



Anglo-Saxon – Part Two

Old English (Anglo-Saxon) Words and Influences

If you have not already read *The Lord of the Rings* you will find references to relevant chapters included here, so you will be able to find out how the influence relates to the text.

- Tolkien's academic background in Anglo-Saxon and medieval studies is well known. His lecture and essay *Beowulf, the Monsters and the Critics* proved to be a seminal work.
- Even though *The Lord of the Rings* has been described as a pastiche of medieval topics and literature, and it may be tempting to see the book in such postmodern terms and apply postmodern terminology to its structure, it is important to remember that to a medievalist like Tolkien, the use of earlier material would be entirely consistent with the idea of medieval authorship itself. His method in constructing *LotR* looks back not only to medieval languages and types of story (genres), but to the way they were written.
- Medieval authors borrowed from their predecessors and contemporaries to lend authority to their work and justification to their opinions. Chaucer borrows from Petrarch, Dante, Gower, and other contemporaries, sometimes naming them, but not always. Similarly, at the end of the Middle Ages, Shakespeare was free to appropriate material from many sources without identifying them.
- Medieval authors did not know about **plagiarism. The problem of borrowing is different now. Plagiarism is an offence and against the law.**
- Tolkien's use or re-use of material taken from earlier sources, should not be regarded as a flaw, or weakness, in his work.
- It should NOT be mistaken for any kind of inadvertent modernism, and should definitely NOT be misunderstood as somehow postmodern.
- The use of sources and analogues is in complete accord with Tolkien's declared intention of creating a mythology for England.
- Each source and analogue refers back to earlier literature, myths, legends, and folk tales and so places Tolkien's work in that long literary 'genealogy'.
- The sources and analogues define the ways in which English literature, legend and folk material intersect with the literature, legends and folk tales of those lands whose former inhabitants helped to create England and the English as Tolkien knew them.
- England and the English language continue to evolve, but the ancient history of the land and its inhabitants does not change, even if it speaks differently to an evolving society.
- Tolkien took what he enjoyed, what he learned, and what he perhaps regarded as treasures too valuable to left neglected. **Like the shards of a broken sword he reforged the material that he treasured into something glittering and new.**

Anglo-Saxon Society and its Poetry

A stereotypical view of **Anglo-Saxon society** is that it is represented in most of the surviving literature as heroic, and founded on a warrior class who drank mead after fighting battles.

There are many other Old English (OE) texts that offer other views of the Anglo-Saxons and their views of the world they lived in. Many of those texts can help us understand Tolkien's work in more depth.

It is true that OE poetry is not romantically sentimental: lovers do not pine away for the love of fair ladies, nor do they rescue damsels in distress. Warriors do not fight to win the hand of a bride, they fight to defend their homes, their kinsfolk, and win the favour of their lords. This is certainly the view found in the great poems *Beowulf*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Battle of Maldon*. But it is a long way from being the whole story, or even as much of that story as we currently understand. All these poems refer us to relationships which are in some ways quite different to those we know and expect in society today, but which are nevertheless of the greatest emotional and social significance to that older society.

The role of women in the society portrayed in the OE poems often presents us with problems. If they are present at all it is in a primarily symbolic or stereotypical role, and this is often true for the representation of women in the sagas and the Germanic legends which we know also influenced Tolkien's work.

As queens and princesses, women in the OE poems are 'peace-weavers' whose marriages are made as part of peace-keeping alliances. But these women are important because they are **bearers of the mead cup**, passing among the warriors in the king's hall. This is a deed which honours those to whom the cup is handed by the royal lady.

But women in the related Germanic tales may occasionally be as active as the male heroes. Brunhilde in the *Nibelungenlied* is probably the best known, but Hervor in the *Saga of King Heithrek* seems to be a close pattern for Éowyn. This saga was edited by Christopher Tolkien

The sorrow of a woman denied the man she loves is plaintively represented in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Wulf and Eadwacer*.

The restrained emotions of Anglo-Saxon poetry are unfamiliar, even in translation, to readers brought up on post-Chaucerian, post-Shakespearean, and post-Romantic poetry, all of which perpetuate the deep lyrical obsession with heterosexual love.

Other forms of love were more important to Anglo-Saxon society, or at least that is what their literature tells us, because they provide the foundation and stability for that society.

