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Fear mainly in Old English

It is a daunting task to give a lecture in honour of J. M. Kemble, the greatest of English-speaking Anglo-Saxonists of the first two thirds of the nineteenth century. His range in editing literary and historical texts was formidable, as was his range in archaeology, a subject on which he addressed the President and Members of the Royal Irish Academy on 9 February 1857, a month before his untimely death while still in Dublin.¹ Though Old English and Anglo-Saxon studies were central to his scholarship, he did from time to time work on Middle English,² and so I venture to stray now and then into some post-Anglo-Saxon literature.

Not *War on Terrorism*, but *War on Terror*: that wording will have brought home to many speakers of English the ambiguity of these words. *Terror* can be used either objectively or subjectively: either terror within us, subjectively, when we are terrified, or, objectively, it may be some agency, external to us and terrifying us, from which Fear we may hope to shelter by striving for security. Whatever we do, if it is a *terror* within us we should make war on it, for *terror* is often a fear beyond reason.

John Donne is good on *terror* and *fear*:³

¹ Published in *Horæ Ferales; or, Studies in the Archaeology of the Northern Nations*, ed. R. G. Latham and A. W. Franks (London, 1863), pp. 71–106.

² For example, in Kemble's edition of *Anglo-Saxon Dialogues of Salomon and Saturn* (title of the completed volume, part III, Ælfric Society 14, appended at end, *The Dialogue of Salomon and Saturnus*), 3 parts, Ælfric Society 8 (1845), 13 (1847), and 14 (1848), pp. 91–3, 105–9, 127, 225–57 (edn of *Proverbs of Alfred*), 270–82 (edn of *Proverbs of Hending*).

³ John Donne, Sermon LXIX 'The Fifth of my Prebend Sermons... upon Psal. 66.3', in his *LXXX Sermons* (London, 1640), pp. 695–705, at 701–2. Cf. *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. G. R. Potter and E. M. Simpson, 10 vols (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1953–1962) VIII, 123. In the Authorized Version (A.V.) (quoted, throughout this article, from *The Holy Bible An Exact Reprint ... of the*

Though there be a difference between *timor*, and *terror*, (feare and terror) yet the difference is not so great, but that both may fall upon a good man; Not onely a feare of God must, but a terror of God may fall upon the Best.

Fear is not to be confused with fearfulness, as Donne makes clear:⁴ ‘Briefly, this is the difference between Fearfulnesse, and Feare, (for so we are fain to call *Timiditatem* and *Timorem*) Timidity, Fearfulnesse, is a fear, where no cause of fear is.’ Many of the words used for emotions are ambiguous: *terror* is one of them. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) regards some objective uses of *terror* as trivial, as, for example, when a troublesome child is playfully described as ‘a little terror’.⁵ Untrivially, the objective use of *terror* is by no means new. *MED*⁶ records no quotation with *terroure* meaning, subjectively, the emotion felt, but three late Middle English quotations exemplify the word meaning, objectively, a cause of fear. *OED* has untrivial examples from the Bible and from *Paradise Lost*. First, the Biblical use, *King of terrors*, that is, Death (A.V., Job 18:14): ‘His confidence shalbe rooted out of his tabernacle, and it shall bring him to the king of terrours.’ *OED* draws attention to the fact that an earlier translation had (Geneva 1560) *king of feare*.

In Present English *fear* cannot be used objectively as ‘cause of fear’, but it could be so used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as in *Paradise Lost*, Eve’s reply to Adam:⁷

‘His fraud is then thy fear, which plain inferrs
Thy equal fear that my firm Faith and Love
Can by his fraud be shak’n or seduc’t.’

Authorized Version ... 1611, with an introduction by A. W. Pollard [London, 1911]) Psalm 66:3, ‘Say vnto God, How terrible art thou in thy workes? through the greatnesse of thy power shall thine enemies submit themselues vnto thee.’

⁴ Donne, Sermon XXXIX on 1 Peter 1:17, *LXXX Sermons*, pp. 384-92, at 387. Cf. *Sermons of John Donne*, ed. Potter and Simpson, III, 280.

⁵ *Fright* is now often used trivially, not unlike *terror*, but more of inspiring distaste by appearance: ‘She looked an absolute fright.’

⁶ *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. H. Kurath, S. M. Kuhn, J. W. Reidy and R. E. Lewis, 13 vols (Ann Arbor, 1952–2001, plus ‘Plan and Bibliography’, 2007).

⁷ See *OED* s.v. *fear* n., 4.d., said to be a Hebraism. *Paradise Lost* (London, 1667), sig. Ff2, Book 8 lines 282–7 (Book 9 in the edition in twelve books).

The ideal ruler does not feel the fears of lesser men. As Caesar says in dialogue with Mark Antony after Caesar had contemplated the character of Cassius:⁸

Ant. Feare him not *Cæsar*, he's not dangerous,
He is a Noble Roman, and well giuen.
Cæs. Would he were fatter; But I feare him not:
Yet if my name were lyable to feare,
I do not know the man I should auoyd
So soone as that spare *Cassius*.

...
I rather tell thee what is to be fear'd,
Then what I feare: for alwayes I am *Cæsar*.

MnE *fear* is derived from OE *fær* 'a sudden danger'. The *Dictionary of Old English (DOE)* has two poetic uses of the word under this, its first sense, *Andreas* line 1530 and, by some thought to be the source of the *Andreas* use, *Exodus* line 453.⁹ *Andreas* lines 1528b–1532a:

Sund grunde onfeng,
deope gedrefed: duguð wearð afyrhted
þurh þæs flodes fær. Fæge swulton,
geonge on geofone guðræs fornam
þurh sealtes sweg.

