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'SOUL AND BODY' TEXTS AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE VERCELLI BOOK

This paper examines the role which 'Soul and Body' texts play in the Vercelli Book, as an indication of the way this homiletic and poetic theme was understood and interpreted in late Anglo-Saxon England. The Vercelli Book is the only considerable collection of Anglo-Saxon vernacular religious literature, in prose and in verse, to have been preserved in an Italian library. It was written by a single scribe, working in the South of England (possibly at Canterbury or Rochester), probably between AD 960- 980: every item in the collection is overtly religious and devotional[1]. The scribe seems to have copied in single texts, or small groups of texts, as they came to hand, perhaps over a considerable period of time. The scribe did not try to impose linguistic uniformity on the items of the collection, nor did he or she try to impose a single format: he or she seems to have usually preserved, perhaps with minor modifications, the layout, headings and rubrics of the exemplars. The collection, in its present state, comprises twenty-three prose items and what modern editors have considered to be six separate poems. However, an Anglo-Saxon reader of the collection might well have felt that there were only three, not six, poems. None of the poems has a title or descriptive heading. The scribe visually presented the single manuscript section which modern editors have named *The Fates of the Apostles* as an appendix to the fourteen manuscript sections which modern

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[1] See Sisam 1976; for the poetry see Krapp 1932; for the prose, Scragg 1992. In the present article, to encourage to reader to imagine the manuscript text, and to avoid confusion between the different editorial procedures of modern editors, verse texts will be quoted as punctuated in the manuscript, but set out as verse in modern lineation. Prose will be quoted as punctuated in the manuscript. Poetry will be referred to by manuscript folio (and the line as counted on the manuscript page) followed by a short title for the poem and the lineation found in modern editions, thus: 101v1-4 (*Soul* 1-5a); prose will be referred to by manuscript folio and line, followed by the number and lineation of the homily in Scragg's edition, thus: 9v10-14 (Scragg *II* 7-12).

editors have understood as a long religious epic, and have named *Andreas*. Likewise, the scribe has presented the three poems now named *Soul and Body I*, *Homiletic Fragment I* and *The Dream of the Rood* as a visually unified sequence of four lections[2]. The poem now named *Elene* is immediately followed by a single prose excerpt, now called *Homily XXIII*. In the manuscript, these two texts between them occupy two quires, and could, before the Vercelli Book was bound in its present form, have been used for reading as a separate two-quire 'booklet'. These two quires are, like the *Andreas-Fates* sequence, presented as a visually unified sequence of sixteen lections: the only notable difference between what modern editors see as a single epic, *Elene*, and the excerpt which follows it is that all of the fifteen sections of verse, except the first, are provided with Roman numerals (II to XV), while the final lection (*Homily XXIII*) does not have a roman numeral. It is clear that the scribe, or the collector who commissioned the scribe to write out the texts, did not subscribe to our rigid modern distinctions between 'prose' and 'verse'[3]. For modern readers, it is natural that all the verse in the Vercelli Book should be collected in one volume of the «Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records», while all the prose should be collected in another, *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts* (texts which of course do not include 'poems'); but the original collector and scribe (perhaps these were one and the same person, perhaps distinct persons) thought in different terms.

The importance of the Vercelli Book can be briefly stated: it is the earliest collection in which we can examine the tastes and recurrent preoccupations of a reader of both prose and verse in the Old English vernacular. Here, for the first time, we can get inside the mind of an Anglo-Saxon reader: perhaps the mind of the scribe himself, or at least the mind of the scribe's patron, the person who perhaps commissioned the scribe to copy in these religious texts in this order. None of the thirty-three verse lections in the manuscript have descriptive headings; and, while descriptive headings and liturgical rubrics are occasionally found among the twenty-three prose items, these are sporadic and unsystematic: the scribe seems to have copied in, perhaps with modifications, some of the headings and rubrics he or she found in the exemplars. In short, the only way to become familiar with the

[2] I follow earlier scholars in assuming that the manuscript folio lost after fol. 103 contained the end of the second lection of *Soul and Body* and the beginning of a separate lection, now named *Homiletic Fragment I*.

[3] See Ó Carragáin 1981.

contents of the Vercelli Book is to read the texts themselves: the scribe was not concerned to help readers to find their way easily around the contents of the manuscript. It seems unlikely that a collection presented so sporadically could ever have had a descriptive 'contents list': certainly, none survives. The Vercelli Collection seems written, or commissioned, by a single reader, in a community where scribal copying was more of a 'cottage industry' than would be needed in a scriptorium properly organized to serve the needs of an organized community.

