the elegiac genre in general. The subdivision into literary genres is subsequent to the Anglo-Saxon period and it is the result of a retrospective classification work often inaccurate. In the absence of any internal reflection on the tradition taken in analysis, scholars have adopted two fundamental directions for the creation of a taxonomy of these compositions. In particular, one of the two approaches involves the application of the categories developed for the classical tradition to this literature, bringing with it a series of difficulties and inaccuracies. For example, a criterion like that of the "elegiac character", based on a classical meaning, can be limiting and distract the attention from the ways of composition of a culture like the Anglo-Saxon one. On the other hand, the second methodology is to extrapolate a definition of Anglo-Saxon elegiac genre from within the 'elegiac' compositions, looking at the recurrent characteristics. However, in chapter two, too much subjectivity of such a methodology has been largely demonstrated. The particularly colourful theoretical scenario that derives from it seems to leave many questions and unresolved doubts.

The main objective of this study is to try to answer the following questions:

- Is it possible to speak of an Anglo-Saxon elegiac genre?
- How many and which compositions can really fall within this elegiac genre?
- How do these texts distance themselves from other genre labels?

To do this, it has been previously explained that the theory of speech acts will be taken into consideration. Indeed, speech acts can clarify the meaning and especially the purpose of what is said, and can solve intricate mysteries related to certain discourses that are difficult to decipher.

In particular, the analysis will be conducted on two levels: the micro-structural and macro-structural levels. Individual speech acts will be analysed following the taxonomy of Searle and looking at their distribution and combination in the elegies. Then, the *illocutionary force* of the entire text will be studied in order to identify the *illocutionary purpose* at its basis, and to attribute the composition, where it will be possible, to a certain class of genre.

In conclusion, the current study is also intended to demonstrate that the *Speech Act Theory* might be useful in answering questions at the basis of this kind of research.



## 4.2. Speech Acts Analysis of the Corpus

### 4.2.1. The ‘Elegies’ from the *Exeter Book*

#### 4.2.1.1. *The Wanderer*

Following the original distribution and order of the *Exoniensis* compositions, the first ‘elegiac’ text appearing in the manuscript is represented by the 115-line poem *The Wanderer*, traditionally considered by the critics one of the major and most representative Old English elegies together with *The Seafarer*. Yet, even though its ‘elegiac character’ has always been supported by the majority of the scholars, others manifested different ideas about *The Wanderer*’s nature. The poem, indeed, has sometimes been associated to the homiletic genre, in particular for the Christian elements distributed in the poem and for a gnomic ending particularly similar to that of the homilies<sup>19</sup>. Klinck (1992, 231) recognizes the homiletic character of the second part of the poem, without however questioning its belonging to the elegiac genre. In fact, as we have seen, the scholar attributes the Christian and religious elements present not only in this elegy but also in others ‘elegiac’ texts to an inevitable Christian influence due to a society already completely Christianized<sup>20</sup>.

As a result, someone might ask:

- 1) Is the presence of Christian elements and/or a purely homiletic ending sufficient to assign this composition to the homiletic genre?
- 2) Is it possible that the purpose of the composition is didactic-religious and that all the other elements present in the text serve only as an outline?
- 3) Is there a possibility to overcome the presence of these elements to demonstrate instead the belonging to the elegiac genre?

To answer these questions, let us analyse the text from a pragmatic point of view, focussing on speech acts.

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<sup>19</sup> In this regard, in Chapter 2 the theories elaborated by Timmer (1942) and by Gordon (1960) have been considered. To briefly recap, Timmer completely excluded *The Wanderer* together with *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem* and *Resignation* from the Old English elegiac corpus due to the religious content that, according to the author, seems to be particularly predominant in the poems, and for their religious-didactic purposes. Gordon, instead, focussed his attention on a particular passage from *The Wanderer* and from *The Seafarer* known with the term of *ubi sunt*. The scholar highlighted the similarities of the two poems with the Christian-Latin homiletic tradition. (See Chapter 2 §2.2. pp. 37-41)

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 2 § 2.2. pp. 43.

First of all, scholars generally divide the text into two main parts: the first part goes from line 1 to 57 and *narrates* the sorrowful life of an exile; the second part goes from line 58 to 115 and seems to *moralise, recommending* to adopt a life dedicated to the eternal and not earthly joy. For a long time, there has been a discussion about the particular structure of the poem that seems to present more than one voice, due to the lack of punctuation or of indications for the beginning of direct speeches.<sup>21</sup> This difficulty is particularly evident in the first seven lines. In lines 1-5, a third singular person is used to describe the particular condition of an exile forced to walk paths of exile because of his inexorable destiny, and who finds his mercy in God. Even though lines 7-8 are interpreted by Klinck as a sort of interpolation in a monologue, the majority of the critics offers another possibility, interpreting them as a prologue (Klinck 1992, 30-1). In both the cases, however, it is a sort of introduction to the rest of the discourse, which seems characterised by two main *assertions*, firstly, about God's mercy on the exile's suffering soul (1-5a) and, secondly, about the inexorability of *wyrd* on the course of the world (5b). The other two lines, instead, represent a sort of *narration* to signal the beginning, or in Klinck's opinion the continuation, of a direct discourse made by the exile himself. This introduction seems, then, to anticipate and summarize the two main parts of the speech: the difficulties of an *anhaga*<sup>22</sup>, who has lost everything, his wanderings across the sea in search of a new lord with memories of a glorious past as his only companions, and then a reflection on the transience of things and on the need to rely on God's mercy and not on the finished earthly things.

With the beginning, or continuation, of the direct discourse, the *persona loquens* appears *lamenting* his sorrowful conditions as an exile (lines 8-9a):

*Oft ic sceolde ana     uhtna gehwylce*  
*mine ceare cwīþan .*

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<sup>21</sup> It is important to remember that writing in the Anglo-Saxon period was particularly influenced by orality. Any oral discourse, especially in a society still predominantly based on it, is particularly fluid, free of complexities and connectors, full of implied elements as a result of the public's perfect knowledge of what was being talked about. A written text of a period that still felt the presence of orality would naturally show an ambiguous structure, often made of juxtapositions and unspoken things.

<sup>22</sup> Two forms of the word might be possible: *anhaga* and *anhoga*. Both are composed by *an* (trans. "one", "only one") and *haga* (trans. "fence, enclosure") or *hoga* (from *hogian* "thinking"). In the first case the word might indicate someone who has withdrawn into himself, into the fence of his heart, who does not put out his feelings (anticipating indeed what is said some lines later). In the second case, it would mean "the one who meditates alone", also in this case recalling his future action, that is to say, that of reflecting on the side-lines (lines 111b *sundor æt rune*). See Maria Grazia Cammarota and Gabriele Cocco, *Le elegie anglosassoni* (Milano: Meltemi, 2020), 44-5.

Here, the protagonist is not simply *reporting*, or *narrating*, his story but he is also showing his own conditions and psychological state. Following, Searle's theory of speech acts, we are in front of an *expressive illocutionary speech act*:

E Ø (Ψ) (S/H +property)

where E indicates the *expressive* purpose, Ø suggests that there is no *direction of fit*, Ψ is a symbol for the variety of psychological aspects, and (S/H+ property) indicates a property or aspect of the speaker or of the hearer. Lines 9b-11a seem to be a continuation of this *lamenting* speech act. Indeed, by saying that there is no one with whom the wanderer can manifest his suffering souls, he is again lamenting his loneliness. The protagonist is not performing a *representative* act of *informing* the *hearer*, he is not *narrating*, but he is manifesting his psychological state of *grief*.

The following lines (11b-18) are characterised, instead, by a continuous *asserting* speech act. In particular, it is possible to identify three main *assertions* about the importance of being reticent and of not speaking the hearth to others. Lamenting alone is a virtue, also because a sorrowful hearth and a suffering soul cannot change the course of the things. So that, - he *asserts*- even a glorious man hides often his sorrow in his hearth, and laments it in his own chest. According to Searle's taxonomy, assertions belong to the *representative* category of speech acts, where the direction of fit is words-to-world, since the purpose is that of adapting the words to the world, and the psychological state is *belief*, being the *speaker* firmly a believer of what he/she is saying.

So far, the *persona loquens* seems to have *lamented* his condition as an exile, who has lost his friends and family, who has to lock his pain in his hearth and who knows that his sorrowful soul cannot change his fate. From a macro-speech act point of view, following Van Dijk's theories, the three *assertions* that can be found in this first section might be considered at the service of another speech act, the one that precedes them, i.e. *lamenting*. It is plausible that the whole set of these speech acts has an *expressive* function, that is to express the state of *grief* of the exile, alone and withdrawn in himself.

Let us, now, taking into account the following lines (19-29a):

*swa ic modsefan minne sceolde,*  
*oft earmcearig, eðle bidæled,*  
*freomægum feor feterum sælan,*  
*sipþan geara iu goldwine minne*  
*hrusan heolstre biwrah, ond ic hean þonan*  
*wod wintercearig ofer wapema gebind,*

*sohte sele dreorig    sinceb bryttan,*  
*hwær ic feor oþþe neah    findan meahte*  
*þone þe in meoduhealle    min mine wisse,*  
*oþþe mec freondleasne    frefran wolde,*  
*weman mid Wynnum*

The speaker seems to repropose in the first lines what was said previously: miserable and afflicted (line 19) he had to tighten his heart in laces, that is to say, to withdraw in himself, far from everyone and abandoned. Also in this case we are faced with a *lamenting* speech act. The speaker complains about his situation and refers to the causes of his loneliness: the death of his lord, the impossibility of finding new kin, travelling for years on the shuffling of the waves (line 24).

The following lines until the end of the first part (29b-57), as the poem has been conventionally divided, are characterised by an alternation of *assertions* and *descriptions or narrations* about the typical conditions that an exile ends to live. In details, lines 29b-31 seems to show an *asserting speech act*, since it is said that every exile well knows that *grief* is a cruel fellow in absence of friends. From this moment on, the *persona loquens* describes the conditions of a general *anhaga*, by using a third person singular: the *anhaga* has only the path of the exile in front of him, nor gold, neither land; he remembers the joy in the hall, now disappeared; in his sleep, he dreams to be with his lord; he wakes up to find only sea and sea birds; his hearth is injured; he remembers his family and kin, but these memories are evanescent; his grief is renewed each time that he has to face with the shuffling of the sea. These *narrating/describing* speech acts about the conditions of a third person are used not simply to describe or narrate a story, that of an external exile, but also to manifest his own status and painful moments. We are in front of what Searle has defined an *indirect speech act*. In other words, these are utterances that present the surface of one type of speech act, but possessing the force of another type.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, the *illocutionary force* of the single micro-speech acts and of the macro-speech act is that of an *expressive*, since the speaker is expressing grief, pain, anxiety, loneliness. It is possible to assert, indeed, that the maximum of the torment is expressed precisely in these lines.

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<sup>23</sup> Searle refers, for instance, to the example: "Can you pass me the salt?". Even though this question formally seems to be a question about the hearer ability in passing the salt, the illocutionary force is that of a *request*. See John R. Searle "Indirect Speech Acts," in *Speech Acts*, ed. Peter Cold and Jerry L. Morgan (New York: Academic Press, 1975), 59-82.

The contemplation of his sorrowful condition leads then to his reflection on the caducity of the earthly things. The second section begins with an *assertion*, which introduces the succeeding *stream of consciousness* about mortal life. Another *assertion* at lines 62b-63 claims that every day our land perishes and dies. These reflections are, according to the speaker, consistent with a wise man (as he has become) who has lived many years to see the truth of things.

After these first three assertions, a series of indications about how a wise man should behave follows. The *persona loquens* describes a typical wise man, who should practice fortitude and reticence (as he did), needs to be cautious in taking decisions, but most importantly needs to become aware of the dreadful panorama that will come once everything will be perished. He then goes on to *narrate* past events that seem to predict the future of decadence. He speaks of death and destruction, wanted by God the Almighty. The wise man who has reflected on this transience is aware that all that is mortal has an end. There are no more horses, no warriors, no lords and their halls, no earthly glory. Everything passes and dies and darkness takes over. This passage is expressed by the so-called rhetorical technique of the *ubi sunt*, whose different questions have the illocutionary force of *assertions*.