[The flood swallowed up the ground, stirred up from the depth:
tried warriors were frightened by the sudden danger of the flood.
Those doomed perished, the violent attack carried off young
men through the crash of the brine.]

⁸ *The Norton Facsimile: The First Folio of Shakespeare*, ed. C. Hinman (New York, 1968), p. 719; *Julius Cæsar*, I. ii. 195–211.

⁹ *Dictionary of Old English*, ed. A. Cameron, A. C. Amos, A. diP. Healey (Toronto, 1986–). *Andreas and The Fates of the Apostles*, ed. K. R. Brooks (Oxford, 1961), p. 49; his note, p. 114, gives the reference to C. Schaar, *Critical Studies in the Cynewulf Group*, Lund Stud. in Eng. 17 (1949), 289–90. *Exodus*, ed. P. J. Lucas (London, 1977), p. 132. Brooks and Lucas have been used by me, but not all editorial details have been followed. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Old English Exodus*, ed. J. Turville-Petre (Oxford, 1981), has also been used, especially his translation p. 29, notes pp. 69–70, and his glossary. These two uses are so close to each other in associating fear with the sudden danger of overwhelming waters that it has been suggested that the poet of *Andreas* may have been inspired by the use in *Exodus*, though that watery fear is hardly sufficient grounds for establishing such an inspiration.

Exodus lines 447–455a:¹⁰

Folc wæs afæred. Flodegsa becwom
gastas geomre. Geofon deaðe hweop.
Wæron beorhhlidu blode bestemed.
Holm heolfre spaw. Hream wæs on yðum,
wæter wæpna ful. Wælmist astah.
Wæron Egypte eft oncyrde.
Flugon forhtigende. Fær ongeton.
Woldon herebleaðe hamas findan.
Gylp wearð gnornra.

[The army was frightened. The terror of the flood came upon the sorrowful souls. The sea loudly¹¹ threatened death. The mountain-high waves were spattered with blood. The ocean spewed forth gore. There was crying amid the waves, the water full of weapons. A deadly mist arose. The Egyptians were turned back. They fled in fear. They perceived the sudden danger. Weary of martial life they would gladly have got themselves to their homes. Their vaunt had turned less boastful.]

Nowhere in Old English verse is *fær*, ‘sudden peril’, more vigorously described, the suddenness of it and the danger: how it inspired fear. Distant etymological relationships are highly speculative, especially when exploited semasiologically. In a wider view many words, nouns and verbs, of movement and peril, may be related. Caution is best, rather than to suggest that ‘sudden danger’ and ‘fear’ were indistinct in the Indo-European original language.¹² Yet the development within English is

¹⁰ Most editors (cf. the preceding footnote) strive to turn the short sentence units of this *Exodus* passage into something more like a ‘sentence paragraph’ (familiar from other Old English poetry), not stichic verse in which the *stichos* is often the half-line. I believe that the poet’s half-line sentences, as punctuated by me, convey the breathless excitement of the scene.

¹¹ The translation is mine. Tolkien, *Exodus*, p. 69, says, ‘448. *hweop*: *hwopan* seems to imply sound as well as menace.’ He does not tell us why. The answer may lie in an origin of this verb (which has no known etymology) suggested by Leonard Bloomfield for the Gothic cognate of the verb, explained by him as a formation based on the inherited verb Gothic *wopjan* ‘to cry’, OE *wepan* ‘to weep’; ‘Etymologisches’, *BGDSL* 37 (1911), 245–61, at p. 251.

¹² *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, ed. J. Pokorny, 2 vols (Berne, 1947–1969) I, 816–18, and if the possibly related root *per-*, *per-g-* is included (I,

perhaps explicable. The semantic development of *fǣr* ‘sudden danger’ to ME *fēr*, MnE *fear* may be compared with the development of OE *clūd* ‘rock’ to MnE *cloud*, a change that was taking place in Middle English. There may be more to this semantic change than that rocks and clouds have this in common that both are agglomerations. In *The Owl and the Nightingale*, the wild landscape where the song of the nightingale is not to be heard is described in these words (lines 999–1002):¹³

Ɔat lond nis god ne hit nis este,
Ac wildernisse hit is & weste:
Knarres & cludes houentinge,
Snou & hazel hom is genge.

[That country is neither good nor pleasant, but is a wilderness and wasteland: what they (*scil.* its inhabitants) are familiar with is crags and rocks reaching up to the skies, snow and hail.]

The phrase *cludes houentinge* may provide a clue to the semantic change. In the wild country, as described by the poet, crags and rocks merge with the snow-clouds and hail-clouds. The contiguity of the very different agglomerations, clouds and rocks, may have helped to bring about the semantic change: it is not always easy to tell where the rocks end and the clouds begin. The more abstract contiguity of cause and effect, the event *fǣr* ‘sudden danger’ and *fear* the resultant emotion, may have helped to bring about this semantic change. Verbal formations based on *fǣr*, thus *afǣred* ‘frightened’, had led the way.

Old English *broga*, *egsa*, *gryre* all mean subjectively ‘terror, fear, horror, awe’, perhaps also objectively ‘danger, something to be feared’. How far can we claim to be able to recapture the nuances of Old English, overlaid, as they are, by our wish to translate Old English texts into subtle Modern English? English has a range of synonyms, near-synonyms, or more distantly related concepts, not all of them usable for translating these three nouns: *fear*, *fearfulness*, *terror* — perhaps also *terrorism*, though not yet found useful, as far as I know, for describing pre-Conquest events. What was the *fyrð* warring against if not terrorism, what were the Vikings, what were Grendel and his mother if not terrorists? *Horror*, *dread*, *gruesomeness*, *savagery*, and related concepts

818–20) OE *forht*, *fyrhtu* finds a place. Pokorny’s list of Germanic cognates does not include the verb OE *fyrhtan*.