Most important, to judge from the poetry, is the reciprocal love of lords and their liege-men - those who share the dangers of battle and the rewards of the mead-hall. This love is not just reciprocal loyalty, as it would later be during the feudal period after the Conquest. The terms in which it is expressed in poems such as *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* represent it as an emotional bond between men. It is not necessarily homoerotic, and it is certainly not emasculating in its intensity, rather the reverse - it is this bond which strengthens the individual warrior, which gives him his sense of identity within the group, although that identity is not individualistic. The lords of these warriors are frequently named as ring-givers: **beag-gifa** means 'ring-giver or lord'. There is no necessary difference - lords gave rings to their warriors as rewards for bravery in battle and as a sign of favour. But these were not small finger rings. The Anglo-Saxon rings were ornate gold or silver arm rings.

The **form of OE poetry** is also strange when compared to the forms of poetry that most of us have grown up with.

Old English poetry does not rhyme.

It is written in a style known as THE ALLITERATIVE LONG LINE.

Alliteration means that a group of words all begin with the same letter. The easiest forms of alliteration are those using consonants - 'Tolkien **t**ells **t**errific **t**ales' - the words alliterate on the consonant /t/. 'Swords **s**hone in **s**unlight' - the words alliterate on /s/.

All vowels may alliterate together - 'innocent **a**ngels **e**at **u**npeeled **o**ranges'.

Patterns of alliteration in OE poetry can be very complicated because of the way each line is created.

Each line is in two parts known as 'half-lines'. There may a slight or a definite pause between them. This is known as a caesura.

Each half line has a distinctive pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. **It is the stressed syllables that alliterate.**

e.g. Wigbil wanian; þæt wæs wundra sum [this line has a definite pause in the middle created by the semicolon punctuation]

lidmen to lande linde bæron [the caesura comes after 'lande' and is felt, not punctuated]

There are many patterns of alliteration. These depend on how a poet constructed the meaning or significance of a line within the greater meaning of the poem. Words would be chosen so that their naturally spoken stressed syllables provided alliteration and so together they emphasised the part of the story being told. So in the second example above, **lidmen to lande linde** bæron, meaning 'the seamen carried their lindon shields ashore' the part of the story being emphasised is that the Vikings came ashore ready for battle. The line comes from the poem known as *The Battle of Maldon*

The form of this poetry makes it memorable. Anglo-Saxon society had low levels of literacy, only a few people could read and write. Poems were not written down when they were composed, but memorised and sung or chanted by storytellers or **scops** (pronounced 'shops'). If they were regarded as especially important they would then be written down by a scribe.

Beowulf

This epic poem was written down by scribes in about 1000 CE but it was composed at an earlier date. The language of the manuscript is 'classical' late West Saxon, the dialect of Wessex, which served as the standard language for much of the literature before the Conquest. It became the standard for written language because it was the language used at the court of the Anglo-Saxon kings in Winchester. The span of time between the poem's composition and its written version may suggest that it was continuously popular. It certainly suggests it was regarded highly enough to accord it the status of a written work.

The description of Meduseld - As the hero Beowulf and his companions approach Heorot for the first time they could see the mighty timbered hall splendid and decorated with gold. Later Beowulf takes the head of Grendel the monster: *To þæm goldsele* 'to that golden hall'. See *The Two Towers*, Book 3 Chapter VI.

Breaking doors - One of the most interesting links between *LotR* and *Beowulf* centres around the lines *Duru sona onarn / fyrbendum fæst, syþðan he hire folmum æthran*. It means 'the door secured with fire-forged iron immediately gave way when he touched it with his hand'.

It is the monster Grendel who stands behind this door. He has come to devour the king's men yet again.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, as the fellowship flees from the orcs and trolls in Moria, Gandalf has to confront something behind a door fixed with iron rings. This thing is strong enough to challenge his shutting spell and when it takes hold of the iron ring the door bursts in pieces. We know that this is a Balrog, and there is a similarity between the 2 monsters. Grendel is described as *sceadugenga* - 'the shadow walker' or 'walker in darkness', the Balrog is described as 'like a great shadow in the middle of which was a dark form'. Both are terrifying. See *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book 2 Chapter V.

Elves and orcs - elves and orcs are both mentioned in *Beowulf*.

þanon untydras ealle onwocon,

Eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas,

Swylce gigantas, þa wið Gode wunnon

Lange þrage.

[Then an evil brood all arose, monsters, and elves, and evil spirits, also giants that fought with God a long time.]

The elves and orcs described here are both evil.

The old king faced with evil times - Hrothgar is the first aged king beset by evil, and his demonic enemy is Grendel who invades his hall at night to kill and eat his warriors. This troll-like creature has a taste for 'manflesh' as orcs do.

As Hrothgar's own men become helpless in the face of this interloper, Beowulf and his men arrive to combat the monster. The arrival of Gandalf and Aragorn at Meduseld signals the same kind of help for Theoden.

Beowulf himself in his old age is also confronted with evil, this time in the form of the dragon who ravages his kingdom. See *The Two Towers*, Book 3 Chapter VI.

