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Wulf and Eadwacer Reloaded: John of Antioch and the Starving Wife of Odoacer

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Abstract: This study re-examines the idea that Eadwacer in the short Old English 'Elegy' *Wulf and Eadwacer* is a literary representation of the historical Odoacer, a fifth-century Germanic king of Italy, and Wulf is his historical and traditional literary opponent, Theoderic the Ostrogoth. The text of the poem is compared for the first time with the historical records of the contention between Odoacer and Theoderic, and particularly of the siege of Ravenna (490–493). A new and revealing analogue is identified in a seventh-century chronicle of this event by John of Antioch, which introduces Odoacer's wife as a woman who is starved to death, mirroring a puzzling detail in the poem. It is argued that the historical record (itself featuring literary influence) explains the characters and scenario of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, which can thus be re-interpreted as a linguistically highly adept and bitter lyric spoken by Eadwacer's wife, lamenting her marriage to him and longing for her outlaw love, Wulf, set in the landscape of northern Italy. It is argued that it is a unique example of a poem in the (possibly Continental-derived) Anglo-Saxon Theoderic tradition, which was otherwise lost save for a few brief allusions in other poems. It is also suggested that the importance of its speaker and her feminine viewpoint ought to be incorporated into our concept of "heroic" poetry, as it existed in England by the latter tenth century.

Key terms: Old English poetry, Old English elegies, Exeter Book, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, heroic poetry, Germanic vernacular literature, Theoderic, Odoacer, chronicles, John of Antioch

1 "Of this I can make no sense"

Wulf and Eadwacer is the title given by modern critical convention to an untitled, anonymous poem of only nineteen lines found on folios 100b–101a of the Exeter Book, a collection of Old English poems mostly in West Saxon – save for a number

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of word-forms from other dialects – which was copied in the latter half of the tenth century.[1] It is usually also counted among the Exeter Book's 'Elegies', a varying grouping of poems marked by a similar plaintive tone and opaque subject-matter. However, line-for-line, *Wulf and Eadwacer* has proved one of the most enduringly puzzling works in Old English. Indeed, criticism of it began in bafflement when in 1842 the Exeter Book's first editor Benjamin Thorpe confessed: "Of this I can make no sense, nor am I able to arrange the verses" (1842: 527). He did not attempt a translation and entitled it "Riddle I" (it is followed in the Exeter Book by fifty-nine undoubted riddles) – a label which stuck for the next forty or so years. Since the end of the nineteenth century, in well over a hundred published articles and commentaries on the edited text, it has proved amenable (or resistant) to just about any critical method or explication of its scenario. However, the upshot seems to be that, like Thorpe, we still do not know who or what it is about.[2]

Yet it is possible to overstate the epistemological problem posed by the poem's opacity. As a formulation of the conundrum presented by the poem and its fellow Elegies, perhaps T. A. Shippey's cannot be bettered:

> The existence of other poems in the 'elegiac' group, notably *The Wife's Lament*, *The Husband's Message* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, reminds us that Anglo-Saxon audiences must have had a high tolerance of enigma – or else some extra information, now completely lost, about these poems (1972: 71).

2 The Rise and Fall of Eadwacer

The question of Shippey's "extra information" has often been considered. This began in 1888, in a short review by Henry Bradley, who gave the *coup de grace* to the "riddle" interpretation and was the first to suggest that it was a fragment of dramatic monologue "drawn from history or Teutonic legend, or purely the invention of the poet" (1888: 198), the true meaning of which might be revealed if we had the entire poem.[3] In 1902, Israel Gollancz responded to two articles arguing

1 The Exeter Book is most recently dated between 950 and 975: Muir (2000: I, 2 and n. 1); Conner (1993: 76–77).

2 See Bjork (2020). Noting Thorpe's perplexity, he says: "No other scholar has made convincing sense of it, either. On all levels, it is replete with indeterminacy." Bjork gives a useful account of some of the approaches.

3 Bradley only scotched the snake: see its revival in Anderson (1986: 19–56); Klinck (1984 and 1992: 20, 56–60, 197–199), and North (1994).

for an Old Norse literary source,[4] and proposed that Eadwacer was Odoacer, a historical fifth-century king of Italy, and Wulf was Theoderic the Ostrogoth (the Dietrich of the Middle High German verse-epics):

> Wolf, the exiled prince, living the life of an outlaw; his wife kept from him by the mighty foe, Odoacer, to whose embraces she at last yields herself; the sudden return of the exile, who carries off the child of the seemingly faithless wife; the cowardice of the tyrant (Gollancz 1902: 552).

Gollancz saw parallels in the ninth-century Old High German *Hildebrandslied*, in which Theoderic was driven away by Odoacer's enmity, and in the Old English poem *Deor*, in which Theoderic's exile lasted thirty years. But a direct source was still hard to see, and although he thought there were "parallel" episodes in the mass of literature about Dietrich, he conceded that he could not point to "any particular incident directly treated" in *Wulf and Eadwacer* (1902: 552). He said "internal evidence would seem to connect the poem with the glorious story of Theoderic the Great, whose ultimate triumph over Odoacer made him conqueror of Italy" (*ibid.*). Bradley immediately picked up the ball and noted that Lawrence and Schofield had failed to account for the name *Eadwacer*, which he thought was "the only possible English form" of the name of Odoacer, an identification which he though could be made "in all probability", though he saw no evidence that Wulf was necessarily Theoderic (1902: 758).

The idea of a connection with the story of Odoacer and Theoderic was considered by Alois Brandl, who also saw no literary parallels. He speculated that it was a separate Anglo-Saxon development of the Odoacer or Wolfdietrich stories or "a completely unknown outlaw-story" (1905: 977). Rudolf Imelmann (1907) wrote a lengthy monograph arguing boldly that Eadwacer was the same character as Wulf, and that he was not only the hero of the poem but also of the Old English Elegies *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message*. He identified Eadwacer/Wulf as a Saxon sea-rover and proto-Viking named Adovacrius or Adovagrius who – according to a single passage in Gregory of Tours' *Historia Francorum* – had raided in Francia and (under the name Odovacrius) ruled in northern Italy. Unfortunately for Imelmann's theory, Gregory had conflated two sources about two different men.[5]

Levin Schücking, probably also mindful of the absence of literary Odoacer-analogues, avoided mention of him but nonetheless saw a parallel to the poem's

4 Gollancz (1902), responding to Lawrence (1902) and Schofield (1902). Schofield's idea has been resurrected in North (1994), Hough (1995), Rozano-García (2021), and Sebo (2021).

5 See MacGeorge (2002: 104–106). She cogently argues that the different spellings of the name indicate the existence of two sources.

theme of wolves in the version of the Middle High German Wolfdietrich-legend known as *Wolfdietrich B*, which he seems to have regarded as potentially part of the "Dietrichsage".[6]

In 1969, Ruth Lehmann said, almost in passing, that she thought Imelmann "may have been on the right track" – apparently unaware of his mixture of Odoacers. But while she was prepared to entertain some connection with the story of Odoacer and Theodric, she agnostically concluded that the legend behind the poem could only be guessed at (Lehmann 1969: 163, 165). Since her essay, the identification with Odoacer has been dismissed – either by implication or in particular[7] – although the idea that the poem represents some unknown (or known) narrative occurs now and again.[8]

The idea so briefly stated by Gollancz and Bradley has never caught on, seemingly for the want of an exact or close enough literary parallel. And it has been said, reasonably enough, that "[n]o known legend of Odoacer matches this poem's details" (North 1994: 52). However, there is no explanation apart from Gollancz's and Bradley's which convincingly accounts for a name which is central to the poem. As the philologist Bradley correctly said, it is indeed the Anglo-Saxon (or Old English) form of Odoacer. However, I propose to argue in this study that the outcome is radically different if, as Gollancz suggested, one looks not for the literary parallels but for historical ones (although it will become clear that the two are not always easy to distinguish). Accordingly, I intend to examine the historical recordings of the contention between Odoacer and Theoderic and to argue that they show a surprising correspondence with *Wulf and Eadwacer*. I also identify – I believe for the first time – a significant analogue to the poem in the account of a seventh-century Byzantine Greek historian, John of Antioch, which, I contend, reveals to us a significant stage in the mysterious process by which what we call 'history' became what we call 'literature'. In light of this, I offer a discussion of the poem's cruces and a reinterpretation of it as a short lyric of doomed love and feminine longing, based on a historical episode in the history of Odoacer and Theoderic (who appears under the *nom de guerre* Wulf). I shall also argue that, despite its female speaker and feminine viewpoint, this is a poem squarely

6 See Schücking (1919: 16–17). Apart from the similarity in the names Wolf-Dietrich and Dietrich, no clear relationship between the two characters and their stories has ever been established.

7 See Fanagan (1976: 131). North (1994: 52 and n. 75) says that the name Eadwacer was "a reference to the Gothic legend [*sic*] of Odoacer and Theoderic, might have been coined to throw us off the track further".

8 See e.g. Baker (1981) and Harris (1983: 48–49). There have been various suggestions (which I do not list here) that the poem represents a narrative from the *Hjaðningavíg* legend, the Old Norse Helgi-poems and/or the story of Weland the smith.

in the "heroic" tradition, and that our definitions of that masculinised genre should be readjusted accordingly. Finally, I discuss *Wulf and Eadwacer*'s likely origins and identify them in the literary-historical tradition of poetry about the hero Theoderic, which – apart from *Wulf and Eadwacer* – almost entirely disappeared in England.

3 The (Hi)story of Odoacer and Theoderic

3.1 The Contention of Odoacer and Theoderic: A Summary

By distilling the historical sources I examine in this section, we can summarise the historical rivalry between Odoacer and Theoderic as follows:[9] Odoacer, a man of Germanic birth, became a general in the Roman army.[10] In 476, he led a military revolt which deposed Romulus Augustulus, a boy or youth who had been installed by his father, the Roman general Orestes, as the emperor of the Western Roman Empire (the last, as it turned out). At least initially, Odoacer may have been nominally subordinate to Romulus's deposed predecessor Julius Nepos (until Julius's murder in Dalmatia in 480), and thereafter to Zeno, the emperor of the Eastern Empire. But although Odoacer used the Roman title *patricius* and ruled with the consent of the Senate, he also styled himself *rex* of Italy and ruled it *de facto* if not quite *de jure*. In the late 480s, when Constantinople found itself threatened by the armies of Theoderic, king of the Ostrogoths, the eastern emperor tempted him away with the promise of rule in Italy if he toppled Odoacer, who was now seen by Constantinople as a rival. In 489 and 490, there was a series of battles and sieges in northern Italy in which Odoacer or his forces were mostly

9 See the chronicle entries with respect to the siege of Ravenna and its end, particularly Anonymus Valesianus and Agnellus, in *Chronica minora* 1: 316–321. See also the *Chronicon* of Marcellinus *comes* (*d.* after 534) in *Chronica minora* 2: 93; *Agnelli Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis* (Holder-Egger 1878: 303–304); the (very brief) accounts of the Gothic monk Jordanes (writing in Byzantium in 551–552) in *Romana* 348–349 and *Getica*, LVII.293–295 (Mommsen 1882: 45, 134); and the account of Procopius in his *History of the Wars*, V.i.24–26 (Dewing 1914–1940: III, 10–11). A precise chronology (followed here) is given by Hodgkin (1879–1916: III [first ed.], 233–235) based on the Latin chronicles and John of Antioch. – All translations in this article are my own, unless stated otherwise.

10 Odoacer was variously described in late antique sources as a Scirian, a Rugian, a Herulian, a Goth, and a *Torcilingus* (= Thuringian?). Some later writers regarded him as an eastern Roman or a Hun. Penny MacGeorge gives a lucid and authoritative account of the vexed question of Odoacer's ethnicity, with good reasons for concluding that he was of mixed but Germanic birth (2002: 284–287).

defeated by Theoderic. In 490, Odoacer retreated to Ravenna. This city had previously been chosen as the new capital of the Western Roman Empire because it was easily defensible, being surrounded, Venice-like, by a marshy lagoon dotted with islands, and it had access to the Adriatic by a waterway leading to its port. Theoderic laid siege to it for three years until 493.

Sparse details of the history of the siege can be found in a small number of Latin and Greek texts of the early sixth to eighth centuries.[11] The account we find – in composite – is that after Odoacer withdrew to Ravenna he withstood Theoderic's siege for three years, even occasionally sallying out and causing destruction among the Goths. However, by February 493, Theoderic was in possession of the rest of Italy, and Ravenna was reduced to terrible starvation. Accordingly, a deal was brokered between Theoderic and Odoacer by John, Archbishop of Ravenna. On 25 February, Odoacer's son, named Thela or Okla, was handed to Theoderic as a hostage, and on 27 February, a treaty was concluded. On 5 March, Theoderic was admitted to the city by John. It is uncertain whether the terms of the agreement had been simply to avoid bloodshed or – as later Greek authors like Procopius and John of Antioch suggested – for Odoacer and Theoderic to rule jointly. Whatever they were, a few days later (John of Antioch says not quite ten) Odoacer was dead, killed by Theoderic personally. Theoderic then massacred Odoacer's followers, wiped out his family and claimed the throne of Italy for himself. While preserving the outward forms of a subject of the emperor at Constantinople, Theoderic ruled Italy as absolutely as he pleased until his own death in 526.