But, as I have argued elsewhere, the personal and 'do it yourself' nature of the collection may provide an important clue as to why the book was brought to Vercelli. The holding of personal possessions (such as 'personal' books) was an aspect of older Anglo-Saxon clericalism which the Benedictine reformers of the late tenth century most firmly opposed: the Vercelli Book, precisely because it is so personal and idiosyncratic, looks more like the personal devotional commonplace book of a canon than a book compiled for a reformed Benedictine monastery. But Saint Eusebius of Vercelli was famed as the patron saint of canons[4]. It is possible to imagine that a group of canons and their friends, at a time when canons were being ejected from ecclesiastical foundations which would henceforth follow customaries based on the *Regularis Concordia*, might have felt that pilgrimage was the best solution. If so, where better to pause on the way to Rome than at a pilgrim-hospice in Vercelli, where St Eusebius had exemplified their kind of devout, but not over-communalized, community life[5]?

The first thing to note about the Vercelli Collection, therefore, is that it was gathered piecemeal. The collector (a term I use to refer to both the commissioner and the scribe, if these were different individuals) did not begin with an overall plan: rather with a well-defined set of spiritual preoccupations. These preoccupations were so narrow and urgent that they can fittingly be called obsessions: at regular intervals the Vercelli collector felt the need to include items which made him or her remember that life was short, that death was coming, and with death the Judgment; and that the end of the world itself could not be far away. He or she copied in, or ordered the scribe to copy in, as they became available, texts which corresponded to these preoccupations. Thus the collection grew gradually, by adding small groups of one, two, three or even four texts at a time. Indeed, as we have it, the Vercelli book consists of at least four earlier collections, originally cop-

[4] On Vercelli and the cult of Saint Eusebius, see Dal Covolo – Uglione – Vian 1997.

[5] See Ó Carragáin 1999.

ied into independent groups of quires, which may have existed as separate collections or separate booklets for some considerable time, before being bound together into a single collection. This obsessive preoccupation with death and Judgment is the key to understanding why the Vercelli collector brought together no less than three separate 'Soul and Body' texts, two of them in prose (*Homilies IV* and *XXII*) and one of them in verse (*Soul and Body I*).

I shall argue that each of the 'Soul and Body' texts in the collection plays an important structural role within those four original booklets. Two of the three major booklets in the collection each end with a 'Soul and Body' text. The first booklet comprises Quires 1 to 3, and contains *Homilies I* to *IV*. It ends with *Homily IV*, which contains an extended 'Soul and Body' scene. The largest booklet of the three, Booklet B, comprises Quires 4 to 17. It ends with *Homily XXII*, another extended prose 'Soul and Body' text. Within the large Booklet B, the scribe went to the trouble of recopying all the texts in what is now Quire 15. This recopied quire contains most of *The Dream of the Rood*, all of *Homily XIX*, and the beginning of *Homily XX*: the scribe carefully adjusted the layout of the texts in Quire 15 so as to conceal, as far as he was able, this laborious task of recopying. His reason is evident: he wished to bring two separate booklets, two independent sets of quires, together into a single large booklet (Booklet B, Quires 4 to 17). It is of the greatest interest that the splicing of two originally-separate collections took place precisely at the quires which contain the four verse lections which begin with *Soul and Body I* and end with *The Dream of the Rood*. This meant that the scribe brought together two separate booklets, each of which ended with a 'Soul and Body' text. There is a close codicological connection between the poem *Soul and Body I* and the prose 'Soul and Body' text now known as *Homily XXII*. It is clear that the Vercelli collector, even before the Vercelli Book was brought together in its present form, considered that, when possible, individual booklets should end with 'Soul and Body' texts. The 'Soul and Body' texts, whether in prose or in verse, provided the Vercelli Collector with an appropriate sense of an ending.

Let us first look at Booklet A, quires 1 to 3, which contains *Homilies I* to *IV*. The collector gave the four homilies of Booklet A a relatively uniform layout. None of the homilies was provided with headings (describing the contents) nor with rubrics (assigning the homily to a liturgical feast). Celia Sisam showed that the collector brought Booklet A together in three

stages[6]. These three stages may be summarized as follows: first, *Homily I* was given a quire to itself; later, *Homilies II* and *III* were added to it; and finally *Homily IV* was added, from a different exemplar. The person who chose the texts and had them copied in would have had no difficulty in finding his or her way around them. But, in the absence of headings, later readers would have had to read some or all of each text for themselves before they could make out what the booklet contained. It is probable that the collector intended the booklet for personal use, i.e. for private reading. There is a simple logic behind the booklet. It begins with a paraphrase of the most solemn gospel narrative of the year: the Passion according to St John, declaimed at the ninth hour on Good Friday. *Homily II*, a vivid account of the Last Judgment, partly in rhythmic prose, provided a complementary eschatological perspective to the relatively calm narrative of *Homily I*. If *Homily I* described the Crucifixion, *Homily II* gives a vivid account of how the Cross will reappear on the day of Judgment:

> . ond on þam dæge bið dryhtnes rod blode flowende betweox wolcnum . ond in þam dæge bið dryhtnes onsyn swiðe egeslicu . ond ondryslicu . ond on þam hiwe þe he wæs þa hine iudeas swungon ond ahengon . ond hiora spatlum him on spiwon . In þam dæge þa synfullan heofiaþ ond wepaþ . for þan hie ær noldon hira synna betan . ac hie sarige aswæmaþ ond in susle afeallað .
>
> (9v10-14; *II* 7-12)

> And on that day the Lord's Cross will be flowing with blood amidst the clouds, and on that day the Lord's countenance will be very terrifying and fearsome and in the colour that it was when the Jews whipped and hanged him and spat their spittle at him. In that day the sinful will lament and weep because they had not done penance for their sins; but they will be sore ashamed and fall into torment.

Homily II provides urgent and vivid motivation for responding to the restrained Good Friday Passion-narrative of *Homily I*.

Homily III returns the reader to 'this holy lenten season of fasting' («þyssum halgum lengten fæstenes», 12v18, *III* 15-16) as a time for repentance. For the first time in Booklet A, the reader is now encouraged to contemplate and analyse his or her own moral situation, by means of the eight deadly sins (*III* 19-24). A description of the act of confession, in the sacrament of penance, is central to *Homily III*; it lays great stress on the care

[6] Cf. Sisam 1976, p. 37.

with which the priest should encourage each penitent to examine his or her conscience. The homily goes on to describe at some length the chief exercises of the ascetic life. Together with the eight deadly sins, such a list was of practical use for a reader who wished to examine his or her conscience: «the first is confession, the second penitence; the third is vigils, the fourth is fasting; the fifth is prayers, the sixth alms» (cf. *III* 16-17). Each exercise is then described.

In *Homily IV*, the final item in the booklet, we swing for the second time in the booklet from the season of Lent to thoughts of the last things. Once more, an eschatological perspective supplies urgent motives to respond to the previous homily. At the centre of *Homily IV* comes what Don Scragg justly calls «one of the most dramatic and successful of all addresses of the soul to the body in Old English literature»[7]. This extended picture of the Last Judgment is firmly related to the life of man here on earth: the homily opens and closes with passages encouraging the reader to use what time remains to him to repent. The homily emphasizes that the devil 'each day bends his bow at us and wants to shoot his arrows (of temptation) at us' («he hæfð ælce dæge his bogan to us gebend . ond wile us scotian mid þam strælum .»: *IV* 319-20). *Homily IV* does not replicate the vivid images of the Last Judgment in *Homily II*. Instead, it relates the Judgment to the reader's daily life much more thoroughly than *Homily II* had done. The collector's decision to make this homily the final item in Booklet A shows good editorial sense. Booklet A was particularly suitable for reading in Lent: it begins with the Good Friday Passion (*Homily I*) and describes a lenten programme of repentance (*Homily III*). But the scribe presented the four homilies so that they could be easily used at any time: thus he or she omitted any directions for specific liturgical use. The Vercelli collector copied in small groups of three or four texts so that they could be read in sequence. Within Booklet A, *Homily IV* may have been added precisely because it related the lenten, eschatological and ascetic themes of the three earlier homilies to the everyday life and the everyday choices open to the collector, and provided him or her with urgent motivation to choose the good and to avoid evil.

Now, let us turn to the end of Booklet B. This large booklet ends with a set of three Rogationtide homilies, *Homilies XIX-XXI*, and with the 'Soul and Body' text now called *Homily XXII*. The presentation of *Homilies XIX-XXI* indicates that the scribe considered them to form a set. Modern studies of the language, punctuation and sources of the homilies support his view of them. The three were composed for use on the Rogation days, i.e. the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday before Ascension Thursday. Donald Scragg has demonstrated that the three Vercelli homilies were copied from a recently-compiled set of four homilies. The fourth homily of the set, for Ascension Day, was not included in the Vercelli Book; but it survives, together with another copy of Vercelli *Homilies XIX* and *XX*, in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 162, an homiliary arranged according to the liturgical year. Scragg concludes that the original set of four was compiled, not long before the Vercelli Book itself, at Canterbury. The four homilies were translated from the same Latin homiliary, and therefore they stem from the same milieu[8]. It is likely that the collector found in the exemplar the fourth homily of the set, for Ascension day, but that he or she omitted it, or instructed the scribe to omit it. Why?