From line 97 to 105, he continues his *narration* or description of the past events reminded by the ruins. It is also important to emphasize that just as in the first part, the use of a third person, in this case a wise man and not an exile, is actually representative of the speaker's condition and his reflections. The figure of the wise man, that is, implies that he himself has become a wise man. The wise man, the speaker, the exile who has understood that nothing remains on earth but the ruins of what was, suffers for this condition. He is anxious and grieves for the impossibility of finding refuge in earthly things, because of their mortality. Once again, therefore, although this passage is purely crossed by *narratives* and *assertions*, the *illocutionary force* with which they are uttered is that of a *lament* (107-110).

Line 111 might be considered another interpolation in the direct speech of the wanderer or the initial line of a conclusion not part of his direct discourse. The poem ends with a new reflection, an act of *moralising*, which means to lead to the observance of the criteria prescribed by honesty and rectitude. It is wise who knows how to be reticent and who does not let the transience of the world destroy him, but it is above all wise who places his life and his hope in God and in the kingdom of heaven.

Looking now at the whole pragmatic meaning of the text, it turns out that the first part is characterized by an illocutionary force of an *expressive*, in particular we see the lament of an exile for his conditions of abandonment, loneliness and pain. The second part is, then, characterized by the reflections of a wise man who finds himself in tension between his solitude for having understood that everything decays and dies, that a man's destiny is inevitably directed to death, and his attempt to stifle this pain, as a wise man who has understood that the lament does not lead to any solution and that the worries to seek new consolations on earth are useless. Therefore, this part also has as its force that of an *expressive* speech act, as it expresses his state of mind in pain and distress.

In sum, the speaker is abandoned, in search of a new lord, on a stormy sea, remembering his past beauty and glory. Yet he must tighten his sorrowful soul, since pain cannot lead to any remedy, nor he can find comfort in the decaying earthly things. At this point, it is necessary not to abandon to the pleasures of the earth, but instead to entrust to God's hands.

Let us now consider some quantitative data, by looking at the recurrence of the single speech acts in the text.

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.		Percentage
Representatives	29		47%
Directives	2		3%
Commissives	0		0
Expressives	Direct	Indirect	44%
	3	24	
Declarations	0		0
+Exclamations	4		6%

Table 2. Recurrence of speech acts in *The Wanderer*.

As we can see from the table, the quantities of *representatives* and of the *expressives* are the highest. The former's percentage (47%) is slightly higher than that of the *expressives* (44%). Instead, the percentage of the *directives* is reduced to 3%, since the only manifestation of a *directive* speech act can be found at the end of the poem, with the act of *moralising*.

In details, the *expressives* comprise three *direct expressive* speech acts (lines 8-11a and 19-29a), as we have previously seen, and 24 *indirect expressive* speech acts, realised

in forms typical of other *illocutionary* groups. These 24 acts comprise: 14 *narrating* acts (lines 29b-57), where the conditions and pain of a general exile are described to manifest, instead, the speaker's own status; five questions in the *ubi sunt* passage, used not with an *assertive* force but with that of *lamenting*; five final *assertions* (line 108-110), where in fact the speaker *laments* the caducity of the earthly things.

The *representative* speech acts, instead, are very often used in function of *lamenting*. Following Van Dijk (1981), indeed, it seems that the initial three *assertions* (11b-18) are used to introduce the following *lamenting* section, as well as the section about the wise man (lines 64-87) seems to be used to open the reflection on the caducity of the world in the *ubi sunt* passage. The same pattern seems to occur at the end, when the five final indirect *expressive* speech acts are introduced by eight *narrating* acts (97-107).

So far, everything seems to suggest a perfect realization of the macro-speech act-force of *lamenting*, that, according to Fournier (2018), might attribute the composition to the *elegiac genre*.

However, someone might wonder if the final *moralising* act contribute instead to compromise the elegiac function of the text. If, in sum, the 'elegy' might be considered a religious text, a thesis that has sometimes been supported also by relying on the several Christian elements in the text.

Before trying to answer to this final question, it is necessary to analyse another 'elegy', which has been very frequently associated to *The Wanderer*, both from an elegiac point of view, and from a religious-didactic perspective, *The Seafarer*.

#### 4.2.1.2. *The Seafarer*

The second most important 'elegy' which follows *The Wanderer* in the *Exeter Book* is known with the name of *The Seafarer*. This 'elegy', exactly as the previous one, comprises elements from the Germanic tradition together with religious traits.

*The Seafarer* can also be divided into two main parts: the first (lines 1-64a) focuses on the painful vicissitudes of an exile who has chosen to leave his land, his loved ones and in general his homeland to embark on a sea-voyage; the second represents once again a series of reflections on the transience of the world, life and earthly things.

The text starts with a particular speech act that we find also in *The Wanderer* (and as we will see in other 'elegies'), i.e. the *lamenting* one. It is an explicit speech act introduced by the performative verb *wrecan*, through which the speaker complains about his suffering during his sea-journey (1-8a). In the following lines, the speaker reveals his

physical sufferings: cold, pain and hunger (lines -12a), with a beautiful oxymoronic image in particular at lines 10b-11a (“þær þa ceare seofedun // hat ymb heortan”). The speaker also addresses loneliness in the lines 17b-25, after an *assertion* about a man on the land who has no idea of his sorrow (lines 12b-17a). Another *assertion* towards this generic man on the land comes at lines 27-30, where a contrastive image with that of the seafarer is again created. After another short passage addressing the harsh cold which surrounded him (lines 31-33a), despite the difficulties of the trip, despite the painful context in which it takes place, the seafarer states that he is anxious to start a new adventure on the sea (lines 33b-38). With three other *assertions*, the *persona loquens* emphasizes how men like him, eager to depart, are not satisfied with the things around them, nor with their glory neither with their valour, even if these are among the best. The speaker then *describes* the world around him that is blooming, and it is precisely this bloom that drives him to start the journey. In the meantime, however, the cuckoo announces pain and sorrow (lines 48-55a). For a third time he addresses the man living on the land, saying that he cannot understand the sorrow of the sea-journeys. The speaker concludes this first part by *stating* that his mind that longs for the voyage goes far and wide on the sea and comes back to push the soul to leave (58-64).

At the hemistich 64b the most reflective part of the composition begins. In particular as in *The Wanderer* the speaker reflects on the transience of things. There follows a series of *assertions* with which the seafarer affirms his desire to turn to God more than to earthly things (6ab-66a), he sustains that all are in fact caducous (66b-71), and with which he states that it is necessary to behave piously according to God’s willing.

Then an eschatological image follows, very similar to the one previously seen in *The Wanderer*, which describes the transience of earthly things, of the cities, of earthly glory, and of men themselves. In addition, the speaker states that no earthly riches will be helpful to a sinful soul (80a-102).

At line 103 instead a description of the divine power opens, in front of which he defines insane he who is not intimidated, and happy who lives humbly (103-108). Moreover, he indicates how to live in such a humble way.

He concludes by asserting again the mightiness of God and of the fate, and with a series of homiletic exhortations about preparing for the eternal homeland. The last three lines comprises instead an act of *thanksgiving* to God, so that he may save their souls.



As far as a quantitative analysis is concerned, the table below shows the recurrence of the main speech acts in the text.

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.	Percentage
Representatives	49	67%
Directives	6	8%
Commissives	0	0
Expressives	18	25%
Declarations	0	0
+Exclamations	0	0

Table 3. Recurrence of Speech Acts in *The Seafarer*.

The table shows that the *representative* speech acts (49) are more than the other types of *illocutions* (*directives* 6; *expressives* 18). Despite this, it is possible to affirm that at least the first part of the ‘elegy’ is characterised by an *expressive macro-force*. Indeed, it seems that all the *assertions* or *narrating* acts here distributed are disposed in a way to create a contrast with the *lamenting* parts, and to highlight the pain that a seafarer always feels. Yet the pain that is addressed is not simply that resulting from the difficulties of the sea-journey, but also that resulting from his willing and desire to reach again the sea. This sorrowful longing is justified by the reflections which occur in the second part of the elegy.

In a certain way, the reflexive evolutions of the second part, in which it is said that earthly things and life are only transient, that nothing earthly has value, that it is foolish who thinks to put his life not in God’s hands, allow us to understand the reason for his suffering shown in the first part, and why his soul yearns so strongly for the sea. Some scholars have understood the journey as a kind of journey to heaven, but it can also be read as an example of *peregrinatio pro amore dei*, as an attempt to free oneself from ephemeral things in order to dedicate to eternal glory.

Also *The Seafarer*, then, ends in the same fashion of *The Wanderer*: the final lines, indeed, are characterised by a sort of *exhortation*, in the former, and of *moralising* in the latter. In both cases we are in front of two examples of *directive* speech acts.

At this point, let us try to answer the last question about the associability of *The Seafarer* and of *The Wanderer* to the homiletic genre. In order to do so, some linguistic

elements and *illocutionary* speech acts from the two elegies will be compared with an Old English homily.

The example of homily to be addressed is represented by *Blickling Homily VIII*, also known with the title of *Soul's Need* from Morris' translation (1880), or more commonly as *The Rogation Monday*. This composition belongs to a collection of anonymous homilies composed in Old English, probably at the end of the tenth century. One of the main reasons at the basis of the choice of this text relies on the fact that the homily shows an evident and clear *ubi sunt* passage.<sup>24</sup>

In details, the text shows a sequence of *assertions*, sometimes alternating with *directives* in particular towards the end of the homily. It begins by *asserting* the necessity of bearing in mind Christ's salvific action, and by *exhorting* to seeking salvation and forgiveness following the Holy Cross. A series of *exhortations* follows, with the attempt of inviting the audience to accept a humble life, in God's willing. The homilist *exhorts* to abandon a life of richness and of earthly possessions, since once dead everything will lose its value. At this point a series of *ubi sunt* questions follows: where has gone the wealth? Where have gone the earthly glory and success? Where have gone the adornments and the earthly things? Where have gone the human skills? Where the splendour of their possessions? Everything is gone, *-asserts* the homilist. He continues by saying that these things cannot save a man, nor his fellows can solve his torments and pains. The only solution is to feed the soul with God's words and willing.

Even from this short summary here provided, it is possible to notice that for different thematic elements the homily seems to resemble the two *Exoniensis* elegies. Among these similarities there is the theme of the caducity of the earthly things and of the life itself. The particular ephemerality of the world should lead the human beings to turn towards God and to entrusting their lives to the Heavenly Father. As in *The Seafarer* the protagonist wants to start a sea-journey as a symbol of his separation from the ephemeral things and of his dedication to a humble life according to God's willing, in the homily the public is invited to take care of their souls, by adopting a humble style life, by piously behaving and by separating from any richness. In addition, the idea expressed in the homily that no richness or no fellow can save the eternal torment of a soul is very similar to *The Seafarer* (lines 97-102). Most importantly, the *ubi sunt* passage that can be found

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<sup>24</sup> See also Di Sciacca (2006) for other important *ubi sunt* passages in homilies. Claudia Di Sciacca, "The 'Ubi Sunt' Motif and the Soul-and-Body Legend in Old English Homilies: Sources and Relationships." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 105, no. 3 (2006): 365-87.

in the *Rogation Monday* is largely similar to the explicitly expressed *Ubi Sunt* passage in *The Wanderer*, and that implicitly manifested in *The Seafarer*.

From a pragmatic point of view, the homily taken into account results being composed by the following percentages of speech act types:

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.	Percentage
Representatives	45	60%
Directives	27	35%
Commissives	4	5%
Expressives	0	0
Declarations	0	0
+Exclamations	0	0

Table 4. Recurrence of Speech Acts in Blickling Homily VIII.

