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THE OLD WORK OF THE GIANTS — RUINS AND NOSTALGIA IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

Abstract: Nostalgia of some kind is a common concern in Old English literature, especially in poetry, and it is often most visible in images of ruin and decay. Destroyed buildings, abandoned homes, and ancient tombs in the Old English tradition speak not only about the lives and ways of those who dwelt or are now buried in them but also on behalf of those who have come to observe them or who have seen in them either a reflection of their own lives or the fate towards which each and every thing in the world is slowly going. This paper seeks to analyse the themes of nostalgia in Old English poetry by examining the images of architectural decay in order to explore and better understand the connection between nostalgia and the symbolism behind ruins in the Old English poetic tradition. The analysis relies largely on holistic studies of the Exeter Book and other Old English manuscripts (cf. Ericksen, 2011; Reading, 2018; Niles, 2019) and aims to enter a dialogue with studies of nostalgia, transience and fate as some of the chief pillars of Anglo-Saxon poetry (cf. Di Sciacca, 2006; Fell, 2013; Trilling, 2008).

Key words: Old English, Anglo-Saxon, Exeter Book, mediaeval poetry, nostalgia

INTRODUCTION: A NOTE ON SYMBOL IN MEDIAEVAL POETRY

An honest discussion of symbolism in mediaeval poetry must first address two questions: 1) what kind of poetry are we dealing with, and 2) what does symbolism mean in that kind of poetry? In this analysis, we are dealing with the Exeter Book, that is, two of the poems in the Exeter Book characterised by images of ruins, namely, *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer*. Until 2019 and John D. Niles' book titled *God's Exiles and English Verse: On The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry* (2019), there had not been any holistic studies of the Exeter Book, probably the most important source of Anglo-Saxon poetry and certainly the most well-known one. That is, there had been no studies that approached the manuscript as not merely a miscellany of unrelated texts but as a book meant to be read from cover to cover and a book whose contents were dependent on each other and tied together by various threads, hidden and obvious. Ruins are one such thread: both literal ruins that we see

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or hear of in *Juliana*, *The Wanderer* and *The Ruin* and ruins of the world as a whole, such as those insinuated in *The Seafarer* (Niles, 2019: 77).

When discussing the Exeter Book, Niles puts himself in the shoes of an idealised reader in whose hands the manuscript was most likely to fall. More precisely, he imagines himself as a cleric, or rather, as one of many clerics, brothers in a 10th-century monastic setting (Niles, 2019: 31). In such an environment, a literary symbol does not represent an unfixed, inexhaustible potentiality of meaning that we have come to associate with the term, but rather an element of a clearly defined and well-known set of polysemantic images that demand a skilful quill to contribute to or produce an innovative literary effect. For Anglo-Saxon poets, such images are often: 1) oral-connected, as such images come heavy with metonymic potential that allows the poet to repurpose what is already familiar and find new uses for it in the new, written tradition, and 2) liturgical symbols that rely on the similarities between ritual and oral performance to give poetry an additional extratextual dimension (Maring, 2017: 2–3). Thus, for example, crosses bring together the patristic symbol of *lignum maris*,¹ the actual liturgy and monuments such as those at Ruthwell and Bewcastle (Maring, 2017: 2–3); the sea comes to represent the tumultuousness of life and the actual sea often experienced by seamen while bringing to mind the works of Gregory the Great in whose writings it is a powerful metaphor for a turbulent life (Moorhead, 2005: 47), and the whale, bringing to mind a sea monster to be slain by a hero, becomes one of the *piscium grandium* or aspidochelones representing the devil that has come to devour the proud and remind them of the story of Jonah (Eriksen, 2021: 84). The fact that a great number of texts contained in the Exeter Book feature similar recurrent symbols despite being composed at different periods of time tells us that the Anglo-Saxon *scop* mostly stuck to tradition, finding new uses for familiar symbols first and experimenting second. Most common symbols of the kind described include, in short, turbulent seas, storms, divine light and walls in need of restoration (Niles, 2019: 242), and the reader, if they are indeed a pious cleric as Niles would have them be, sees them, to quote Huppé on the Augustinian relationship to symbol in Old English poetry, as “pleasurable means of revealing Christian beauty” (Huppé, 1959: 10-11).