The scribe left a single line blank before beginning *Homily XXII* (116v20). The layout of the homily suggests that the collector found the homily in a separate exemplar from that which provided *Homilies XIX-XXI*. *Homily XXII* begins with a plain large capital, quite unlike the zoomorphic initials used for *Homilies XIX* and *XXI*. It also differs from the preceding set in minor points of scribal usage and in dialect. But perhaps the most striking difference between *Homily XXII* and the homilies which precede it is the different audiences for which the texts were designed. *Homilies XIX-XXI* had each begun with the phrase 'men ða leofestan', the Old English equivalent of 'Dearly beloved people'; but *Homily XXII* begins less like a sermon than like an excerpt intended for private reading. The opening sentence functions like a heading; it indicates the author and theme of the text: «At this point it tells how St Isidore spoke about the parting of the soul and the body». The bulk of the text is a shortened version of Isidore's *Synonyma de Lamentatione Animae Peccatricis*. The formula 'men ða leofestan' does occur at the end, and the final pages have been written in a homiletic style. But the piece has the appearance of a literary text, primarily intended for reading, which has been given minimal adaptation so that, if necessary, it could provide themes for a sermon. In Booklet C, the next prose text (*Homily XXIII*, the account of Guthlac's temptations) is another literary text, given the same sort of minimal adaptation. I have argued elsewhere that the Guthlac excerpt was inserted after the long poem *Elene* in order to

[7] Scragg 1992, p. 88.

[8] Scragg 1992, pp. 310-314.

suggest answers to some practical problems posed by the themes of *Elene*[9]. Neither *Homily XXII* nor Homily *XXIII* begin like sermons, although both have been provided with endings appropriate to sermons. Perhaps in the Vercelli collector's circle there was a strong tradition that devotional texts in English prose, when excerpted, should be adapted to provide material for preaching. That two literary texts, *Homily XXII* at the end of Booklet B and *Homily XXIII* at the end of Booklet C, were both adapted in the same way, may provide a hint that Booklet C was intended from the beginning to complement Booklet B: there is no doubt that *Elene* (in Booklet C) complements the vision of the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood* (in Booklet B).

The three Rogation homilies, *XIX-XXI*, were copied without rubrics assigning them to the Rogation Days and, as we have seen, without the homily for Ascension Thursday which originally completed the set. It is clear that the Vercelli collector was not primarily interested in the liturgical uses to which these homilies could be put during Ascension week: in the first half of Booklet B, he or she had also provided a Rogation set which had no homily for the Ascension (namely *Homilies XI-XIV*). Rogation homilies were popular because «although they contain references to the season, [they] provide general instruction which might be appropriate at any time»[10]. This set of three homilies had another principle of internal unity: the first, *Homily XIX*, begins with the creation of the world, and the third, *Homily XXI*, ends with a vivid picture, in rhythmic prose, of the Last Judgment. To this extent, the set encompasses the history of the world. The ascetic material of *Homilies XIX-XXI* was, at the end of *Homily XXI*, complemented by thoughts of the Last Things. The set thus exemplifies the collector's need to place ascetic material within an eschatological perspective which would provide urgent motives for repentant asceticism. It is likely that the collector excluded the Ascension Day homily because it did not fit these narrow but urgent devotional preoccupations. Instead, he or she provided *Homily XXII*, our 'Soul and Body' excerpts from Isidore, from a separate exemplar: presumably because it expanded and sharpened the eschatological themes of the final section of *Homily XXI*. Just as in Booklet A the compiler supplemented the brief vivid Judgment scene of *Homily II* with the searching 'Soul and Body' descriptions of *Homily IV*, so at the end of Booklet B he or she supplemented the Judgment scene at the end of *Homily XXI* (in which, as it happens, the author had used another redaction

[9] Ó Carragain 1981.
[10] Bazire – Cross 1982, p. xix.

of the material in *Homily II*) with the 'Soul and Body' meditation of *Homily XXII*. The collector was particularly interested in 'Soul and Body' texts, which brought the reader back to the reality that he or she must soon face death. In Quire 14, the verse *Soul and Body* already dramatized the theme; by recopying, or having the scribe recopy, Quire 15, the collector ended Booklet B with another 'Soul and Body' account, *Homily XXII*. The final folios of Quire 17 were cut away, presumably when Booklet C was bound in with Booklet B. This may have been in order to re-use blank folios: but perhaps it was done because the collector considered *Homily XXII* to provide a suitable closure for that large booklet (which comprised Quires 4-17, fourteen quires in all), and wished to excise devotional texts (originally copied in after *Homily XXII*) which were irrelevant to what he or she wanted the booklet to be. The collector ensured that throughout Booklet B, for all the diverse material it contains, the reader was brought back, at more or less regular intervals, to face two major challenges: how to lead a life of repentance, and how to face death and Judgment. The urgent personal character of these devotional preoccupations suggest that the collector planned Booklet B intelligently, and primarily for personal use.

