Introduction

Not unlike Christianity, Old English poetry begins in a stable, with livestock serving as the predominant witnesses to a miraculous birth. But in his eighth-century account of Cædmon's spontaneous composition, Bede emphasizes not just that the cowherd's poetry was miraculous, but that it was moving. When Bede apologizes for the loss of *decor* and *dignitas* in his prose Latin rendering of Cædmon's Old English *Hymn*, he both invokes a conventional statement on translation and asserts the qualities that made the verse worth mentioning: Cædmon's gift was miraculous not because it offered any new understanding of theological content, but because of its power to *move* those who heard it, to produce a sense of wonder, to inspire emulation in other believers. And its spontaneous appearance could only be recognized as miraculous because Cædmon's poetry was recognizably excellent:

> Quicquid ex diuinis litteris per interpretes disceret, hoc ipse post pusillum uerbis poeticis maxima suauitate et conpunctione conpositis in sua, id est Anglorum, lingua proferret. Cuius carminibus multorum saepe animi ad contemtum saeculi et appetitum sunt uitae caelestis accensi. Et quidem et allii post illum in gente Anglorum religiosa poemata facere temtabant, sed nullus eum aequiperare potuit.[1]
>
> [whatever he learned through interpreters from the holy Scriptures, he shortly produced the same in poetic words with the greatest sweetness and sting in his own language, that is that of the English. By means of his songs the spirits of many were often incited to contempt of the world and desire for heavenly life. Certainly, others of the English people after him attempted to make compositions in religious verse, but none was able to equal him.]

The miracle of Cædmon's poetry is no unique interpretation of Scripture – Cædmon learns his material *per interpretes*, through interpreters, who take care of that part for him. Instead, the miracle lies in the poetry's *suauitas* and *compunctio*: It is both sweet and stinging, it pleases and yet moves

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its hearers to dissatisfaction with worldly life. This deeply felt experience defines the effectiveness of the poetry. The dismissive verb *temptare* (attempt) with which Bede describes the efforts of Cædmon's imitators asserts a standard only his divinely gifted poetry achieves; religious content alone does not suffice. Likewise, it matters little to Cædmon's teachers that he sings only the content they themselves have offered to him: "in carmen dulcissimum conuertebat, suauiusque resonando doctores suos uicissim auditores sui faciebat" (he turned it into the sweetest song, and by its sweeter sounding he made his teachers in turn his own audience; iv.24). It is only the poetry of Cædmon that convinces the learned, simply upon hearing it, that "caelestem ei a Domino concessam esse gratiam" (to him was granted heavenly grace by the Lord), and Cædmon continues to produce further poetry explicitly in order to provoke a piety that is deeply affective: "in quibus cunctis homines ab amore scelerum abstrahere, ad dilectionem uero et sollertiam bonae actionis excitare curabat" (in which things all together he took pains to draw the people away from the love of sin and to excite indeed the love and practice of good action; iv.24). There is no information in Cædmon's poetry that his teachers had lacked; the inspiration he receives and offers to his hearers consists instead in the *dilectio* he stirs within them, contrasted with the *amor scelerum* (love of sin) he drives them to reject.[2] The story of creation and praise of the Creator that make up the poem's subject matter are necessary to vindicate both the vernacular verse tradition and, in line with Bede's larger aims, the English people who spoke that vernacular. More importantly, however, Bede's story requires that the verse be aesthetically pleasing and affectively *moving* – so spiritually affecting as to be actually miraculous.

In this context, it seems surprising that standard scholarly narratives hold that deeply emotional engagement with religious devotion begins only as the Old English period ends, in the mid to late eleventh century. From the high to late Middle Ages, this narrative goes, new types of devotional works urging contemplation of the sufferings of Christ and the Virgin Mary arise, taking their place alongside earlier images of Christ in victory. Later medieval readers are entreated to consider the human suffering of God; to learn, as one scholar has put it, "how to feel."[3] According to this narrative, after about 1100, we read a very different English literature from that of Old English with its battles and Beowulf: one in which affective piety is newly central. And yet we can hardly say that readers had never learned how to feel before the twelfth century, or that existing religious works simply parceled out doctrine with indifference to its emotional as well as its