The naming of swords - The naming of swords in ancient Northern European story and legend is a reflection of the society in which those stories arose. In a warrior society the weapon with which a man defends his life, the lives of those he reveres or loves, and with which he defends his home and homeland, will always have a special significance. We may be more familiar with King Arthur's sword Excalibur, or Durendal, the sword of the French hero Roland, but in many in stories of warrior-heroes the special significance of the hero's sword is shown through the naming it is given. Beowulf wields two named swords: Hrunting, which is lent to him, and Nailing which was taken from Dayraven champion of the Franks. However, neither sword is actually strong enough for the use to which he puts it. See *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book 2 Chapter III.

The melting blade - Only the sword he finds in Grendel's mother's lair is strong enough to withstand being wielded by Beowulf against his supernatural foes. It is orþanc enta ærgeweorc - the cunning work of giants - but when Beowulf kills Grendel's mother and beheads Grendel with it the monsters' blood makes even this huge blade melt like ice.

*þa þæt sweord ongan
æfter heaþoswate hildegicelum,
Wigbil wanian; þæt wæs wundra sum,
þæt hit eal gemealt ise gelicost.*

[Then the sword began to dwindle from the blood on the blade; that was a wonder, how it all melted just like ice]

Only the twisted hilt is left, which Beowulf takes back from the scene of the fight. The blood of the Nazgul has a similar effect on blades, leaving only the hilts. See *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book 1 Chapter XI and *The Return of the King*, Book 5 Chapter VI.

[The dwindling sword belongs to the ancient tradition which uses the fate of swords such as those in *Beowulf*, the *Volsungasaga* and the *Nieblungenlied* to express the potency of evil, the valour of the hero, and rights of succession. The broken sword reforged comes from *Volsungasaga* and the *Nieblungenlied*.]

Swearing of fealty: Lord as father-figure - This relationship between a king and a newcomer to his court is expressed in the relationship between Hrothgar and Beowulf, but more broadly echoes the special relationship between a lord and his warriors in Anglo-Saxon society. In *Beowulf* the hero reminds Hrothgar the king that he had once before promised to 'assume the place / of a father towards me when I was gone' if Beowulf died fighting for him. Merry expresses a similar attitude. See *The Return of the King*, Book 5 Chapter II.

Swearing of fealty: until death - Beowulf says as he sets out to do battle with Grendel's mother:

*Ic me mid Hruntinge
Dom gewyrce, oþþe me deaþ nimeþ.*

[With Hrunting I will work this doom, or death take me!]

Pippin swears an oath to Denethor in similar terms. See *The Return of the King*, Book 5 Chapter I

Pyres and mounds - are among the ceremonies of death accorded to the heroes in *Beowulf*. See *The Two Towers*, Book 3 Chapter VI; and *The Return of the King*, Book 5 Chapters VI and VII.

Trolls - the trolls in *Beowulf* are Grendel and his mother. Their literary and mythological ancestry lies in the Northern tradition where male and female trolls of great size, ugliness, and malice were common. They are cannibalistic, and Grendel carries a glove in which he can put his human prey and carry it away. Tolkien's trolls put dwarves in bags. See *The Hobbit*.

Unarming - At Edoras the travellers are confronted by **Hama** the doorward who demands that they should leave their weapons outside the door. An similar situation occurs in *Beowulf* when the hero and his men arrive at Heorot. Wulfgar brings the message that Beowulf and his men must leave their weapons outside Heorot, saying: lætað hildebord her onbidan, wudu wælsceaftas worda gebinges [here let your battle-shields and deadly spears await the result of your words.] See *The Two Towers*, Book 3 Chapter VI.

Women as cup-bearers - in *The Two Towers*, the king's niece performs the role of cup-bearer, offering a cup as a sign of hospitality and unity of purpose. In *Beowulf* this is an honourable duty performed by queens and princesses who carry the mead cups to the heroes in the hall as a sign of welcome and gratitude for their courage in battle. See *The Two Towers*, Book 3 Chapter VI.

While a number of the storytelling elements found in *Beowulf* are also found in *The Lord of the Rings*, the poem contains a two names of importance:

Hama - is the name of a daring character.

Éomer - the name of Theoden's nephew in *The Lord of the Rings* occurs in *Beowulf* and is recorded in Bede as the name of the historical son of Offa the Angle, who was the ancestor of King Offa I of Mercia, most famously remembered for the construction of Offa's Dyke on the borders of Wales. In the poem Eomer is described as ' the helper of heroes ' strong in battle.

ƿonon Eomer woc,

Hæleƿum to helpe '

Niƿa cræftig.

[from thence Eomer arose, helper of the heroes ... strong in battle.