Let us finally turn to the third 'Soul and Body' text in the Vercelli Book, the two-lection poem now called *Soul and Body I*. We have seen that those two lections are the first in a four-lection sequence which culminates in the famous poem *The Dream of the Rood*, and we have also seen that the scribe recopied most of the final lection in the sequence, that is, *The Dream of the Rood*, in order to splice *Homilies XIX-XXII*, another four-lection sequence which this time ended with a 'Soul and Body' text, onto what we now have as Booklet B.

It made sense for the Vercelli Collector to copy in the verse text *Soul and Body I* immediately after *Homily XVIII*, *DE SANCTO MARTINO CONFESSORE*. That homily posed a practical problem for any Anglo-Saxon readers concerned about the fate of their souls: how could the homily be practically applied to their own spiritual situation? *Homily XVIII* tells how St Martin's birth, conversion and achievement as a missionary bishop culminated in his happy and edifying death, surrounded by his monks. Like Christ, he is completely obedient to the will of God, ready either to remain on earth with his *familia* of monks, or to accept death, the fitting end to his holy life. Death enables Martin to be an intermediary for men in the court of heaven: therefore, urges the homilist, «let us pray that he may be an in-

tercessor for us with our Lord» (*XVIII* 308-9). The homily ended at line 17 of fol. 101r: the scribe left seven lines blank at the end of the page. When readers turned over the leaf, fol. 101v provided a salutary shock: an urgent warning to think, now, of their own situation. After the optimistic and relaxing conclusion of *Homily XVIII*, the abrupt change of tone was calculated to brace any reader to the task in hand:

> **HVRV** ðæs behofað hæleða æghwylc
> þæt he his sawle sið sið sylfa geþence .
> hu þæt bið deoplic þonne se deað cymeð
> asyndreð þa sybbe þe ær samod wæron lic ond sawle [...]
>
> (101v1-4, *Soul* 1-5a)

> Indeed it behoves every man to think out for himself about his soul's journey, journey: how terrible it will be when death comes, and breaks the relationship that previously existed between body and soul [...]

The new sequence of verse texts provided a psychological counterweight to St Martin's peaceful death. Ordinary men and women, who do not lead lives of heroic sanctity, cannot count on having such a happy death: instead, they must prepare actively for death, so as to avoid the damnation that faces the evil soul.

Within his sequence of four verse lections, the compiler gave similar layouts to the first and last lections: that is, to the opening paragraphs of *Soul* and *Dream*, using visual presentation to reinforce the similar contents of each lection. *Soul* is set at night: the damned soul is condemned to seek out its body on one night each week: «symble ymbe seofon niht», 'always each seventh night' (101v7: *Soul* 10) – for three hundred years, unless the end of the world comes sooner. The damned soul describes how it is obliged to visit its body:

> sceal ic ðe nihtes swa þeah nede gesecan
> synnum gesargod ond eft sona fram þe
> hweorfan on hancred þonne halige men
> lifiendum gode lofsong doð
> secan þa hamas þe ðu me her scrife .
>
> (102v1-5, *Soul* 66-70)

> Nevertheless I am compelled to seek you out by night, injured by sins; and afterwards depart from you instantly at cockcrow, when holy men recite lauds to the Living God: seek out the dwelling-places to which you have condemned me.

The scribe set out the first paragraph of *Soul* as a distinct prologue, an introductory paragraph which sets the scene; he did the same for the opening paragraph of *Dream*. He marked the end of each prologue with a *positura*, and provided a *littera notabilior*, or small capital letter, for the beginning of the poem proper. In *Soul*, the *positura* marks the end of the description of how the damned soul is forced to visit its body once a week: the imprecations of the soul to its body, the main theme of the first section of the poem, then follow immediately:

> Sceal se gast cuman geohðum hremig
> symble ymbe seofon niht sawle findan
> þone lichoman þe hie ær lange wæg
> þreo hund wintra butan ær þeodcyning
> ælmihtig god ende worulde
> wyrcan wille weoruda dryhten :,
> **C**leopað þonne swa cearful cealdan reorde
> spreceð grimlice se gast to þam duste .
>
> (101v6-11: *Soul* 9-16)

> The ghost, the soul, must come lamenting its sorrows, always each seventh night to find the body which it had once worn for a long time: [must come] for three hundred winters, unless before that the king of nations, Almighty God the Lord of hosts, should bring about the end of the world. It calls out then so miserable, with a cold voice; the spirit speaks grimly to that dust [...]