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moral and intellectual reception – quite the contrary. Although early medieval devotion at times takes different objects, and evinces different understandings of feeling, than that of the later Middle Ages, Old English devotional poetry, for its part, nonetheless requires profound emotional engagement with its content. A person "[ð]e his synna nu sare geþenceþ"[4] – who now sorrowfully considers his sins – is not one who simply understands those sins but performs a specific affective engagement with them.[5] Few devotional poems offer much in the way of detailed theology; rather, they evoke the memory of and feeling for doctrine already understood, so that it may be dynamically experienced in a way no less essential. Christopher A. Jones defines devotion as separate from liturgy by means of devotion's "essentially private and flexible character," while cautioning that in practice as well as in the texts that define them, both categories may operate simultaneously.[6] As this book shows, it is not affective devotion itself but later medieval conventions for evoking the experience of affective devotion that have characterized affective piety as modern scholars recognize it. Although new devotional practices and literary forms gradually shift the aesthetics of medieval English devotional poetry, both poetic and devotional topoi of early English literature quietly persist into the central and later Middle Ages, bringing their potent affective associations with them. But not all of the shared conventions that evoke these earlier affective engagements have been as readily understood by modern readers.

A medieval writer would not have used our categories for affective piety, and we must remember that whether or not a devotional text appears to us to embody such piety depends on what sort of affects we consider relevant. For his own part, Bede apologizes for what is lost in his literal (*ad uerbum*) translation of Cædmon's *Hymn*, which cannot "sine detrimento sui decoris ac dignitatis transferri" (be translated without loss of its own elegance and dignity; iv.24). However conventional Bede's apology may be, it asserts the connection between the verse's quality, its *decor* (elegance) and *dignitas* (dignity), that lends itself to its *suauitas* (sweetness) and *compunctio* (sting).[7] These effects are specific to the poetic conventions of its English vernacular, and so although its content may be translated, its content is nearly beside the point. What Cædmon does, ostensibly for the first time, is to combine the conventions of vernacular poetry and the weight of associations they bear with the catechetical conventions of the creation story.[8] The poem's aesthetic achievement and its affective weight may not be expressed in Latin, because they are created anew from the conventions of vernacular verse. Bede himself was a poet:[9] He

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incorporates his own Latin verse into the *Historia ecclesiastica* elsewhere, and he might have transferred Cædmon's *Hymn* from English verse into Latin verse. To address the question of why, when Bede so insisted upon the qualities of this verse, he offered only a workmanlike prose translation of it, is to address how and why devotional poetry matters to the earliest medieval English literature, and what qualities in particular were most highly valued. A demonstration of Latinate poetic skill at this moment in his narrative would undercut the significance of the divine having chosen the vernacular as its instrument – mixing the means of English verse with the matter of Scripture. Medieval texts often rhetorically excuse the use of the vernacular with prefatory remarks acknowledging the priority and authority of Latin sources. As Nicholas Watson observes, "the one situation in which Latin texts often manifest the specifically sociolinguistic self-consciousness of their vernacular colleagues is in the ambit of peer languages, Greek, Hebrew, or Arabic, where it is Latin that finds itself stripped of authority and sustaining the role of a regional *lingua franca* usually fulfilled by the vernacular"[10] – in other words, only in the company of other sacred languages. Yet Bede here flips the convention on its head, and with it the priority of sacred languages over vernacular ones. In apologizing for translating a miraculous vernacular poem into an inadequate Latin paraphrase, he accords to English the status of sacred language in preference to Latin. Moreover, the Old English conventions that Cædmon brought to his poetry could only produce their effect within the web of associations they evoke within that vernacular literature.[11] The story of Cædmon thus requires that Bede valorize the significance of this piece of vernacular verse, and, having asserted that Cædmon's verse could not be equaled, that he not attempt to equal it in Latin translation. His demurral at providing an aesthetic performance is itself an act of aesthetic reverence for Cædmon's verse. Bede's refusal to rewrite Cædmon's *Hymn* in Latin verse tells us something important about the role that its particular *suauitas* and *compunctio* are understood to have, and the affective response these are understood to invoke, as the latter part of the Cædmon story tells us about the effects of his subsequent literary production. If Bede's own carefully crafted story takes edification as its aim, its devotional ends expect and indeed require an affective engagement with vernacular verse. The beauty in question is that of vernacular poetry in particular. The affective associations of these poetic conventions – how they are meant to make readers feel – are particular to their original language; the inimitability of that literary experience is precisely Bede's point.