¹³ *The Owl and the Nightingale*, ed. N. Cartlidge (Exeter, 2001), p. 25, lines 999–1002. I have not followed Cartlidge in editorial detail.

like *danger*, *endangerment*, *peril*, *attack*, *assault*, and, more psychologically charged, *suspicion*, *anxiety*, *anxiousness*. The list of words available for translation is long, though not infinitely long even if to unqualified nouns we add adjectival phrases, such as ‘fearful danger, gruesome peril, savage attack’, and many more. Old English *broga*, *egsa*, *gryre* express what is to be feared. We may like to think that we can detect shades of meaning for the three nouns, we may like to standardize our translation procedure by using systematically just one Modern English word for each Old English word, perhaps always ‘terror’ for *broga*, ‘fear’ for *egsa*, and ‘horror’ for *gryre*. If we do so we are imposing a Modern English system of our making on the Old English texts, but have come no nearer to understanding them.

There are twenty occurrences of *broga*, almost 120 of *egsa*, and twenty-three of *gryre*. There are many derivatives and compounds. The occurrence of *broga* in *Guthlac A* lines 140b–142a is clear in sense, combining that noun with the adjectives *egeslic* and *uncuð* and other terror-inducing words, as the evil spirit contends for Guthlac:¹⁴

Oft þær broga cwom,
 egeslic 7 uncuð, ealdfeonda nið
 searocræftum swiþ.

[Time and again terror came there, fearful and unknown, the hostility of ancient fiends strong in wily skills.]

Here *broga* could mean ‘attack’, and so it could in the similar passage, line 84b–88a, with *egsa*:¹⁵

Oft him brogan to
 laðne gelædeð se þe him lifes ofonn,
 eaweð him egsan, hwilum idel wuldor
 brægdwis bona, hafað bega cræft,
 eahteð anbuendra.

[Time and again the deceitful slayer, who grudges him life, brings to him evil terror, reveals fear to him, at times a vainglory — he has skill in both, — persecutes hermits.]

¹⁴ Cf. *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*, ed. J. Roberts (Oxford, 1979) p. 87. Not all the editorial details of the edition have been followed.

¹⁵ L. L. Schücking, *Untersuchungen zur Bedeutungslehre der angelsächsischen Dichtersprache* (Heidelberg, 1915), p. 30, renders it ‘Angriff, Anfechtung’, and he draws attention to the similar use at line 84.

Uses in prose are common, and the distribution is interesting. It seems that Wulfstan, whose homiletic vigour might have been expected to make *broga* call out loud and clear, as if to war on terror, never uses the word; and the *Microfiche Concordance* records only two uses by Ælfric, both on the terror of the Day of Judgement; first, his Catholic Homily, II, *In Natale Sanctarum Virginum*:¹⁶ *Witodlice, se rihtwisa on ðam dæge forhtað, ðeah ðe he ðurh god ingehyd Gode gelicode: þeahhwæðere cwacað þæt ingehyd þær afyrht for ðam micclum brogan þæs gemænan domes* [Truly, the righteous will be afraid on that day, though through a good conscience¹⁷ he has pleased God: this notwithstanding that conscience trembles with fear that day because of the great terror of the General Judgement].

Secondly, Ælfric's *Sermo de Die Iudicii*:

Eall swa bið on Dome[s]-dæge on ures Drihtnes tocyme: | þæt fyr cymð swa færlice þæt menn foresceawian ne magon, | and mid egeslicum bryne ealne middaneard ofergæð; | and menn þonne ne gumað for þam micclan ogan | æniges oðres þinges butan þæs anes brogan, | ne nan mann ne mæg ætberstan þam bradan fyre ahwider; and þæt fyr þonne afeormað þas eorðan | and hi geedniwað to ænlicum hiwe, | and heo ne bið na forburnen ac bið geclænsod | from eallum fylþum þe hyre fram frymðe becomon, | and heo swa on ecnysse eall scinende þurhwunað.

[So too (like Sodom) it will be on Judgement Day at our Lord's advent: that fire comes so suddenly that people cannot provide for it, and with terrifying flame it overruns the earth, and on account of that great terror people care nothing for anything else except for that single terror, nor can anyone break away from that fire to anywhere; and that fire then purges this earth and

¹⁶ *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English*, ed. R. L. Venezky and A. diP. Healey (Toronto, 1980). *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. M. Godden, EETS ss 5 (1979), p. 332 lines 171–4; *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. J. C. Pope, 2 vols, EETS os 259–60 (1967–8) II, 260, lines 75–85. Not all the editorial details have been followed.

¹⁷ The rendering is indebted to *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary based on the manuscript collections of the late Joseph Bosworth: Supplement*, ed. T. N. Toller (Oxford, 1908–1921), s.v. *ingehygd* sense II, 'conscience', but for the first use of the word in this quotation sense V, 'course of life', would also be appropriate: 'a good course of life' leads to 'a good conscience'. Since Ælfric repeats the word in this sentence it is best to use the same word twice in translation, and sense V is not appropriate for the second use.

renews it to uniquely beautiful appearance, and it will not be consumed by fire but will be cleansed of all foul practices that have befallen it from the beginning, and so it will continue all-radiant for ever.]