3.2 The Italian Sources

For several of the early Italian writers and chroniclers it was Odoacer who was the villain of the piece, even though, ultimately, he was the victim. In the "sonorous and servile" *Panegyric Spoken to Theoderic*, composed about 507 by Ennodius, a Gallic clergyman at Theoderic's capital of Pavia in northern Italy (and later its bishop),[12] Odoacer was wholly bad – a usurper, tyrant, wastrel, and instrument of the devil, an *intestinus populator* 'internal destroyer' who had bled his subjects white. Theoderic, however, he welcomed fervently as Odoacer's nemesis and the deliverer of Italy.[13] Ennodius also claimed that a conciliatory and honourable Theoderic was too trusting of the apparently defeated Odoacer. He offered him

11 Collected as *Chronica minora* in Mommsen (1892–1898) (henceforth "*Chronica minora* 1, 2, 3").
12 *Panegyricus dictus clementissimo regi Theoderico ab Ennodio Dei famulo*, in Vogel (1885: 203–214). The description "sonorous and servile" was Gibbon's (1897: VII, 193, n. 31).
13 *Panegyricus*, VI–X, in Vogel (1885: 206–209).

peace and expected him to stand by his oath, but in the end was forced to anticipate his treachery: *consumpta res est prospero fatalique bello: succisa est Odovacris praesumptio, postquam eum contigit de fallacia non iuvari* 'The matter was ended by a fortunate and deadly battle. The presumption of Odoacer was cut down after it so happened that he was not assisted by deception'.[14]

In 519, Cassiodorus (then Theoderic's *chef de cabinet*) wrote or superintended the compilation of a chronicle of the world which gave the Ostrogothic official line:[15] [493] *Hoc cons[ule] d[omi]n[us] rex Theodericus Ravenna ingressus Odovacrem molientem sibi insidias interemit* 'During this consulate, the lord king Theoderic, having entered Ravenna, kills Odovacar who [or 'as he'] was fomenting plots against him'. In the most detailed account of these early narratives, Anonymus Valesianus, an unidentified historical epitomator, writing probably after 526 but before 535, gave the earliest account which supplies some of the background details:[16]

> igitur coactus Odoacar dedit filium suum Thelanem obsidem Theoderico accepta fide securum se esse de sanguine. sic ingressus est Theodericus: et post aliquot dies, dum ei Odoacar insidiaretur, detectus ante ab eo praeventus in palatio, manu sua Theodericus eum in Lauretum pervenientem gladio interemit. cuius exercitus in eadem die iussu Theoderici omnes interfecti sunt, quivis ubi potuit reperiri, cum omni stirpe sua.
>
> 'Thus placed under compulsion, Odoacer gave his son Thela to Theoderic as a hostage, once he had received an oath that he was safe from bloodshed. So Theoderic entered. And after a few days, when Odoacer, who was plotting against him, was detected by him and intercepted in the palace as he was coming through the Lauretum [laurel grove], Theoderic ran him through with a sword by his own hand. On the same day, by order of Theoderic, all his army was killed, whoever could be found, together with all his family'.

Other accounts were neutral, or at least oblivious to or uninterested in wrongdoing on either side. The *Fasti Vindobonenses Priores* (Waitz's *Annales Ravennates*) says: *et occisus est Odoacar rex a rege Theodorico in palatio cum commilitibus suis* 'and king Odoacer was killed by king Theoderic in the palace with his fellow warriors' (*Chronica minora* 1: 320). Agnellus records: *post paucos dies occidit Odovacrem rex in palatio in Lauro cum comitibus suis* 'after a few days the king killed Odoacer in the laurel grove in the palace, together with his nobil-

14 *Panegyricus*, X, in Vogel (1885: 209).

15 *Cassiodori senatoris chronica ad a. DXIX*, in *Chronica minora* 2: 159.

16 *Anonymi Valesiani pars posterior*, 11.55–56, in *Chronica minora* 1: 320. But Anonymus (or his source) changed his mind about Theoderic. See Lienert (2008: 33): "Bis zum Jahr 518 ist die Darstellung theodorichfreundlich, danach theodorichfeindlich" ('Up to 518 the portrayal is friendly to Theoderic, thereafter hostile to him').

ity' (*Chronica minora* 1: 321). The *Auctorii Havnii Ordo Prior*, however, was uniquely anti-Theoderic: *pacis specie Odoachrem interfecit cum collegas omnes, qui regni praesidium amministrabant* 'Under the show of a treaty he killed Odoacer with all his companions who were responsible for the defence of the realm' (*Chronica minora* 1: 320).

Even if Theoderic was initially regarded by Italians as a plus for the troubled country, by the time of his death in 526 he had become anathema to the Catholic Church at Rome, who saw him as a cruel, heretical tyrant. He had always been an Arian and thus a heretic, but in the last three years of his reign he was held responsible for the judicial murders of the senators Symmachus and his son-in-law Boethius (the author of *De Consolatione Philosophiae*), on trumped-up charges of treason, and in the last year of his life for the maltreatment and death in prison of Pope John I. Gregory of Tours did not recognise the Trinity-denying Arians as Christians at all and was certain that Theoderic was bound for hell, his damnation being God's vengeance on him for massacring Catholic Christians in Italy and the death of John.[17] Pope Gregory the Great (*r.* 590–604) recounted an anecdote told him by a relative, according to which a hermit on the Sicilian island of Lipari had seen the souls of Pope John and Symmachus (not Boethius, note), leading the barefoot and manacled soul of the recently-deceased Theoderic into a nearby volcano, thus answering the interesting theological question of whether the fires of hell were physically real (yes they were).[18] This remained the Roman Church's official view of Theoderic, including, as we shall see, in Anglo-Saxon England.

3.3 The Eastern Roman Sources

Eastern Roman historians, however, tended to be more hostile to Theoderic than their secular Italian counterparts, and thus less so to Odoacer. Marcellinus *comes*, a Greek official and chronicler under Justinian, wrote (*s. a.* 489): *Odoacer itidem rex Gothorum metu Theodorici perterritus Ravennam est clausus. Porro ab eodem Theoderico periuriis inlectus interfectusque est* 'Odoacer, also king of the Goths, was thoroughly terrified by fear of Theoderic and shut himself in Ravenna. Later he was lured by false oaths by the same Theoderic and killed' (*Chronica minora* 2: 93). Theodor Mommsen quotes another hostile Byzantine chronicle entry: *a Theo-*

17 See, for instance, Gregory of Tours (*c.* 538–594) *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, ch. 39, in Krusch (1885: 63), and Gregory's *Historia Francorum*, III, introduction and ch. 31.

18 See the extract from his *Dialogues*, IV.31, in Lienert (2008: 42–43).

dorico in fidem susceptus ab eo truculenter peremptus est 'Having taken an oath from Theoderic, he was savagely murdered' (1872: 335, n. 6). In 551–552 in Constantinople, the Italian Gothic cleric Jordanes compiled his *Getica*, partly from a now lost but undoubtedly pro-Theoderic history of the Goths by Cassiodorus. According to Jordanes, the siege of Ravenna ended when Odoacer, isolated and starved out, sought forgiveness. Theoderic at first granted him this, but then 'removed him from this light' (*ab hac luce privavit*) – i.e. killed him (*Getica*, LVII.293–295; Mommsen 1882: 134). This does not sound particularly complimentary to Theoderic. But even though Jordanes was himself a Goth, his epitome (with a measly three days to read and absorb Cassiodorus's twelve-volume mammoth) was not supposed to be pro-Gothic. At the time of its writing in 551/2 in Constantinople, the Eastern Romans had finally beaten the Goths in Italy, and his work was, as it were, the full stop to their part in the history of Rome. Theoderic's achievements are thus somewhat underemphasised. But the *Getica* stands in odd contrast to the Jordanes' approving account of Theoderic's reign in his epitome of Roman history, the *Romana*, the writing of which was probably interrupted by the commission to write the *Getica*. In the *Romana*, Odoacer was killed by the just ruler Theoderic to whom he was suspect (*suspectus*) (*Romana*, 348; Mommsen 1882: 45). The discrepancy may be due to the fact that the *Romana* was based on Italian sources, and its purpose was to emphasise the continuity of Roman republican government in Italy under a different dispensation, not to gloat over a beaten foe. Either that, or, by the mid-sixth century, no one had quite worked out what to make of all the world-shaking turmoil. At any rate, in neither history was Jordanes much interested in the contest between the two.

In his *Gothic Wars*, Procopius, the historian of the reign of Justinian, saw Theoderic as a just and effective ruler until he blotted his copybook with the tyrannical persecutions of Symmachus and Boethius. He describes the negotiations, facilitated by Archbishop John, which led to the surrender of Ravenna (*Wars*, V.i.24–26; Dewing 1914–1940: III, 10–11). According to their agreement, Theoderic was to enter Ravenna, but he and Odoacer would both live in Ravenna and 'have a way of living that was fair and equal' (*ἐπὶ τῇ ἴσῃ καί ὁμοίᾳ δίαιταν ἔχουσι*). This was observed for a while, but then Theoderic caught Odoacer desiring to plot against him. However, as if dubious of the anti-Odoacer case, Procopius adds *ὥς φασιν* 'thus the rumour' or 'thus the accounts'; and for him it is Theoderic who 'with treacherous intent' (*νῷ τε δολερῷ*)[19] invited Odoacer to a feast where he killed him. As to detail, Procopius is the only source which is specific that Theo-

19 Another manuscript reads *τρόπω τε δολερῷ* 'in a treacherous manner' (*Wars*, Dewing 1914–1940: III, 10, n. 1).

deric's killing of Odoacer took place at a banquet. This may have been true or invented to illustrate Theoderic's cynical ruthlessness in catching his trusting rival off-guard. Nonetheless, it finds its way into most modern histories.[20]

In the Greek history (up to 563) of the Syrian monk, John Malalas (roughly contemporary with Procopius), Theoderic is the son rather than the nephew of Valamer, and he had besieged Rome not Ravenna, then under the command of Odoacer, 'king of the barbarians'. Once hostilities began, the Senate united to betray Odoacer and, without a fight, Theoderic took the city and captured Odoacer, whom he killed. Theoderic then ruled for forty-seven [*sic*] years – apparently wisely, as illustrated by an anecdote in which he executed some time-wasting lawyers.[21] This rather discrepant account makes it seem as if Theoderic were redeeming the Roman empire from barbarians under the direction of the Senate, a point of view consistent with the earlier Italian accounts.

3.4 John of Antioch and the Wife of Odoacer

However, it is among the Greek sources that we find a significant illumination of the development of the story of Odoacer and Theoderic which sheds light on *Wulf and Eadwacer*. It has not to my knowledge been previously considered with respect to the poem.[22] This is an account written by John of Antioch, a Greek monastic chronicler of the first half of the seventh century (though preserved in texts of the tenth), which I quote in full:[23]

> Ὅτι Θεοδώρικος καὶ Ὀδόακρος συνθήκας καὶ ξυμβάσεις ἐποιήσαντο πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἄμφω ἡγεῖσθαι τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς, καὶ λοιπὸν ἦσαν αὐτοῖς ἐντεύξεις παρ' ἀλλήλους φοιτῶσι συχναί. Οὕπω δὲ ἠνύετο ἡμέρα δεκάτη, καὶ, τοῦ Ὀδοάκρου γενομένου παρὰ τὸν Θεοδώρικον, προσελθόντες τῶν αὐτοῦ ἄνδρες δύω τὰς τοῦ Ὀδοάκρου, ἅτε ἱκέται γενόμενοι κατέχουσι χεῖρας, μεθ' ὃ τῶν προλοχισθέντων ἐν τοῖς παρ' ἑκάτερα οἰκίσκοις ἐπελθόντων ἅμα τοῖς ξίφεσιν, ἐκ δὲ τῆς θέας καταπλαγέντων καὶ οὐκ ἐπιτιθεμένων τῷ Ὀδοάκρῳ, Θεοδώρικος προσδραμὼν παίει τῷ ξίφει αὐτὸν κατὰ τὴν κλεῖδα, εἰπόντα δέ "Ποῦ ὁ θεός?" Ἀμείβεται: "Τοῦτό ἐστιν ὃ καὶ σὺ τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἔσδρασας". Τῆς δὲ πληγῆς καιρίας καὶ μέχρι τῆς

20 John's account was unknown to Gibbon, but his editor, Bury, amalgamated the accounts of John and Procopius (Gibbon 1897: VII, 192, n. 28 and 29). The same was done by Hodgkin (1879–1916: III [first ed.], 235–236) and by Wolfram (2005: 214–215). Thus is "history" still constructed.

21 See Thurn (2000: 306–307) and Jeffreys et al. (1986: 212–213).

22 It is referred to by Lienert among her exhaustive *Dietrich-Testimonien* (2008: 43–44). However, although she lists *Widsith*, *Waldere*, and *Deor* among the works which mention Theoderic, she makes no reference to *Wulf and Eadwacer*.

23 The text (except for punctuation of direct speech) is taken from Mariev (2008: 444). The translation is my own, but I gratefully acknowledge the learned help of Dr Lionel Scott.

ὀσφύος διελθούσης τὸ Ὀδοάκρου σῶμα, εἰπεῖν φασιν Θεοδώρικον, ὡς: "Τάχα οὐδὲ ὀστοῦν ἦν τῷ κακῷ τούτῳ". Καὶ τὸν μὲν πέμψας ἔξω θάπτει εἰς τὰς συνόδους τῶν Ἑβραίων ἐν λιθίνῃ λάρνακι ἔτη βεβιωκότα ξ', ἄρξαντα δὲ ιδ', τὸν δὲ ἀδελφὸν τούτου ἐν τῷ τεμένει φυγόντα κατετόξευσε. Συνέχων δὲ καὶ τὴν Ὀδοάκρου γαμετὴν Σουνιγίλδαν καὶ Ὀκλὰν τὸν παῖδα, ὅν Ὀδόακρος Καίσαρα ἀπέδειξεν, τοῦτον μὲν ἐκπέμπει εἰς Γαλλίαν, ἐκεῖθεν δὲ ἀποδράντα κατὰ τὴν Ἰταλίαν διαφθείρει, τὴν δὲ ὑπὸ λιμοῦ φρουρουμένην ἐξήγαγε τοῦ βίου.

'Theoderic and Odoacer made a treaty and covenant with each other that they would both rule the empire of the Romans, and henceforward there were frequent meetings between them as they went about their business. But the tenth day was not yet over when, as Odoacer was visiting Theoderic, two men of his approached them as if they were petitioners and grasped his [Odoacer's] hands. After that, men lying in wait came from small rooms on either side and immediately set upon him with swords, but they were terrified at the sight and did not attack Odoacer. Theoderic, running up, strikes him with his sword through the collarbone; and when he [Odoacer] said, "Where is God?", he replied, "This is what you too did to mine". But since the fatal stroke had gone through Odoacer's body to the loins, it is reported that Theoderic said, "So, maybe there wasn't a bone in this evil fellow". And, having had him taken away, he buries him near a synagogue of the Jews in a stone coffin – him who had lived for sixty years but ruled for fourteen. He also had his brother, who had fled into a sanctuary, shot full of arrows. And he also arrests Odoacer's wife Sunigilda and his son Okla, whom Odoacer had made Caesar. He had him sent into exile in Gaul, but when he had run away from there to Italy, he killed him. But the wife he kept under guard and deprived her of life by starvation'.