As shown in the table, out of 76 speech acts<sup>25</sup> about 60% are represented by *representative* speech acts. Their recurrence is greater than that of *directives* (35%) and *commissives* (5%). It is important to note that in the homily there is no example of *expressive* speech acts, exactly as the amount of *commissives* is almost reduced to the minimum in the two elegies. This is a difference not to be underestimated, since it already suggests something characteristic of homilies.

Going into details of these data, out of the 45 *representatives* eight are the questions of the *ubi sunt* passage. In *The Wanderer*, as we have seen, where the *ubi sunt* passage is explicit and it is pronounced with an *expressive* illocutionary force. As far as the homily is concerned, instead, the *ubi sunt* questions are uttered with an *assertive force*. The passage is used to *affirm* the transience and ephemerality of earthly things, useless at the moment of death, and of the separation of the soul from the body. In *The Wanderer*, the *persona loquens* is pining for the ineluctability of time. In the first case, then, the reader or the listener can hear the tone of contempt for the earthly life, in the second a tone of lament.

Moreover, another important element to take into consideration is concerned with the distribution of the speech acts in the text. What emerges from an analysis of the text is

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<sup>25</sup> Quotations from the sacred scriptures have been excluded from the analysis.

the fact that very frequently *assertions*<sup>26</sup> are used in order to introduce a following *directive*, generally an *exhortation*. From a *macro-speech act* point of view, hence, the *illocutionary force* of the whole discourse might be recognised in that of a *directive act*, in particular that of *exhorting*. In addition to that, it is possible to identify also a *perlocutionary force*: the homilist, indeed, through the use of a series of elements and strategies attempts to *convince* the audience to follow the Christian doctrine. The *perlocutionary* purpose might be used also to explain the presence of some *commissives*. As can be seen from the table, the text shows four main *commissive* speech acts, in particular *promising*. The homilist *promises* to the audience that whoever will accept to follow the Christian dictates will receive the salvation of the soul. As Green states in his analysis of Wulfstan's homilies, "one aim of the preacher is to teach and recommend — hardly to demand — acts of confession and penance" (1995, 110). Three *commissives* out of four appear to be introduced by the *directive* speech acts. In these cases, the whole chunks can be considered by the audience both as *exhortations* and as *warnings*. More in general, the whole *exhortation* discourse can also be considered as a sort of *warning*. According to Green (1995, 110), this open interpretation was a conscious choice made by preaches in order to reach the different sensibilities of the public.

In order to fulfil this purpose, preachers used the so-called *selective inclusiveness*. The general term of inclusiveness is used to indicate the act of reaching the public and of creating concordance among the whole audience. The second is used instead to reach the audience but distinguishing between those who follow and are open to the words of the preacher and those who should be admonished. The *hypothetical phrases* are typical of this type of inclusiveness and also recur within this homily. If we consider general inclusiveness, some typical elements that characterize it are the recurring of first-person plural pronoun, the use of the verb *utan* "let us", which is used in speech acts with *exhortative* force, the use of the subjunctive "ought", the modal verbs or the imperative (Green 1995, 115-20).

The frequency of these elements within the Blickling Homily VIII is much higher than that of the elegies, where the only example of inclusiveness with the verb *utan* is found, for instance, in the last lines of *The Seafarer* (line 117).

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<sup>26</sup> An assertion, however, is used with a *threatening* force. Morris translated the sentence as follow: "No man then needs visit the deep abyss of the hot and the severe flame except those, who of their own accord, heedlessly forsake God's behest." See Richard Morris, ed., *The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century*. (London: Early English Text Society, 1880): 102.  
<https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.264046/page/n117/mode/2up>

All these pragmatic differences therefore lead to the demonstration that the two texts traditionally called elegies by critics cannot be considered religious texts.

Christian elements can be explained as the result of Christian culture influence. The authors were well acquainted with the word of God and were well aware of the sermons and homilies that were continuously performed in front of an audience. It is inevitable that at the time the world was filtered through Christian doctrine, that the only way to find meaning in life was by putting themselves into God's hands and yearn for the divine homeland. As Klinck also stated (1992, 34), it is better to consider Christianity as an integral part of these works rather than to try to separate them: *The Wanderer*, after trying to be as strong as possible in the face of the transience of things, understands with the final sentence that the only salvation is in God; *The Seafarer* pines so hard because he wants to leave for the salvation his soul, separating himself from earthly things.

#### 4.2.1.3. *The Riming Poem*

The *Riming Poem* is the third elegy in order of appearance in the manuscript. This work has long been criticized by scholars and excluded from the elegiac genre (Macrae-Gibson 1983, 62). At the base of the often-negative judgements that sometimes considered it a mere poetic exercise, there is a great complexity that is distributed on several levels: thematic, lexical and metric. Briefly, the poem seems in fact to present elements of various literary genres, from heroic epos to eschatological and religious traits; it seems to have undergone various cultural influences, one of which is particularly plausible, namely the Scandinavian one (Klinck 1992, 43); it is rich in textual cruces; it is characterized by particular metric elements such as the final rhymes<sup>27</sup>.

The structure of the text is, instead, quite linear. It is possible in fact to divide the elegy in two main parts: on the one hand the joyful and glorious past of the speaker, probably a lord, and on the other hand a miserable and painful present that leads to reflection (as in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*) on the transience of existence. Moreover, it ends with a gnomic conclusion similar to those of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*.

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<sup>27</sup> See Cammarota and Cocco (2020) who deepen all the difficulties related to the composition. Maria Grazia Cammarota and Gabriele Cocco. *Le elegie anglosassoni*. (Milano: Meltemi, 2020): 69-70.

The text, whose elegiac nature has recently been confirmed through a lexical analysis by Opfer (2017)<sup>28</sup>, begins with an assertion about the speaker’s life, seen as a gift given by God (lines 1-2, “*se þis leoht onwrah*”). A sequence of *narrating* acts follows, through which the *persona loquens* reports his glorious past. As above said, he was probably a lord, whose life was joyful and glorious. He had the respect of everyone and was probably loved by the people. He describes the *Joy in the Hall* (a recurrent topos, as previously said, in the heroic context). The speaker was courageous and his fame spread among his people. Yet this magnificent status seems to be disappeared now. From lines 43, indeed, the tone changed completely, and the passage is signalled by the temporal adverb *nu*.

Now, he *laments* to be in pain, joy has disappeared and dismay has come forward. His torment is felt in his chest, considered by the Anglo-Saxons the place of the soul and of mind. This image is, then, very similar to two passages recurring in the other two elegies: *brondhord* (line 46a) recalls *breost-hord* (line 55a in *The Seafarer*) and *hord-cofa* (14th in *The Wanderer*). His agony is followed by a *reflection* on the transience of things, on the ineluctability of fate and on the inevitable arrival of death. The speaker *predicts* in fact what will happen: he will not be able to escape death, nor will his body be able to avoid the hunger of worms. The reflection concludes by *stating* that it is fortunate the one who reflects on this fate in time, and who prepares himself for his departure, living a life without sin. Also in this case, this assertion seems to be very similar to the final one of *The Seafarer* as well as to the figure of the wise man in *The Wanderer*. The very last lines are then characterised by an *exhortation* to live a pious life to obtain the salvation of God.

In the following tables the main types of speech acts are quantified:

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.	Percentage
Representatives	93	82%
Directives	1	1%
Commissives	0	0
Expressives	19	17%
Declarations	0	0
+Exclamations	0	0

Table 5. Recurrence of Speech Acts in *The Riming Poem*.

<sup>28</sup> According to Opfer, *The Riming Poem* would not simply be part of the elegiac corpus, but would also represent a sort of precise canon for the Old English elegiac genre. See Stephanie Opfer, “Old English Elegies: Language and Genre”, (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 2017).

As can be seen from the table, the percentage of *representatives* is largely higher than that of *directives* (about 1%) and *expressives* (17%). In detail, most of the *representatives* (about 59 out of 93) are placed in the first part of the poem, where, in fact, up to line 42 no other type of speech acts occurs. It is important to note that among the *representatives* there are no *explicit* speech acts, that is with a performative verb manifested, unlike the two elegies seen previously. 27 are instead the assertions that coincide with his reflection on the end of time, a pattern that is also found in *The Wanderer* and in *The Seafarer*. Some assertions, as mentioned above, are then used to talk about the wise and lucky man who reflects on things in time and behaves accordingly. In addition, seven are the predictions about the coming of death.

The *expressives*, on the other hand, are equal to 17% of the whole pragmatic structure of the text and are concentrated mainly at the beginning of the second part, in which the speaker addresses his mental condition and his pain, due to the end of the joy of the past.

Exactly as for the elegies seen previously the focus of the text seems to be on the speaker's pain. The first part up to verse 42, where the past joy and glory is described, serves to create a contrast with the present time characterised by pain and torment. This contrast is marked by the *nu*, as mentioned above. Consequently, even though the *illocutionary* force of the first part, extrapolated from the context, might be that of a macro-*representative* speech act, the use that is made to contrast the *lamenting* part creates consequently a single macro-speech act with the *illocutionary force* of an *expressive*. The part of reflection on the world and its transience is instead a consequence of the *lament* of his tormented condition. The last lines do not change neither the general *illocutionary* force, nor the *direction of fit*, which is null being the macro-speech act an *expressive*. The lines 83b-87 in fact are the only example of *exhortation*, introduced by the verb *utan*, which occurs in the elegy. As for *The Wanderer* and for *The Seafarer*, his reflection ends with the gnomic consideration that only a pious life without sins can guarantee true salvation and security.

#### 4.2.1.4. *Deor*

The 42-line *Deor* is probably one of darkest *Exeter Book* 'elegiac' compositions. As mentioned in the first chapter of this work, the text is divided into stanzas, between which a very precise refrain occurs: *þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg.*

The interpretative difficulty of this composition is mainly due to its great allusiveness: all the stanzas, except the last one, refer to episodes of Germanic culture, telling about historical and legendary characters often difficult to identify. The *Deor*, however, is not a narrative text, since the references to past characters are used to deal with their torments and their misfortunes. To intensify then the darkness of the work is the enigmatic identity of Deor himself, presented towards the end of the speech and the characterizing refrain, whose enigmatic meaning has brought to the elaboration of numerous possible translations<sup>29</sup>. The different interpretations given to the refrain, in addition, have influenced the understanding of the entire text and of its ultimate meaning.

Except for some scholars<sup>30</sup>, the majority of the critics has always considered the ultimate meaning of *Deor* to be a dramatic monologue pronounced by a former court cantor who lamented his misfortunes and finally consoled himself with a refrain influenced by Boethius' philosophy. Bloomfield's theories (1964) about the charm-form of *Deor* continues today to offer important insights into the nature of the composition, into its literary purpose and into the literary-cultural influences that might characterize it.

The *persona loquens*, whose name is Deor, a scop, *narrates* for 27 lines the stories, in particular their sufferings, of German legendary and historic figures<sup>31</sup>. The lines 28-41 constitute a single stanza which can be divided into two parts. In the first section (lines 28-34), Deor, the poet introduces a brief reflection that recalls the elegies previously seen. In particular, the speaker introduces a third person who is suffering and sits on the sidelines thinking about his pain and the condition that seems endless (line 30). This image of pain and torment is followed by a short exhortation passage (lines 31-34), very similar, also in this case, to the exhortation part of *The Riming Poem*, *The Seafarer* and to the homiletic conclusion of *The Wanderer*. The poet, in fact, seems to invite the afflicted to entrust himself to God, who can give and take away joy and suffering from anyone. Also in this case one can read the use of this third person as a reference to the speaker himself, who is afflicted and full of pain for what happened to him and who must try to become wise by relying on the greatness and omnipotence of God. The cause of his pain is precisely addressed in the following lines, where he narrates of having been once full of joy and happiness, when he was a *scop* at the court of the Heodenings and of being later

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 2 (§ 2.3., p. 48) for a detailed discussion on the meaning of the refrain.