Several words of fear, terror, and suddenness are used by Ælfric in this passage: *færlice* ‘suddenly’, the first element of which leads to Modern English *fear*, as we have seen; *egeslic* ‘terrifying’; *oga* ‘terror’, and *broga* ‘terror’. If in Modern English *angst* implies a neurotic state, perhaps resulting from an inner insecurity, the fear of Judgement Day is no *angst*, for in this passage Ælfric makes it clear that the security of a good conscience still leaves the reasoning mind open to rational fear of the all-consuming conflagration at the Second Coming, a purge from which the righteous will rise cleansed. But who can have the security that he or she is one of the righteous? Ælfric’s fear of Judgement Day is not because he, and the Anglo-Saxons more generally, were *angst*-ridden, but because right reason brought him and them to fear that event.

The common prose word *oga* has an interesting distribution. It occurs only once in verse, in the late poem *The Judgement Day II*, is very common in Ælfric, is quite common in the Psalter glosses, and is never used by Wulfstan; the related word *ege* is also rare in verse, and very common in prose.¹⁸ John C. Pope has an excellent definition of *oga*:¹⁹ (a) is what *OED* calls the subjective use, (b) the objective use: ‘(a) an emotion in the observer... (b) as the exciting cause of this emotion’; both senses are clearly exemplified in Ælfric’s Homilies: (a) XVII, line 299: *Da wearð mycel oga on eallum þam menn* [Then there came great fear upon all those people]; (b) XI, lines 200–4:

¹⁸ Cf. Pokorny, *IEW*, pp. 7–8; and E. G. Stanley, ‘Studies in the Prosaic Vocabulary of Old English Verse’, *NM* 72 (1971), 385–418, *oga* at p. 397, *ege* at pp. 404–5. The noun *ege* is rare in verse other than in the Paris Psalter and *The Meters of Boethius*: one occurrence in *Guthlac A*; one in *Azarias*, line 58 in a passage of two lines that have no parallel in *Daniel*, conveniently laid out in *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie*, ed. C. W. M. Grein, revised by R. P. Wül(c)ker, 3 vols (Kassel later Leipzig, 1883–1898) II, 494–5; two occurrences in *The Judgement Day II*; one in *Solomon and Saturn*; one in *An Exhortation to Christian Living*; one in *The Seasons for Fasting*; and one in *Instructions for Christians*.

¹⁹ *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. Pope, II, glossary p. 898. He gives (at II, 579) the source of Homily XVII, line 299: Luke 4:36; in the translation of the Vulgate, *The New Testament of Jesus Christ, Translated faithfully into English* (Rhemes, 1582), 147, ‘And there came feare vpon al.’

Nis na eallum mannum se gemænelica deað | gelice earfoðe, ac
foroft becymð | þam synfullan men sumera synna forgyfennys |
þurh ðone earfoðan deað þe hine swa swiðe drehte | and ðurh
ðone ogan þæs egeslican deaðes.

[That universal death is not equally hard to all, but very often
forgiveness for certain sins comes to the sinner through the hard
death which has afflicted him so greatly and through the terror of
that dreadful death.]

We may wish to distinguish *awe*, *respect* from *fear* in Modern English usage; there is every reason for thinking that in earlier ages ‘awe, respect’ was part of plain ‘fear’. The modern rendering ‘awe’ is usually for ‘fear of God’, *timor Domini* (etc.), in medieval writings. An absolute monarch — a form of government no longer in the experience of western democracies — inspires fear, and that fear engenders awe and loving respect in loyal subjects, and in disloyal subjects hatred and the urge to rebel. In the experience of someone living in a Christian country over which an absolute sovereign rules unpredictably, God too is perceived by the faithful as the absolute King of all kings, *ealra cyninga cyning*, and his rule is likewise unpredictable.

John Donne may be quoted to illustrate how, in more devout times than the twenty-first century, the fear of God was viewed. Donne, in his sermon on the Conversion of St Paul saw the fear of God thus:²⁰ ‘it is a blessed disease [= both ‘disquiet’ and ‘illness’] the feare of God, and the true way to true health.’ Love of God and fear of God have always been in balance. The fear of God, fear of the Lord, is a frequently expressed concept in the Bible. The whole of the second chapter of Isaiah might be quoted; perhaps part of verse II.21 in the Authorized Version gives a sufficient taste ‘for feare of the LORD, and for the glorie of his Majestie; when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.’ In Isaiah II.21 we see God’s wrath in action, and God’s wrath is as unfashionable a concept now as the fear of God, mankind’s response to God’s wrath. Psalm XLVII.2 supports the equation of the Lord as a strict king (Authorized Version): ‘For the LORD most high is terrible; he is a great king ouer all the earth’.

²⁰ Donne, Sermon XLVI, *LXXX Sermons*, pp. 459-68, at 466. Cf. *Sermons of John Donne*, ed. Potter and Simpson, VI, 218.

In his translation of Psalm XLVI.2, 4 and 6 King Alfred makes the royal glory of God sing out, that he is a terrible God, and because he is our God we must sing his praises:²¹

2 for þam he ys swyþe heah God and swyþe andrysnlic and swiþe micel cynincg ofer ealle oðre godas... 4 He us geceas him to yrfewardnesse and Iacobes cynn þæt he lufode... 6 Ac singað urum Gode and heriað hine: singað, singað, and heriað urne cyning, singað and heriað hine.

[because he is the very high God and very terrible and the very great King over all other gods. He chose us as inheritance for himself and Jacob's tribe which he loved. Now sing to our God and praise him: sing, sing, and praise our King, sing and praise him.]