Of this fragment, John's editor Sergei Mariev (2008: 444, fn.) notes: "fontem non inveni" ('I have not found the source').

As a coda to the early chronicle history of Odoacer, we can add that in the seventh-century chronicles of Francia attributed to Fredegar, *Odoagrus* appears with an unnamed (Frankish) wife who is killed together with their son, also unnamed. The account is roughly contemporary with that of John of Antioch. According to Fredegar, Theoderic retreats into Ravenna, but eventually, and heroically, beats Odoagrus and his men with only a few of his own. It is also notable for a short passage of direct speech in which Theoderic's mother, called Lilia, shames him into resistance by telling him, in front of his men, that there is nowhere he can hide unless she were to lift up her skirts and he were to go back into the womb he came from. This last, in particular, seems to be a clear literary embellishment.[24] After this, the sources are silent about Theoderic and Odoacer until, as Deotrihh and Otacher, they appear in the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*, originally composed somewhere in upper Germany at some time before about 830 (the date of its manuscript).

24 See *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii scholasticii libri IV*, II, in Krusch (1888: 79).

John may, of course, have supplied details which were known to other writers who omitted them in the interests of brevity. His account superficially resembles that of Anonymus Valesianus; but it looks a lot more like literature – as does Fredegar's account of about the same period. Furthermore, it looks like the literature of its time. Stylistically, it can be compared to a roughly contemporary late sixth-century text, the episode of Sicharius and Chramnesindus in Gregory of Tours' *Historia Francorum*, the narrative of which Auerbach examined penetratingly.[25] He found Gregory's style of narration utterly unlike classical Roman models in being paratactic, unpolished, dramatic, graphic and anecdotal, told as an eye-to-eye scene with brief pieces of direct speech, revealing to us "a first early trace of the reawakening sensory apprehension of things and events", which were "visible, palpable, perceptible through all the senses". In it could be sensed the "concrete vigour of the vernacular". These, he said, were the features of the chronicle histories which began to flourish in early medieval Europe (see Auerbach 1953: 67–83). The same features, I would suggest, are evident in John's account, indicating that it too comes from a new and developing tradition of chronicling not based on classical models – hence *fontem non invenimus*.

But John's is also a story with a point. While modern historians see the interplay of complex economic, social and political factors in historical events, medieval vernacular poets preferred to see personal motives of greed, hatred and vengeance (see Gschwantler 1976: 214); and John's story – like Gregory's – tells a story about vengeance delayed. John's account of Theoderic's words "This is what you too did to mine" find a parallel in the struggles recorded between their respective families. The histories record that in the 460s a Scirian army led by Odoacer's father Edico and brother Hunwulf fought the Ostrogoths, killing Theoderic's uncle Valamer. Subsequently, Edico was killed in battle by the Ostrogoths led by Theoderic's father Theodemer and his uncle Widimer.[26] In this vendetta-culture, the sins of the fathers were visited on the sons.

25 The episode is found in *Historia Francorum*, VII.47 and IX.19. See especially Auerbach (1953: 76, 82–83).

26 See *Getica*, LIII.274–LIV.279; Mommsen (1882: 129–130). This perhaps explains the obscure reference in Ennodius, *Panegyricus* VI: *nata est felicis inter vos causa discordiae, dum perduelles animos in propinquorum tuorum necem Romana prosperitas invitavit* 'There was born between you [Theoderic and Odoacer] a fortunate cause of contention, when the wealth of Rome invited hostile spirits to murder your kinsmen' (Vogel 1885: 206). Mommsen (1872: 336 and n. 2) did not know who these kinsmen were. See also Reynolds and Lopez (1946: 40–41), and Macbain (1983). According to Gillespie (1973: 103), Anonymus Valesianus recorded (*s.a.* 526) that Odoacer attempted to assassinate Theoderic (referring to *Chronica minora* 1: 320). But this seems to be mistaken.

This theme of delayed vengeance is also found in the *Hildebrandslied*, in which Deotrihh (Theoderic) had been driven away by *Otachres nid* 'Odoacer's hatred, spite, envy or violence', and after thirty years he had returned to northern Italy (probably Ravenna) with his last remaining thegn Hiltibrant, backed by an army of Attila's Huns, to seek his vengeance and regain his kingdom. The same scenario and theme are found in the early eleventh-century Saxon chronicle, the *Annales Quedlinburgenses* (ed. Giese 2004).

The situation described by John also has literary echoes. It is similar to the scenario in the Finnsburh story told in *Beowulf* and alluded to in *Widsith*, in which previously feuding parties are cooped up in the same space (possibly also on an island, in Frisia), after hostilities have ceased, under a shaky agreement not to harm each other but resentfully mindful of slaughtered kinsmen and the duty to avenge them undone. As we see in *Beowulf* (l. 2020–2069), and in the allusion in *Widsith* (l. 45–49), the same situation seems to have existed in the story of the wedding of Hrothgar's daughter Freawaru to the Heathobeard king Ingeld which ended the war between the Danes and the Heathobeards. After the wedding, with both sides in close proximity at Heorot, the duty of vengeance was soon re-awakened and the place is burned down in the renewed conflict. In such situations, it would seem to be a literary *topos* that eventually one party succumbs to the desire for (or duty of) vengeance, breaks his faith and violence ensues. Both scenarios also involve a *freoðowebbe* 'peace-weaver' queen, which as we shall see may also be a part of John's account.

John's account is also notable for its veneer of moral neutrality or equipoise, another characteristic of some "heroic" verse.[27] Neither party is said to have plotted beforehand: John depicts Theoderic as exacting vengeance for the death of his kinsmen, albeit in the form of a squalid assassination. Odoacer appeals in his agony to a God that has abandoned him. But we do not know if we are supposed to believe that God was right to do so. Theoderic treats his victim as an unnatural monster, a thing without bones unworthy of burial in hallowed ground and thus to be disposed of among the alien Jews. But was this description just, or an attempt at demonisation? John also omits the details found in other accounts of the general massacre of Odoacer's followers, which serves to emphasise the personal nature of the contention between two men forced into close proximity to each other with unresolved issues of revenge. One gets the sense of a Christian author groping towards a moral for the story but not finding one. Similarly per-

27 A recurring theme in the criticism of Shippey. See, for instance, Shippey (1972: 50–52) and (2010).

haps, when reading *Beowulf* and the poems of the *Poetic Edda*, we sense that modern ethical categories of "good guy/bad guy" do not apply in the "heroic" world.

Here, I would argue, in John of Antioch (and also to a degree in Fredegar), we see the first significant steps in the process of turning a primarily historical account into a primarily literary one (see Taranu 2015: 34–35 and references). If, as Mariev (2008) says, the precise *fons* cannot be found, it is nevertheless possible to suppose that John's account incorporated or was influenced by stories circulating among the Germanic cultures with which Constantinople was in close touch. These may have percolated through the cultural barrier to form part of the *on dit* relied on even by learned chroniclers to fill out their works. Although this is an idea much resisted by scholars such as Walter Goffart (2005), I suggest that John's account shows us that there was likely to have been a seepage of legendary or literary material – some of it vernacular – into "official" history, even among the Greeks of the Eastern Empire.

It is also the central argument of this study that John's account constitutes an analogue to *Wulf and Eadwacer*. For the first time, we see Odoacer equipped with a son who ends up in the hands of his father's rival Theoderic, first as a hostage and second as his victim. Odoacer now has a wife who is starved to death while imprisoned. This offers us an opportunity to readdress the narrative of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, so often found mysterious (see section 4 below). Lastly, the scene of Ravenna, a watery fortress-city, corresponds – as it always had – to the landscape in the poem.

4 *Wulf and Eadwacer* Reinterpreted

The historical record tells us that Theoderic – encamped somewhere in the watery hinterland of Ravenna – was received into the reduced and starving fortress-city by Odoacer. Depending on which source one reads, either man almost immediately plotted against the other, an indication of an arrangement which began in bad faith. This seems remarkably similar to the scenario at the outset of the Old English poem *Wulf and Eadwacer*. At lines 1–8, the speaker says:[28]

28 Unless stated otherwise, the text of *Wulf and Eadwacer* is taken from Krapp and Dobbie (1931–1953, III, 177–178), and all other quotations from Old English verse are taken from their edition. All translations from *Wulf and Eadwacer* here (including the alternative meanings which seem available) and all other texts are henceforth my own.

Leodum is minum swylce him mon lac gife; 1
willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð.
Ungelic is us. 3
Wulf is on iege, ic on oþerre.
Fæst is þæt eglond, fenne biworpen. 5
Sindon wælreowe weras þær on ige;
willað hy hine aþecgan, gif he on þreat cymeð. 7
Ungelice is us.

'For my people it is as if someone is giving them/him a gift/favour/sacrifice/battle. 1
They wish to receive/consume him if he comes in force/in need/threateningly/into a band.
It is not the same for us/We are not alike. 3
Wulf is on an isle, I on another.
That island is secure, surrounded by fen/marsh. 5
The men on that isle are bloodthirsty.
They wish to receive/consume him if he comes in force/in need/threateningly/
into a band. 7
It is not the same for us/We are not alike'.

As can be seen from the alternatives in my translation, the meanings of several of the poem's words and phrases are unclear or debatable. I therefore propose to re-address its cruces in the light of the historical analogues I have identified (set out under separate headings below).

4.1 Lines 1–7: The Siege of Ravenna?

Line 1a: *leodum is minum*

In *leodum is minum* 'for my people' (l. 1), the female speaker identifies herself with a group of people who seem to be hostile to Wulf and his people. After the statement *willað hy hine aþecgan* 'they wish to receive him' in lines 2 and 7, she utters the refrain *ungelic is us* 'it is not the same for us', using the plural pronoun *us*, rather than the dual *unc*. This is to be compared with the dual *uncerne earne hwelp* 'our wretched/cowardly whelp' in line 16, presumably referring to the speaker and Eadwacer; and *uncer giedd geador* 'our song/passion together' in line 19, referring to her and Wulf. *Us* indicates that she refers to more than two people: the *hy* must be her people, and the *hine* Wulf. Therefore, she means that with respect to this situation she does not share the attitude of "her people". We can also contemplate further sub-meanings, such as 'we are not all alike (i.e. at one)', or even 'with respect to us (all), it is not what it looks like'. As I argue below, it is possible that Eadwacer's wife played the role of the *freoðowebbe* 'peace-weaver', the woman married to her family's former enemy and whose allegiances were suspect to her new people. If so, a *freoðowebbe* would simultaneously be of the people of

her lord and husband and yet different from them – here not only in blood but outlook too.

Line 1b: *lac*

The meanings of *lāc* are several: 'sacrifice', 'battle, gift, service, favour', and 'message'.[29] Therefore, *swa him mon lac gife* could mean that it is as if someone is giving the speaker's people either a favour or service, a gift, a sacrifice, or battle. With impressive wit, the poet makes the most of the impersonal construction with *mon* with its uncertain agent, the multiple meanings of *lac* and the ambiguous referent of *him*. This would encapsulate several aspects of a scene in which a besieger offers the besieged the favour of quarter if they surrender, but under threat of continued battle if they do not; and in which one or both secretly regards the other as an unsuspecting sacrifice come to slaughter.

Line 2a: *aþecgan*

The meaning of the rare verb *aþecgan* is difficult. Apart from the two instances in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, it occurs only once elsewhere in Old English, in the *Leechdoms*, in an instruction on what to do if someone ingests poison.[30] The strong verb *þicgan* 'to take, receive' had a weak causative, *þecgan* 'to cause to take, receive', which would accord with the sense 'to serve' which Peter S. Baker suggested for *aþecgan*. *DOE* also records a participial form *aþegen*, (< **aþicgan*), glossing Latin *distentus*, appearing to mean 'crammed or stuffed (with food)'. This suggests that **aþicgan* ought to have meant 'to cram' (i.e. 'to receive or eat excessively'), and thus its causative *aþecgan* 'to cause to cram, eat excessively'. If so, we can understand the injunction in the *Leechdoms*, *aþege buteran and drince*, to be 'cram him with butter and liquid', which would be highly sensible emergency first-aid advice, intended to flush the poison out with a mixture of liquid (a diuretic) and oil (a laxative), or both to induce vomiting (an emetic).

Baker also suggested 'to kill' as a further, metaphorical meaning for *aþecgan*. If this is correct, the verb could mean to serve someone food and to kill them. As the prefix *a-* is likely to be intensifying, one could adjust these meanings to 'to gorge on' and 'to thoroughly do in'. The use of a word with the multiple meanings 'to receive/welcome', 'to cause to eat/cram with', and 'to kill' would seem extremely apt for a situation in which a hypocritical welcome ('Let us have you for

29 See *Bosworth and Toller*, s.v. *lāc* (n.). Baker (1981: 40–41 and 40, n. 4) says the meaning 'battle' in *Bosworth-Toller* is erroneous. I am not sure. The Old Norse cognate *leikr* as a poetic term for battle suggests caution in rejecting such a meaning in Old English. So does the compound *heaðolac* 'battle-play' in *Beowulf*, lines 583 and 970 (see *DOE* s.v. *heaþu-lac*).

30 I am much indebted to the able discussion in Baker (1981: 42–43).

dinner', as it were) is extended to a guest by a starving city, and for a scene of final, deadly confrontation which takes place at a feast, as recorded by Procopius.