What kind of role do ruins as triggers for nostalgia play in such poetry? What does nostalgia even mean in the context of the 10th century, the period when

¹ By *lignum maris* is meant, for example, a cross or a wooden object such as that described by Augustine in book I of his *Confessiones*, which carries the children of Eve across a turbulent ocean towards salvation.

the Exeter Book was compiled? There is certainly no Old English word for *nostalgia*, a term coined well into the Modern Era, but the yearning for the past or something familiar that the term describes is certainly there in the poetry, and it is one of the pillars of the Anglo-Saxon world for some critics, usually those of a Postmodern predisposition (cf. Trilling, 2009). For someone taking our, that is, Niles' approach, however, nostalgia must take a different form. If our ideal reader of the Exeter Book is a cleric, we can imagine them as familiar with patristic or at least homiletic Christian tradition and as someone who sees life as a spiritual exile from Paradise (cf. Hebrews 11:11–16), the memory of which fills the believer with inexplicable longing for 'something more', that is, their true *æðel* 'homeland' (cf. Haydon, 2009). The same Christian tradition is largely built on Classical models, which, if the reader is familiar with them as well, sometimes present ruins as a source of melancholy and a reminder that the world is hastening towards its end (cf. Edwards, 2012), that is, that it is *on ofste* 'in a rush, hastening', as Wulfstan put it in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. Unlike the native, oral tradition, this textual, monastic (i.e., Christian) tradition allows for and demands hermeneutic readings (Maring, 2017: 22–23), which we assume would have influenced the reader's approach to the manuscript, making them rely heavily on the attitudes of the church fathers when analysing ruins; and seeing how more emphasis is put on manuscripts as fruits of monastic labour and the best context for understanding poetry (cf. Reading, 2018; Niles, 2019; Ericksen, 2021), our approach only emphasises the debt Old English poetry owes to its patristic heritage.

Old English poetics appear and are hybrid even when we step out of the intended reader's shoes. They are a result not so much of a violent clash but an interweaving of two traditions: one oral and heroic and the other written and patristic. By coming into contact, these two traditions weave for the poet a web of well-known signs full of metonymic potential usable in all modes and genres of poetry and capable of bringing to mind diverse but equally vigorous associations that blur the border between performance and text (Maring, 2017:155).² It is not at all surprising that the Old English poets took an interest in ruins as such a symbol. The arriving Germanic settlers from continental Europe that would later form their seven kingdoms found themselves 'squatting' in the ruins of Roman Britain for a long time (Pearsall, 2020:4). Their dwelling among Roman ruins gave them plenty of time to adjust to and come to view ruins as recognisable and convincing symbols of the frailty of everything earthly and the durability of everything heavenly. Thus, ruins are a

² And also ritual, as Maring (2017) demonstrates.

notable symbol of impermanence even in the early Anglo-Latin literature,³ and their significance becomes larger over time, with ruins even engaging in an active discussion with the reader. The ruins can indeed speak, and the warning (or lament) uttered by Babylon itself in the Old English rendition of Orosius's *Historiae adversus paganos* speaks of their eloquence and the gravity of their words:

Nu ic þuss gehroren eom ond aweg gewiten, hwæt, ge magan on me ongitan and oncnawan þæt ge nanuht mid eow nabbað fæstes ne stranges þætte þurhwunian mæge.

“Now that I am so gone and fallen into ruin, look, you can understand and see in me that you have nothing firm or strong that could survive.”