The command, 'fear God!' is fierce: godfearing piety is terrifying, more Old Testament; God-loving piety is more hopeful, more New Testament. Leviticus is vigorous on the subject, and Ecclesiastes XII.13 sums it up neatly (Authorized Version): 'Let vs heare the conclusion of the whole matter: Feare God, and keepe commandements, for this is the whole dutie of man.' In the New Testament more than a trace of it remains in I Peter II.17, and shows that the whole duty of man was well understood: 'Honour all men. Loue the brotherhood. Feare God. Honour the King.' In Old English Leviticus XXVII.17 is rendered: *Ne swenceað eowre magas: ondrædað eowerne Drihten, eowerne God*, that is in the Doway Version, rendering the Vulgate, 'Doe not afflict your contrimen, but let euerie one feare his God, because I the Lord your God.'²² No wonder then that the Anglo-Saxons had an adjective *godfyrht*,

²¹ *King Alfred's Old English Prose Translation of the First Fifty Psalms*, ed. P. O'Neill, Medieval Academy Books, 104 (Cambridge, MA, 2001), p. 158.

²² *The Old English Version of The Heptateuch, Aelfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, ed. S. J. Crawford, EETS os 160 (1922), p. 299. *The Holie Bible*, I (1609), p. 312. The Vulgate (*Biblia Sacra*, II, 464) reads: *sed timeat unusquisque Deum suum | quia ego Dominus Deus vester*. I do not know whether my interpretation of *Waldere* I line 19b has found favour: *ðy ic ðe Metod ondred* 'on your behalf I therefore feared the Lord', the speaker is the sword-maiden Hildegyth addressing Waldere. If that interpretation is right, this half-line shows how the fear of God informs the heroic world. For the text, see *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. E. V. K. Dobbie, ASPR 6 (New York, 1942) p. 5; for this interpretation, see E. G. Stanley, 'Courtliness and Courtesy in *Beowulf* and Elsewhere in English Medieval Literature', *Words and Works*:

used three times in the verse. It occurs also in prose, for example, in Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, and in several anonymous homilies.²³ Godfearing is an epithet applied with some frequency to monks; thus in a lively direct speech by King Wulfhere, son of Penda, forming part of a piously invented account of how the monastery of Peterborough was founded, and, in more worldly terms, how it was royally endowed: *Ic haue here godefrihte muneces þa wolden drohtien here lif on ankersetle gif hi wisten hwere, oc her is an igland þet man cleoepð Ancarig* [I have here godfearing monks who would wish to conduct their life in a hermitage if only they knew where, but here is an island that is called Thorney].²⁴

A significant use of *godfyrht* occurs in a Vercelli Homily, of special interest because of the list of adjectives expressing desirable qualities among which 'godfearingness' is one.²⁵

Utan we nu forþan efstan to Gode ærþan us se deað gegripe
forþan he us swiðe to nealæceð, 7 sien we snotre 7 soðfæste 7
mildheorte 7 rummode 7 rihtwise 7 ælmesgeorne 7 clænheorte 7
fremsume 7 godfyrhte 7 larsume 7 þeowfæste 7 gehyrsume Gode
7 urum hlafordum 7 geþyldige Godes willan.

Studies in Medieval English Language and Literature in Honour of Fred C. Robinson ed. P. S. Baker and N. Howe (Toronto, 1998), pp. 88–9, 101.

²³ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS E*, ed. S. Irvine, *The AS Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 7* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 28 line 21; *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, ed. D. Whitelock, 3rd ed (London, 1963, reprinted 1967), p. 62 line 155; *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. B. Assmann, *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 3*, reprinted with a supplementary introduction by P. Clemoes (Darmstadt, 1964), MS Hatton 114, p. 118/1 line 42 (cf. MS Bodley 343, p. 118/2 line 38; for a third version, see Peter Clemoes's introduction to Assmann's edn, pp. xxix–xxx). I owe these references of course to Venezky and Healey's *Microfiche Concordance*.

²⁴ *The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely*, ed. P. H. Reaney, *English Place-Name Society 19* (1943), p. 280.

²⁵ *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, ed. D. G. Scragg, EETS os 300 (1992), pp. 62–4 (Homily II lines 107–11), cf. p. 361 (Homily XXI lines 231–7). The parallels adduced by Scragg for Homily II do not include the word. For Homily II, cf. 'Der Vercelli-Codex CXVII', ed. Max Förster, *Studien zur englischen Philologie 50* (1913), 20–179 at p. 95 (= p. 79 of separate), lines 20–6, and Förster, *Die Vercelli-Homilien*, *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 12* (Hamburg, 1932, repr. Darmstadt, 1064, omitting p. 180), p. 53 lines 138–44; and *The Vercelli Book*, ed. C. Sisam, EEMF 19 (Copenhagen, 1975), fol. 12^{ro}.

[Let us now hasten to God before Death lays hold on us for that reason that he draws near to us mightily. And let us be wise and true and compassionate and generous in giving and just and liberal with alms and pure in heart and benign and godfearing and ready to learn and ready to serve and obedient to God and to our superiors and patient of God's will.]

In this Old English passage many of the adjectives are likely to have had shades of meaning that we cannot recover. Some words here are too rare for multiple contextual guidance, thus *rummod*, *larsum*, and *þeowfæst*. What emerges clearly from such a list of adjectives is that virtue has many aspects, and the wise will understand them if the wise are true in Faith, *snotor 7 soðfæst*; towards one's neighbour, kind, just, and generous, and pure in heart, *mildheort 7 rummod 7 rihtwis 7 ælmesgeorn 7 clænheort 7 fremsum*; and towards God, fearing, patient of His will, ready to learn and to serve, and ready to serve and obey God and one's superiors (in the religious order), *godfyrht 7 larsum 7 þeowfæst 7 gehyrsum Gode 7 urum hlafordum 7 gepylðig Godes willan*. The list is impressive, and well organized. Wisdom and Faith come first and govern all, love of one's neighbour next and, lastly, fear of God, and obedience to Him and to those called to be one's superiors.