Line 7b: *on þreat*

On þreat in line 7 is a considerable crux. Yet, it can be shown that its range of meanings is suitable to the likely context of the poem and, again, wittily deployed. *Þreat* in Old English meant either 'band, troop, crowd' or 'violence, force, misery' (*Bosworth-Toller*, s.v.). Both senses can be rendered modern English by the word 'force'. *Þreat* was related to OE *þreotan*, meaning 'to weary' and *aþreotan* 'to be wearisome, tedious, distasteful' (*DOE*, s.vv.). In Old Norse, *þraut* meant 'struggle, great exertion, labour, hard task' (i.e. the use of force) (*Cleasby-Vigfusson*, s.v.), and the noun-phrase *í þraut* (cognate with *on þreat*) meant 'in or with a desperate struggle' or 'in the end, finally' (i.e. when subject to force).[31] The verb *þrjóta* (cognate with *þreotan*) was impersonal, meaning 'one wants, lacks, runs out of something', and one can detect in this the core sense of being forced by need, thus lacking something. These words derive from the same root as PrGmc **uzþreutanǫ* 'to weary, trouble, displease': cf. Gothic *usþriutan* 'to trouble' and OHG *bi-*, *gi-*, *irdriozan* 'to weary, trouble' (*AHDWB*, s. vv.). Jan De Vries suggested a relationship between ON *þrjóta* and Latin *trudere* 'to push, shove' and OSlav *truda* 'labour, effort' (Modern Russian труд) – both of which effectively mean 'force'.[32] I suggest, therefore, that the core sense of **þreutanǫ* was 'to subject to the use of force' and thus perhaps 'to harry, weary, wear out' – senses which were retained by its lexical descendants.

In the phrase *on þreat*, the noun is accusative rather than the dative form *þreate*. If this is not just a grammatical quirk of the idiom with no particular meaning, it would imply motion or a process, i.e. a movement towards *þreat*, which might support the interpretations 'in the end' (i.e. 'towards a conclusion'), or 'into misery, violence' or, as we could even say, 'into threat' or 'among a troop'. We can see that these meanings are appropriate to the situation at the end of the siege of Ravenna. Both sides were in force, and each, in different ways, threatened the other – Theoderic by reducing the city and Eadwacer by enticing Theoderic and his forces in, both possibly with treacherous intent. This arrangement was also *on þreat*, if this meant 'in the last extremity, finally' or 'when forced by need'. Or, if the stem *þreat*/*þreot* contained the sense of 'to weary, wear out, run out', it may have carried the connotation 'when people were worn out' or 'when supplies ran

31 See the discussion in Malone (1962b: 109), in which he suggested "in a desperate struggle" as a translation for ON *í þraut* and Anglian *in þreat* (= WS *on þreat*).

32 *ANEW*: 622–623, s.v. *þrjóta*. See also *IGEWB*: 1095–1096, under the PIE etymon *treud*.

out'. At any rate, the phrase *on þreat* was likely to have a number of connotations which seem appropriate to the scene we are discussing, encompassing the situation of an apparently humane offer of surrender in the face of overwhelming force or dire need, masking the continued threat of treacherous violence.

So, in the first two lines of the poem we see the poet's deft use of multiple meanings to express the female speaker's awareness or suspicion of potential treachery by her (i.e. her and her husband's) people towards Wulf, but also her lack of certainty, or her inability to communicate it directly.

4.2 Lines 4–6: The Poem's Landscape

Landscape is important to the poem. There are at least two islands, with Wulf on one and the speaker and her people on another, of which it is said *fæst is þæt eglond* / *fenne biworpen* 'that island is secure, surrounded by fen/marsh' (l. 5). The poem seems to describe a watery scene featuring a fortified island on which Eadwacer and his people live, apparently contemplating the approach or encroachment of Wulf. This seems remarkably reminiscent of Ravenna as we find it in the descriptions by Jordanes and Procopius, essentially as a fortified island in a lagoon. Jordanes wrote: *Quae urbs inter paludes et pelago interque Padi fluenta unius tantum patet accessu, cuius dudum possessores, ut tradunt maiores,* ainetoi, *id est laudabiles, dicebantur* 'This city between the marshes and the sea, and between the streams of the Po, gives access only on one side' (XXIX.148; Mommsen 1882: 96). Procopius gives a lengthier description, also accurate and consistent with Jordanes.[33]

4.3 Line 9: *dogode*

The syntax in the difficult line *Wulfes ic mines widlastum* / *wenum dogode*, meaning something like 'I followed my Wulf's tracks in hope' (l. 9), can be paralleled in *The Husband's Message* (l. 30): *þær se þeoden is* / *þin on wenum* 'where the chieftain is in expectation of you' (Krapp and Dobbie 1931–1953: III, 226). The phrase (*on*) *wenum* + GEN would seem to mean 'in expectation of someone/thing'. Bernard Muir, following several editors, emended the manuscript reading *dogode*

33 *Wars*, V.i.16–23 (Dewing 1914–1940: III, 6–11). Procopius's *Wars* was not known in Anglo-Saxon England. But Alcuin asked a fellow courtier at Charlemagne's court for a copy of the *Getica*. See (Innes 2000: 243). See the discussion at pp. 408–409 below.

to *hogode*, citing Kemp Malone's interpretation 'I was mindful of my Wulf in his wanderings, his expectations' (Muir 2000: II, 604). *DOE* in its entry for *hogian* (s.v., sense 10.a.i.) cites *Wulf and Eadwacer* for the phrase *wenum hogian* 'to think with hope about, concentrate hopefully on (a subject uppermost in one's thoughts, *dat.*)'. However, in *DOE*'s article on this very well-evidenced verb, there is only one – uncertain – example of *hogian* taking a dative object, in sense 5.a, where dative *sawle minre* is a manuscript variant for accusative *sawle mine*. In all other cases it either takes an accusative object or governs a prepositional phrase (in line 133 of *The Battle of Maldon*, exceptionally, it governs a genitive object). *DOE* has no entry for **dogian*.

Some have retained *dogode* from presumed **dogian* (see the references in Muir 2000: II, 604). *Bosworth-Toller* suggests *dōgian* 'to bear, suffer, *pati*?' which is just guesswork. But I argue in support of retaining the manuscript reading. Firstly, the principle of *difficilior lectio* ought to apply unless *dogode* cannot be made to make sense. I suggest that it can, and good sense too. Perhaps surprisingly, the only word for 'dog' which occurs in Old English is *docga*, which occurs in a single figurative instance in literature and in a small number of place-names (*DOE*, s.v.). In Old English, the digraph <cg> is a variant of <gg>, and the weak masculine nominal form <cga> may be hypocoristic, as with e.g. *frocga* 'frog' (Hogg and Fulk 1992–2011: II, 195–200). Therefore, *docga* probably meant 'doggie' rather than 'dog'. The existence of a hypocorism makes the existence of OE **dog* virtually certain; and there is no linguistic reason to discount a weak verb, **dogian*, formed from it. (One notes that Old English had the morphological resources to turn the noun *æppel* 'apple' into a verb, **æpplian*, from which came *æpplede*, of a golden object 'coloured or shaped like an apple'; see *DOE*, s.v. *æpplede*). We can also note that since *dogode* would mean 'follow', its governing of the dative case in *widlastum* mirrors that of the verb 'to follow' in Germanic (OE *fylgean*, ON *fylgja*, Modern German *folgen*). The line can thus be interpreted to mean 'I dogged my Wulf's wide-ranging tracks in (or with) expectation' or 'I dogged wide-ranging tracks in expectation of my Wulf' – both of which senses may have been meant. Aside from the virtue of requiring no emendation, the sense of the canine mother of the *hwelp* dogging the tracks of the outcast wolf is an appropriate and compelling image, brought to life by the poet's characteristic facility with language.[34]

The image of the outlawed or exiled wolf-figure is one which, I argue, was appropriate for Theoderic, the essence of whose story, as it appears in heroic le-

34 Osborn (1983: 181–182) supports the reading *dogode* but substitutes 'followed' for 'dogged', preferring, wrongly I think, to "lose the wordplay".

gend from the ninth century onwards, is that he was exiled from the city he ruled and spent many years at the court of Attila, from which he returned to exact his vengeance and regain power. Although it cannot be proved, this traditional lupine image may also be the sole surviving link between the legends of Theoderic and Wolf-Dietrich ("wolf-Theoderic"). At any rate, *dogian widlastum* is consistent with the female speaker's following Wulf – in his exile like a wolf – either physically or metaphorically, or both (which seems to be what the speaker in *The Wife's Lament* does – see below). In the *Hildebrandslied*, Hiltibrant, Deotrihh's faithful companion in exile, left behind him a wife and a young child. And his son Hadubrant – although he does not realise that the man he faces in single combat is his father – tells Hiltibrant of the stories which had filtered back to his family about his father, whose own "wide-ranging tracks" had been "dogged", if not literally, under the assumption that news was expected to be obtainable even from far-flung lands.

4.4 The Theme of the Tyrant's (Unfaithful) Wife

The theme of Theoderic as the lover of Odoacer's – or anybody's – wife is not found in the German tradition or its Norwegian offshoot, *Þiðreks saga af Bern* (ed. Jónsson: 1961–1962), although Hugdietrich was in the Wolfdietrich stories. However, the theme of the infidelity (real or suspected) of the tyrant's wife exists. In the prose introduction to *Guðrúnarkviða II* and in *Guðrúnarkviða III* (Kristjánsson and Ólason 2014: II, 352, 362–364), Þjóðrekr (Theoderic) makes an appearance as a thegnless exile at the court of Atli (Attila). Atli is aware of his wife Guðrún's meetings with Þjóðrekr, accuses her of an affair (she claims they were just sharing their experiences of loss) and subjects her to the judicial ordeal by boiling water, which she passes. In the *Edda*, an evil counsellor makes Jǫrmunrekr (Ermanaric – Odoacer's eventual replacement in the German Theoderic tradition) suspect that his son Randvér is having an affair with his betrothed, Svanhildr (the daughter of Guðrún and Sigurðr), and he kills them both. In Paulus Diaconus's poetically-inspired story about Alboin, king of the Lombards, Alboin's wife Rosemunda conspires with her lover Helmechis – who is Alboin's foster-brother – to kill her husband, in vengeance for Alboin's killing of her father (from whose skull he made a drinking cup and invited his wife to drink out of it).[35] In *Vǫlsunga saga*, Signý has

35 *Historia gentis Langobardorum*, I.27, II.28–30 (Waitz 1878: 69, 87–90). See Gschwantler (1976: 217, 236–238, 245–247), though he thought it to be of a debased *entheroisiert* kind. Potential poetic origin is ignored by Goffart (2005: 391–393). However, the development of this historically inaccu-

sex with her brother in order to produce a child brave enough to kill her hated husband Siggeirr, who had murdered her father. It is even arguable that Guðrún is an example of emotional infidelity to Atli, since she never gets over her resentment at the death of Sigurðr, the only husband she loved – in which she mirrored the Hunnish Brynhildr, whose attachment was to Sigurðr rather than to her husband Gunnarr.

We find in each of these stories the motif of the woman (in fact a princess) who is married to a foreign husband against her will and/or as a political arrangement to make or cement peace between previously warring parties – the classic *freoðowebbe*. In the cases of Guðrún, Rosemunda and Signý, they had reason to avenge themselves on their husbands, and they do so by killing him. In the case of Svanhildr and Rosemunda, the motif includes a liaison with a relative of the tyrant, and in that of Signý, one with a relative of her own. Therefore, it is at least arguable (if no more than that) that the story of the tyrant could include the elements of his partner's actual or suspected infidelity with a person (including a relative) who encompasses his death.

The situation of the speaker of *Wulf and Eadwacer* – as has often been noted – seems to be similar to the female speaker in the Old English Elegy *The Wife's Lament* (Krapp and Dobbie 1931–1953: III, 210–211) – the only other poem in Old English with a female speaker. This is about a woman who loves one man from whom she is separated when he was sent over the sea. She seems to resent another who – after her own exile, perhaps for the purpose of marriage – has become her husband (*hlaford* 'lord', l. 6, 15) and forces her to live in a grove or wood (*herheard* 'land in a grove', l. 15; *on wuda bearwe* 'in a wood-grove', l. 27), in a tomb or cave (*eorðscræf*, *eorðsele* 'earth-scrape, earth-hall', l. 28–29) in a dark dale surrounded by hills and briars (l. 30–31). The echoes of the unhappy *freoðowebbe* 'peace-weaver' are strong here.

It is a matter that has not been remarked on for over a hundred years that the narrative content of *The Wife's Lament* is not only similar to that of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, it may be from the same story. Indeed, if one were to argue, on internal grounds, that it was not, on what would one rely? There is an emotional attachment to a man who is exiled, a period of the speaker's own exile (reminiscent of *widelastum […] dogode*), followed by distressful confinement and separation from him. Indeed, it is notable that the narrative content of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message* outline a narrative according to which a woman is separated from her lover (a man who is forced to travel

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rate legend – including the late appearance of the wife figure – bears comparison with that of Odoacer and Theoderic.

over the sea as an exile), married to a foreigner and retains a connection with her love. But for the lack of the internal evidence of the names – and with all due respect to the wonderful complexity and subtlety of the scholarship on these poems – they could all be part of the same story with the same characters.[36] But at any rate, even if we suppose – along with critical convention – that *The Wife's Lament* could be both effective poetry and entirely anonymous, its audience must have at least understood its speaker's situation and found it poignant. It stands to reason that *Wulf and Eadwacer* would strike the same chord. If, as I suggest, it was about identifiable people in a historical situation, *The Wife's Lament* stands as evidence that its story had been adapted to a narrative familiar to an audience in whose culture of highly conventional literature such dilemmas, even in the abstract, were strongly affecting.

4.5 Lines 10–12: Boughs and Battle-Brave Men

Lines 10–12 of *Wulf and Eadwacer* seem to express an ambivalence about the speaker's lover which has sinister undertones:

Þonne hit wæs renig weder ond ic reotugu sæt,	10
þonne me se beaducafa bogum bilegde,	
wæs me wyn to þon, wæs me hwæþre eac lað.	12
'Then it was rainy weather (or a rainstorm) and I sat sobbing/wailing	10
when the battle-brave one wrapped his arms around me.	
There was joy for me in that, there was, however, also loathing'.	12

Interpretation of what was referred to in the phrase *to þon* has varied widely. The most natural reading would seem to be that it is the speaker's ambivalent reaction to being held by *se beaducafa* 'the battle-brave one', which is a kenning for 'warrior' and could refer to either Eadwacer or Wulf. But if Eadwacer were her hated husband, why would she feel joy; and if Wulf were her longed-for lover, why would she feel loathing? We have passed beyond the confines of the historical material and only supposition is possible.