At the end of the prologue to the *Dream*, the *positura* comes towards the end of a manuscript line, and is followed by a blank space. In that space at the end of the line, the scribe had room to write the next word, 'syllic', but instead he wrote it on the next line. The prologue ends with the description of how all creation honours 'the angel of the Lord'. In the next sentence, marked by a *littera notabilior*, the Dreamer for the first time contrasts his sinfulness with the splendour of the victorious tree:

> beheoldon þær engel dryhtnes
> ealle fægere þurh forð gesceaft ne wæs ðær huru fracodes gealga .
> **A**chine þær beheoldon halige gastas
> men ofer moldan ond eall þeos mære gesceaft :.
> **S**yllic wæs se sigebeam ond ic synnum fah
> for wundod mid wommum
>
> (104v13-18; *Dream* 9-14)

> All fair things throughout time and creation looked upon the angel of the Lord there. Indeed, that was not a criminal's gallows: but holy spirits looked upon it there, men over all the earth, and all this glorious creation. Splendid was the victory-tree, and I was stained (made hateful) by sins, terribly wounded by stains (sins).

Soul and *Dream* both begin with a passage involving the word 'engel'. In each case, the word has puzzled editors; and in each case 'engel' is closely identified with Christ. George Krapp pointed out that «as the [Vercelli] text stands, 'engel' is appositive to 'meotud', l. 29, which implies an unusual sense of 'engel'»[11]. He went on to give examples of 'engel' meaning Christ. In the Vercelli text, the 'angel' becomes the equivalent of 'almighty God' and is also clearly identified with Christ, who 'redeemed you with the holy blood'. The Vercelli text eliminates any possibility of interpreting the angel as simply an intermediary, in the way implied by the Exeter original 'þurh engel' ('by means of an angel'). The Vercelli text makes the 'engel' more important. This variant looks like scribal editing, either by the Vercelli scribe or by the scribe whose work he or she copied. Before we get to the remarkable image 'engel dryhtnes' of line 9b of *The Dream of the Rood*, we have already read, in the first lection of *Soul*, about an 'engel' who is identified with Christ[12].

The second manuscript lection of the sequence, the second part of *Soul*, describes how a saved soul comes to its body on a 'happier errand' (129-30). While the damned soul had berated its body for betraying it into sin, the blessed soul praises its body. It looks forward to Judgment Day, when it can lead its soul to heaven: another foretaste of the *Dream*, where the Dreamer hopes that the Cross will lead him to heaven:

> þær ic þe moste mid me lædan
> þæt wyt englas ealle gesawon
> heofona wuldor swylc swa ðu me ær her scrife
>
> (103v4-6; *Soul* 139-41)

> Where I may lead you with me so that we two could see all the angels, the glory of heaven, exactly as you have here made my destiny.

[11] Krapp 1932, p. 126.

[12] For a recent discussion of the significance of the phrase 'engel dryhtnes' in *The Dream of the Rood*, see Ó Carragain 2005, p. 325.

In the Vercelli Book, a missing folio after 103 has deprived us of the end of the second lection of *Soul* and the beginning of the third in the sequence, now labelled a *Homiletic Fragment*. This fragmentary lection is also concerned with messages: it opens with a vivid picture of untrustworthy speech, backbiting and betrayal:

> eorl oðerne mid æfþancum
> ond mid teonwordum tæleð behindan
> spreceð fægere beforan ond þæt fæcen swa swa þeah
> hafað in his heortan hord unclæne
> byð þonne þæs wommes gewita weruda dryhten ;
>
> (104r1-5, *Fragment* 3-7)

> One man with insults and calumnies slanders the other behind his back; speaks fair to his face, but nevertheless has treachery in his heart, an unclean hoard. The Lord of hosts then becomes the witness of that filth (stain, sin).

The theme of the lection is that, in these last days before the Judgment, you cannot trust anyone. Sinners proliferate upon the earth: no one can depend on any of their promises or honeyed words:

> swa bioð gelice þa leasan men
> þa ðe mid tungan treowa gehataþ
> fægerum wordum facenlice þencaþ
> þonne hie æt nehstan nearwe beswicaþ
> hafað on gehatum hunigsmæccas
> smeðne sybcwide ond on siofan innan
> þurh deofles cræft dyrne wunde .
>
> (104r14-18, *Fragment* 24-30)

> That is what deceitful men are like, who with their tongues swear fidelity with fair words, but are treacherously thinking out when they may cunningly find the moment to betray. Their promises have all the taste of honey, smooth speech of friendship, and within their mind through the devil's power, secret wounds.