There may still be some who believe in an unchanging human heart, in unchanging human emotions. Children through the ages are, in such a simple view, all alike in their love of sport and their fear of dangers that might attend it, therefore requiring courage, pluck, if fear is to be overcome. Ælfric's *Colloquy* may seem to lend support to that highly questionable Romantic view, as the master asks and the boy answers:²⁶

‘Wære þu todæg on huntnope?’

Fuisti hodie in uenatione?

‘Ic næs, forþam Sunnandæg ys, ac gyrstandæg ic wæs on huntunge.’

Non fui, quia dominicus dei est, sed heri fui in uenatione.

²⁶ *Ælfric's Colloquy*, ed. G. N. Garmonsway, 2nd ed (London, 1947), pp. 24–5 lines 67–79. My translation is of the Old English; the Latin is slightly different, thus *morari* ‘to loiter’, here perhaps ‘to hang around’, is not the same as *wunian* ‘to dwell, inhabit’.

‘Hwæt gelæhtest þu?’
 Quid cepisti?

‘Twegen heortas ȝ ænne bar.’
 Duos ceruos et unum aprum.

‘Hu gefencge þu hig?’
 Quomodo cepisti eos?

‘Heortas ic gefencg on nettum ȝ bar ic ofsloh.’
 Ceruos cepi in retibus et aprum iugulaui.

‘Hu wære þu dystig ofstikian bar?’
 Quomodo fuisti ausus iugulare aprum?

‘Hundas bedrifon hyne to me ȝ ic þærtogeanes standende
 færlice ofstikode hyne.’
 Canes perduxerunt eum ad me et ego econtra stans
 subito iugulaui eum.

‘Swyþe þryste þu wære þa.’
 Ualde audax fuisti tunc.

‘Ne sceal hunta forhtfull wesan forþam mislice
 wildeor wuniað on wudum.’
 Non debet uenator formidolosus esse quia uarie bestie
 morantur in siluis.

[‘Did you go hunting today?’ ‘I didn’t because it’s Sunday,
 but yesterday I did go hunting.’ ‘What did you capture?’ ‘Two
 harts and one boar.’ ‘How did you capture them?’ ‘I captured
 the harts in nets and I slew the boar.’ ‘How were you so daring
 to slay a boar?’ ‘Hounds drove him to me, and standing
 opposite him I quickly slew him.’ ‘You were very courageous
 then.’ ‘A huntsman must not be frightened because there are
 many kinds of wild animals inhabiting the woods.’]

The adjective *forhtfull* near the end of this quotation is one of many words I have not dealt with; such as, in Modern English, first subjective: ‘fear, frightened, fearful, expressing fear, fearfully, to fear, to

be afraid, to be/become afraid, to be affected/overcome by fear, a shuddering with fear, nervousness, to regard with fear, to shudder with fear, to melt with fear, great fear, terror, horror, greatly afraid, terrified, to fear greatly, to be terrified'; secondly objective: 'cause of fear, terror, horror, a horrible event, thing, creature, causing fear, to cause fear, causing dread, terrifying, fearfully, dreadfully, to terrify'. What a wealth of terror-stricken misery is here, and according to the *Thesaurus of Old English* there are Old English words for all these shades of multitudinous emotions.²⁷ How subtle the Anglo-Saxons were. Yet a suspicion enters my mind that these are not subtle Old English senses and subsenses, but the senses and subsenses attached to Old English words by subtle lexicographers, glossary-makers, and translators. I have chosen for comment a few words from that great list, and have suggested that for *fear of God*, *godfearing*, OE *godfyrht*, for a devout Christian of former ages the most terrifying of all emotions, we should look for some synonymous renderings sterner than 'devout, pious, religious', the words given as equivalents in the *Thesaurus of Old English*.

Interesting among fear-related emotions are those for which the Anglo-Saxons seem not to have a word though they must have had the feeling. The emotions, the passions are many; suspicion comes high in any list of states of mind that are such as mankind is, or should be, sorry to entertain, or such as one reluctantly feels, or believes that one has to entertain in fearful anticipation. Milton has a good list of the states of mind of our First Parents after the Fall of Man.²⁸

Thus fenc't, and as they thought, thir shame in part
Coverd, but not at rest or ease of Mind,
They sate them down to weep, nor onely Teares
Raind at thir Eyes, but high Winds worse within
Began to rise, high Passions, Anger, Hate,
Mistrust, Suspicion, Discord, and shook sore

²⁷ *A Thesaurus of Old English*, ed. J. Roberts and C. Kay with L. Grundy, King's College London Med. Stud. 11, 2 vols (London, 1995), 'fear' is to be found (at pp. 384–6) as 06.01.08.06 (and sub-divisions) in department 6 'Mental Faculties', 06 'Spirit, soul, heart', sub-department 06.01 'The head (as seat of thought)'; not near department 8 'Emotion', 08 'Feelings', sub-department 08.01 'Heart, spirit, mood, disposition', with which (at pp. 436–8) as 08.01.02.02 (and sub-divisions) 'love' has found a place. 'Fear of God' is far to seek (at p. 666) as 16.02.01.11 'Devout, pious, religious' and there we find OE *godfyrht*.

²⁸ *Paradise Lost ... in Ten Books*, sig. Ii3¹⁰, Book 8 (later editions Book 9), lines 1119–31.