This is appropriate as a description of Tolkien's Éomer.

Anglo-Saxon Metrical Charms

Tolkien also seems to have known the **herb lore** of the Anglo-Saxons, their medical learning, which was not just for easing the wounds of battle, but covered treatments for a wide range of ailments and disorders that women, children and farmers might have suffered, as well as warriors.

Language as magic- the Anglo-Saxons thought that real magic exists in language itself, and this belief controlled part of their use of runes as well as their attitude to the 'magical' ability to read and write. Anglo-Saxons believed the actual runes themselves had power, not just the words they spelled out. Tolkien reflects this attitude to the 'magic' associated with reading and writing in his depiction of the runes of power on swords and doors. See *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book 2 Chapter III and Chapter IV. For more on Anglo-Saxon runes see the Study Pack on this website.

In Anglo-Saxon there exist a number of 'real' magic spells, known now as **Charms**. Among these are charms against 'the water-elf disease'; against a swarm of bees, a journey charm to keep the traveller safe, and a charm for fertile land. The most fascinating is perhaps the one known today as **The Nine Herbs Charm**.

It can be found in the collection known as the *Anglo-Saxon Metrical Charms* (Harley MS 585). It takes the form of a poem. The spell declares is to be recited when certain herbs are used to cure a number of conditions. More than nine herbs are named in the 'spell' but there are nine herbs which fight against or defy nine 'venoms'. These may be 'flying venoms', best thought of as **contagions or infections**, or they may be afflictions such as abscesses. Whichever form they take they are repeatedly said to 'go through the land'.

The balance of the nine beneficial herbs against the nine venoms which may fly as they go through the land is striking.

Nine is a significant number in Christian mythology, one of the 'magic' numbers and the opposition between nine forms of good and nine forms of evil is particularly startling when set alongside Tolkien's creation of the nine walkers set against the nine riders that are evil. The spell moves briefly from herb lore into pagan mythology, then into Christian references, before finishing with the part to be sung or chanted.

The spell begins with praise of some of the significant herbs. Mucgwyrt (**mugwort** in modern English) is called the oldest of herbs.

Wegbrade (**plantain** in modern English), is called the mother of herbs. The pronunciation of the word spelt wegbrade would have sounded like the modern English **waybread**. The Elves provide food whose name translates as 'waybread'. See *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book 2 Chapter VIII

In the spell, both herbs fight against venom and flying contagion. The spell begins:

*Gemyne ðu, **mucgwyrt**, hwæt þu ameldodest,*

....

Una þu hattest, yldost wyrta.

ðu miht wið III and wið XXX,

þu miht wið attre and wið onflyge,

þu miht wið þam laþan ðe geond lond færeð.

*Ond þu, **wegbrade**, wyrta modor,*

....

Swa ðu wiðstonde attre and onflyge

And þæm laðan þe geond lond fereð.

[Remember what you revealed **mugwort** You are called the One, the oldest of herbs. You are mighty against three and against thirty, you are mighty against venom and contagion, you are mighty against the evil that travels through the land. And you, **waybread** (plaintain), mother of herbs Thus you withstand venom and contagion and the evil that travels through the land.]

The charm ends with clear instructions to recite the 'spell' over the herbs and the person they are to be used on before they are used. Aragorn recites a 'spell' over hilt of the poisoned knife before applying the herb he uses to heal injuries caused by the **Ringwraith**. See *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book 1 Chapter XI.

Other Examples of Anglo-Saxon Influence

While the *Beowulf* influence on Tolkien's work is well known, the influence of the later OE poem ***The Battle of Maldon*** gives us a different range of material because this is **a poem about a real battle and serves as a memorial to the valour of real men.**

Briefly, the poem tells the story of the elderly earl Byrhtnoth's battle against an invading force of Vikings at Maldon in Essex in 991 AD. The poem is not an historical account, that is recorded elsewhere, but it does give a picture of how Anglo-Saxon warriors behaved in battle. It is not simply a blood-thirsty account of warfare, OE heroic poems are rarely just accounts of battles. They usually record the bravery of named warriors and the loss of brave men who have died in order to save their homes and people from terrible enemies. OE heroic poems are often very sad. The Maldon poem records the bravery of the remnant of the Anglo-Saxon army in the face of inevitable defeat.

The story starts when a Viking army tries to land and reach the mainland by a causeway that can be crossed at low tide. In the poem the causeway is referred to both as bricge (bridge, because sometimes it is dry) and as a ford (because sometimes it is not quite dry but shallow enough to walk across). At the start, the tide is up and this gives old Byrhtnoth, who is commander of the Anglo-Saxon army, time to array his troops in battle formation. The Vikings see this and offer to go away if the Anglo-Saxons will give them gold and treasure in exchange for peace. Byrhtnoth tells the messenger that all they will get are spears and swords. The two forces confront one another across the strip of water and as the tide goes out Byrhtnoth sends three of his men to hold the causeway. This they do with great success because the Vikings can only get over the narrow way one or two at a time.