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Mixed Feelings, Mixed Forms

While affective piety may be rightly traced back at least as far as the desert fathers of the third and fourth centuries, if not indeed to the New Testament itself, the present study explores the particular, hybrid conventions by which the earliest devotional poetry in England (ca. 800–1300) conveys and models devotional affect: That is to say, it studies how early English poetry across the Norman Conquest combines, or mixes, the tropes and topoi of homily and liturgy with those of vernacular poetry, and the mixed associated feelings attendant upon them. In these tropes and topoi, the affective quality of early English devotional verse is both revealed to and concealed from modern scholars. Besides its heroic and elegiac conventions, Old English poetry allusively evokes narratives and tropes it assumes its audience will know, and these things are not less important for being less explicitly said. As this book shows, early Middle English devotional poetry works this way, too, but the combination of the tropes of love lyrics, for example, with devotional poetry has been more readily understandable to modern scholars than the earlier tropes of loyalty to one's lord or visceral images of worldly decay. Yet when we move beyond the ideas of Beowulf and battles that dominate modern perceptions of what Old English poetry is, we begin to see that deep and complex feeling – and sophisticated questions of beauty – are not as alien to Old English literature as its own conventions are alien to us.

Medieval English poetic conventions have been opaque to modern readers in part for the very reasons that they were powerful for medieval audiences: They say most strikingly what they say only briefly, allusively, or implicitly. Old English, in particular, works by poetic formulas that are reused and recombined – remixed, so to speak – in different textual contexts. John Miles Foley argues that such formulas work by a process of metonymy, using a single aspect or phrase to evoke a whole tradition and the associations that come with it: "[T]he typical aspect refers to the whole traditional identity of a character […] and actively brings to life that identity for participation in the given narrative context."[12] The "habit" of poetic topoi, connecting poetic objects with poetic affects as well as contexts within which they can be understood, preserves their associated affects while actively forging new affective associations as they are repeatedly used in different contexts.[13] Far from being static or repetitive, the use of formulas, type scenes, and allusions creates what Foley calls a "traditional referentiality," in which the invocation of a convention can recall other uses of that convention, dynamically introducing a

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full range of traditional meaning into a new context in which it takes on new meanings.[14] Heather Maring has argued that Old English poetry also "employed liturgical speech, symbols, and acts in a manner that evokes metonymic associations."[15] Formulaic phrases can be repeated with differences or as part of motifs.[16] These in turn can comprise what Donald K. Fry called "type scenes": particular narrative situations or actions that bring with them the affective associations of all the parallel instances of that narrative situation that came before.[17] In this way, the affects of devotional poetry become dependent upon these repeated forms. The work of metonymy, allusion, and convention does not only happen in poetry. Yet devotional poetry provokes sharp recollection of and reflection on deeply held convictions, using topoi drawn from homilies and images derived from biblical texts, and it then constructs from these its own set of type scenes and conventions. Indeed, when we admit the work of affective piety in literature before the eleventh century, we can see that lines in the alliterative twelfth-century early Middle English poem *The Soul's Address to the Body* echo poetic tropes from Old English elegies as well as devotional topoi from Old English soul and body literature. In doing so, the *Soul's Address* takes up familiar strains of lament from a poetics thought long dead by this point in history and combines them with something new. In working across the divide between Old and Middle English, I seek to demonstrate that literary and devotional traditions of earlier vernacular poetry combine and recombine with new literary forms across the corpus of medieval English.

Throughout the history of medieval English poetry, devotional literary conventions mix with poetic conventions, and the combinations of poetic with other literary and devotional conventions create new poetic forms across the medieval period. The devotional literary forms of the later medieval period have been more intelligible to modern scholars than those of the earlier, but the earlier forms are no less salient nor less significant, and they exert their influence on those that come later. This study demonstrates how devotional poetry creates a dynamic, hybrid aesthetic combining homiletic, hagiographic, and biblical tropes with different poetic tropes as these shift across the English Middle Ages.[18] To take one example, figures of Christ as sweetheart, a later poetic topos appearing around the thirteenth century, have created an enduring aesthetic more familiar to modern scholars than the earlier poetic topos of Christ as warrior, or *hæleð*, characteristic of devotional poems of the eighth. These shifting forms, even when restricted to poetry, reveal at least some of the sorts of affects associated with affective devotional topoi; as Barbara Rosenwein has put