Thir inward State of Mind, calme Region once
 And full of Peace, now tost and turbulent:
 For Understanding rul'd not, and the Will
 Heard not her lore, both in subjection now
 To sensual Appetite, who from beneath
 Usurping over sovran Reason claimd
 Superior sway.

Mistrust and suspicion are barely to be found in the recorded lexis of the Anglo-Saxons.²⁹ Mistrust is represented by the prefix *or-* 'lack of, want of' or when adjectival 'lacking, wanting', as in *orsorg*, *orsorglic*, *orsorgnes*, *ortreownes*, when a verb 'not to', as in *ge|or|trywan*, the stem based on *sorg* 'care, anxiety', or *treow* 'faith and trust, truth'. Nothing reveals that 'mistrust' is more than a lack of faith, trust or truth. Suspicion is an ingredient of mistrust, as the definition of *mistrust* in Johnson's *Dictionary* makes clear: 'Diffidence, suspicion; want of confidence'; the verb is defined by him, 'To suspect; to doubt; to regard with diffidence', with *diffidence* in its original sense of 'lack of trust', not 'distrust of oneself'. And *to suspect* has Johnson's succinct definition, 'To imagine with a degree of fear and jealousy what is not known.'

Fear and suspicion go together. Locke's definition of *fear* encapsulates that in his definitions of *sorrow*, *fear*, *anger* and *envy*, each of which is an 'uneasiness of [*or* in] the Mind', and, though not applied to suspicion in Locke, that uneasiness is central to *suspicion* through lack of knowledge, evidence, or experience.³⁰ 'Uneasiness of Mind', as used by Locke, and equated by him with 'discomposure of the mind', that is, a state of mental discomfort, may be caused in many ways. Locke distinguishes between causes that lie in the past – sorrow – and in the future – fear. *Suspicion* and *mistrust* are aspects or kinds of fear: lack of knowledge, of evidence, of experience lead to a mental discomfort about what the future may hold.

It is difficult to believe that the Anglo-Saxons had nothing at all to express such ideas, other than some thoughts about 'lack of trust'. It may be said with certainty that the Anglo-Saxons did not have a word or

²⁹ The *Thesaurus of Old English*, p. 381, 06.01.08.03.02, gives 'Distrust, want of faith or confidence: *ortrēownes*. Distrustful, without confidence: *ortrēowe*, *ortrīewe*. Not to trust (in), to mistrust: *mistrīwan* [a double 'flag' indicates that this glossing word is rare], *geortrīewan*.

³⁰ John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch, Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke (Oxford, 1975), Book II, chapter XX, p. 231.

words used exclusively for ‘suspicion’ and ‘to suspect’; *wen*, *wena*, and *wenan* may be words of good cheer and hope for optimists, but in a gloomier view any thought, surmise, supposition, expectation of an event or circumstance in the future is a presension of evil rather than of good. These words and their compounds and derivatives are common. Interestingly, a number of *-wen-* words occur often with the prefixes *or-* or *un-* (and once with *for-*, in a gloss), indicating the absence or negation of hope, though prefixed *-wen-* occurs less often than unprefixed hope. The past participle *forwened* is a good word with which to begin on this group of words.³¹ It occurs once only, and means, as the *Toronto Dictionary of Old English* says, ‘suspected, apprehended with mistrust / anxiety’. A cognate of the verb occurs in Old High German, *varwânjan* ‘to despair’.³² There are, of course, some uses in Old English literature where these words refer to favourable expectations; thus in *Beowulf* when Hrothgar predicts Beowulf’s election to be king (lines 1845b–1853a):³³

Wen ic talige,
 gif þæt gegangedð þæt ðe gar nymedð,
 hild heorugrimme, Hreþles eaferan,
 adl oþðe iren, ealdor ðinne,
 folces hyrde, ond þu þin feorh hafast,
 þæt þe Sæ-Geatas selran næbben
 to geceosenne cyning ænigne,
 heordweard hæleþa, gyf þu healdan wylt
 maga rice.

[I imagine (*literally*, ‘I consider it a likely expectation’), if it happens that the spear, battle-fierce warfare, sickness or (weapon of) steel, carries off the son of Hrethel, your lord, the

³¹ Amazingly, the *Thesaurus of Old English*, p. 409, 07.03.03.01, gives it as ‘Despised, despicable, worthless’. The only occurrence is in the glosses to Bede’s metrical *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*, edited by H. D. Meritt, *Old English Glosses (A Collection)*, Mod. Lang. Assoc. of America, General Series 17 (New York, 1945), p. 19, text 9 gloss 108. For the text see *Bedas metrische Vita sancti Cuthberti*, ed. W. Jaeger, Palaestra 198 (Leipzig, 1935), p. 119, line 800, *Nec suspecta diu tardant praesagia* [nor did the suspected presentiments delay for long].

³² *Althochdeutscher Sprachschatz*, ed. E. G. Graff and (vol. 7, index) H. F. Massmann, 7 vols (Berlin, 1834–1846) I, 866–7.

³³ *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. F. Klaeber, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1950), p. 69. For textual and interpretational details cf. E. G. Stanley, ‘*Beowulf*: Lordlessness in Ancient Times is the Theme, as Much as the Glory of Kings, if Not More’, *N&Q* 250 (2005), 267–81, at p. 272.

guardian of the nation, and you still have your life, that the Sea-Geats have none better to elect as king, the guardian of treasure and of warriors, if you are willing to rule the realm of (your) kinsmen.]