36 The idea of Imelmann (1907) was that *The Wife's Lament*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, and *The Husband's Message* were all episodes in a larger narrative of Old English "Odoacer Poetry" (*The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message* being by the same poet). See Rickert (1904–1905: 371–375). She came to the conclusion that *The Wife's Lament* was an "epic lay" or a "fragment", and although the Elegies may not have come from the same story, each of them represented an episode from a larger one. This view is due for reappraisal.

Baker has suggested that the meanings of *bilecgan* (literally 'to surround') were usually negative – 'to accuse, afflict, load down' (Baker 1981: 48; see also Kerling 1980: 140). If so, it may mean not seduction but the use of force which was – at least initially – unpleasant. However, if we pay attention to the order of the words, her first reaction was joy and her next loathing. If the conflicting and paradoxical emotions of love are universal, then this is an expression of them: the elation of physical and emotional union followed by the guilt of breaking a social and religious taboo, the fear of detection, and an intensified dissatisfaction with or hatred of her situation.[37] I would suggest that the meaning of *bogum bilegde* 'embraced and bore her down (?)' was intended to connote, quite emphatically, the physicality of sex with an ardent and dominant partner.

4.6 Lines 13–15: The Starving Wife of Eadwacer?

Perhaps the most remarkable correspondence between John of Antioch and *Wulf and Eadwacer* is the detail of the starvation of the imprisoned Sunigilda. This finds an echo in the poem where the speaker appears to cry out in pain to Wulf, wishing Eadwacer to hear her, as if she is out of earshot or has been put out of the way (l. 13–15):

Wulf, min Wulf, wena me þine 13
seoce gedydon, þine seldcymas,
murnende mod, nales meteliste. 15

'Wulf, my Wulf, my expectation of you 13
made me sick, your seldom coming (rare visits?),
a mourning heart – not desire for food at all'. 15

The *seld* of *seldcymas* 'seldom comings' (l. 14) would be an example of litotes typical of Old English, meaning that Wulf *never* came, or never came again when she longed for him. This is a taunt and a cry of defiance to her punisher or gaoler Eadwacer, intended to deprive him of satisfaction at her agony by claiming that it is not caused by the hunger of his starvation of her but by longing for her lover.

37 Schücking (1919: 17) considered *bogum* literally as 'boughs' and thought Wulf might have made the speaker a shelter of branches in a wooded place: 'self-made tabernacles which serve this purpose in *Tristan und Isolde*, *Iwain* and other places' ("selbstgefertigte Laubhütten, die solchem Zweck dienen, finden wir in Tristan und Isolde, Iwain und an andern Orten"). North (1994: 41–42) argued that here, as in skaldic poetry, a warrior was being likened to a tree. However, *beaducafa* does not mean 'tree', and in skaldic verse even warriors likened to trees are not implied to have branches for arms.

The wife of Odoacer appears for the first time in John of Antioch and Fredegar's accounts. But it is only in John that she is said to be starved and is given a name. It is likely that, as a late addition to the historical record, she was a literary creation. This is also suggested by the meaning of her name, Sunigilda. It is Germanic in form, consistent with Gothic phonology, and has the meaning 'reconciliation payment'.[38] Even if it were the real name of Odoacer's wife, it is suggestive of the role which may be played by the female speaker in the poem, that of the foreign bride who was a *freoðowebbe* 'peace-weaver', i.e. a woman who – willingly or not – was commonly married to a foreign king as part of a deal to make or preserve peace.[39] The wife of Odoagrus in Fredegar was Frankish and therefore foreign.[40] However, the Gothic form of *Sunigilda* might even suggest that the people she came from were those of her lover, the Ostrogoths.

On the topic of names in John of Antioch, Odoacer's brother was named Ὀνοούλφος[41] (Latin *Onoulfus* or *Honoulfus*).[42] Jordanes called him *Hunuulfus* – i.e. Hunwulf (*Getica*, LIV.277; Mommsen 1882: 129–130). Although Förstemann suggested that this "Prince of the Sciri" was also called *Wulf*, he cited no source

38 Her name is very similar to that of *Sunilda* in the *Getica*, the prototype of the Eddaic Svanhildr in *Hamðismál*, both of them the fictional victims of the tyrannical Ermanaric charcter. *Suni-* is consistent with the Gothic stem of a word cognate with *suona* in Old High German and *són* in Old Norse, which meant 'reconciliation'. See Mommsen (1882: 155), quoting Karl Müllenhoff. *Gild* was Gothic for "payment, tribute, tax" (*GWB*, s.v. *gild*). This could be a regular Germanic "variation name" of a real person (though not recorded in *ADNB*). Or it could be a name invented to describe a narrative function, or a real name the interpretation of which suggested a literary role for the bearer of it. See Shaw (2020: 8–9).

39 *Freoðowebbe* 'peace-weaver' occurs twice in Old English, both of foreign brides: Ealhhild in *Widsith* (l. 5), and the wife of Offa of Angel in *Beowulf* (l. 1940). See *DOE*, s.v. *friþu-webbe*: "(female) weaver of peace; honorific or epithet for a (high-ranking) woman; *fæle friþuwebbe* 'faithful peace-weaver'". See also Sklute (1970: esp. 540) who says that the word was a "poetic metaphor referring to the person whose function it seems to be to perform openly the action of making peace by weaving to the best of her art a tapestry of friendship and amnesty". Freawaru in *Beowulf* (l. 2016) is a *friþusibb*, which meant the same. Etymologically, these terms embodied the sense that *friþu* – the relationship which bound blood-relatives in peace – could be created by the relationship of marriage (*sibb*), the "weaving" (*webbe*) of two people.

40 See Luecke (1983: 197) who says that the "conjectured female persona in *Wulf and Eadwacer* might very logically have been a victim of an exogamous pairing with a member of a hostile tribe".

41 John of Antioch, fragment 232 (in Mariev 2008: 420–421); *ADNB*: 935, s.n. *Hunulf*, where Förstemann refers to the occurrence of the name in Malchus and other (unnamed) Greek sources.

42 Isidore of Seville, *Historia Gothorum* (*c.* 625); *Chronica minora* 2: 283, *Onoulfus*, with manuscript variant *Honoulfus*; Eugippius, *Vita Sancti Severini*, XLIV; Mommsen (1898a: 52) gives *Onoulfus* with manuscript variants *Onoulphus*, *Aonulfus*, *Aonolfus*, *Anolfus*, *Adonulfus*. The name is fairly well attested.

for this.[43] However, given the historical association of his father Edico and their tribe of the Sciri with the Huns,[44] this name may have been partly epithetical: "Wulf of the Huns" (Reynolds and Lopez 1946: 49). We see in the *Annales Quedlinburgenses* that Odoacer and Theodoric were cousins.[45] So, it is at least interesting and curious that early in the Odoacer tradition he was associated with a Wulf who was also his relative – though a brother and supporter rather than a cousin and an enemy. From small details such as this larger traditions grow.

4.7 Lines 16–17: Wulf, Wolves, and Wolf-Heads

Lines 16–17 have also proved enduringly enigmatic:

> Gehyrest þu, Eadwacer? Uncerne earne hwelp
> bireð wulf to wuda.
>
> 'Do you hear, Eadwacer? A wolf/Wulf takes our wretched/cowardly whelp to the wood'.

With respect to the description of the *hwelp*, the manuscript reading is *earne* (l. 16), a non-word in Old English which editors usually emend to *eargne* 'cowardly, unmanly' or *earmne* 'wretched'. However, *earne* may simply be a pronunciation-spelling of *eargne*.[46] If anything in the poem turns on the distinction between *earg* and *earm*, it is that to be called *arm* was uncomplimentary, but to be called *arg* was a deadly insult to any man in Germanic culture, implying not only cowardice but effeminacy.[47] The positive cultural implications which led *Wulf* to be used as a male personal name-element can be contrasted with the inglorious associations of the word *hwelp* – the offspring of some tame domestic pet or wild

43 *ADNB*: 1643: a "Fürst der Sciren" of the fifth century. See also *ADNB*: 935, s.n. *Hunwulf*, where the same description is given, again without source.

44 See the references in Macbain (1983: 323).

45 See Giese (2004: 410–411 (text), 108–115 (discussion)). The *Annales* mix the Theoderic story with a revenge tale, with a scenario and names strongly reminiscent of *Hamðismál*. But there is nothing in the *Annales* which conflicts with the *Hildebrandslied*.

46 Muir (2000: I, 240). Also on loss of <g> in such a position, see Sievers (1898: 108, n. 10). By analogy, cf. manuscript *bearna* for editorial *bear[d]na* in *Beowulf* (l. 2037, 2067).

47 See Ström (1974), albeit focusing on Scandinavian conceptions of *ergi*, which included the grossly sexual ('craving cock' as Andy Orchard habitually interprets it). In seventh-century Langobardic law and the Old Icelandic *Grágás*, a person called (in Langobardic) *arga* or in Old Norse *ragr* was entitled to compensation or, if refused it or a retraction, to kill the person who used the word. That is some insult.

dog, which *earg* makes even worse. From this chillingly unmaternal denigration of her own child we can sense the magnitude of the scorn she feels for the husband whom she wishes to hear it, whether she is speaking to him face-to-face or soliloquising. It is of some interest to point out here that Jacob Grimm (1875–1878: I. 308–309) and Gillespie (1973: 117 and n. 3) noted that Odoacer's replacement in the Theoderic-tradition was the evil counsellor called *Sibeche* in Midde High German, or *Bikki* in Old Norse (*Bicco* in Saxo Grammaticus), a hypocorism of OHG **Sibihho* or OLG **Sibiko* which was possibly homonymous with a word which was the male counterpart of 'bitch' (cf. ON *bikkja* and OE *bicce*).

In *bireð wulf to wuda* 'Wulf/a wolf takes to the wood' (l. 17), the word *wulf* could be a common noun or the name *Wulf*. Perhaps it was meant to be both. Whether the wife is informing Eadwacer, or only imagining doing so, she plays on *wulf/Wulf* to suggest that not only has Wulf taken their son, but this is as if a wolf has seized a helpless *hwelp* as its prey and taken it to its proverbial forest lair to devour. As the historical Theoderic did indeed take Odoacer's son as a hostage (in Anonymus Valesianus) and subsequently killed him (in John of Antioch), again the poem accords with the historical record.[48]

But if the speaker seems repulsively unmotherly, she is in famous company. In *Atlakviða* and *Atlamál*, in order to avenge herself on her husband Atli for the murder of her brothers, Guðrún murdered her own children and fed the unsuspecting Atli on their blood and gobbets of their flesh. In *Vǫlsunga saga* Signý was married to Siggeirr, the man who killed her father. She got her brother Sigmundr to test out her children by Siggeirr to see if they were capable of avenging her on him. As they were not, she had her brother kill them. In order to produce a child (i.e. a blood-relative who would be obliged to take up her feud), she magically altered her appearance and committed incest with her brother. These shocking transgressions need not be the subject of "trigger-warnings": they are literary motifs intended to express in memorably horrific terms, first, the strength of the duty or compulsion to avenge blood-relatives like fathers and brothers – represented as greater even than the taboos against killing husbands or one's own children, or cannibalism; second, that the emotional component of the desire for vengeance is particularly strong in women; and third, that because women may

48 He is *Thela* in Anonymous Valesianus, a name which is unrecorded and seems to have no apparent meaning: See *ADNB*: 1408, s.n. *Thela*. In John he is *Okla*, which, as a form of *Ocila*, would be a hypocoristic and syncopic shortening of his father's name, hence 'little Odoacer'. Cf. a Herulian *Ὄχος*: Procopius, *Wars*, VI.xiv.38 (Dewing 1914–1940: III, 412). A Visigoth *Occila: Historia Francorum* II.8. See also *ADNB*: cols 1174–1175, s.v. *OC*, including *Ochilo* and (from a place-name) *Okilo*. John's first editor, Karl Müller, suggested ΘΕΛΑ might have been mistaken by a scribe for ΟΚΛΑ, or the other way round (Müller 1841–1873: V, 29, fn.).

lack the physical ability or the legal capacity to exact vengeance directly by combat, they take it indirectly, clandestinely, and thus all the more devastatingly. Seen in this way, the removal of the *hwelp* is the curse on her own misbegotten offspring by a mother in the Guðrún/Signý mould.

4.8 Wulf the Outlaw?

It has been argued that the wolf-motif underlying *Wulf and Eadwacer* is derived from other stories about outcast wolves. The characters Hugdietrich, king of Constantinople, and his natural son Wolfdietrich exist in a story-tradition which is separate from the Middle High German Dietrich poems, despite the attempts of many scholars to link Hugdietrich to the Frankish king Theuderic (son of Clovis) and Wolfdietrich to Dietrich and hence to the historical Theoderic. In no surviving literature was Theoderic or his later incarnation Dietrich called or likened to a wolf, such that this might explain why he might have been called "wolf-Theoderic" (see also Gillespie 1973: 148). The name Wolfdietrich is explained in the Middle High German poems *Wolfdietrich A* and *B*, in which the baby Dietrich, either abandoned or hidden, is taken and nursed by a wolf. In *Wolfdietrich B*, Hugdietrich, the king of Constantinople and his lover, princess Hildburc, have to expose their child who is later recovered by Hildeburc's father king Walgunt from a wolf's lair. Given this motif, it is not surprising that Schücking made a comparison between *Wolfdietrich B* and *Wulf and Eadwacer* (1919: 17). Certainly, there is the theme of the boy fostered by wolves and thus named Wolf-Theoderic, and a clandestine sexual relationship with a sequestered Rapunzel-type woman who is antagonistic to her family.