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it, "one cannot separate feeling from rhetoric … emotional expression is always rhetorical to some degree."[19] But these shifting and recombining forms reveal something else to modern scholars, too: It is precisely the rise of such later literary conventions, as much as any change in devotional practice, that has rendered later affective piety recognizable and thus legible to scholars in a way that earlier affective piety has not been. In other words, post-Conquest devotional tropes created the taste by which later readers have appreciated them. The predominance of later affective devotion in the scholarly conversation has led to the effective erasure of the earlier almost entirely. Modern readers have held that affective piety originates only in the central Middle Ages, where they begin to recognize its familiar literary forms. This account, however, obscures how even those familiar forms arise as part of a developing narrative of affective piety in literature beginning centuries before. To address this problem, this book reconsiders the deeper roots and longer branches of affective devotional tropes in England, beginning as early as the eighth century. In this work it revises and reimagines dominant conceptions of both literary and religious history.

Medieval Histories of Feeling

To understand *why* it matters that early medieval poetry did expect believers to feel things, or why modern scholarship would suggest that it didn't, we need to consider the larger narratives of religious and literary history in which this conversation comes about. These histories refer to deeply felt religious engagement as affective piety. The narrative that "affective piety," or feeling, really matters only in later medieval devotion arises as early as 1953, with R. W. Southern's *The Making of the Middle Ages*. Southern characterizes the Benedictine monasticism that dominated the religious climate of the earlier medieval period as a practice that is "a static one in more than one sense," "a ceaseless discipline, an unvaried round from year to year, a communal life where the individual was lost in the crowd,"[20] and he contrasts this with the "power of a new energy" in the world after Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux.[21] This new energy manifests itself, according to Southern, in two forms: an emphasis on "self-knowledge" and upon the "theme of tenderness and compassion for the sufferings and helplessness of the Saviour of the world."[22]

This narrative thread continues through Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, in which the significance of Christ's brokenness comes to the fore particularly in relation to changing understandings

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of the Eucharist – as Christ's literal broken body and blood – after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.[23] Sarah McNamer, like Bynum, focuses on the role of women's devotion in the development of affective piety,[24] while Michelle Karnes integrates the history of affective piety into a history of medieval imagination and cognition, demonstrating that affective and intellectual concerns were integral to one another.[25] Sarah Beckwith has argued that the evolving significance of the Eucharist made the image of Christ's broken body central to the construction of late medieval social order.[26] These important studies all recognize crucial developments in the history of medieval Christianity: the rise of Cistercian monasticism; the institution of regular, mandatory confession after the Fourth Lateran Council; the influence of devotional texts for women; and changes in artistic depictions of Christ and the Virgin Mary. These phenomena certainly all influence the role of affect in devotion, and the conventions and practices that come to govern the experience of devotional affect in the later Middle Ages. As these studies demonstrate, too, the variety of phenomena they account for itself leads to the difficulty of defining simply what scholars mean when they talk about affective devotion. Moreover, because of the significance of the cultural shifts they document, accounts of these phenomena can often characterize later medieval devotion by contrast with what came before, just as modernity is often characterized by contrast with the Middle Ages. This contrast often exaggerates and distorts the centuries against which these phenomena are set, and by that same token distorts the significance of those phenomena themselves.

Nevertheless, scholars of the early Middle Ages have at times challenged versions of this linear narrative.[27] As early as 1977, Thomas Bestul challenged Southern's characterizing Anselm "as a reaction to Carolingian austerity" and pointed to the likely influence of the "significant body of private devotional prayers" recorded in England in the late tenth century.[28] Anselm's work, for Bestul, thus represents the continuity of a tradition in pre-Conquest England dating back to the early ninth-century Book of Cerne at least.[29] Scott DeGregorio has also criticized Southern's assertion of Anselm as the figure who made a new "inner life" possible, one very different from the regimented life Southern imagined for figures such as Bede.[30] Indeed, DeGregorio shows how Bede's commentary on the Song of Songs in its meditations on love for Christ in the heart and mind, as well as Asser's description of Alfred's emotional engagement with collecting psalms and prayers, contradict narratives in which affect only matters after the eleventh century, or narratives in which "[t]he transition from early to late medieval piety is […] described in terms of a movement from