<sup>30</sup> Timmer (1942, 34-7) excluded *Deor* from the elegiac corpus for the presence of heroic matter, whereas Howe (1985), defined the text an example of "catalogue poem". Both the theories have been however abandoned nowadays. See Chapter 2 (§ 2.2. p.37 for Timmer's theories; § 2.3. pp.48-9 for Howe).

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 1 (§ 1.1.3. pp.18-9) for a detailed discussion on the themes of *Deor*.



replaced by Heorrenda, another cantor, probably more talented than him. Thus, Deor fell into misery and lost all his privileges. Yet Deor seems to have understood now that there is no need to complain about losing his position, because just as God took away his happiness, one day He will probably take away his suffering and make him happy again. This reflection is synthesized in the refrain that is constantly repeated at the end of each stanza. "That is past, this will pass too" might be considered as an *assertion*, since Deor, the *persona loquens*, believes in what he is saying: after each stanza *þæs* would refer to the condition of unhappiness just described, which has passed, *þisses*, instead, might refer to the next described condition which will pass equally. As far as the last refrain is concerned, *þæs* might refer to Deor's former happiness, while *þisses* to his present misery.

Let us now look at the data about the kinds of *illocutionary* speech acts which seem to occur in the poem:

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.	Percentage
Representatives	25	96%
Directives	1	4%
Commissives	0	0
Expressives	0	0
Declarations	0	0
+Exclamations	0	0

Table 6. Recurrence of Speech Acts in *Deor*.

The table shows some interesting data. First of all, the percentage of *representatives* is particularly predominant. Only one speech act belongs to the *directive* class of speech acts, and it corresponds to the *exhorting* passage at lines 31-34. Among the *representatives*, then, there are six *predictions* at the level of the six refrains. Most importantly, there is no instance of *expressive speech act* that instead is found in the previously elegies. One might consider the absence of this class of speech acts a particular insight for not belonging to the Old English elegiac corpus. As Cammarota and Cocco (2020, 94) underlined, however, the main focus of *Deor* is on pain and grief seen as a universal condition that is nevertheless subjected to God's willing. As a consequence, from a thematic point of view *Deor* would perfectly be part of the elegiac genre. From a pragmatic point of view, it is possible to read the lines 28-30, considered as a sequence

of *representatives*, instead as an indirect speech act, pronounced with the force of an *expressive*:

*Siteð sorgcearig,    sælum bidæled,  
on sefan sweorced,    sylfum þinceð  
þæt sy endeleas    earfoða dæl.*

The same situation is found in *The Wanderer*, as we have previously seen, where at the lines 32-57 a series of *representatives* (around 13) are used to talk about the condition of a generic exile, in which it is possible to recognise a direct reference to the speaker's own sorrowful condition as an exile. Those acts are uttered with an *expressive* force, and with a null *direction of fit* since the speaker is not describing precise events and conditions, but a generic situation of pain which is also his own. Hence, *Deor* is presenting a situation of grief and sorrow, a universal condition, as demonstrated by the narrative section, which, consequently, is again used in function of the *expressive illocutionary* purpose, but that can pass away since God, the Almighty, can relieve the afflicted.

In conclusion, *Deor*, exactly as the elegies that immediately precede it, ends, after a reflection on life, with a gnomic ending which in this case plays the role of a *consolatio*.

It is true, however, that the form of this elegy is particularly ambiguous, for its repeated refrain in particular, and for the great allusion to the Germanic matter. The particularity of the refrain has led Bloomfield (1964) to read *Deor* as a charm rather than an elegy, with a *directive* illocutionary force rather than a *representative* one. Yet the pragmatic system of charms, in terms of distribution and combination of micro-speech acts, shows differences from that of *Deor*. In brief, charms seem to lack a *reflection* part, or an act of *philosophising*, and, in addition, the combination of the acts, generally *representatives*, is directed towards the refrain, so that the macro-illocutionary force is exactly that of the refrain.

On the other hand, Klinck (1984, 134-7) justified the complexity of this elegy defining *Deor* a sophisticated elegy, composed through a great poetic ability, by a poet whose knowledge of the Germanic traditions, as well as of other literary genres was probably notable<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Bloomfield, instead, justified the elements atypical for the charm genre defining *Deor* as a "sophisticated charm". See Morton W. Bloomfield, "The Form of *Deor*", *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 79, no. 5 (1964): 540-1.

#### 4.2.1.5. *Wulf and Eadwacer*

Between the *Deor* and the first section of *Riddles* in the *Exeter Book* there is another composition that has traditionally been called 'elegy', *Wulf and Eadwacer*. However, the great crypticity of this poem has also led to a number of other genre definitions. One of the most supported is the one that associates this composition, as well as *The Wife's Lament* with the genre of the *Frauenlieder*, a term used to indicate erotic love songs sung by a female voice (Malone 1962; Davidson 1975). Klinck herself in a 1994 essay seems to accept this theory and to include the two compositions in this literary genre. Together with *The Wife's Lament*, *Wulf and Eadwacer* is considered the oldest medieval example of the *Frauenlieder*, which instead seems to have been born and developed in the classical world (Davidson 1975, 451). It is necessary to specify that if this collocation is correct, the female voice is that of the lyrical person and not of the author. What is certain, however, is that the female figure is pining for a distant love and all that comes with it.

The *persona loquens* begins her *lament* asserting that if Wulf will go to the island will be like making a gift to her kin, since they would kill him<sup>33</sup>. She also *asserts* that, contrary to her people, she would love to see again Wulf, who is living on an island different from hers. Immediately after, the woman describes the island (probably the one where Wulf is) defined as inaccessible and defended by fierce warriors ready to kill Wulf<sup>34</sup>. Once again, she *states* that the relationship between them is different, because she would welcome him. At this point, the woman begins her lament which culminates in the poignant cry of pain in which she invokes the name of Wulf (line 13 "Wulf, min Wulf"). A question follows with which she turns to Eadwacer, probably her husband, to *warn* him that the wolf will take the poor whelp<sup>35</sup> away<sup>36</sup>. The last couple of lines, instead, propose a *reflection* which however is uttered with the *illocutionary force* of a *lamenting*. This is

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<sup>33</sup> Interpretive details have been discussed in particular in Chapter 1 (§ 1.1.3. pp.19-21). To summarize, the third person pronoun "hine" (line 2) has been associated with the figure of Wulf (whose name recurs 5 times in the poem), since the same line repeated at line 7 refers to Wulf, introduced immediately above. Klinck then suggests that the terms *lac* and *aþecgan* might refer to 'sacrifice' and 'kill' respectively, thus giving a precise interpretation to the lines: Wulf, the woman's lover, is for some not specified reasons in exile, and in case he would come back he could risk being killed by her kin.

<sup>34</sup> At this point the same sentence of line 2 is repeated: *willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð*.

<sup>35</sup> *hwelp* is another word that intensifies the animalistic substratum of the work, along with *wulf*, the idea of the guardian contained in the name *Eadwacer*, and the terms *lac* and *aþecgan*.

<sup>36</sup> There are actually two possible emendations to the question in the absence of an original punctuation. In particular the question could be understood as *Gehyrest thu, Eadwacer?*, i.e. with the exclamation mark after the name of the woman's husband, or as *Gehyrest thu?* and *Eadwacer* would be the agent who will take her son away from her. The question in this second case would be addressed to Wulf. See Maria Grazia Cammarota and Gabriele Cocco, *Le elegie anglosassoni* (Milano: Meltemi, 2020), 102.

particularly true if we analyse in details the two lines. Line 18 has been associated to a religious passage from Matt 19,6 “*Quem Deus coniunxit, homo non separet*”, suggesting that probably since the woman and Wulf are not married, they can be easily separated (Cammarota and Cocco 2020, 107). What intensifies the lament is the last line: *uncer giedd geador* (trans. “our story together”), which might be linked to the previous line, suggesting that it is exactly what happened to them. Therefore, the last lines would indicate a poignant *lament*, probably a resignation, for a love that cannot exist.

The table below offers a representation of the speech acts that can be found in the text:

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.		Percentage
Representatives	7		54%
Directives	1		8%
Commissives	0		0
Expressives	Direct	Indirect	31%
	3	1	
Declarations	0		0
+Exclamations	1		8%

Table 7. Recurrence of Speech Acts in *Wulf and Eadwacer*.

Before commenting these data, it is necessary to show the results of a speech-act analysis of a typical *Frauenlied*. In particular, it has been analysed *Levis exurgit zephirus*, which Davidson (1975, 453) precisely relates to the two female elegies in the *Exeter Book*. Composed in Latin, the song is articulated around the classic theme of the awakening of nature in spring, but in contrast to this joyful atmosphere the female character complains about her suffering.

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.		Percentage
Representatives	11		58%
Directives	2		11%
Commissives	0		0
Expressives	6		31%
Declarations	0		0
+Exclamations	0		0

Table 8. Recurrence of Speech Acts in *Levis exurgit zephirus*.

As can be seen by comparing the two tables, the percentages of speech acts which compose the two compositions are pretty similar. In both cases, there is majority of *representatives* (respectively 54% and 58%) and a minority of *expressives* (31% for both). The two texts show, indeed, a *narrative/assertive* part as well as a *lamenting* section. As far as the macro-speech act analysis is concerned, *Wulf and Eadwacer* has clearly an *expressive illocutionary force*, and a *direction of fit* which is null. The *representatives* which occur in the poem create the context of the *persona loquens*' lament, and introduce the *lamenting* part. The *directive* through which she warns her husband of the possibility of losing her child intensifies the grief of the woman, and it is a consequence of this impossible love. The final gnomic conclusion resembles the same scheme of the other elegies seen so far. Yet the generic assertion seems to turn again to the personal sphere with the final three words, intensifying again the woman's sorrow. The *Frauenlied* has also a clear *expressive illocutionary force*. The purpose of the text is that of *lamenting* the pain of a woman left alone. The *narrative* part, about the blossoming of the nature, is used to create a contrast with the painful situation of the woman.

However, there is a main difference, which, in a certain way, allows us to separate the two poems and to confirm the elegiac identity of *Wulf and Eadwacer*. The scenario in which the protagonist of the poem utters her lament is gloomy and oppressive, and her own lament is agonising. On the other hand, the woman of the *Frauenlied* expresses a sorrow which is of a sexual/erotic nature, as suggested by the context in which is uttered: a spring-like time. Her sorrow derives from the absence of her beloved one in a moment of blooming, probably spring, that is period of sexual resolution. This suggests that the two griefs have a different nature.

#### 4.2.1.6. *The Wife's Lament*

The *Wife's Lament* is the second 'elegiac' poem considered by the critics part of the *women's songs* group, the English name to indicate the *Frauenlieder*. What is absolutely evident and true, leaving aside its real belonging to the *Frauenlieder*, is the fact that together with *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Husband's Message*, they form a subgroup in the elegiac corpus for focussing on love suffering.

The text can be divided into three main sections: first, the lament (1-5); secondly, the description/narration of the events which caused her suffering (6-41); thirdly, a final passage interpreted at times as a gnomic reflection and at other times as a curse (lines 42-

53). Summarizing briefly the composition from verse 1 to 42, the *persona loquens* begins her speech by stating that she can tell her story of misfortune and painful consequences. In fact, a long excursus of causes and effects follows. The protagonist *tells* of having been abandoned by her lord, and complains of having suffered at dawn<sup>37</sup>, at the thought of where her man was. She *narrates* that she was forced to separate from her man because of a plot warped against her by his family. She *complains* that she has longed for him. Then, she *says* that her man ordered her to dwell in a specific place, which we later discover to be under an oak tree<sup>38</sup>, and complains that she is sad to have discovered that her lord has hatched a plot against her. The Wife proceeds *narrating* how in the past promises of fidelity and love were exchanged between her and her husband, and now everything has changed and their deal seems to have never existed. Hence, she *complains* that she is destined to suffer. The hearers are then informed that the husband ordered her to dwell under an oak tree, and that she has suffered from loneliness for a long time. In the end she *laments* that she never has peace from her yearning.