A source has also been suggested in the story of Signý and Sigmundr in *Vǫlsunga saga*, in which Sinfjǫtli is taken from Signý by her brother (and his father) Sigmundr into the forest (where Sigmundr has been outlawed by Signý's husband), where they spend some time magically transformed into the shape of wolves (see the references at note 4 above). Lindy Brady (2016) has also proposed an analogue in an episode in the life of the English saint Bertellin, a text of the twelfth century (though first published in the sixteenth century) containing what she argues – convincingly – is an Anglo-Saxon narrative tradition of a romantic nature. Bertellin travels overseas (similar to an exile or outlaw), has a clandestine affair with a woman (an Irish king's daughter), makes her pregnant, and evades her family's hostility by taking her to England. While they are hiding in some dense woods, she gives birth. But she and the baby are eaten by wolves as he goes to seek the help of a midwife.

These texts all share with *Wulf and Eadwacer* the motifs of the wolf-like male outsider, a sexual affair with a woman, her hostile family, a child in a wood taken

by wolves, islands and water. While it is arguable that *Wulf and Eadwacer* and the likely Anglo-Saxon source of the Life of St Bertellin might be directly related, any influence on them of Old Norse stories, such as that of Sigmundr and Signý, would have to have come from English contact with Scandinavia or Scandinavians (as, perhaps, in the Danelaw). But if *Wolfdietrich B* is part of the same narrative tradition, derivation from English or Scandinavian models looks unlikely. The evidence is too scanty for the sure identification of an origin. But these stories do indeed show striking similarities. Unless this is coincidence, they may all be reflexes of some vernacular or folkloric narrative tradition common to Germany, Scandinavia and England

On the topic of wolves, many critics seem to have interpreted *Wulf* as the name of the female speaker's estranged lover on the basis that it seems to match his role as an outlaw or outcast and his nature as a dangerous predator. However, Eric Stanley (1992) has argued that they are mistaken and that an Anglo-Saxon audience would not have associated the monothematic name *Wulf* with an outlaw. This is something which should be addressed, because, if accepted, it negates much of the criticism of *Wulf and Eadwacer* – including this study. Stanley accused several scholars of accepting on trust Jacob Grimm's mistaken idea (in his *Deutsche Rechtsalterthümer*) that because *vargr* meant both 'outlaw' and 'wolf' in Old Norse, this was also the case with the cognates of *vargr* in other Germanic languages. He cited evidence, correctly, to show that these cognates were legal words meaning 'criminal'. But he also argued that there was no evidence that in England there was any association between outlaws and wolves. In doing so, he failed to consider that the comparison between a wolf and an outlaw was explicitly made in the *Laws of Edward the Confessor* in which this was said of an outlaw: *Lupinum enim gerit caput a die utlagationis sue, quod ab Anglis* uuluesheued *nominatur* 'For he wears a wolf's head from the day of his outlawry, which is called *uuluesheued* by the English' (C. 6.2–2a; Liebermann 1903–1916: I, 631) In England, the notion of the "wolf's head outlaw" survived until the fourteenth century, appearing in Bracton's legal treatise, the Middle English poem *Gamelyn* (l. 696) and the pseudo-legal farrago *The Mirror of Justices*. Also, the word *wulfheafodtreow* 'wolf-head tree' in the unsolved Exeter Book Riddle 55 (l. 12) can only really mean 'gallows, gibbet',[49] as Stanley more-or-less admitted (1992: 53).

In coming to what appears to have been a mistaken conclusion, Stanley relied heavily on a legal study by Julius Goebel Jr., who found no equation between

49 See Muir (2000: II, 662): "Uncertain, but some sort of sword-rack or -box seems intended, which was perhaps in the shape of a cross and gallows (a *t*-shape)", and Liebermann (1903–1916: II, 251), who defined it as "Verbrecherbaum" ('criminal's tree').

'outlaw' and 'wolf' in legal texts, although such, he conceded, may have been an inference from "vernacular expressions" (Goebel 1937: 14, 16). By "vernacular expressions" Goebel was referring to a phrase used by Karl von Amira by which he meant the term 'wolf's head' in the law of Edward the Confessor (von Amira 1913: 237) – i.e. although it was in a law, von Amira thought it was a "vernacular expression". Goebel either did not realise von Amira was talking about this law, or he dismissed 'wolf's head' as "vernacular" and therefore not legal terminology. At any rate, he did not discuss the wolf's head law, and in following him, neither did Stanley. However, the evidence with respect to the 'wolf's head' is easily good enough to indicate that the legal language of outlawry in eleventh-century England utilised vernacular tradition, and both were in agreement – entirely unsurprisingly – that an outlaw could be likened to a wolf.[50]

In any event, poetic comparisons between wolves and outlaws were not bound by the letter of any law (most which was unwritten in Anglo-Saxon England anyway), and Stanley's argument would not apply to exiles or *wræccan* if they were not, legally speaking, outlaws. And we can see from vernacular Old English texts just how the wolf was seen by Anglo-Saxons. Its wretched loneliness and enmity to its own kind were described in *Maxims I* (l. 146–151; Krapp and Dobbie 1931–1953: III, 161):

> Wineleas, wonsælig mon genimeð him wulfas to geferan,
> felafæcne deor. Ful oft hine se gefera sliteð;
> gryre sceal for greggum, græf deadum men;
> hungre heofeð, nales þæt heafe bewindeð,
> ne huru wæl wepeð wulf se græga,
> morþorcwealm mæcga, ac hit a mare wille.
>
> 'A friendless, miserable man takes wolves for his companions,
> very treacherous animals. Very often this companion tears him.
> There ought to be fear for the grey ones, a grave for a dead man.
> It wails mournfully with hunger, it does not circle it [the grave?] in mourning at all,
> nor does the grey wolf weep for the slaughter,
> the destruction of men by murder, but wants it ever more'.

In *Maxims II* (l. 18b–19a), there is also the adage: *wulf sceal on bearowe, / earm anhaga*, 'a wolf ought to be in the wood, a miserable solitary'. These would seem to be the kinds of traditional beliefs which led the Scandinavians to see the meaning 'wolf' in *vargr*.

50 Indeed, Stanley had cited Grimm's references to Adam of Bremen and Saxo Grammaticus in which the same equation 'wolf=criminal' seems to exist, indicative of a wider phenomenon of equating wolves and criminals.

There is therefore no obstacle to the idea that Wulf was an outlaw or exile by name or by nature, and when in line 17 (*bireð wulf to wuda* 'Wulf takes to a wood') he lupinely seizes the *earne hwelp* 'wretched/cowardly whelp', he takes it to a wolf's proverbial dwelling-place. It is therefore my argument that *Wulf* was intended to be taken as the informal shortening of a name with the element *wulf* in it which would have been common and thus suitable as the pseudonym or *nom de guerre* of the clandestine lover of the speaker. It was also particularly apt to the situation of an outlaw preying, wolflike, on Eadwacer's wife and son. It is also clear that in the analogous Life of St Bertellin, *Vǫlsunga saga*, and *Wolfdietrich B* the image of the wolf is associated with hidden and forbidden love.

Lines 18–19: Song and Passion

The poem's last lines (18–19) seem to revisit the ambiguity of lines 1–3 and the refrain *ungelic is us*, with the use of the dual pronoun *uncer*. In line 16, the child (we infer) was called *uncerne earne hwelp* 'the whelp of us two'. As this immediately follows *Gehyrest þu Eadwacer?*, it seems most natural to regard it as the child of him and the speaker. But in 18–19 who is referred to by *uncer*?

> Þæt mon eaþe tosliteþ þætte næfre gesomnad wæs,
> uncer giedd geador.
>
> 'One easily cuts apart that which was never joined together (or composed)
> – our song/passion together'.

As has been noted before, line 18 seems to echo Matthew 19:6: "What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder",[51] signalling that the speaker's dilemma involves the subject of marriage which, of course, can be to only one man at a time.[52]

Showing a characteristic facility with polysemy, the poet captures the meanings that that the speaker's marriage easily parted her (physically and legally) from the lover to whom she was not thus joined, and with whom she could enjoy neither song nor emotional or physical union or passion (*giedd*); but also that she was also to be parted easily (metaphorically) from the husband to whom she was joined in marriage but not in sympathy or love. Although not supported by *DOE* (s.v. *gydd*), the context of the use of *giedd* in the poem makes it highly likely that it

51 Vulgate: *Quod ergo Deus coniunxit, homo non separet*. Cf. OE *ne ge-twæme nan mann, þa þe god gesomnode*, and *þ[æ]t forðon god ge-geadrade monn ne toslite/tosceaða/suindria* (Skeat 1887: 152–153).

52 Its Christian sentiment is not inconsistent with historical reality, as Odoacer and Theoderic were both Christian, if Arians.

incorporates the sense found in ON *geð*, of emotional and sexual union – not as a loan from Old Norse, but evidencing a meaning inherent in the etymology of the word. Thus, *giedd*, with its potentially double meanings of 'song' and 'passion', symbolises the speaker's state of mind. In a literal sense it is a song of love, but metaphorically it is also an emotional joining, neither of which the speaker can enjoy with her lover (because prevented) or her husband (because unwilling). Our almost Donne-like poet may even have been sonically aware of the etymological connection we know exists in the contiguous and alliterating words *giedd* and *geador*, one an *i*-mutated form of the other.[53] A *giedd* was 'a thing together', both a song and the passion celebrated in song. However, like the *soðgied* sung by the speaker in *The Seafarer* (l. 1), the 'true song' of the speaker of *Wulf and Eadwacer* is something which she can only sing alone.

5 The Origins of *Wulf and Eadwacer*

5.1 The Question of *ljóðaháttr*

If *Wulf and Eadwacer* is not a poem about Odoacer and Theoderic, then there is little to be said about its possible origins, which must remain a mystery. The romantic and lupine motifs which it seems to share with *Vǫlsunga saga*, the Life of St Bertellin, and *Wolfdietrich B* could have originated in the vernacular folklore or *Hausmärchen* of anywhere in Europe. Scandinavian origins have been argued for by Schofield (1902), North (1994) and others, on the basis of its resemblance to the story of Sigmundr and Signý as it appears in *Vǫlsunga saga*. But the story of neither Sigmundr nor his son Sigurðr is Scandinavian in origin. It looks more Frankish or Burgundian.[54] It has also been argued that *Wulf and Eadwacer*'s metrical oddities are evidence of the influence of Scandinavian poetic metre, and in

53 The stems of *giedd* and *geador* are related to each other and to 'gather' and 'together', the underlying concept of which was 'something joined'. See *IGEWB*: 423–424, under PIE etymons *ghedh*, *ghodh* 'to join, make a bond'. The concept of joinder in *giedd* 'poem, song' would be the joining of thoughts or verses, or the gathering of remembered stories. Pokorny placed the obviously related ON *geð* under his etymon *g^{w}hedh* 'to beg, wish for' (*IGEWB*: 488). But in Old Norse (particularly *Hávamál*) *geð* is used of a state of mind connoting joinder in the sense of mutual sympathy and sexual union.

54 See Gillespie (1973: 118–123, 125–126, s.nn. *Sifrit* and *Sigemunt* (*von Niderlant*)). In *Vǫlsunga saga* and the *Poetic Edda*, the Vǫlsung family are kings of *Húnaland* 'Hun-land', and Sigurðr is regularly referred to as *Húnzkr* 'Hunnish' – a semi-legendary concept of Hun-conquered territory in the lower Rhine, Frisia, and/or Saxony.

particular *ljóðaháttr*.[55] The long line followed by a short line, characteristic of *ljóðaháttr*, has been seen in lines 2–3, 7–8 (including the refrain *ungelic(e) is us*) and in the concluding quartet at lines 16–19, thus dividing the poem into "stanzas", which are familiar in Eddaic poetry but found in Old English nowhere else apart from *Deor* (which also has a refrain).[56] The subject has not been fully studied, but A. J. Bliss (1971), in a self-limited survey, found evidence of *ljóðaháttr*-type short lines in quite a few Old English poetic texts not usually noted for any Scandinavian influence, which he argued were a genuine metrical variant, not examples of scribal omission.[57] He found them in Old English gnomic poetry, charms, the religious verse of the Junius Manuscript – including *Genesis B*, the translation from Old Saxon – and at least one Old English Elegy (*The Seafarer*). It is also evident from his examination that such long-line-short-line tripartite structures were related to the phenomenon of "hypermetrical" lines in Old English, which may be found even further afield, including in *Judith* and *Beowulf*. On this writer's preliminary scan, one could add more short-line examples, including several from the Old English Elegies.[58] As none of this poetry shows other evidence of Scandinavian influence, the case for its derivation from *ljóðahattr* seems poor on the face of it.

Furthermore, *ljóðaháttr* – or something metrically like it – has also been detected in the *Hildebrandslied*, which shows no linguistic connection with Scandinavia whatsoever. Rosemarie Lühr and Klaus von See saw a metre resembling *ljóðaháttr* in lines 37–38a, instead of the usually-supposed lost half-line (38b).[59] It is also possible to find others (at lines 7, 8b–10 and the final lines at 67–68a),

55 See North (1994: 29–31), identifying several other Old Norse metres, (erroneously in my view) accepted by Rozano-García (2021).

56 See Sievers (1893: 144–146, esp. 145; in the section "Strophen-bildung"); Imelmann (1907: 14–15), Brandl (1905: 976), and Malone (1962b: 110). The irregularity was also noted by Lehmann (1969: 152–154) but not attributed to *ljóðaháttr*. The perception of Old Norse influence has been influential in Eddaic studies: see Orchard (2011: 306).

57 Malone (1943: 202–203) discussed the phenomenon much more briefly. He saw what he called "line-and-a-half" constructions in legal texts, and four times in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the composer of which he thought had used it systematically (uniquely in Old English). He thought this metrical type had developed into *ljóðaháttr* in Scandinavia.

58 My own (very preliminary and limited) scan suggests that tripartite structures including short lines may also be found in the Elegies: *The Wife's Lament* (l. 23–24), *The Husband's Message* (l. 31–32), *The Seafarer* (l. 112, 113), *The Wanderer* (l. 90–95), and *Resignation* (l. 93, 103, 118). It may exist in more places in the wisdom-poem *Maxims I* than Bliss identified (see l. 53–55, 163, 167–168, 177–178 and 188–191).