Even if taken from a prose text, i.e., a historical study, and not poetry, the quote above alone can more than illustrate the importance of ruins in the educated, literary Old English language. The lines are found in a paragraph describing Babylon, whose corresponding Latin original contains but a single sentence in which the ruins of the city play no active role. In other words, the translator seized the opportunity to turn a simple statement about the destruction of a city into a rather Biblical treatment of the transitory nature of the world and give the city a voice of its own so that it could admonish the reader with greater force and more intimately.

The primary reason why ruins are so potent when it comes to evoking memories and leading the observer to fantasise and ‘reminisce’ about the home prepared for them by God is the fact that they, much like the memories they evoke, both are and are not (Shippey, 2017: xiv–xv). That is, ruins are a physical presence, often imposing and wonderful to behold, but they are also there because something else is not. It is that something, that which the ruin is a ruin of, that attracts and manages to rouse imagination and nostalgia. However, these views must never be considered nihilistic or defeatist when taking our approach. No matter how disheartened one may be by the impermanence of the world, complete despair would be considered a sin in a Christian tradition, at whose core was the belief that the all-good God can and will make sure that everything goes according to his wise and righteous will. In fact, God in Old English poetry can, just as in the scriptural and patristic writings, be described as both the stone that binds everything together and as a builder who will one day come and rebuild the ruined dwellings of humankind,

³ cf. Alcuin's elegiac couplets on the ruins of Rome: *Roma caput mundi, mundi decus, aurea Roma — nunc remanet tantum saeva ruina tibi.*

as can be seen in the poem *Christ I* (13–14) also found in the Exter Book, where the poet tells us that God must come and *þonne gebete, nu gebrosnad is, hus under hrofe* ‘restore it, now that it is ruined, the house beneath the roof’ (Raw, 1978: 62). In other words, we can see ruins reflecting edifices and the fallen world reflecting Eden, as will be clear in the further analysis of *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer*.

THE RUIN AND THE WANDERER

There is no poem in the entire Old English poetic corpus that offers a more detailed description and a more on-the-spot treatment of ruins than *The Ruin*. Interestingly, at first reading, the poet never seems to moralise and never tries to make an example of those who came before them and preach. That leads some to assume that the poet is taking ruins as the subject for no other reason other than the fact that ruins are a natural product of the world they inhabit or due to antiquarian interest, not because the ancient inhabitants of the city they are describing were decadent or led astray (Orton, 2002: 357). The poem also appears to be a homage to the typically Latin genre called *encomium urbis* ‘eulogy for a city’, similar, for example, to Ausonius’ *Ordo urbium nobilium*, which describes and ranks Mediterranean cities according to their significance in the empire (Amodio, 2014: 275). It can also be read as an example of the *excidium urbis* ‘the ruination of a city’ genre (Niles, 2019: 156). Another similar Old English example of such an urban eulogy is the poem *Durham*, which describes the city that lends the poem its name, as well as the relics of Saint Cuthbert within it. Whatever the poet’s goal was, some say, what matters more is the fact that they describe their subject with great precision and remarkable lucidity, showing their mastery of a wide variety of words for decay and destruction (Marsden, 2004: 322). In short, the text is primarily descriptive in style. However, the detached voice of the narrator still manages to make the atmosphere grander by occasionally resorting to loftier, more heroic language, for example, by employing a kenning and calling the walls *enta geweorc* (2b) ‘the work of the giants’ or by personifying the land the city was built upon, that is, the land whose *heard gripe* (8a) ‘hard grip’ now clutches those who once cultivated it. Going by such vocabulary choices, we can see early on that the text concerns itself with a history that demands textual embellishment that will help imprint on the mind of the reader the spectacle of the city’s history as glimpsed in its ruins.