As for *Wulf and Eadwacer*, if we compare this composition with an example of the *Frauenlieder* genre, we might see important similarities and differences. In this case, the *Frauenlied* that will be taken into consideration is *Nam languens*, often used to compare *The Wife's Lament* to the genre of *women's songs* (Davidson 1975, 452). The poem recites:

*Nam languens amore tuo,  
consurrexi diluculo,  
perrexique pedes nuda  
per nives et frigora  
atque maria rimabar mesta,  
si forte ventivola  
vela cernerem  
aut frontem navis conspicerem*<sup>39</sup>.

By reading these lines, the afflicted protagonist of *The Wife's Lament* is brought to the mind. Indeed, at lines 7b-8, she said to be tormented by sad thoughts in the early morning

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<sup>37</sup> The dawn in the elegies represents indeed the main moment of suffering, as the man or woman awakens and with them the worries of life.

<sup>38</sup> As mentioned in the Chapter 2 (§ 2.2. p.39) some scholars saw this concept as a suggestion to understand the woman as dead, and the elegy as a death song.

<sup>39</sup> "Hence, languishing from your love, / I rose at dawn, / and I went forth barefoot, / through snow and bitter cold, / and I scrutinized the seas sadly / if paraps the blown-wind / sails I might discern / or the prow of the ship glimpse" [Translation mine]

hours and exactly as for the woman of the *Frauenlied*, she wonders where her husband might be. In both cases, the reader can see two women struggling with loneliness, with abandonment and with longing for their husbands. Yet, again, a poignant cry is totally absent in the Latin composition. The narration of the Wife is a story that reveals sufferings far worse than those of the woman who sings a faraway love in the Latin composition. Her lament is obscure, agonizing and irrecoverable. She narrates the horrible things that she has suffered, how other individuals have decided for her life and confined her in a horrible place, forced to lose all her freedom and her kin. She is suffering for the decisions that her husband and his people had taken for her life. Hence, she is not simply suffering for love. The Wife's discourse, indeed, can be read as a climax of her sufferings, from the loss of her beloved one to the forced separation from him, and from the breaking of the pacts by her husband to her confinement under an oak tree. Hence, it is understandable that the grief expressed in the two compositions has two different aspects.

Let us now consider and analyse the final lines of the poem (lines 42-53). At line 42 there is a change from the first person singular to the third ("*geon mon*", eng.: "the/a young man"). Traditionally, verses 42-53 have been considered an example of gnomic conclusion, typical, as seen so far, of the Anglo-Saxon elegy. In particular, the woman would conclude with a reflection on sadness, inevitable, but which must be kept in the heart by a young man who must always be good-looking, whether his condition depends on himself or on the others' willing. This interpretation wants the verb *sculan* in its two verbal forms (*scyle*, conjunctive at line 42 and *sceal*, indicative at line 43) to always be translated with an indicative, and the verb *sy* to have a value of possibility (Niles 2003, 8). However, according to other scholars in these last lines the woman *curses* the man who made her suffer, first abandoning her, then betraying her (Straus 1981).

*Cursing* might be defined as an attempt to "influence social, natural, and supernatural phenomena through the bare power of the embodied and spoken word" (Danet and Bogoch 1992, 134). From a pragmatic point of view, *curses* belong to the *directive* category of speech acts, since the *direction of fit* is world-to-words, and the *illocutionary goal* is that of changing the world based on the words uttered.

As Niles (2003, 1133) said in his essay on the cryptic conclusion of *The Wife's Lament*, the practice of cursing was particularly widespread in the Anglo-Saxon world. In particular, curses were widely used during religious services, for example with a purification function, or in order to excommunicate, but also in the private sphere by individuals in order to take revenge against enemies. Words represented an important tool

if there were no other means to carry out one's revenge. And in particular it was women, in the private sphere, who had as tools for their personal defence their own words<sup>40</sup>. Some curses can be found at the beginning of books or at the end of them, as in the case of *Exeter Book* itself, in order to guarantee its safety (Niles 2003, 1127). In both cases, both in the private and religious spheres, the curses were based on models coming from Christian sacred texts. Since the sacred books were a source of learning Latin, the psalters always came into contact with these curses and used them as models for their speeches. The teachings of the sacred texts were often translated into Old English so that even possible laic poets had perfect knowledge of the curses.

An important passage of the Bible characterized by a series of curses and also translated from Latin to Old English is represented by chapter 27-28 of Deuteronomy (Niles 2003, 1121)<sup>41</sup>. As Niles stated, it is possible to notice a certain similarity between these curses and the passage of *The Wife's Lament*:

15 . . . Gyf ðu nelt gehyran Drihtnes bebod, ðines Godes, ðe ic ðe to daeg  
bebeode, ealle ðas wyrignyssa cumað ofer ðe 7 ðe fordoð.

16 Beo ðu awyriged binnan byrig 7 butan.

17 Sy ðin beam awyriged 7 ðline lafa.

18 Sy ðines innodes wæstm awyriged 7 ðines landes wæstm 7 þinra nytana.

[Niles 2003, 1122]

In particular, the grammar of sentences 17 and 18 is very similar to that of verses 45b-47a in the elegy. The verb *sy* is used with optative function and contributes to the realization of the *illocutionary force* of *cursing*. In addition, they manifest themselves in correlation with the verbs *cumað* and *fordoð* used in the future, exactly as it happens for *The Wife's Lament*. As Niles (2003, 1122) claimed, however, it is important to note that sacred texts such as the Deuteronomy were not used as literary bases in a conscious way, but Christian teachings had spread certain structures and conventions stored in the memory of every speaker.

Curses are found, then, in legal documents, for example, in order to avoid the breaking of a legal covenant or altering conditions:

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<sup>40</sup> Niles, in his article explores this aspect of curses related to women, taking into account the main consequence of this relationship, namely the association with the devil and accusations of witchcraft. See John D. Niles, "The Problem of the Ending of 'The Wife's Lament'." *Speculum* 78 (2003): 1131-3.

<sup>41</sup> As specified by Niles, this book represents for Christians together with the Decalogue from the book of Exodus the so-called *Old Law*. See John D. Niles, "The Problem of the Ending of 'The Wife's Lament'." *Speculum* 78 (2003): 1122.



*Gif hwa æfre ænig þine of þysum cwyde awende oþþe ætbrede, sy him Godes ar 7 his ece edlean æfre ætbroden, 7 he næfre ne wurþe on his myltse gemet, ac he sy amansumod of þam gemanan ealra gecorenra Cristes heapa, ge nu ge on ecnysse, buton he þe hrædlicor past forlæte 7 on riht eac eft gewende.*<sup>42</sup> [Niles 1125-6]

As can be seen also from this legal document, the verb *sy* is used with the same purpose of *cursing* seen above.

Considering verses 17-25a of the elegy, it is possible to note that one of the main reasons for the Wife's suffering was to have discovered that her husband hatched against her, putting an end to the pacts of "friendship" between them. Hence, after broking these pacts, the Wife suffers now his enmity (line 26). It seems therefore that the woman does not simply complain about the end of a love, about the distance of the beloved, but about the end of a pact. The husband has failed in his duty to his wife, leading her to lose everything, to be abandoned, probably to lose her status (Niles 2003, 1134).

Straus (1981), in her analysis of speech acts in this elegy, shows how the typical elegiac incipit of *The Wife's Lament* is a powerful assertion that, through the use of a modal, *affirms* in this case the woman's power to use words to tell her story. Language is for the Wife her only weapon, through which she can show her grief to everyone and in the end send back the same pain to those who made her suffer. Consequently, we might read passage 42-52 as a *curse*, whose verbs *sy* have an *optative* value, as demonstrated by legal and religious documents, whose verb *scyle* has an equally *optative* function, and the following verbs in *future* tense are part of *predictions* about the future of suffering that awaits her "friend". The woman, therefore, does not suffer passively her pain condition, but decides to use the words not only to *lament* but also to *react*. Here lies the substantial difference with *Wulf and Eadwacer*, where the woman *complains* about the pain for the distance of her beloved, for their impossible love and for the resulting consequences. The woman of *The Wife's Lament*, who has also suffered a "legal" outrage, not simply *complains*, but also decides to act.

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42 Bold mine. Niles translates the passage as follows: "anyone ever alters or removes anything in this will, may God's grace and his eternal reward be taken from him forever, and may he never be found in his favour, but let him be excommunicated from the society of all Christ's chosen companies, both now and in eternity, unless he will quickly desist from that behaviour and also make full amends." The text is a passage from the final part of a bequest composed at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century by a wealthy man whose name was Ælfhelm. See John D. Niles, "The Problem of the Ending of 'The Wife's Lament'." *Speculum* 78 (2003): 1125-6.

The final line instead has the structure and the force of a gnomic assertion whose main meaning is that of underlying a universal reality: those who are forced to wait for their beloved ones have only sufferings.

In the following table the recurrence of the illocutionary speech acts is shown:

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.	Percentage
Representatives	14	50%
Directives	4	14%
Commissives	0	0
Expressives	10	36%
Declarations	0	0
+Exclamations	0	0

Table 9. Recurrence of Speech Acts in *The Wife's Lament*.

To conclude, I would not exclude *The Wife's Lament* from the Old English elegiac genre, even though the *directives* of the final part of the text assume an important role in terms of purpose. *The Wife's Lament* shows important similarities with the other elegies both from a thematic and lexical point of view as largely demonstrated by the majority of scholars, and from a pragmatic perspective. There is, first of all, a narrative/descriptive part whose *representative speech acts* (50%) play an important role in the justification/introduction of the *expressive speech part*. The poem seems to conclude with a gnomic assertion, relatively briefer than the other elegies, but, however, still having a universal value and purpose. The general and overall *illocutionary purpose* of the macro-speech act might be defined, also in this case, as an *expressive purpose*, whose main goal is that of manifesting the grief of the speaker, here a woman. Yet this grief is different from that of the woman in *Wulf and Eadwacer*. Her grief is not only deriving from affectional reasons, but also from being injured in her status and her identity, so that, after having loss everything and having suffered the plot of her husband and his kin, she decides to take revenge. Therefore, *The Wife's Lament* may be read as a woman's scream, sorrowful but also sharp.

#### 4.2.1.7. Resignation

Resignation is probably the most difficult text to classify in the Anglo-Saxon elegiac corpus. Traditionally, the composition would be attributed to the Old English 'elegies'.

Yet some scholars argue that it belongs to the genre of *prayers*. This difficulty of classification is then increased by the fact that, according to some scholars like Bliss and Frantzen (1976), lines 1-70 and 71-119 should be separated and attributed to two different genres. As mentioned earlier, this is due to a sudden change of tone and themes in correspondence of those lines<sup>43</sup>. An important voice of the first current of thought is represented by Klinck, who, in her studies on Resignation (1987), confirmed the unity of the poem and demonstrated its belonging to the elegiac genre. In particular, the scholar asserted that it is possible that the second part of Resignation, the most elegiac one, is more ancient than the rest of the poem, probably added later to create a Christian context. An exponent instead of the second current is Bestul (1977) who considered the whole poem an important example of *private confessional prayer*.

In short, what has been called by critics *Resignation A* begins with the expression by the *persona loquens* of a *request* to God, that is, to have him in glory. Then follows an expression of *commitment* to the Almighty God and continues with a series of *requests* for the salvation of his soul. In fact, he *admits* several times that he is a sinner, and thus asks God for forgiveness. The constant repetition of the requests for help and salvation and the admission of sin underline the sinner's particular anxiety to be saved. He concludes this first part with a new *admission* of guilt and *thanking* God for the favours He has given him.