It would be difficult to imagine a more fitting counterweight to this grim vision of universal treachery and untrustworthiness than the opening of the fourth and final lection in the series:

> **HW**æt ic swefna cyst secgan wylle
> hæt me gemætte to midre nihte
> syðþan reordberend reste wunedon .
> þuhte me þæt ic gesawe syllicre treow
>
> (104v7-9: *Dream* 1-4)

> O, I wish to tell of the best of dreams, that I dreamed at the middle of the night, when all voice-bearers were at rest. It seemed to me that I saw a very splendid tree [or, good faith, fidelity, trust].

The *Dream* provides exactly what clerical readers working their way through the succession of verse lections, and applying the contents to their own spiritual life, would have been longing for at this point: a vision which is trustworthy and worthy of faith. The vivid images of treachery and betrayal in the *Fragment* prepared readers for the pun at the beginning of the *Dream* (4), between the neuter noun *treow* 'tree, wood' and the feminine noun *treow* 'fidelity, faith, pledge, grace'. This final lection provides what the reader needs: consolation, something to trust.

The *Dream* provides a timely answer to disturbing questions posed by the preceding verse lections. This pattern, of problem and answer, occurs twice in the four lections. The grim picture of what damnation would involve for soul and body (*Soul*, lection one) was answered by the consoling message of peace and praise brought to its body by the good soul (*Soul*, lection two). The warning of the *Fragment* (lection three), that men are not to be trusted, is now answered in the *Dream* (lection four) by a messenger who is identified with Christ himself, and a message which can certainly be trusted, of how to achieve union with Christ: 'But through the Cross each soul who wishes to dwell with the Ruler must seek out the Kingdom, away from the way of earth' (*Dream* 119-21). All four lections progressively explore the question, whether human speech will be of any use, or even possible, on the Day of Judgment. The first part of the *Soul* (lection one), and later the *Dream* (lection four), both warn that on that terrible day the time for speech will be over. The challenge of Christ as Judge will reduce sinners to silence. Both in lection one (*Soul*) and in lection four (*Dream*) the very similar rhetorical questions, what can sinners say in their defence on the Last Day (expected answer: nothing), are marked out by heavy punctuation and *litterae notabiliores*:

> þonne ðu for unc bæm andwyrdan scealt
> on ðam miclan dæge þonne mannum beoð
> wunda onwrigene þa ðe on worulde ær
> fyrenfulle men fyrn geworhton .
> Ðonne wyle dryhten sylf dæda gehyran
> hæleða gehwylces heofena scippend
> æt ealra manna gehwæs muðes reorde
> wunde wiðerlean . Ac hwæt wylt ðu þær .
> on þam domdæge dryhtne secgan .
>
> (102v16-22, *Soul* 88-96)

> Then you must answer for the pair of us on the Great Day, when to men will be revealed the wounds which formerly, here on earth, crime-filled men inflicted long ago. Then will the Lord Himself, the creator of the heavens, listen to the deeds of each of mankind; receive from the mouth of every single human being a recompense for these wounds. But what will you there, on the Day of Judgment, say to the Lord?

This passage recalls the prophecy that 'they will look on him whom they have pierced' and that 'on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail', at the moment of Christ's death in John's Passion, read on Good Friday (Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34; Revelation 1:7-8). When this prophecy is fulfilled, the evil body will be reduced to silence. It will be unable to offer a defence 'when the Lord will be enraged at the Judgment' («þonne reðe bið dryhten æt þam dome», *Soul* 99-100). Indeed, the accusations of its own damned soul already leave the body speechless:

> liget dust þær hit wæs .
> ne mæg him ondsware ænige gehatan
> geomrum gaste geoce oððe frofre .
>
> (103r5-7; *Soul* 105-7)
>
> The dust lies where it was: it cannot offer any answer, neither defence nor consolation, to the miserable spirit.

In lection two, on the other hand, the blessed soul assures its body that they need not fear for the answer they will both be able to give at the Judgment:

> ne þurfon wyt beon cearie æt cyme dryhtnes .
> ne þære andsware yfele habban
> sorge in reðre . ac wyt sylfe magon
> æt ðam dome þær . dædum agilpan .
> hwylce earnunga uncre wæron .
>
> (103v20-3, *Soul* 160–4)
>
> We two need not be worried at the coming of the Lord, nor need we be preoccupied about the answer, with sorrow in our mind: instead, the pair of us may, there at the Judgment, boast of our deeds, at what reward the two of us have earned.