Genre is not the only problem, and many have found it difficult to imagine the intended audience, too, analysing the poem as an elegy (Liuzza, 2002: xxiv). Not defining a fixed framework and imagining an ideal reader in the manner Niles did

before approaching the text, it is indeed a challenging task deducing who the intended audience was from the text itself because the poem is solitary among other texts of a similar genre, as it is not a confessional monologue or lament of personal griefs — it is rather a descriptive piece with a ghost town as its subject. However, the buildings and streets the poet describes are not merely lifeless objects without any context or backstory to them. On the contrary, they are closely associated with the people who made them as a group, as if those artisans still lived through their art (Mitchell and Robinson, 2012: 237). Indeed, the story that the poet seems to be interested in at first is the story of the genius and creative disposition of the *entas*, ‘giants’, that is, the architects who built the place and the people who dwelt in it — the poet is interested in telling the story of their *orþonc*, ‘ingenium, natural talent and disposition of mind’. Niles attempts to reconstruct the intended audience by analysing the positioning of *The Ruin* and similar poems in the manuscript and assigning them strategically chosen and thus prominent positions in the book, which he sees, first and foremost, as instructional material for a cleric (Niles, 2019: 77, 142) who, reading the manuscript, would assign double meaning to the poem from the Augustinian perspective (Niles, 2019: 188). The double meaning is, of course, in relation to Augustine’s *The City of God*. The city in *The Ruin* is earthly; it is splendid but spiritually void. The city is full of *meadoheall monig* (23a) ‘many a mead-hall’, and although marvellous, its inhabitants are *wlonc and wingal* (34a) ‘proud and wanton with wine’ (Niles, 2019: 189). Those familiar with Old English poetry will note that *wlanc* is used elsewhere of immoral characters whose cities suffered the same fate, for example, Nebuchadnezzar in *Daniel* 96a. The Biblical attitude to city ruination is clear from the examples of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the patristic tradition picks up on it with Babylon. In *The Wanderer* 87a, the poet latches onto the same metaphor and employs the same idiom for ruins we see in *The Ruin* (*eald enta geweorc*), although with a more explicit addendum later on (85–87) that it was God who laid waste to the world, which is probably what the author of *The Ruin* would have said as well (but the damage the manuscript suffered makes that impossible to know).

One of the chief reasons to read *worldly* nostalgia into *The Ruin* is that the poet, although detached from his subject, imagines in a few lines (21–24) the old ways and customs of the inhabitants to have been very similar to what can be described as the stereotypically Anglo-Saxon way of life. He sees in the ruins the loss of what he thought were the best things in life: great halls with their gables (*heah horngestreon* 22a), many mead-houses full of frolic (*meodoheall monig mondreama full* 23) and the din of warriors and their boastful song (*heresweg micel* 22b). To some, the poem seems an expression of the Anglo-Saxon experience: the experience

of a people that have been living among the ruins of a once-great Roman civilisation that left magnificent traces (Pearsell, 2020: 55). To others, the poet seems to follow in the footsteps of Latin poets such as Venantius Fortunatus, who laments the fall of the Thuringian kingdom in a poem full of motifs of urban decay titled *De excidio Thoringia* (Matyushina, 2020: 51). Who it was that inspired the poet in literary terms is perhaps unclear, but it seems more than clear that they understand that time separates the dead from the living more so than fate, and the poet speaks in Anglo-Saxon terms because, for the Anglo-Saxon reader, the greatest joys are those they have experienced themselves, and their loss is, of course, the greatest loss of all, at least until they have been reassured by their reading of the Exeter Book that the loss of material things is one of the conditions of life, eternity being reserved for the righteous. However, by using the joys from the reader's everyday life as a starting point and by imagining the melancholy a sudden shift in fate would bring, they are still able to sympathise and envision how those who came before must have felt when their own bliss was turned upside down by *wyrd seo swiþe* (24b) 'fate the mighty'.