*Resignation B* begins with a conjunction suggesting the lack of something preceding<sup>44</sup>. In spite of his fear, in spite of his sins, in spite of his awareness of being a sinner, suddenly the speaker *asserts* his readiness to depart for that journey that he asked God to protect (lines 71-77a). In the following lines, the speaker again expresses his guilt: he has angered God, so that he has been severely punished, and he has not been a wise man. His not being wise led him to suffer too much affliction in the world, probably excluded from his people. Therefore, he introduces the figure of an outcast, which as in the case of *The Wanderer* can be read as a way of speaking about himself (lines 82b-89a). From line 89b begins a section particularly related to the elegiac genre. Indeed, there seem to be some recurring elegiac themes<sup>45</sup> such as exile, abandonment and voyage. From a pragmatic

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<sup>43</sup> See Chapter 1 (§ 1.1.3. p.23) and Chapter 2 (§ 2.2.) for an in-depth analysis on the debate about *Resignation's* genre.

<sup>44</sup> As seen in chapters 1 (§ 1.1.3. p.23), it is possible that a half of a folio lacks between 117v-119r. It might have contained the end of *Resignation A* and the beginning of *Resignation B*, or a further sequence of *requests* and *confessions* linking the two parts.

<sup>45</sup> Resignation seems to comprise a significant number of themes and lexical items common to the Old English elegies seen so far. For instance, the *persona loquens* seems to be a *wineleas wræcca* and an

point of view, it is possible to notice a recurrence of *lamenting* speech act together with the usual elegiac *assertion* which generally introduces the lament. The man appears eager to depart, however, he does not have money to face the journey, and more importantly he *admits* not to be ready. Therefore, he *claims* to be sick in his soul and *asks* God to redeem his last sin. The text ends with a gnomic conclusion: that it is always better to accept the fate that cannot be changed.

Let us now look at the recurrence of speech acts in *Resignation A*, *Resignation B* and *Resignation* as a whole poem.

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.	Percentage
Representatives	9	29%
Directives	19	61%
Commissives	2	6%
Expressives	1	3%
Declarations	0	0%
+Exclamations	0	0%

Table 10. Recurrence of Speech Acts in *Resignation A*.

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.	Percentage
Representatives	27	73%
Directives	1	3%
Commissives	0	0%
Expressives	9	24%
Declarations	0	0%
+Exclamations	0	0%

Table 11. Recurrence of Speech Acts in *Resignation B*.

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*anhoga*, who urges to depart for his ‘journey’, and who suffers from his earthly condition. Moreover, his eagerness to depart expressed at lines 97b-98 “ond ymb siþ spræce, / longunge fus, ond on lagu þence” show some similarities with *The Seafarer* at line 47 “ac a hafað longunge se þe on lagu fundað”.

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.	Percentage
Representatives	36	53%
Directives	20	29%
Commissives	2	3%
Expressives	10	15%
Declarations	0	0%
+Exclamations	0	0%

Table 12. Recurrence of Speech Acts in *Resignation*.

As can be seen by comparing the Table 10 with Table 11, in *Resignation A* the number of *directives* (61%), especially *requests*, is higher than in *Resignation B* (3%), where there is only an indirect *request* at lines 103b-104a. Vice versa the number of *representatives* and *expressives* increases particularly in *Resignation B* (respectively 73% and 24% contrary to 29% for the *representatives* and 3% for *expressives* in *Resignation A*), as we would expect being considered the most elegiac part. This analysis suggests that *Resignation A* is actually different from *Resignation B* in terms of genre. That is, it seems that *Resignation B* can be easily defined as an elegy, compared to *Resignation A* where any kind of *lament* is missing. The purpose of *Resignation A* seems rather that of a prayer, as can be seen by comparing this text to some prayer examples.

*Resignation A* begins with a request to God, and a subsequent act of *commitment*, in which he offers his soul, body, words and deeds to God asking to protect them. The continuous *requests* and acts of *commitment* make this text a *devotional* act.

In the Anglo-Saxon Middle Ages, Christianity had spread different ways of expressing its devotion. It went from canonical prayers to personal confessional prayers. The former was used in liturgical contexts and were often translated from Latin into Old English in order to make the word of God accessible to all. These soon inspired a series of private devotional prayers, used for personal purposes by single individuals. *Resignation A* seems to show similarities with the canonical prayers, as well illustrated by Sobol (2012), especially on the lexical level and with regard to the appellations of God<sup>46</sup>.

Critics such as Thomas (2011, 274-279), however, tend to consider *Resignation A* more similar to a confessional prayer than to a canonical one. Moreover, private confessional

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<sup>46</sup> Sobol discusses the lexical elements in common between *Resignation A* and some canonical prayers like *The Creed* and *The Lord's Prayer*. See Helena Sobol, "The Old English 'Resignation': An Editorial, Linguistic, and Textual Analysis of an Exeter Book Poem", (MA diss., Uniwersytet Warszawski Wydział Neofilologii 2012), 44.

prayers could have the form of poems. Indeed, the particular structure of a poem, open to repetitions and to the use of synonyms could be well adapted to a devotional purpose. In this regard, let us consider an example of confessional prayer in the form of a poem present in *Cotton Julius* and known as *A Prayer*. From a pragmatic point of view, this prayer shows a number of similarities with *Resignation A*. It appears to be characterised by a great majority of *directive speech acts*, particularly *requests*, together with a series of *representative speech acts*, in details *confessing acts* and *assertions*, and with some examples of *commissive speech acts*. Important instances of *requests*, very similar to those appearing in *Resignation A*, can be seen in particular at the beginning of the poem/prayer with the repetitions of the imperatives at lines 2 (“*geara me*”), 9-10 (*gemiltsa þyn mod me to gode, // sile þyne are þinum earminge*), 22-24a (“*Getiþa me, tiredig kyning, // þonne ic minre sawle swegles bydde, // ece are*”). Lines 61-67 show an example, instead, of *confession*:

*and ic eom se litla for þe    and se lyðra man,*  
*se her syngige    swiðe genehhe,*  
*dæges and nihtes    do, swa ic ne sceolde,*  
*hwile mid weorce,    hwile mid worde,*

*hwile mid gepohte,    þearle scyldi,*  
*inwitniðas    oft and gelome.*

The speaker underlines that he is a sinner in thought, in words and in deeds, exactly as the speaker of *Resignation* offers his souls, his body but also his words, thoughts and deeds to God in order to save them (lines 5-9).

The probable lack of half a folio in the *Exeter Book* between *Resignation A* and *Resignation B*, however, leads to no certainty about the effective separation of the two parts as well as about their unity. Consequently, for the sake of clarity, it is also necessary to consider the possibility that *Resignation* might be a single and complete text. In this regard, let us look at the Table 12. It seems particularly evident that there is a large percentage of *representatives* and a lower percentage of *expressives*, a situation very similar to that of the other elegies. However, some *assertions* are used to introduce the following *directives*, often arranged in several sequences. Looking at *Resignation* from a macro-speech act point of view, one could read the composition as a whole prayer to God, whose purpose is to ask God for salvation. This is demonstrated by the only indirect *requesting* speech act in *Resignation B* at lines 103b-104a, which would attribute to *Resignation B* an indirect *requesting force*, exactly as *Resignation A* is a direct request to

God. From the beginning the speaker *affirms* his guilt, that he is a sinner and that he made God angry. Then, the speaker decides to entrust his soul to God, now that his time is coming (i.e., his death is approaching). He asks God to take care of his soul and save him. Despite being a sinner, he seems to have decided to leave and to face the journey towards death, confident in the salvation of his soul. His sins have led him to be punished by God, to be exiled from his people, to feel excluded and to complain about his condition. However, his initial resolution has now vanished (line 89b), he has no money to depart for his journey, but in particular he no longer has the courage to face it. Once again, the speaker is sinning since he is afraid of death, and of what is to come. At this point he asks again God to save him, because his soul is corrupt (103b-104a).

In conclusion, both *Resignation A* and the whole poem might be considered examples of *private confessional prayers*, without excluding an elegiac tone in the second case.

#### 4.2.1.8. *The Husband's Message*

The belonging of *The Husband's Message* to the Old English elegiac corpus has very often been questioned by scholars. Some of them, such as Timmer (1942) and Renoir (1981) particularly supported the idea that this poem cannot be defined an 'elegy' with eyes closed. Timmer, in details, excluded completely *The Husband's Message* from the Anglo-Saxon elegiac genre, because of its optimistic tone. Renoir, on the other hand, did not completely remove this text from the corpus but defined it as the least elegiac of the elegies. In fact, the reader who approaches the text will notice that the tone is particularly optimistic, and that, unlike other elegies, his focus is not on a present of suffering but on solved problems now relegated to the past. *The Husband's Message* is, indeed, the call of a husband for his bride to join him, in order the to be reunited.

The call, however, is mediated. In facts, the husband does not speak in first person but he uses a messenger, identified by the majority of the critics with a piece of wood, which through the technique of *prosopoea* becomes a speaking object. Precisely because of the absence of a *poignant lament*, and for the overcoming of problems such as separation and exile, *The Husband's Message* has often been attributed to other genres as *Riddles* and *Love Lyrics*<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> As seen in chapter 2 (§ 2.3. p.50), also an allegorical interpretation of the text has been formulated, giving to *The Husband's Message* a religious meaning. It would seem that the husband is in fact Christ who renews his pact of fidelity to the Church, his bride. Swanton (1964 as cited in Klinck 1992, 59) read this allegory in relation to *The Wife's Lament*, being the latter the desperate cry of the Church abandoned by God, and the former as the reassuring response of Christ.

Firstly, the attribution to the riddle genre is due to the presence of runes<sup>48</sup> within it and for the similarity of this text with *Riddle 60* (also found in *The Exeter Book*), often considered a sort of introduction to *The Husband's Message*. The similarities with riddles are particularly found in the first part of the poem where the speaking object presents itself, talking about its origin, its transformation and its function.

Secondly, the central theme of love in the text also allowed the attribution of the poem to the genre of *love poetry*. The messenger, indeed, *narrates* the joy and the desire that the Husband shows waiting to see her again (lines 30-35; 45-48), *reports* his firmly and joyful decision to renovate their love promises (lines 49-54) and *orders* the woman on behalf of the Husband to remember those promises and to be prepared to depart.

The table below shows as for the previous elegies the percentage of appearance of the main kinds of *illocutionary speech acts*:

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.		Percentage
Representatives	14		70%
Directives	Direct 3	Indirect 2	25%
Commissives	1		5%
Expressives	0		0%
Declarations	0		0%
+Exclamations	0		0%

Table 13. Recurrence of Speech Acts in *The Husband's Message*.

Looking at the results, it is possible to notice that in the poem examples of *expressive speech acts* do not occur. As we have previously seen also in *Deor* this category of speech acts seems to be absent. Yet it has been demonstrated that the macro-illocutionary force of the poem is in fact that of a *lamenting* act, being the text nevertheless focussed on grief and sorrowful earthly situations. As far as *The Husband's Message* is concerned, instead, there is no reason to support the idea that its macro-illocutionary force is that of *lamenting*.

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<sup>48</sup> The runes appear towards the end of the composition (lines 49-54) and would indicate the secret message that the husband wanted to send to the beloved woman. There is no agreement on the ultimate meaning of these runes and different are the interpretations that the critics have attributed to them. One of the most recent hypotheses has been developed by Buzzoni, according to which the message would have the purpose of revealing the name of her husband and his role: *Sige-red your man in earthly joy*. See Marina Buzzoni, "A Note on the Runes in "The Lover's Message"", in *Dat dy man in alla landen fry was*, ed. Marco Battaglia and Alessandro Zironi, (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2017), 55-69.



As generally supported by the critics, the tone of the text is particularly optimistic and its focus is on the joyful resolution of a probably very painful past.