Is any of this beginning to sound familiar? Three warriors holding a narrow bridge? **The Bridge of Khazad Dum** (Chapter V, Book 2 of *The Fellowship of the Ring*) is not the only narrow passage Tolkien to which refers. There are various fords that have to be crossed in difficult circumstances. Most notable, perhaps, is the defeat of Theodred and his men at the **Fords of Isen** which we only hear about. See *The Two Towers*, Book 3 Chapter VI and Chapter VIII

There are also at least **3 causeways** in *The Lord of the Rings*, the one that goes to **Bucklebury ferry**, the one at **Helm's Deep**, and the one close to **Minas Morgul**. All are associated with danger. See *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book 1 Chapter VI; *The Two Towers*, Book 3 Chapter VII; and *The Return of the King*, Book 5 Chapter VIII.

Byrhtnoth too is in mortal danger. In the spirit of ofermod - a kind of arrogance or over confidence, Byrhtnoth lets the Vikings cross and he and his whole army are forheawen cut to pieces, but the dying Byrhtnoth is defended by hyse unweaxen / cniht on gecampe 'a boy not yet grown / a squire in battle'. NOTE 'hyse' pronounced almost 'heesa', and 'ea' in 'unweaxen' as in MnE 'meat'.

For an echo of the boy beside the dying old warrior See *The Return of the King*, Book 5 Chapter VI. Both Éomer and Éowyn seem to have part of their roles drawn from *Maldon* as Byhtnoth's swustersunu, 'sister-son' or nephew, the son of his sister is one of the first of the Anglo-Saxon warriors to be killed. While Éomer IS Théoden's sister-son, Éowyn, also the child of Théoden's sister, is comes close to death when she encounters the Lord of the Nazgûl. See *The Return of the King*, Book 5 Chapter VI. More on the sister-son relationship can be found below.

When all seems lost at Maldon, Byrhtwold, one of Byrhtnoth's old retainers tries to encourage the diminishing Anglo-Saxon forces with one of the most stirring speeches in all epic and dramatic poetry. He cries to the weary and failing men around him:

*Hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre,
mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mægan lytlað.*

[Pronounced roughly: 'heeya sheall the heardra, heorta the kenra, mod sheall the mar ra the oor maggan litlath.]

*Courage shall be the more resolute, heart shall be the braver,
spirit shall be the greater, as our strength grows less.*

Frodo and Sam show the same kind of courage and determination as they move towards the end of their journey. See *The Return of the King*, Book 6 Chapter III.

Tolkien wrote his own sequel to *The Battle of Maldon* and called it *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son* It takes the form of a short play and is very different in tone to the *Maldon* poem. The relationship between *Maldon* and *LotRis* complex.

The poem known as ***The Wanderer*** provides an example of a poetic form known as the ***ubi sunt***. This is a Latin term which translates as 'where is'. It is used in OE and later medieval poetry as a way of recalling nostalgically and sadly a lost time when things were better. It is sometimes used to begin a series of lines in a poem, in which case it takes the form known as *anaphora*, but in ***The Wanderer*** it is one long line:

Hwær cwom mearg, hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom mappumgyfa? [where is the horse, where is the man? Where is the giver of treasure?]

This may remind us of the lines that begin: 'Where is the horse and the rider'. See *The Two Towers*, Book 3 Chapter VI.

The Anglo-Saxon **Gnomic Verses** set out wise sayings or 'lore'. 'Gnomic' means wisdom and the verses reveal interesting things about the society and the world view of the people who made them. Although the verses do not rhyme, they have a distinct rhythm which makes them memorable. This was a common function of 'poetry' in ancient times: the rhythms helped people to remember important information.

The Verses include weather and animal lore as well as political and religious aphorisms. They begin *Cyning sceal rice healdan* [The king must rule the kingdom]. By line 5 they have taken on exactly the form and the rhythm which Tolkien uses for Treebeard's List:

Winter byð cealdost [winter is coldest]

Lenten hrimigost [spring/Lent frostiest]

Sumor sunwlitegost [summer is sunniest]

At line 16 the rhymes describe the activities appropriate to animals:

Hafuc sceal on glofe

Wilde gewunian; wulf sceal on bearowe,

Earm anhaga; eofor sceal on holte

toðmaegenes trum.