59 *mit geru scal man* / *geba infahan,* // *ort widar orte* 'with a spear ought a man to receive a gift, point against point'. See Lühr (1982: I, 273–274, 283) and von See (1981: 47–48).

again where editors have supposed missing half-lines.[60] As with Bliss's examples, the sense of the verse is continuous, and it is not necessary to suppose lacunae. These metrical punctuations also have the effect of seeming to create stanzas, which had also been supposed by Richard North (1994) (and others) to be evidence of Eddaic influence on Old English verse. The matter probably requires a monograph, if not a thesis, but the evidence, such as it is, would seem to suggest a phenomenon of metrical variation which may be common to West Germanic verse, and perhaps even specific to certain genres, and in particular "gnomic" poetry. In Old Norse, the *ljóð* of *ljóðaháttr* could be a spell or charm – as a part of "gnomic" wisdom – but, as with OE *leod* and German *Lied*, it also meant the kind of short poem called a "lay".

5.2 Names and Naming in *Wulf and Eadwacer*

The name *Eadwacer* has also proved a stumbling-block to the Scandinavian theory, which seems unable to account for it. Although there are only two names in the poem and the conclusions to be drawn from them proportionately tentative, the onomastic evidence with respect to *Wulf* and *Eadwacer* taken both together seems to suggest an origin in Continental Europe. In form, *Eadwacer* was a typical Germanic dithematic "variation name" the elements of which meant 'good fortune, wealth' and 'watchful', in both Old English and other Germanic languages. As Bradley noted, it was the Anglo-Saxon cognate equivalent of Odoacer. Many studies have treated it as a meaningful epithet or a common noun with various referents in the poem.[61] But, as with all such interpretations of a name in a literary work, there are three possibilities: (1) the name is just an ordinary name, whether of a real or invented person, and not meaningful; (2) it is a "Cinderella"-type name invented to describe the characteristics of an invented character; or (3) it is the ordinary variation-name of a real person who is given a literary role or

60 See e.g. the text of the *Hildebrandslied* printed in Fulk et al. (2008: 340–341) ("improved" and based on Lühr's study) in which asterisks indicate that the editors think that lines 10b, 36b and 66b are missing.

61 Morley thought *Eadwacer* meant 'watcher of wealth, property' (meaning 'God'): Bradley (1888: 198). *Bosworth-Toller* (s.v. *ēad-wacer*) and several writers since have agreed. Schofield (1902) suggested 'easily or very vigilant one' (followed in *Bosworth-Toller Supplement*, s.v. *ēad-wacer*, queried as *ēaþ-wacer*, hence 'easily roused (?), alert, vigilant'). Frese (1990) interpreted it as 'watcher of heaven' (a guardian-spirit). Baker (1981: 49) 'Watchful of wealth and happiness' (an epithet for the speaker). Greenfield (1986) 'Guardian of happiness': (referring to Wulf). Morcom (2022: 5) 'the one watchful over joy' (an epithet for God).

character appropriate to an interpretation of the name.[62] Given my interpretation of the poem, Eadwacer might well be seen as someone who was watchful, if he was suspicious of his wife, protective of his child and/or apprehensive of the approach of Wulf. Of course, as the Germanic king of a rich city, his main function was also as a *hordweard* or 'hoard-watcher' (e.g. *Beowulf*, l. 1047), and thus he would be *wacer* 'alert, watchful' over his *ead* 'good fortune, wealth'. However, even if his name suggested a miser, gaoler, fearful cuckold, or financially prudent king, this does not mean that he was a complete invention rather than a real person adapted to a literary role which suited his name.

As a real personal name, *Odoacer* (and variants) is reasonably well recorded in Continental Europe, very rarely in Anglo-Saxon England (no examples before the last quarter of the tenth century) and not at all in Scandinavia, where there is no *Auðvakr*.[63] The monothematic name *Wulf* was very common in Scandinavia, as Úlfr, much less so in Continental Europe as *Wulf*, but practically unrecorded in Anglo-Saxon England.[64] In England and Continental Europe, *Wulf* may have been a familiar shortening of a dithematic name of a type that tended not to be recorded in formal documents, as compared to Scandinavia, where poetry and saga-literature contributed many familiar name-forms to the record. As I have suggested, in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *Wulf* is a good choice of name if intended to encompass an actual wolf, a common and therefore anonymous personal name, a lupine metaphor for an outlaw or exile, the *nom de guerre* of a secret enemy and the pseudonym of a clandestine lover. But it is notable that it is only in Continental Europe that both names are recorded in any numbers, which makes it a more

62 See the discussion of this perennial topic in Old English onomastics in Shaw (2020: 6–9). He reminds us that the third category in my formulation has often been ignored.

63 *ADNB*: 201–203, recording several forms between the fifth and ninth centuries, with four medieval German place-names. See also *Onomasticon*: 189, recording two examples, one possibly late tenth century, the other eleventh century. *PASE* [accessed 14 September 2022] gives three Eadwacers, all eleventh-century moneyers. For the lack of any Scandinavian *Auðvakr*, see Lind (1905–1931). There is no example in *Runnamnslexicon*. However, the elements *auð-* and *vakr* are found separately in medieval Scandinavian names.

64 See *ADNB*: 1639–1663, s.n. *VULFA*, with hundreds of examples of names with the element *wulf*, eight examples of monothematic *Wulf* (1643) but considerably more monothematic hypocorisms (1643–1645). See also *Onomasticon*: 506–522, 584. The large number of dithematic names also include obvious examples of Danish *Ulf-*. See also *PASE*. Mats Redin (1919: 10) doubted if any of the examples of *Wulf* in English recording belonged to English people. For *Úlfr*, see Lind (1905–1931: I, 1054–1055 and II, 795–804). Shaw (2020: 42) thought that there was "no clear evidence for a native Old English name *Wulf*". But *Wulf* could be an informal shortening, as in *Wulf Leofwines sunu* in the entry for 1010 in *ASC* MS D, called *Wulfric Leofwines sunu* in the C and E MSS (noted by Stanley 1992: 46, 53, n. 2).

likely origin for the characters' names, and hence their story, than either Scandinavia or Anglo-Saxon England.

If we look for an origin for a Theoderic-story in the Eastern Roman Empire and for a more or less direct transfer to England, the evidence is lacking. Procopius recorded a highly romanticised (and romantic) story linked to the foundation of England told by Franks (accompanied by Angles) at the imperial court at Constantinople in about 550, apparently as part of their petition for funds to assert sovereignty over Brittany.[65] Two-way traffic in stories is thus a possibility, though not a well-evidenced one. In the late sixth-century, Eastern Roman fashions came to Gaul and England (see Campbell 2000: 75–78 and references) – perhaps arriving in the train of the embassies which resulted in the huge Byzantine cash subventions to Francia which sent a shower of gold into Anglo-Saxon England too. The grave at Sutton Hoo contained luxury goods brought by some means from Byzantium. In 668, the Greek-speaking Theodore of Tarsus became Archbishop of Canterbury (escorted by the bibliophilic Benedict biscop). His reign sparked a mini-flourishing of Greek learning, but this was not long-lived, and Greek was by and large not read in Anglo-Saxon England unless in Latin translation (Cameron 1993: 65). We can only speculate whether Theodore of Hadrian might have brought a copy of John of Antioch's *Chronikon* with them, or a knowledge of its contents or of the traditions on which it was based. There is other evidence of economic or cultural contact between England and Byzantium,[66] but nothing of literary relevance.

If, however, my proposition is correct that *Wulf and Eadwacer* is about Odoacer and Theoderic (hence the continental derivation of the names), it is still possible to build a case – if not an impressive one – for the existence of its raw materials in Anglo-Saxon England. Bede quoted from the chronicle of Marcellinus *comes* and the *Liber pontificalis*, the first of which provides at least some details of the contention of the two men (although for Marcellinus, Theoderic was the villain).[67] If the poem's watery location was supposed to be Ravenna, the city is mentioned in Orosius's *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, known in England, and also

65 Procopius, *Wars* VIII.20.1–56 (Dewing 1914–1940: V, 252–271). See also Thompson (1980).

66 On Byzantine contact with Britain, see Fulford (1989). One notes that the Penmachno stone may constitute evidence that in sixth-century Wales the habit of reckoning dates from Byzantine consular years still existed.

67 For Marcellinus *comes* see p. 380 above. In the *Liber pontificalis* (Mommsen 1898b: 112–138) the entry on pope Simplicius (*r.* 468–483) does not even notice the rise of Odoacer or the fall of the Western Empire: (112–113). Felix III (*r.* 483–492) is noted to be pope from the time of *Odobacer rex* until that of Theoderic (114). Theoderic and Ravenna are mentioned in the entries on Gelasius, Anastasius II, Hormisdas, John I (where Theoderic receives a bad press) and Felix IV.

in the Old English version of the Alfredian period, with a native spelling *Rafenna*.[68] Jordanes' *Getica*, which described it, was available to Alcuin in Francia (Innes 2000: 243) and possibly therefore also to English clerics, as was Paulus's *Historia gentis Langobardorum*, which mentions it frequently, though without much detail other than that it was accessible by ship from Verona and next to the sea. But this is somewhat artificial. If one considers the evidence marshalled by David Pelteret, Anglo-Saxons were everywhere in Italy (and not all the places they went have been accounted for yet). While he does not mention Ravenna specifically, Anglo-Saxons were well known in Lombardy and its capital Pavia since the days of Wilfrid and the Lombard king Perctarit in the seventh century.[69] Ravenna was the capital of the Eastern Roman Exarchate from 540 to 751 and one of the most famous centres of western Christendom in Europe (Charlemagne ranked it second only to Rome in his will). The *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* search-engine produces over 3200 individual instances of forms of the name *Ravenna*, and so it would be a bold statement that well-travelled and/or learned English people could not have absorbed and transmitted a fact as simple as that Ravenna, a famous place in Lombardy, was a city in a lagoon. But accurate information can be passed on by poetic tradition as well as literary texts, and it is not necessarily the case that the *Wulf and Eadwacer* poet needed to know or even ever have heard of Ravenna. This point carries more force when one considers that although the *Raben* of the Middle High German Dietrich epics is undoubtedly Ravenna, and is central to the poetic legend, the only topographical detail about it in the German poems is the fact that it is by the sea.[70] Against all this, however, is the obvious fact that the story of Odoacer and Theoderic was not English, and therefore there is no reason to assume that any Old English story about them was created in England. So, we shall now turn to evidence of the story of Theoderic in England as a reflex of continental European traditions.

68 See *Rafenna* in the *Old English Orosius*, VI.24.2 and VI.30.4 (Godden 2016: 384–385, 393–393). There were three references in the original Orosius: VI.13.2 (in the time of Caesar); VII.22.7, 8 (in the third century AD, including reference to Germanic tribes ravaging as far as Ravenna); and VII.39.2 (*c.* 410, as the place of refuge of the papacy during Alaric's sack of Rome).

69 See Pelteret (2011), who says that his study is in addition to the "classic" account in Levison (1947).

70 In *Rabenschlacht*, Dietrich captures Ravenna and then (v. 967–968) chases Witege into the sea, where he is received by a mermaid called Wæchilt. See Gillespie (1973: 133).

6 Theoderic in England

What seems particularly important with respect to the origin of *Wulf and Eadwacer* and its connection to the Theoderic tradition is that the only evidence for a literary Eadwacer outside of our poem is in John of Antioch, Fredegar, the *Hildebrandslied* and the *Annales Quedlinburgenses*. And in all of these he is the antagonist of Theoderic.

Stories of Theoderic were certainly known in Anglo-Saxon England. He can be found as Þeodric the *Amuling* (member of the Amal royal clan) in the Old English *Martyrologium* (Mercian, latter ninth century; Kotzor 1981: II, 107) and the Old English *Orosius* (West Saxon, during or shortly after Alfred's reign).[71] This information about Theoderic's membership of the Ostrogothic royal clan of the Amals is not contained in Boethius's work, nor in the Latin *vitae* often attached to it. However, it agrees with the Amal tradition in the *Getica*.[72] As P. J. Frankis observed, this information about Theoderic the Amuling at least shows us that Theoderic and his clan had Anglo-Saxon names and thus an existence outside religious texts (1962: 163). R. M. Wilson believed that the surviving allusions in Old English indicated "a familiarity with Theoderic as a hero of legend", and that Alfred's statement that Theoderic was an *Amuling* "must be due to the heroic poems of which he was so fond" (1970: 5–6). Even if the Old English *Boethius* was not by Alfred, this evidence suggests that our clerical writers needed to inform their vernacular readers that the Church's villain was their hero.

Indeed, I suggest that the Þeodric we see alluded to in *Widsith*, *Deor*, and *Waldere* is likely to be this heroic figure.[73] In *Widsith* (l. 115), he is named among the famed *innweorud* 'inner court' of the Ostrogothic king Eormanric. In *Deor* (l. 18–26), his story is said to be *monegum cuþe* 'known to many', and he is again named in association with Eormanric, described as a tyrant. We can guess that the

71 Godden and Irvine (2009: I, 243–244 (prose), 384–386 (metre); and II, 251–257, 497, 498 (notes)).

72 See *Getica*, XIV.79–81. Cf. Cassiodorus's *Variae, IX.25* (Mommsen 1894: 291–292). Cassiodorus wrote a letter to the senate as if he were Athalaric (Theoderic's grandson and successor), and praised himself for having rescued seventeen generations of *Hamali* kings from the oblivion of antiquity. See also Goffart (2005: 38–39). Goffart emphasises the written origins of Cassiodorus's researches in early Gothic history, though where Cassiodorus found mention of these legendary figures in Roman records is hard to imagine.