*Representative speech acts*, on the other hand, represent the predominant class of speech acts in the poem. Some *narrating* and *describing* acts are concentrated in the first part of the work, in which the object presents itself, talks about its creation and introduces its function: that of reporting the words of its lord. This beginning (lines 1-12) seems particularly similar to the structure of *Riddle 60* that immediately precedes it. Analysing this riddle from a pragmatic point of view, in fact it seems to be formed 100% by *representative speech acts* that describe its origin (lines 1-7), its transformation and its use (lines 8-17). If *The Husband's Message* ended at line 12, its belonging to the riddle genre would be easily to confirm. Instead the following lines make it difficult to attribute it to this genre as well as to the elegiac one. The messenger reports the words of his master, spreads his message to his beloved woman and orders her to leave and follow him. In these lines the man's message speaks of love, and expresses his anxiety to see her again as soon as possible, now that the exile is over. The message or the piece of wood represents the words of the man who therefore renews the promises of love for the woman. The text might be therefore associated with a love lyric, but, following Fournier's theories (2018), such a composition should show an *expressive* force, since the lyric genre tend to express a precise state of mind or emotion (in this case joy of love). In the absence of examples of love lyrics in the Anglo-Saxon period, it is difficult to say whether there were love texts that, unlike a modern lyric, presented the message of the beloved in the third person, perhaps through a technique of *prosopopea*. Consequently, it is difficult to attribute this composition without doubt also to this literary genre. Yet what seems certain from the pragmatic point of view is the absence of a more or less poignant lament uttered by the *persona loquens* and therefore the probable not belonging to the elegiac genre.

#### 4.2.1.9. *The Ruin*

The last composition of the *Exeter Book* to be part of the Anglo-Saxon elegiac corpus is *The Ruin*, placed just after *The Husband's Message* and before a second series of *riddles*. As already mentioned in the first chapter of this work, *The Ruin* is a contemplation of the remains of an ancient and glorious city, whose ruins recall its past splendour. Many scholars have tried to identify the historical places to which this text

might refer, others have focussed on the allegorical meaning of the text. One of them is Doubleday (1972), who saw in *The Ruin* an example of *philosophy of history*.<sup>49</sup>

However, in addition to the debate on the meaning of the text, *The Ruin* also created disagreement on the question of the literary genre to which it would belong. The main theory is that which attributes the text to the elegiac genre, as the composition proposes fundamentally elegiac themes such as the transience of earthly things. However, the lack of a lament for a condition of pain and the absence of a monologue in the first person questioned its belonging to the elegiac corpus and several attempts have been made to offer alternatives<sup>50</sup>.

As for the other eight elegies from the *Exeter Book* corpus, also in this case *The Ruin* will be analysed from a pragmatic point of view in order to see if it is possible to demonstrate its belonging to the elegiac genre, and, otherwise, if it is possible to find an alternative solution.

As always, the table below shows the recurrence of the illocutionary speech acts in the text, excluding the analysis of the corrupted parts.<sup>51</sup>

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.		Percentage
Representatives	22		81%
Directives	0		0%
Commissives	0		0%
Expressives	Direct	Indirect	19%
	3	2	
Declarations	0		0%
+Exclamations	0		0%

Table 14. Recurrence of Speech Acts in *The Ruin*.

The majority of illocutionary speech acts is represented by the *representatives*, which comprises in particular *describing acts*. The *persona loquens*, indeed, describes the ruins of the city which he seems to have in front of him, and its past look. At the very beginning of his discourse, the speaker asserts that the destruction of the city is the result of *wyrd*

<sup>49</sup> See chapter 1 (§ 1.1.3. p. 25) for more details.

<sup>50</sup> Klinck summarised the main theories about *The Ruin*'s genre, in particular by referring to the *de excidio Urbis* genre. See Anne L. Klinck "The Old English Elegies a Critical Edition and Genre Study". (Montreal (etc.): McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992): 61-3.

<sup>51</sup> As specified in the first chapter, being *The Ruin* the last elegy of the *Exeter Book*, and in general one of the last texts in the manuscript it suffered worse from the fire (see Chapter 1, § 1.1.3, p. 25).

(line 1b), an idea that can be seen also in other elegies. However, even though it might appear as a reflection on the transience of time and of earthly things, the text totally lacks its melancholic and lamenting part, typical for example of *The Wanderer*. The “*broſnað enta*” (line 2b) that can be also found in the first elegy of the *Exeter Book* (line 87a *enta geweorc*), indeed, is not a reason for *crying* in this composition. The speaker, indeed, seems to feel admiration for these ruins just as he seems to express admiration for its past. It lacks, then, a final gnomic reflection that, as previously seen, is typical of the Old English elegies.

It is therefore likely that this text actually wants to represent something different from an Old English elegy.

Analysing the *expressive* speech acts, it is possible to see something different from the lament. Among the five *expressive* speech acts, the first one appears exactly at the first line. By pronouncing these words, the speaker does nothing but express his admiration for the ruins of the city. He does not *lament* but *praises* what remains from the passage of fate. Again, in verses 19b-20, the *persona loquens* praises the act of building the ancient walls: admirably put together by a strong ingenuity. An example of an indirect speech act follows, which despite having the form of a description is once again an act of *praise* for the splendour of past constructions. Also in this case he specifies that the transience of time has destroyed all past glory. Yet the speaker does not complain, and continues instead to remember the past splendour and to praise the city (38-42).

It seems therefore that more than an expression of sorrow, the aim of the texts is to *praise* the past splendour of a city, now destroyed, whose remaining ruins are marvellous since they allow us to remember the splendid city it was once. According to Howlett (1976), it is possible to associate this composition, in fact, to an *encomium urbis*, a literary composition with origins in the classical world whose purpose is to praise a city. An example of *encomium urbis* to which Howlett associates *The Ruin* is a composition of the late Old English (probably 12<sup>th</sup> century) known with the name of *Durham*<sup>52</sup>

The poem can be divided into two parts: a first section in which the city known throughout England is described in its natural context, and the second part, instead, which describes the many relics that the city hosts. From a pragmatic point of view, it appears

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52 Margaret Schlauch was the first scholar who recognised the motif of the *encomium urbis* in Durham, by underlying perfect correspondences between the lines of the Old English composition and some Latin examples of the genre. See Margaret Schlauch, ‘An Old English Encomium Urbis’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 40, no.1 (1941): 14-28.

to be characterized by a totality of representative speech acts, in particular it is possible to count more or less seven main *describing* acts. However, the main purpose of this text is to *praise* the city, emphasizing its fame and showing the abundance that this city has from every point of view.

#### 4.2.2. Elegiac passages from *Beowulf*

Traditionally, alongside the nine compositions of the *Exeter Book*, the critics, as mentioned in the first chapter, have also recognized an elegiac character within texts coming, for example, from an epic context. In particular, according to Harris (1988), it is possible to extend the definition of "formal elegy" also to two passages of *Beowulf*, renamed *The Lament of the Last Survivor* and *The Father's Lament*.

As stated by Perelman (1980), analysing *Beowulf* from a pragmatic point of view, it appears that the number of *expressive* speech acts is much lower than, for example, *representative* speech acts. The *expressive* instances that can be found are generally reduced to *thanking* acts. However, as Perlman said, it is possible to find further cases of expressive *illocutionary* acts in indirect form. The longest example of indirect expressive illocution is represented by *The Lay of the Last Survivor*.

The table below shows the recurrence of speech acts in the text.

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.		Percentage
Representatives	1		7%
Directives	0		0%
Commissives	0		0%
Expressives	Direct	Indirect	86%
	0	12	
Declarations	0		0%
+Exclamations	1		7%

Table 15. Recurrence of Speech Acts in *The Lay of the Last Survivor*.

The last survivor of a kin, after losing all his companions, collects the treasure of his people and buries it in a barrow, while reciting a monologue. In particular, the *persona loquens* begins his speech with an *exclamatio* towards the earth, *asking* to guard what had previously been of his people. Subsequently, he seems to make a series of *assertions*

through the use of negations (i.e., “there is no longer their joy in the hall, the companions have disappeared, etc.”).

In spite of this, their form of *representative* speech acts, however, the force with which they are uttered is that of lamenting. The speaker, in fact, is not simply describing a reality of facts, that is the death of all his people because of the war, but he is also *complaining* about their death and their absence. The *exclamatio* is also a rhetorical figure, as Perlman pointed out, which is generally used in pathetic situations to express one's grief. Consequently, the overall strength of the text is that of an expressive speech act, in particular a *lamenting* act, whose underlying emotion is the pain for the disappearance of its people.

Moving towards the final part of *Beowulf*, there is then a further elegiac passage. In detail, the lament is part of a long speech made by Beowulf about his past at the court of King Hrethel. He tells of a tragedy that occurred at the court, when one of the king's sons accidentally killed his older brother. Beowulf compares Hrethel's grief to a man's lament for his son who died on the gallows. Being part of Beowulf's speech, this is not a lament uttered in the first person by a father. The hero imagines the pain that a man would feel for the loss of his firstborn son, just as it happened to Hrethel. Beowulf thinks of the continuous lamentations that a father would utter about the irreversibility of the facts and about his inability to do anything. The speaker imagines the old man suffering for the empty halls and the disappearance of joy at court, now that his son is dead. The pragmatic analysis of the speech acts of this passage in Beowulf's speech shows how he mainly pronounces representative acts.

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.	Percentage
Representatives	9	100%
Directives	0	0%
Commissives	0	0%
Expressives	0	0%
Declarations	0	0%
+Exclamations	0	0%

Table 16. Recurrence of Speech Acts in *The Father's Lament*.

Beowulf is not the one who is complaining, since he simply imagines a man mourning the death of his son, in order to recount the tragedy that occurred years earlier at Hrethel's

court. Beowulf certainly shows the pain of a father who has lost his firstborn son, but he is not complaining himself. This passage does not report the state of pain of the *persona loquens* but that of a third person. Consequently, although it is possible to speak of pain, loss, death and abandonment, the impossibility of changing the course of events, all typical elements of the Old English elegiac genre, this passage cannot be defined an elegy. An elegiac sentiment is obviously present. Nevertheless, the speech is devoid of *expressive* speech acts or a more general *expressive* force that might represent the state of pain of a speaker.

#### 4.2.3. *Guthlac B*: an elegiac conclusion

The Anglo-Saxon poem *Guthlac B* is part, together with *Guthlac A*, which immediately precedes it, of a group of hagiographies present in the *Exeter Book*. Being a hagiography, both texts *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* narrate and celebrate the actions and miracles of St. Guthlac. As mentioned in the first chapter, *Guthlac B* is presented mainly in the form of a dialogue between Guthlac and one of his disciples. Aware that he had reached the end of his life, Guthlac ordered his faithful disciple to bring his remains to his sister. Thus, at Guthlac's death, the young man, saddened for his loss, departs for a sea-voyage to Guthlac's sister. The closing of the text, especially verses 1348-1379, has been considered by Powell (1998) as a kind of elegy, for the recurrence of particular lexical elements and themes typical of the elegiac genre: the sea-voyage, the exile motif, death and loss themes. Death in particular is for the insecure disciple reason for lamenting and suffering, contrary to Guthlac who sees in death a consolatory moment.

The disciple's final discourse is introduced by the narrating voice, which refers to the following words as a *dirge* (lines 1346). In fact, the young man begins his own speech with a lament. Exactly as we have seen in *The Wanderer*, where the *persona loquens* uses a generic third person to actually speak about their mental state, here too Guthlac's disciple states that those who lose their master must have courage to face their loss. The soul becomes sad and the only thing it can do is to leave and go away. Thence the theme of the exile, which is also suggested at the end of the lament (lines 1377b-1379).

Immediately after a praising act to Guthlac he confirms his death to his sister and tells her of Guthlac's last will. He ends his speech exactly as it began, i.e. with a cry of grief

for his loss and announcing his departure. The text ends abruptly so that we do not know much more about the journey of Guthlac's disciple.

Pragmatically speaking, the text seems to be composed as follows:

Type of Illocutionary S.A.	Quantity of S.A.	Percentage
Representatives	11	61%
Directives	0	0%
Commissives	0	0%
Expressives	7	39%
Declarations	0	0%
+Exclamations	0	0%

Table 17. Recurrence of Speech Acts in *Guthlac's B*.