It is also the poet's avoidance of anything specific that aids the reader in imagining the city as relevant to everyone and finding an excuse to be nostalgic. There seem to be no traces of individualism in the walls that the poet is studying, at least not in the fragments that we have. That vagueness is in accordance with the tenets of the gnomic verse, even if the poet refuses to be explicitly gnomic and avoids the *sceal* and *bip* formulae characteristic of maxims. That is, the imagery in the poem is generalised — even if vivid and detailed enough to, according to some, give away explicitly the Roman nature of the place — and the cracked walls are like a canvas for the poet and the audience to paint a scene on according to their liking. What can be an obstacle to self-identification, however, is the fact that, although vaguely described and presented in Anglo-Saxon poetic terms, the ruins are of explicitly foreign make — the Anglo-Saxons themselves almost never used stone, only timber. Nevertheless, the materials used are ultimately just a preference, and no matter what the Anglo-Saxons used to build their halls, their symbolism remained the same. That is, these grandest of buildings represented the focal points when it came to socialising, especially in the literary context where lords and their fellow retainers share rings and swear oaths to each other, which is how the halls in *The Ruin* are presented. The halls were, as the poet says, *scurbeorge* (5a) 'shelters from the storm'. Both the marvellous stonework of the city and the gabled horns of the Germanic settlers were only a celebration of skill and beauty — the protection from the 'storm' was where the true value of a hall lay (Hume, 1976: 353).

The poet's celebratory tone is, however, a trap. The once-beautiful city may have survived *rice æfter oprum* (10b) 'one kingdom after another' and provided its inhabitants with shelter, but it is nonetheless gone. The fact that the poet focuses on a succession of earthly kingdoms only emphasises their short-lived nature when compared to the heavenly kingdom and proves that even the most long-lasting of cities are but a speck of dust compared to the Augustinian City of God, especially when those who dwell within them are sinful. Similarly, the poet of *The Wanderer*, musing on another set of ruins, even says that ruinous halls *woriað* (78a) 'are wandering about, being vagabonds', like people who have lost their way (Irving, Jr. 1967: 162). The Wanderer's is also a more explicit and personal viewpoint, as he is a man travelling along *wræclastas* (5a) 'paths of exile'. The poet calls him an *anhaga* (1a) 'the one who lives alone', which is hardly a desirable position to be in, especially since outlawry and exile of any kind in medieval times meant complete removal from society at all levels, and for the average man lacking martial prowess and potential for violence, without wealth or connections that would help him find asylum, it usually resulted in quick and inglorious death. Nevertheless, the subject of *The Wanderer* is far from a criminal or a mere wretch who has lost his companions. The word *anhaga* brings to mind wolves and outlaws as in *Maxims II* 19a but also the phoenix and thus Christ too in *Phoenix* 87a, opening the possibility of a hybrid reading of the subject as relying on native oral metonymy to allude to written, Christian sources. The poet in *The Ruin* uses a broken city as a catalyst for a series of imaginative visions of joy and frolic of its long-gone inhabitants, the 'giants' skilled enough to erect whole cities made of stone and trusts the reader to interpret it homiletically, but the exile in *The Wanderer* is not in the position to be vague when faced with ruins, both those he encounters on the path of exiles and those in his memories. Because the Wanderer is deprived of his loved ones and all the joys they shared together, the images of broken walls and abandoned halls only remind him of his loss and the bleak future that awaits both him and the entire order of the world as he knows it, which is why he speaks with nostalgia, almost resignedly, regarding the past and his state of mind (58–62).

The workings of fate in *The Wanderer* are more immediate and more contemporary, and the speaker at first seems like he does not have the privilege of being a neutral observer at any moment because he has not had enough time yet for his wounds to completely heal. Nevertheless, he comes to understand fully the lot he has been dealt by fate, and he moves from there to more universal musings on the nature of the world (Irving, Jr., 1967: 159). Thanks to such a personal and intimate starting point, the Wanderer is perhaps able to better sympathise with others he seeks

to enlighten with his gnomic pieces of advice about humility and frugality. Yet his great heartache and desire to steer the listener towards the right path also make the inevitable ruin of all things that much more tragic.