73 *Widsith* is potentially datable on linguistic grounds to the beginning of the eighth century (though this is not universally accepted) (Malone 1962a: 112–116). *Deor* and *Waldere* cannot be dated further than their *termini ante quem*, i.e. the date of the manuscripts which contain them. *Deor* in the Exeter Book are therefore no later than 950×975. The two surviving leaves from the manuscript of the lost *Waldere* epic are dated *c.* 1000 (Hill 2009: 6).

allusion is to the tradition – found in German texts from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries – that Theoderic (Dietrich) ended his exile and returned to Ravenna to unseat Ermenrich. Hence the consolation in the poem's refrain: *þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg* 'that passed away and so can this'. In *Waldere*, Þeodric is said to be the owner of a magically invincible sword called Mimming, and to have been rescued from the *fifela geweald* 'realm of monsters' by Weland's son Widia, to whom he thought of giving it as a reward. This is again consistent with similar stories of monstrous encounters recounted in the Norwegian *Þiðreks saga af Bern* (*c*. 1250 from Low German and/or Saxon sources) and the German Dietrich epics. Indeed, the theme of the sword Mímungr in *Þiðreks saga* is that it can cut through anything (though it is owned by Viðga (= Widia)), just as, perhaps, Theoderic's sword cleaves right through Odoacer in John's account. It can be seen from these references that Þeodric was part of a complex of stories involving other characters, including, as an opponent, Eormanric (who is also mentioned in *Beowulf* as a man who committed *searoniðas* 'deceitful crimes' or 'serial murders': l. 1196–1201). The Theoderic-tradition must have lasted in England until at least the early thirteenth century, the only evidence of which is a six-line fragment in Middle English alliterative verse quoted in a Latin sermon on humility, the so-called "Wade Fragment".[74] As with the *Hildebrandslied*, these excerpts from the story of Theoderic (and Ermanaric) would be meaningless without a wider knowledge of their tales, which audiences doubtless had.

The English sources make no reference to Odoacer, only to Eormanric. However, the evidence from Francia suggests that *Eadwacer* was probably there in the background, nonetheless. The Old High German *Hildebrandslied* is found in a manuscript from Fulda dated *c*. 830, but its mixed language shows it has gone through a number of copyings, indicating composition some time before the date of the manuscript. In it *Otacher* is named as the man who drove Hiltibrant and his lord Deotrihh from their home (which was probably Ravenna). The poem is not explicit, but one might expect Otacher is also the man whom they return to avenge themselves on. There is no mention of *Irminrihh, but in literary tradition he ruled Verona not Ravenna, and so his absence from the scene in the *Hildebrandslied* is not surprising. In the literary culture of a monastic foundation close-

74 See Wentersdorf (1966: 281–282). This minuscule remnant of the Theoderic tradition in Middle English has still not been properly edited, translated or explained. Wade is related to the sea-giant named Vaði in *Þiðreks saga*, and he was the owner of a boat in an allusion found in Chaucer's "The Merchant's Tale". The fragment also makes mention of creatures called *nikeres* 'water-monsters' known to *Ildebrand*. This would seem to resemble the *fifela geweald* 'monsters' realm' associated with Þeodric in *Waldere*, which – like the landscape of our poem – is a watery place where monsters lurk.

ly associated with English missionary clerics like Boniface, Otacher was part of the Theoderic tradition.

But there is other circumstantial evidence that not too long after the *Hildebrandslied*, Ermanaric was also a part of the same legend and was also associated with Theoderic. Matthew Innes noted that in 893 Archbishop Fulco of Rheims warned Arnulf King of East Francia off intervening in the affairs of Charles the Simple, the newly crowned king of West Francia, by writing to him of the example of Ermanaric who *in libris teutonicis* ('in German books' or 'German literature') was led by evil counsellors to kill his own relatives and was toppled by Huns (see Innes 2000: 227). Innes thought that Fulco was a learned man who was expressing his knowledge of Ermanaric from Latin sources. However, Ermanaric did not murder his relatives in Ammianus Marcellinus, Jordanes' *Getica* or other historical texts. Fulco was referring to essentially the same Ermanaric-figure we see in the *Annales Quedlinburgenses* and the Old Norse *Hamðismál*, where he is a killer of his own kin. The same tradition of awfulness is suggested by allusions in Old English poetry such as *Widsith* (possibly from around 700) which names the people who were his victims and calls him a *wraþe wærloga* 'angry pledge-breaker'. In *Deor* (not satisfactorily dated other than no later than *c*. 975),[75] he was a *grim cyning* 'cruel king' with a *wylfenne geþoht* 'a wolvish cast of mind' – the wolf who destroys his own kind, as in *Maxims I*. Thus, it may be inferred that the preceding allusion to Þeodric in the same poem was to the man who got rid of him, to his subjects' relief, so that the poet-speaker could offer himself and his reader the consolation *þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg*, 'things passed on from then, so can they from now'. And in *Beowulf*, Hama, a *wræcca* 'exile' at Eormanric's court in *Widsith*, fled Eormanric's *searoniðas*. As Fulco expected Arnulf to know, the message was: "Like Ermanaric in the poetry we both know, you mess with your royal relative[76] at your peril. He and the Huns from the east will get you". These would have been the same Huns with whom Deotrihh – quite unhistorically – arrived in the *Hildebrandeslied* and Theodoricus (Ermanricus's nephew) in the *Annales Quedlinburgenses*, to overthrow Ermanaric. But it was only in vernacular poetry that Theoderic was related to Ermanaric and was a thegn of Attila, who in reality were dead before he was born.

The early eleventh-century *Annales Quedlinburgenses* is a text in which Ermanricus, Theodoricus, and Odoacer all feature in the same narrative. It is a mixture of history and poetic fiction, Odoacer is Theodoricus's cousin and per-

75 However, see Klinck (1992: 161), who placed it, on linguistic grounds, in the Alfredian period. As we have seen, *Þeodric Amuling* was known to the Boethius translator of the same time, and his audience.

76 Arnulf and Charles were third cousins. Their great-grandfather was Louis the Pious.

suades their uncle Ermanricus to expel Theodoricus from Verona. After his exile, Theodoricus returns to Ravenna with Attila and defeats Odoacer. After Attila intercedes, Theodoricus refrains from killing Odoacer and exiles him to some small villages at the confluence of the Elbe and the Saale, a place not far to the east of Quedlinburg itself. At some time after the *Annales Quedlinburgenses* were written Odoacer disappears from the Theoderic-tradition in Europe. In *Þiðreks saga* and the Dietrich-poems of the thirteenth century, Ermenrich is Dietrich's sole opponent and the counsellors who provoke him to evil courses have other names. However, the references to this tradition, taken as whole in Francia, Germany, Saxony and England up to the eleventh century, suggest that they were a trio at some stage not later than the *Hildebrandslied*. We can therefore surmise that behind the references to Þeodric in Old English poetry there lay a story about his enmity with Eadwacer at *Rafenna*, as well as with Eormanric.

How the Theoderic-Odoacer-Ermanaric story or its reflex in *Wulf and Eadwacer* came to England is unknown. Indeed, it may still be that our poem is a purely English take on a continental legend. It might have come from Francia to England or the other way round, either in the ninth century or before.[77] The potential transmitters are many. There is much evidence of clerical contact between England and Francia from Merovingian times.[78] In addition, the language-barriers between Old English and other North Sea Germanic languages, like Old Saxon and Old Low Franconian were probably not insurmountable, even by the Alfredian period, when the Old Saxon poem *Genesis* was translated fairly literally into Old English and a manuscript of the *Heliand* existed in England (Doane 2011: 64–71). It should be remarked, however, that all it takes to transmit a story is one person with an invitation, an audience and a lyre. How many thousands of foreign guests entertained their hosts with songs from their homeland in an age when – as Bede would have us believe – everybody could sing to the lyre and only Caedmon was the odd-man-out?

77 See Innes (2000) for a survey of ninth-century evidence in Francia of vernacular traditions – particularly of Ermanaric and Theoderic. However, he does not consider John of Antioch, Fredegar or the English evidence, which may pre-date the ninth century. Accordingly, he regarded this Carolingian phenomenon as learned in origin rather than an expression of "Germanic warrior culture". The assumption that a vernacular literary tradition, if not learned, must express the culture of "Germanic warriors" is one which this study is partly intended to overturn. For a discussion of the "adoption" by "elites" of vernacular stories in ninth-century Francia (as argued for by Goffart and Roberta Frank), see Taranu (2015: 35–36 and fn. 54, 55).

78 See Levison (1947) and Palmer (2011: 139). See also Shaw (2020: 179) on the eighth-century Continental Germanic clerics in England who could have brought to England the continental traditions he identified in *Beowulf* from his examination of its names. (He preferred an early date for *Beowulf*: 181).

But, with respect to transmission across languages, it is interesting that the *Hildebrandslied* MS has the linguistic peculiarities that it was originally composed in Old High German, that is in Rhineland Franconian, with some signs of Bavarian dialectal influence, but it has an overlay of Low German or Old Saxon forms, as if incompletely adapted by a speaker of those languages for a north German or Saxon audience (Lühr 1982: I, 41–71). In his account of the deeds of Alboin, the sixth-century Lombard conqueror of northern Italy who was murdered by his wife, Paulus Diaconus says that Alboin was renowned far and wide, and that poems were told about him by the Bavarians and among the people who had long been allies of the Lombards, the Saxons, as well as by other speakers of 'the same language' *(eiusdem linguae)*.[79] So, it is somewhat remarkable that the language of the *Hildebrandslied* – a Theoderic-poem – and Paulus's account seem to coincide, positing an origin for a narrative in northern Italy, with subsequent transmission to Upper German Bavaria and Lower German Saxony.

The same trajectory may have been taken by Theoderic traditions (which also went south and east to Byzantium), not only reaching England but Sweden, where a rune-master of the ninth century carved a verse about **þiaurikR hin þurmuþi stiliR ¶ flutna** 'Theoderic the bravehearted, commander of seafarers', who, though he died nine generations before, was still being talked about and was still sitting on his horse Goti, armed and with a shield slung about him – apparently referring to the equestrian statue of Theoderic in Ravenna, or Aachen, to where Charlemagne removed it in 801.[80] In the inscription, Theoderic is referred to as **skati marika** 'king of the Maringa', a tradition related to *Deor* (l. 19) which refers to Theoderic's rule of the *Mæringa burg*. If, as seems likely, these are related Germanic patronymic forms developed from Gothic *mēr* 'glorious', the deuterotheme of Theoderic's father Theodemer and his uncles Valamer and Widimer, it is not a learned tradition, but, again, a vernacular one (see also Hill 2009: 116). Dare one even speculate that if the 'commander of sea-farers' was a Scandinavian *sækonungr* 'sea-king', he might also be the figure who, as in our poem, crossed the water from one island to another?

79 *Historia gentis Langobardorum*, I.27 (Waitz 1878: 70). He and his father Audoin were known to the *Widsith*-poet as Eadwine and Ælfwine of *Eatul* 'Italy' (l. 70–74, 98). His poem's narrative centred round Ælfwine's probably fictional sister Ealhhild and her marriage to Eormanric.

80 Or at least it was the opinion of the chronicler Agnellus and the poet-monk Walafrid Strabo that it was of Theoderic. On the Rök Stone, see Gordon (1957: 188–191 (text), 262–263 (notes)).

7 Conclusions: *Wulf and Eadwacer* a *Sonegildeleoð*?

In conclusion, I suggest that *Wulf and Eadwacer* is not as anomalous as most critics have held. Its metres, including its variants, are those of Old English and probably other West Germanic verse. Its language is standard West Saxon, apparently uninfluenced by other dialects or languages. In its short lay-like form, and with its refrain, it is like *Deor*. In its near-anonymity and focus on expressions of mood and emotion, including those of women, it is like the Old English Elegies. If it is accepted that it is about Odoacer and Theoderic, it resembles other works in the Old English "heroic" tradition in that it is about the contentions of historical or supposedly historical people who were not English, and it is set in a country that is not England. Thus, it resembles *Widsith*, *Beowulf*, *Deor*, *Waldere*, and the *Finnsburh* Fragment. It has the motif of exile, which is common in heroic verse and the Old English Elegies. Its folkloric element, centred on wolves, has analogues in Anglo-Saxon and medieval Scandinavian and German literature (see section 4.8 above); and it is comparable to the monsters in *Beowulf*, magic swords and *fifelas* in *Waldere*, and eternal battles among the cursed in the *Hjaðningavíg* story which frames *Deor*. Thus, it exists at the interface of history and literature, perhaps more demonstrably than any other text surviving in Old English. The analogue identified in John of Antioch, I argue, also demonstrates that what we still take to be "history", because it is written in Latin or Greek, may contain a significant component of material which we should probably categorise as "fiction", being adopted by chroniclers – for the want of anything better – from vernacular, poetic traditions among non-Roman or non-Greek peoples.

Its real oddity is that it has a romantic or sexual theme and a female viewpoint, unique in surviving Old English verse apart from *The Wife's Lament* (see pp. 392–394 above). It is one of the implications of this study that it raises the question of whether this greater focus on the feminine was something that existed in "heroic" vernacular tradition much earlier than its appearance in the *Poetic Edda* or the German Middle High German epics, but, by chance, it was under-represented in the handful of survivals of secular poetry in Old English and Old High German. If so, it deserves to be incorporated into our overly-masculinist ideas of what is meant by "heroic".

I suggest that the poem is a kind of *Sonegildeleod*, in which the speaker embodies the conflict inherent in the position of the *freoðowebbe* wife – not a Hygd or a Wealtheow, but unwilling and tortured, like the *Edda*'s Guðrún, Signý in *Vǫlsunga saga*, or Rosemunda, the murderous wife of Alboin the Lombard.

Finally, I argue that the identification with Odoacer and Theoderic recovers Shippey's "extra information" (see p. 374 above), such that we do not have to

presume – at least in this case – that the Anglo-Saxon tolerance for enigma was any higher than our own. Instead of a wilfully obscure text about nebulous and unidentifiable beings, it becomes a bitterly witty and intense exploration of divided loyalties, unsatisfied longing and transgressive hatred at a turning-point in the history of the Goths and of Europe. To find a historical parallel is not to diminish the value of *Wulf and Eadwacer* as imaginative literature. Indeed, I hope that by making it less of an anomaly, this study serves to increase it.[81]

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