[the hawk must remain wild on the glove; the wolf must live alone, wretched in the wood, the strong-tusked boar must in the forest.]

The rhythms make these *Verses* easier to remember, like the Rhymes of Lore. The *Verses* preserve ideas that were important to Anglo-Saxon society, just as Gandalf's and Treebeard's Rhymes preserve things they need to recall. See *The Two Towers*, Book 3 Chapter III and Chapter XI.

The **Old English Exodus** echoes particularly in the depiction of Rohan. **Éowyn** is described as **high-hearted**, as Moses is described as 'that chieftain high-hearted' when the Anglo-Saxon translator of the Vulgate Bible writes

þær him gesealde sigora Waldend modgum magoræswan his maga feorh.

When Tolkien translated this into MnE, he wrote:

There the Lord of Victories gave into the hands of that chieftain high-hearted the lives of his kinsmen.

And later the declaration 'Dugoð forð gewat' is translated by Tolkien as **Forth marched the host**, a statement whose rhythms echo in the description of the last ride of the Rohirrim to Minas Tirith.

The Anglo-Saxon Word Horde

A wander through any Anglo-Saxon dictionary will reveal how often Tolkien looked back to OE, and the word games he plays!

Doorward -Theoden's doorward, Hama, is aptly described, for while we might easily conclude ward = warden, in Anglo-Saxon the word weard means 'guardian'.

Ent - 'giant'. It is found in the Anglo-Saxon *Gnomic Verses* which set out a long list of the appropriate properties of things, beginning with the king, who shall rule the kingdom. The verses continue:

Orðanc enta geweorc, þa þe on þysse eorðan syndon

Wraetlic weallstana geweorc.

'Skilful work of giants that are on this earth, wonderful masonry work.'

Éomer - his name is made up of two Anglo-Saxon elements: eoh 'horse', and mære 'famous'.

Eored - means a troop of horsemen.

Éowyn - a name made up of two runes. The first, which looks like a modern M is called eoh meaning 'horse', the second, which looks a little like an elliptical 'p' is called wynn meaning 'joy'.

Galmod - an adjective meaning 'wanton' or 'licentious' in Anglo-Saxon. In *LotR* it is his son Grima who is the licentious one.

Grima- could mean 'a mask', 'a visor' 'a helmet' or 'a ghost'. The sense of concealment is most apt.

Helm - meant 'a protector'. The name is found as a description in *Beowulf* where Hrothgar is described as

Hroðgar ... helm scyldinga 'Hrothgar, protector of the shieldings'.

Horse-thane - originally spelt hors-þegn, this could mean a groom in Anglo-Saxon, but it was also a title of rank for an officer in the royal household, equivalent to that of a marshall among the Franks.

Isen - iron.

Mark - border land in the English kingdoms was referred to as the mearc in the days when all the lands were spoken of as parts of middle earth. From this came the word 'march' which is found in Shakespeare's *Henry IV part I* when characters speak of the Welsh marches. Medieval historians refer to 'marcher lords' meaning the medieval barons who held the border lands against rebellion. The word is still used occasionally and in an archaic and slightly sarcastic sense of wild or uncivilised regions.

Meara - another word meaning 'horse'.

Meduseld - means 'mead hall'. In Anglo-Saxon vocabulary the elements of the name are meado+seld meaning 'mead seat'. The hall of the king or lord was filled with benches known specifically as 'mead benches' where his warriors and guests feasted and drank the **mead**, the

honey wine. The mead hall was the centre of an Anglo-Saxon warrior's life when he was not fighting. Its significance is poignantly portrayed in the OE poems *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*.

Middle-earth - Throughout the Anglo-Saxon period the world as far as it was then known was referred to as middan-geard 'middle earth'. In the high and later Middle Ages in England the name continued with various spellings. Chaucer uses it, and it is found in many other medieval vernacular texts.

Mundburg - is a compound word made up of two elements. The Anglo-Saxon word mund can mean 'protection' and 'guardianship'. A burg or burh was a fortified settlement, The homophone *berg* is the German word for 'mountain'.

Reek - rec is the Anglo-Saxon for 'smoke', and does not have quite the sense of stinking fumes which is suggested by its use in modern English.

Saruman/ Sauron - The Anglo-Saxon word searo is a noun which can mean 'art, skill, cleverness', but it can also mean 'cunning, treachery, trick' and even 'an engine of war'. The word searwian is a verb related to searo, and it means 'to be deceitful, to cheat', or to 'dissimulate'. These definitions are certainly appropriate to Saruman, but they may also be applied to Sauron. However, another Anglo-Saxon word sar meaning 'bodily pain' or 'affliction' might also be appropriate as an element in Sauron's name. He not only inflicts bodily pain, but, if he is to be understood as having any kind of bodily existence, must also suffered it, when his hand was mutilated as Isildur cut off the Ring and the finger that wore it.