Where the two poems are similar is their removal of the subject from the heroic boastfulness of the individual that characterises heroic verse. As mentioned, the city in *The Ruin* and its dwellers are not named as Heorot and the Danes were in *Beowulf* or as various tribes were in *Widsith*, and we do not know precisely who the fallen men are in *The Wanderer* either. We also do not know where the battle took place, and we certainly do not know the reason behind it — we can only guess that the speaker's side lost. It can thus be argued that the lines were meant to be generally applicable and instructional, as a sort of Christian cautionary tale in verse meant to show the fall of either an era or an individual who has put too much trust into the immediate and tangible instead of the eternal. Precision would indeed be counterproductive when describing the landscape and the ruins scattered around it (Raw, 1978: 48); but the Wanderer is still, first and foremost, speaking about himself. He must be because the genre the poem is traditionally taken to belong to is characterised and defined as deeply, and, more importantly, within our framework, it is he who *worað*, 'wanders', and it is he whose comrades lie dead by the walls he mentions — there is no more splendour to admire in the wine-halls, only slaughter to be remembered, but it is important to remember that the speaker sees in the aftermath, that is, in ruins, a lesson to be learnt about the frailty of earthly things in general. If we see the Wanderer himself as doing the same action as ruins (i.e., the action of the verb *worian*) we can look at ruins for further illustrations of his predicament. For example, since the ruins seem to converge to a ruinous hall decorated with serpentine shapes, we could draw a parallel between the Wanderer's current environment and the kingdom of heaven, where, as the poet concludes at the very end, stands God, our only *fæstnung* (115b) 'security' or, more literally, 'fortified place'. Since serpents are an obvious Christian symbol representing the devil, and since deserted regions are a common setting for temptation, we can see the Wanderer's days of being a vagabond as a trial in the Christian sense. He has spent a lot of time in isolation, braving the elements in a hostile landscape, with plenty of time for reflection, almost like a Christ figure being tempted by snakes in the wilderness. The Wanderer is the ruined wall surrounded by snakes or, in other words, a sole survivor of a bloody battle who is now left to his own devices, having to come to grips with his new reality and learn how to resist the jaws of all the snakes in life: from the storms and the harsh winter to being an unwelcome exile, to being denied even the simplest of earthly pleasures that are a common source of nostalgia for the Anglo-Saxons, all while, as he says,

þes middangeard ealra dogra gehwam dreoseð ond fealleþ (62b–63) ‘this world, day after day, crumbles and falls.’ He is, moreover, an Abraham figure too. Much like Abraham and his family who, in their exile, found themselves pitching their tents between Ai (from Hebrew אֵי ‘a place or heap of ruins’) and Bethel (from Hebrew בֵּית אֱלֹהִים ‘the house of God’), the Wanderer is poised in expectation of the promised land, or rather the promised house of God, where he can become whole again. That is, like Abraham, he is looking for ‘a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God’ as Paul says in Hebrews 11:10. On his journeys, the Wanderer goes through a series of reflections and comes to conclusions which he presents in the form of gnomic lines matching rather well the advice in the Book of Ecclesiastes, which warns the listener about the necessity of being moderate in life and understanding that all things under the sun are vain and perishable. He eventually realises that if his ruins, that is, he himself, is to become whole again, he must not settle for anything other than God, the strongest fortress of all, a place guaranteed to resist ruination forever, and he comes to understand eventually, despite his pain and initial inability to find a way to ‘keep beauty from vanishing away’, that whatever happened to him and his way of life was a direct consequence of the will of God, as can be seen in lines 58–87.