As always, the majority of *representative* speech acts is not automatically synonymous for not belonging to the elegiac genre, just as individual *expressive* speech acts cannot be considered as a sign for the attribution to the same. It is necessary to analyse the distribution of speech acts within the text and to understand, as a result, which illocutionary forces are at work. Starting from the *expressive* speech acts present in the text, these are distributed between the beginning and the end of the disciple's speech and the *expressive force* is that of a lament. We have already said that Guthlac's disciple lamented the death of his master, of his source of wisdom and security, and, left alone, seems to no longer find his place in the world, so to decide to leave with pain in his soul. The *representatives* that recur in the text, instead, are mostly related to the description of Guthlac's death so that his sister would know, and to the reference of his last orders. It must be remembered at this point that reporting Guthlac's last wishes to his sister is the main reason for his journey as well as for his speech. However, the way in which the disciple utters his discourse is certainly not that of a simple narrative without any emotional involvement, not even a didactic-biographical ending typical of hagiographies. In reporting Guthlac's last wishes, instead, the disciple expresses all his pain as can be seen from the first and last lines of his speech, as well as from the numerous epithets given to his master, underlining the strong bond that the disciple felt and consequently his great pain.

As Powell (1988, 500) states, one cannot say that this heartbreaking cry of pain questions the Christian message of the whole composition. Yet the poet, probably

influenced by other literary genres and perhaps by elegies, has decided to replace the traditional ending of a hagiography with a similar-elegiacal conclusion to show death from another point of view, that of the people who remain and suffer the loss of those they love.

### 4.3. Final Remarks

In this chapter, the nine *Exeter Book* compositions together with two passages from *Beowulf* and from *Guthlac's* hagiography, traditionally recognized by critics as the Anglo-Saxon elegies, have been analysed from a pragmatic point of view. In particular, the analysis focussed on the speech acts that form these texts, starting from Searle's theories regarding the recurrence of individual micro-speech acts (micro-level), and from Van Dijk's for the identification of the ultimate illocutionary force of the entire discourse (macro-level).

After analysing the texts and classifying the individual speech acts according to the Searlean taxonomy, numerical data concerning their recurrence were collected. The second step consisted in analysing their distribution in the text and the way they relate to each other. Generally, if the final aim of the text was to *express* the psychological state of the *persona loquens*, and in particular that of *pain*, and if the *direction of fit* was *null* then, following Fournier's schematization, the text could be called an elegy.

Based on what emerged from the first phase of the analysis, the pragmatic structure of most of the compositions seems to be characterized by a majority of *representative* speech acts and a minority of *expressive* speech acts. Generally, *representative* speech acts include *narrating/describing* acts that are used for the introduction of *lamenting* acts (*expressive* speech acts), and *assertions* often concentrated in a part of gnomic reflection. This is particularly true for *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* and *The Riming Poem*. There is also sometimes the use of a singular third person to express the pain indirectly. This happens for example in *The Wanderer*, but also in *Deor*, where the use of an *indirect expressive* speech act allows the identification of Deor with the broken one and to identify the *expressive* illocutionary force of the poem. Also *Guthlac B* shows this particular use of the third person within an *indirect* speech act.



As for the poems focussed on love pain, it has been shown that both speeches pronounced by women would seem to be elegies, also showing the same pattern described above (i.e. a majority of *representative* speech acts used to introduce or create a situation of contrast with *lamenting* acts). Only *Wulf and Eadwacer*, then, presents a final gnomic assertion made at the same time personal by the last verse. *The Wife's Lament*, instead, seems to close its lament with a heart-wrenching cry similar to a curse. As a result, the two female elegies seem to express two different sorrows, one derived from the separation from the beloved man, the other initially caused by the same reason and later by the betrayal of her husband and his family who plotted against her.

On the contrary, *The Husband's Message*, generally classified in an elegiac subgroup with *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*, would seem not to fall within the Anglo-Saxon elegiac corpus. The pragmatic analysis shows the absence of *lamenting* acts, so that the poem should be rather associated with a husband's *love lyric* announcing to his wife the possibility of reuniting.

Even *The Ruin* would seem not to be among the Anglo-Saxon elegies. In particular, it is possible to notice the presence of *expressive* speech acts that do not include lamenting acts but *praising* acts. This text could therefore be associated more with an *encomium urbis* than with an elegy.

More difficult to classify is *Resignation*, especially for the question of its integrity still open. *Resignation A* has been shown to have all the prerogatives to fall within the private confessional prayers, while *Resignation B* at first impact would seem to confirm its belonging to the elegiac genre. However, if we considered them as part of a single text, at this point *Resignation* should be counted among the prayers, just as for *Resignation A*, reading the second part as an indirect request for salvation to God.

As for the two passages from *Beowulf*, *The Lament of The Last Survivor* seems to perfectly embody the pragmatic elegiac structure, being characterized by a long lamenting act. *The Father's Lament*, despite having an absolutely "elegiac mood" (to use Timmer's terms), from a pragmatic point of view does not show *expressive* speech acts nor at a micro-level neither at a macro-level. Consequently, following Fournier's theories the composition would not be an elegy.

In conclusion, if we want to create a scale from the most elegiac to the least elegiac poem, *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem* and *The Lay of the Last Survivor* would be in first position, followed by *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *Deor*, *The Wife's Lament* and *Guthlac B*. *The Husband Message* and *Resignation* would occur at a third position, being

borderline texts. At the last position, we would find *The Ruin* and *The Father's Lament*, since, as demonstrated through the pragmatic analysis, they seem not to belong to the Old English elegiac genre.

# Conclusions

As it has been observed from the foregoing work, the nine compositions of the *Exeter Book*, *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem*, *Deor*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, *Resignation*, *The Husband's Message* and *The Ruin*, have always been at the centre of heated debates regarding their actual attribution to a single Old English elegiac genre. The discussion has its origins, as mentioned, in the 19th century when the first Romantic critics tried to classify the Anglo-Saxon compositions according to taxonomic categories of the classical tradition. Unlike other literary genres such as the epic, the identification of an Old English elegiac corpus and in particular the definition of elegy in the Anglo-Saxon cultural horizon was particularly arduous.

First of all, what makes the elegiac classification difficult is the absence of a characterizing metre, instead shown within the classical elegiac corpus. As we have said, in fact, the Greek elegiac compositions, considered by critics to be the main models for the Western elegiac genre, initially focussed on various themes but were united by the same metre (the *elegiac distichus*), which remained distinctive of the genre over the centuries.

In the absence of a precise metre, the first critics tended to seek an *elegiac character* within some Anglo-Saxon compositions. With this expression scholars indicated that union of themes and tones centred on the suffering of a *persona loquens*, mainly caused by the loss or death of a beloved one. Consequently, the nine texts of the *Exeter Book* would have been associated with the elegiac genre precisely by a tendency to narrate personal sufferings. However, this particular methodology of analysis, consisting in applying classical criteria to a group of Anglo-Saxon texts is too imprecise and reductive. As previously shown, indeed, the so-called “elegies”, despite having lexical, thematic and tonal affinities, constitute, in reality, a very heterogeneous group, as each text seems to possess and show its own and singular characteristics. Consequently, the application of classical-romantic criteria, or of any other criterion elaborated for a cultural-literary

context different from the Anglo-Saxon one, to such particularly complex compositions is often limiting.

The complexity of the definition of the Anglo-Saxon elegy is further increased by the absence of an Old English term to indicate precisely these compositions or an elegiac genre, together with the limited number of texts that have come down to us which obstacle our understanding of whether or not an evolution of the genre has occurred.

In attempt to solve the Anglo-Saxon elegiac question over the decades, a second approach has been developed. This second methodology does not apply external criteria to the Anglo-Saxon elegiac compositions, but tries to define an elegiac genre starting from the main and common characteristics of these texts. This approach, however, is also problematic, particularly because of the great subjectivity of the analyses carried out and of the theories developed.

In front of the several doubts left unresolved by the critics on the elegiac problem, with this work a new approach for the definition of the Old English elegiac genre has been proposed.

In particular, we opted for a pragmatic analysis, focussing on the recurrence of the so-called speech acts within the texts. It has been said that pragmatics is a science focussed on the idea that when human beings speak, they also perform actions, so that any kind of speech is processed and organized by virtue of a specific purpose, or of the action to perform. Therefore, to look at the speech acts of an ambiguous poetic composition such as the Anglo-Saxon elegiac one, to observe their recurrence, their disposition within the text itself and to try to identify what is called *illocutionary purpose* and *illocutionary force* means trying to understand which action the *persona loquens* wants to perform. It has been shown that if the *illocutionary purpose* of a poetic text is to express the emotional and psychological status of a speaker, and in particular their pain, the poem can be called *elegy*.

The purpose of this study was precisely to seek the *illocutionary purpose*, or the implied action, of the so-called 'elegies' in order to attempt a new way to define the Anglo-Saxon elegiac genre.

The work has been divided and organised in four main chapters. The first chapter showed in detail the main themes of the nine Anglo-Saxon texts called elegies, together with the two elegiac passages of *Beowulf* and the final lines of *Guthlac B*. After that, in chapter two, an attempt was made to summarize the now centennial debate on the Anglo-Saxon elegiac problem, focussing on the two main methodological approaches

traditionally used for the definition of the genre and on the main theories related to them. In the third chapter, instead, the new methodological approach proposed by this work was illustrated, underlining how the study of speech acts has often been limited to single texts and never to the whole elegiac corpus in an attempt to define the genre. In particular, Searle's theories for the analysis of single speech acts at the single sentence level and Van Dijk's theories for the analysis of speech acts at the whole discourse level have been taken into consideration. Therefore, the analysis, presented in the fourth chapter, was conducted on two levels, one micro-structural and one macro-structural. The first step was to identify the different types of speech acts contained in a text, to quantify them and then to analyse their arrangement in the text. The second step was to find the final and global force of the speech, starting from the disposition and organization of the single speech acts in the text itself. The third and last step was to understand the type of discourse according to its *illocutionary force*, considering Fournier's theories. For this purpose, a contrastive analysis was also used, as the pragmatic structure of each text was compared with that of compositions belonging to other literary genres.

In brief, as deepened in the final remarks section of the last chapter, the pragmatic analysis of speech acts has demonstrated that *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem*, *The Lay of the Last Survivor* show a lamenting *illocutionary force*, so that they would perfectly belong to the Old English elegiac corpus. Within the boundaries of the genre, also *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *Deor*, *The Wife's Lament* and *Guthlac B* might be found, being characterised by the same *illocutionary force*. Their position on a scale of elegiac nature from a pragmatic point of view would be, however, inferior to that of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem* and *The Lay of The Last Survivor*, simply because they show some illocutionary particularities (as the final cursing in *The Wife's Lament*) which seem to add something more to their elegiac character. At a third position, we would find *The Husband Message* and *Resignation*, that, as it has been demonstrated, seem to be two borderline cases of the Old English elegiac corpus. *The Ruin* and *The Father's Lament* would occupy the last position since it has been demonstrated their being more similar to other genres than to the elegiac one (respectively the *encomium urbis* and the *narrative*).

Despite the rather innovative results of this methodological approach, it is necessary, however, to make some considerations on possible limits and future possibilities for further investigation.

First of all, it is possible to find a chronological problem. Most pragmatic studies carried out on texts of ancient origin often use concepts and criteria developed on modern language. At the basis of this particular approach there is obviously the scarce evidence of the language of ancient times, of which there are no speakers and whose written texts are few and limited. Therefore, one has to pay attention when analysing for example the speech acts of a text through modern eyes. Indeed, despite the undisputable universality of speech acts, it is possible that their recurrence and organization in ancient discourses differed from those of the modernity.

This type of approach, however, seems to be a successful tool for the definition of a literary genre and might be used to expand the number of texts of the Old English elegiac genre, analysing for example other compositions of dubious nature which have not yet been classified.

In conclusion, the results achieved by this study have confirmed the belonging to the genre of some compositions and questioned that of other texts. Moreover, a common thread among all the 'elegies' considered here has been noted, that of being characterised by a precise recurrence pattern of speech acts, and by a final and global *expressive illocutionary force*, whose main purpose is that of *lamenting* present, future or past sufferings, implying that melancholy typical of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic literature and culture.

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