Shadowfax - The name could be translated as 'Shadow-hair'. Anglo-Saxon feax means 'hair'.

Sister-son - As noted briefly above, the relationship between a man and his sister's son, was of special significance in Anglo-Saxon and medieval literature and in society. The *Maldon* poem tells us:

Wund wearð Wulfmær, wælræste geacas,

Byrhtnoðes mæg, he mid billum wearð,

His swustersunu, swiðe forheawen.

[Wulfmer was wounded, chose death in battle, Byrhtnoth's kinsman, his sister-son, viciously cut down.]

The uncle/nephew relationship appears several times in *Beowulf*. Hrothgar's nephew Hrothulf is often mentioned in ways which suggest that he shared the throne with his uncle and Beowulf is himself depicted as uncle to a nephew, Heardred, for whom he acts as guardian after the death of Heardred's father Hygelac.

In *Beowulf*, King Hrothgar's minstrel tells the story of the hero Sigemund at the feast celebrating Beowulf's maiming of Grendel.

Welhwyc gecwæð,

þæt he fram Sigemundes secgan hyrde

Ellendædum, uncupes fela,

*Wælsinges gewin, wide siðas,
þara þe gumena bearn gearwe ne wiston,
Fæhðe ond fyrena, buton Fitela mid hine,
þonne he swulces hwæt secgan wolde,
Eam his nefan, swa hie a wæron
æt niða gehwam nydgesteallan.*

[He told everything he had heard about Sigemund's deeds of valour, told of many strange things: the hardship of Wael's son, his distant journeys. The sons of men knew nothing of the enmity and the wickedness, except Fitela, who was with him, at such times as he [Sigemund] would speak of such things; uncle to nephew, as they always were in every affliction, comrades in battle.]

Fitela was both nephew and son of Sigemund. This is a mythologically significant relationship in Norse and Germanic literature. Fitela is Sigemund's son and nephew through the mythically significant breaking of the incest taboo by Sigemund and his sister Signy. **Tolkien avoids the unacceptable influence of the taboo.**

Such references reflect the importance of the relationship throughout Germanic society. The privileged status of a sister's son was not, however, limited to Anglo-Saxon literature and society, nor to Norse and Germanic legend, but carries on into medieval romance. Evidence that fostering by maternal uncles was practiced among the Celtic nations is found in some of the stories which make up the body of medieval Welsh tales known as the *Mabinogion*. In the earliest known Arthurian story, *Culhwch and Olwen*, Culhwch goes to the court of his mother's brother, who is King Arthur.

After the Conquest, in the fourteenth-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which Tolkien edited with E.V. Gordon, Sir Gawain is the son of King Arthur's sister whom he names as him 'em' from the OE 'eam', the word specifically used for a maternal uncle (see above).

Back to the word horde:

Thengel - the Anglo-Saxon word for 'prince'.

Theoden - another word for 'prince or lord'. It occurs as a word for 'lord' in *The Battle of Maldon*.

Warg - the word wearg means 'wolf', but can be used of a human, when it means evil, malignant, cursed or vile.

Westfold - a compound name made up of a geographical direction and the Anglo-Saxon fold, which means 'earth' or dry land, as well as a land, region or territory.

Westu Theoden hal - an anglicised version of Beowulf's greeting to King Hrothgar at their first meeting where it takes the customary Anglo-Saxon form. Beowulf says *Wæs þu, Hroðgar, hal!* This is an elaboration and variant spelling of the standard greeting: *wes þu hal* (be you hale/whole/unhurt). Literally a wish for good health, this has come down into modern perceptions of traditional Christmas festivities in the form of 'wassail', which itself dates back to Tudor England.

Other Uses of Anglo-Saxon Vocabulary

Balrog - The /bal/ element of the name of this creature of fire and shadow may derive from the A/S *bæl* meaning fire, flame.

Bane - The word 'bane' in modern English has come to mean little more than a nuisance, as in the phrase 'the bane of my life'. In OE, however, *bana* means killer, slayer, murderer.

Dwimmercrafty - is related to the OE *dwimor* meaning a phantom, ghost or illusion, and *dwimorlic* meaning illusory or unreal.

Fell - as a noun this is the Anglo-Saxon word for a skin or pelt. As an adjective (describing word) it means dangerous.

Flet - in Anglo-Saxon means a floor or a hall.

Frodo - the adjective *frod*, means wise. The masculine name **Froda** is found in the *Beowulf* manuscript. The name is mentioned in one of the inset stories, and it is a sad tale. The meaning of the name, 'wise', is certainly relevant.