In the following quotation, seen from the wolves' point of view and from that of the Children of Israel as Pharaoh's hosts near their end, *wena* is a hoped-for expectation, though humans more generally will take a less favourable impression of the scene at *Exodus* lines 164b–167:³⁴

Wulfas sungon
atol æfenleoð ætes on wenan,
carleasan deor cwyl drof beodan
on laðra last leodmægnes fyl.

In J. R. R. Tolkien's translation:

The wolves sang their dread evensong in expectation of their meat; beasts unpitied grown bold at the dying of day they waited upon the heels of those hated foes for the slaughter of many men.

No suspicion is involved in such expectations. There are, however, cases where suspicion clearly imbues *wen* 'expectation' and *wenan* 'to consider, suppose'; thus in Ælfric's homily for the Feast of St Peter:³⁵ *Drihten cwæð him to: "Habbað eow truwan, ic hit eom. Ne beo ge ofdrædde. Ne eom ic na scinnhiw, swa swa ge wenað. Oncnawað þone þe ge geseoð."* [The Lord said to them: 'Have faith, it is I. Be not afraid. I

³⁴ *Exodus*, ed. Lucas, p. 102. A note avers that '*wenan* is dat. pl. for regular *wenum*.' The matter is less certain: both *on wenan* and *on wenum* are frequent, and though confusion of *-an* and *-um* is a feature of late Old English, the existence of *se wena* in Old English of all periods makes that confusion undemonstrable in *on wenan*. Cf. Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, § 572, and K. Malone 'When Did Middle English Begin?', *Curme Volume of Linguistic Studies*, ed. J. T. Hatfield, W. Leopold and A. J. F. Zieglschmid, Lang. Monographs 7 (Baltimore, 1930), pp. 110–17, at p. 116 and footnote 6. See also Tolkien, *Exodus*, p. 51 note on *on wenum*, line 176. I quote Tolkien's translation, p. 23, lines 144–7.

³⁵ *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. The Second Series*, ed. Godden, p. 226, Homily XXIV lines 151–3. The source has *putare* rendered *wenan* by Ælfric; *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, ed. M. Godden, EETS ss 18 (2000), p. 562.

am no spectre, as you suspect. Know him whom you see.'] A clear example of belief unsupported by evidence, just a surmise, a suspicion, is expressed in an ordinance of the bishops and reeves of London:³⁶

7 we beodaþ eac urum hiremannum þæt ælc mann wite hwænne he his yrfe hæbbe oððe hwænne he næbbe, on his neheburas gewitnesse; 7 us spor tæce gif he hit findan ne mæg binnon þrim nihton, forðam we wenað þæt mænige gimeleas menn ne rececan hu heora yrfe fare for þam ofertruan on þam friðe.

[and we command all our subordinates that everyone is to note when he has his cattle or when he does not have it, with his neighbours' witness; and if he is unable to find it to inform us of the trail within three days, because we have a suspicion that many negligent people do not care how their cattle may stray out of over-confidence in the peace.]

Fear is not involved when bishops and reeves consider the actions of their subordinates. Here we are dealing with a form of suspicion, with an undemonstrable surmise uninfluenced by fear.

Expectation, surmise, fear, mistrust, and suspicion can all be part of what the Anglo-Saxons expressed by *wen*, *wena*, *wenan*. Whether what may be an implicit ingredient of the Old English word is made explicit in translation lies in the mind and hands of the translator. The entry in Liebermann's glossary for *wenan* acknowledges that fear may be part of the sense in a negative context, and by his use of Modern German *argwöhnen* he recalls to us that this cognate compounded with a negative first element, *arg* 'evil' means 'to suspect', and has done so from Old High German onwards.³⁷

The main lesson of this paper is that in the act of translation we impose subtleties on Old English to accommodate their words into our understanding, and in doing so we may go beyond their understanding expressed in their use of their words.

Valour, the duty to be brave, has been left out of this account, except briefly in Ælfric's *Colloquy*, and it is usually left out of current

³⁶ *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. F. Liebermann, 3 vols (Halle, 1898–1916) I, 160, VI Æthelstan für London, 8,7. Glossary, II/1, 238/2 s.v. *wenan* 'erwarten'.

³⁷ See E. Karg-Gasterstädt and Theodor Frings, et al., *Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch* (Berlin, 1952-) I, col. 639, s.vv. *arguûân*, *arguûânen*, and derivatives; *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. Liebermann, Glossary, II/1, 238/2 s.v. *wenan* 'erwarten'.

accounts of War on Terror. Let me end by quoting one of the now least fashionable of once fashionable authors, Carlyle on heroism among Norsemen, Odin's men:³⁸

[T]he one thing needful for a man was *to be brave*. ... They understood in their heart that it was indispensable to be brave; that Odin would have no favour for them, but despise and thrust them out [into the realms of Hela], if they were not brave. Consider too whether there is not something in this! It is an everlasting duty, valid in our day as in that, the duty of being brave. *Valour* is still *value*. The first duty for a man is still that of subduing *Fear*. We must get rid of Fear; we cannot act at all till then.

Philologists will agree that *valour* and *value* are one. The rest is not to modern taste, or at least, not to my taste, especially not when I remember that Carlyle himself was, quill in hand, not much detached from his desk, or, after a goodly dose of laudanum, from his bed. This paper is about 'fear' in Old English, not about Carlyle's desk-bound view of valour, the everlasting duty to be brave.

³⁸ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, Centenary Edition, The Works of Thomas Carlyle, 30 vols (London, 1897–1899) V, 31–2. This chapter (the first, 'The Hero as Divinity'), was delivered as a lecture on 5 May 1840, and first published in 1841.

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