In the corresponding description of the *Dream*, another cluster of *litterae notabiliores*, and heavy punctuation, indicate that Christ's challenge on the last day, and the difficulty of replying to it in words, was an urgent preoccu-

pation of early readers. In the face of Christ's challenge the *Dream* proposes, not words, but the Cross: that symbol, identifying its bearer with Christ's defeat of death, provides a mute but effective answer to Christ's challenge.

It is important to note that these four verse lections explore the four last things (death, Judgment, Hell and Heaven) in a coherent progression. The two sections of *Soul*, damned and saved, are set in the period between death and the end of the world. This period is indeterminate, because God may at any time bring the world to an end (*Soul* 5-14). These first two lections present the reader with an 'either/or' choice. The spiritual strategy of the poem is drastic, perhaps brutal: it tries to frighten the reader into conversion by imagining the time between his death and the Last Day, when choice and conversion will no longer be possible, and the readers or listeners will be frozen for eternity in the destiny that their deeds on earth have shaped for them. The third lection, *Fragment*, modifies this stark vision. It shifts the reader's attention back from the time after death to the dangers and possibilities of the present life. As the world nears its end, the devil has more power than ever before: so much has loyalty declined among degenerate mankind (*Fragment* 24-39). But the reader still has time to repent, to transcend the treacherous world:

> uton to þam beteran nu we cunnon
> hycgan ond hyhtan þæt we heofones leoht
> uppe mid englum agan moton
> gastum to geoce þonne god wile
> eorðan lifes ende gewyrcan :,
>
> (104v2-5, *Fragment* 43-7)

> Let us meditate on and hope for what is better, now while we are able: so that we may possess the light of heaven above among the angels, safety for souls, when God will make an end of life on earth.

The fourth lection, the *Dream*, resolves the problems posed by the three lections that have gone before. Conversion, imagined as no longer possible in *Soul*, and in the *Fragment* as barely possible, is now enacted in the experience of the Dreamer. At the end of the *Dream*, he no longer fears death nor his lack of friends: with joyful heroism he longs for death, confident in the patronage of the Cross who will bring him straight to heaven. The Dreamer provides a model of how the reader should react to the sequence of four lections; the Cross functions as a patron against the dangers of death; the *Dream* even provides the words with which to begin prayer to Christ, who has vanquished death and hell:

> si me dryhten freond
> se ðe her on eorþan ær þrowode
> on þam gealgtreowe for guman synnum
> he us onlysde ond us lif forgeaf
> heofonlicne ham hiht wæs geniwad
> mid bledum ond mid blisse þam þe þær bryne þolodon .
>
> (106r25-9, *Dream* 144-9)

> May the Lord be a friend to me, who here on earth previously suffered on the gallows-tree for the sins of the man [Adam?]. He set us free and gave us life, a heavenly home. Hope was renewed, with happiness and bliss, for those who there suffered burning [...]

It is not impossible that the Vercelli compiler (whether patron or scribe) first brought together these four lections in the present sequence. But it is perhaps more likely that they had already circulated together for some time. Perhaps they once formed a separate pocket-book, one of the unbound 'folded manuscripts' circulating as single quires, known to exist in the late Anglo-Saxon period. *Soul* seems to be a composite poem: the last lines of the first lection, on the Damned Soul (125-6), recall the opening lines; they read like the final lines of a complete poem. The second lection, on the Blessed Soul, only survives in the Vercelli Book. In the Exeter Book, the first lection is followed directly by a different poem, *Deor*. Douglas Moffat concluded that the second lection of *Soul* is «a later, less inspired addition, probably not by the same poet»[13]. If so, the second lection might have been added as part of a larger project. A scribal editor, who was able to write competent but not outstanding verse, may have constructed from two pre-existing lections (the first section of *Soul*, and also the *Dream*) a unified set of four verse lections designed to help the reader imagine what it would be like to face death. If the scribal editor composed the second lection of *Soul*, he or she may also have composed what appears to have been the third lection in the sequence, *Fragment*, or edited it from existing material, in order to put readers into a suitable frame of mind to react to the reassuring images of the *Dream*.

I have tried to show in this paper that the three 'Soul and Body' texts which the Vercelli collector brought together were pivotal to his or her interests and his preoccupations, and enable us better to understand the ways in which the collection was gathered. They provided the collector, as no

[13] Moffat 1990, p. 44.

other theme did, with a fitting sense of an ending: in particular, with a homiletic motif which established a clear connection between the fate of the individual soul and the good or bad actions which, during this life, can decide that fate.

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