High hay - The modern word 'hedge' comes from the OE word *hege*, which resembles the modern word but would have sounded more like 'hay' when it was spoken.

Mathom - the Anglo-Saxon word for treasure. The outcast in the poem *The Wanderer* asks:

Hwær cwom mappumgyfa? [where is the treasure-giver? i.e. his lord].

Mirkwood - various instances of this name in Norse and A/S poems. There are a number of Mirkwoods in Norse poems and sagas. The initial element 'mirk' is familiar in modern English in the form 'mirky' describing a kind of thick, dirty, foggy darkness, as in mirky water, or a mirky atmosphere. Later authors write of characters 'peering through the mirk', and in all instances 'mirk' is a direct descendant of the A/S *myrc* which simply meant 'dark'.

Mordor - is a morphological variant (a variation in spelling) of the Anglo-Saxon *morþor*, which is also spelt *morðor*. Whether it is spelt with /þ/ (thorn) or /ð/ the word means 'murder' or 'torment'. This highly appropriate word becomes Mordor by a process of change which is most often associated with the alteration of /ð/ (eth) into a simple /d/. The change in spelling alters the sound from *morthor* to *mordor*.

Orc - Anglo-Saxon *orc* means demon, the form *orcyrs* means a monster of hell, while the form *orcneas*, which is found in *Beowulf*, means monsters.

Sting - in OE *stingan* means to stab! Modern interpretations of 'sting' associate this action with small forms of discomfort and small means of causing it, such as wasps, bees, and other insects. The A/S meaning suggests violence and danger on a larger scale, although it falls short of the cutting and slashing which might be more easily associated with large swords. The scale of the name is therefore neatly in keeping with the scale of the weapon and its owners, while the joke is on anyone who misconstrues the significance of the name. In contrast to the almost euphemistic naming of Sting is the name *Herugrim* (*Two Towers*). The A/S word for 'sword' is *heoru* and in OE *grimm* means 'fierce, savage, dire, painful'.

Going underground or inside rock - there is a tradition in Anglo-Saxon literature in which death is signalled when a hero passes 'under grey rock'. The death of the aged *Beowulf* takes place when he enters under the rock into the dragon's lair. The same poem includes the story of the

hero Sigemund whose death takes place when he goes 'under grey rock', and almost all we are told of the old retainer Aschere is that he dies where trees overhang grey rock. The tradition continues in medieval English literature. In Celtic folklore there is a belief, which in some places still continues, that the fairy folk live in some of the small hills known as *sidhe* (pronounced 'shee').

Sigemund and Beowulf pass under the rock. The poet describes first how Sigemund

He under harne stan,

æþelinges bearn ana geneoðde

Frecne dæde, ne wæs him Fitela mid.

[The nobleman's son ventured alone under the grey stone, a perilous deed, Fitela was not with him.

For echoes of this convention see *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book 2 Chapter IV and *The Return of the King*, Book 5 Chapter II

Sam - in Anglo-Saxon means 'dull', 'stupid'. Samwise is therefore an oxymoron mixing 'sam' (dull) with 'wise' in its usual modern meaning.

Hamfast - in Anglo-Saxon ham mean 'home', and fast means 'fixed', 'stiff', or even 'obstinate'.

Books Worth Consulting

The University of Oxford has worked on a simple-to-use online coursepack for Old English which is available for anyone to use at: www.english.ox.ac.uk/coursepack/ . It brings together some of the main 'set texts' in Old English used by UK universities. Each text has a running gloss with links to further notes, translations, images, explanatory articles.

Michael Alexander, ed., *Beowulf*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 1973).

Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 1993). The standard work on the development of the English language.

S.A.J. Bradley, trans. *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Dent and Sons, 1982)

Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price, rev. R.E. Latham, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin, 1955) [Don't let the title put you off. It is actually a fascinating account of the arrival of the Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Danes as well as of the Christianising of Britain. It is not a dry read.]

Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, eds, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882) Tolkien did not approve of this dictionary but it is a wonderful repository of information for those of us without Tolkien's philological skills. You will only find it in larger or university libraries.

J.R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th ed., Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching 14 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960). This is a very handy dictionary, obtainable and affordable.

Dennis Freeborn, *From Old English to Standard English*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1998). A very informative book. The section on OE offers additional information to that found in Baugh and Cable.

T.A. Shippey and Andreas Harder, eds, *Beowulf*, Critical Heritage Editions (London: Routledge, 1998)

Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader, rev. Dorothy Whitelock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967)

There are many other books about the poetry, language, history and society of Anglo-Saxon England, and there is much more work to be done on the significance of all of these in Tolkien's works. Happy reading!