SUMMARY

In his reading of the poems in the Exeter Book, John D. Niles approaches each poem in the manuscript as a part of a book meant to be read by a cleric and thus interpreted in an explicitly Christian framework (Niles, 2019). As the analysis offered in this paper hopefully demonstrates, such an approach proves fruitful and opens a possibility for many parallels to be drawn, both between the two poems discussed as well as the two different aspects of Old English poetics, namely the written and the oral (i.e., the Christian and the native-heroic), together with their respective approaches to ruins as symbols. Just like for the Wanderer and the observer of the city in *The Ruin*, we argue, it is impossible for Niles’s ideal reader not to see a piece of themselves in the ruins when reading the two poems analysed above, and it is likewise impossible for them not to interpret them as carriers of an eschatological message. Viewed through such a prism, the first poem, *The Ruin*, becomes a true microcosm of a hybrid treatment of ruinity in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Namely, it demonstrates the author’s and speaks to the reader’s admiration and praise of the aesthetic found in broken objects and places their own experiences with ruins within a broader context by following foreign, Classical models of urban ruin and sprinkling them with modes of expression and form characteristic of their oral tradition,

allowing the apparent nostalgia of the piece to be understood as a medium through which homiletic messages of the patristic tradition can be delivered in a familiar mode. *The Wanderer*, on the other hand, is a poem not about a place but ‘a stranger in the earth’ (Psalm 119: 19), both literally and metaphorically: literally because the speaker has no place to call home and metaphorically because he is looking for a clearer path that will lead him to comfort. Ruins that he encounters and remembers are thus both nostalgic monuments to the things he has lost and milestones on his path to salvation and fortification of wisdom and virtue, that is, to the alleviation of pain and restoration of his soul rather than the deceitful and temporal sources of joy he is nostalgic for.

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Rezime

Iako je termin nostalgija sasvim nepoznat u anglosaksonskoj Engleskoj, budući da je kovanica koja datira iz XVII veka, i budući da nema eksplicitnih reference na bilo šta slično u staroengleskom korpusu, fenomen koji nazivamo nostalgijom je svakako prisutan i vidljiv u staroengleskoj poeziji, kao i drugde u srednjovekovnoj i ranijoj književnosti, što nije nimalo čudno, budući da je čežnja za prošlošću, domovinom i izgubljenim zajedničkim ljudima svakog porekla i svih perioda. U staroengleskoj poeziji, nostalgija se često javlja u slikama ruševina jer uništena zdanja mogu nositi dirljive poruke za one koji su ili došli da ih posmatraju i razmišljaju o prošlosti ili su se u njima nenadano obreli delovanjem sudbine. Te poruke mogu biti ne samo prenete u ime i od strane samih, personifikovanih, ruševina ili u ime onih koji su u njima nekada davno obitavali, već i poruke homiletičke prirode upućene onima koji u ruševinama možda vide sopstevni odraz ili sudbinu svog sopstevnog vremena koje polako ide ka istom kraju i tera ih da potraže način da obnove ruševine svog duha, to jest, da izbegnu duhovnu ruševinu. Ovaj rad se bavi sa takvim slikama arhitektonskog propadanja s ciljem da uspostavi veze između nostalgije i simbolizma ruševina u staroengleskoj pesničkoj tradiciji. U radu idemo putem savremenih analiza staroengleske književnosti koje zahtevaju da rukopise izučavamo holistički i pesme u njima sačuvane posmatramo kao dela koja treba čitati nekim redom i kao dela koja imaju mnoštvo toga zajedničkog, a pre svega kao dela nastala i kasnije čitana u manastirima (up. Ericksen, 2011; Reading, 2018; Niles, 2019). Na kraju, rad teži ka tome da uđe u dijalog s drugim studijama nostalgije u staroengleskoj poeziji, neke od kojih je posmatraju kao glavni stubi staroengleske poetike (up. Di Sciaccia, 2006; Fell, 2013; Trilling, 2008).

Ključne reči: staroengleski, anglosaksonski, Knjiga iz Egzetera, srednjovekovna poezija, nostalgija

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