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a 'fear-based' to a 'love-based' devotion."[31] Helen Foxhall Forbes has also explored the importance of "the developing tradition of affective writing" in a penitential text from late eleventh-century Worcester.[32] Following DeGregorio's work, Frances McCormack argues that Old English poems including *Christ* and *The Dream of the Rood* evoke a "brutal sadness of separation from God."[33] Yet these accounts have generally circumscribed their arguments within the bounds of traditional accounts of affective piety: McCormack acknowledges that *Christ*'s "affectivity is of quite a different character" to that of the later Middle Ages; Foxhall Forbes connects the startling meditation on Christ's crucifixion in the penitential text she examines to "the theological developments of the latter part of the eleventh century," dating it close to the rise of affective piety in the standard narrative; DeGregorio for his part freely admits that Bede's comments "do not, it is true, evoke anything like the intensely humanized Christ of the latter Middle Ages."[34]

The Middle Ages is a story modernity tells about itself. But just as the popular narrative of history makes the Middle Ages the ground from which glorious modernity can arise, a parallel narrative makes the Old English era become the humble setting for the rise of the "high" Middle Ages, creating a premodern that anticipates the modern. Such a narrative preemptively forecloses the possibilities for reading premodern and especially pre-Conquest literature and culture. To offer a more capacious account of early English affective piety, I argue in the chapters that follow that while the conventions of later affective piety are often taken as the thing itself, the earliest English devotional poetry already has conventions for engaging devotional feeling – including grief at visions of the crucifixion, shame for sin at the Final Judgment, and consolation from wisdom. We must not ask whether there was an early English affective piety, but what kind of emotional response – and what manner of evoking such powerful emotion – was expected by medieval devotional literature from the early to central Middle Ages.

Virtually all of the critical terms necessary to twenty-first-century scholars of early medieval literature would have been anachronistic and incomprehensible to the writers of that literature, and "early English poetry" is an inadequate term that I use in the broadest possible sense.[35] "English poetry" includes not merely works written in forms of the English language but those written and reproduced in what is now England. That neither England nor the English existed as they do now is precisely the point – as will become clear, the people who would become the English did not read or live within the disciplinary and linguistic boundaries in which they are

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now studied and taught, and so our study must allow for national and linguistic boundaries as porous and flexible as theirs were. *Genesis B*, for example, is not so much an Old English poem as an Old Saxon poem copied with an English accent, so to speak. *The Grave*, written in what might best be described as late Old English, receives an early Middle English coda adapted from a different poem in Old French. Closely guarding our own disciplinary and period-specific boundaries limits our understanding of the literatures, histories, and peoples who lived blithely across them.

Similarly, the concept of *affect*, a contemporary term of art for the "shimmers" of feeling comprising subjective emotional experience, was not one that medieval writers would have had a word for.[36] Yet *affectus*, in fact, was the term used by John Cassian in the early fifth century in his *Conferences* for the proper "disposition" of the heart when singing or copying the Psalms.[37] As Cassian writes, "we first take in the power of what is said, rather than the knowledge of it, recalling what has taken place or what does take place in us in daily assaults whenever we reflect on them."[38] This formulation suggests both that this power, which exists prior to knowledge, persists affectively and that it makes the content of the Psalms devotionally effective anew whenever it is evoked again in reflection. *Affectus* conveys another simple, yet crucial, aspect of this experience: It is a power that precedes knowledge, and thus cannot always be categorized within the subjective terminology of a particular emotion. The Benedictine Rule drew heavily on Cassian in developing the rituals by which monks prayed the Psalms daily. In her essay on the Benedictine practice of repetition of the Psalms, Amy Hollywood emphasizes that the Rule did not enjoin rote memorization nor "simply recit[ing] the Psalms," but an active performance in which "the monk was called on to feel what the psalmist felt, to learn to fear, desire, and love God in and through the words of the Psalms."[39] Yet even if the "power" of the *experientia* of the Psalms precedes knowledge of them, the discipline of learning this knowledge never replaces this power. In fact, the *Regula Benedicti* requires its adherents to achieve spiritual exaltation by means of "diuersos gradus humilitatis uel disciplinae […] ascendendo" (various steps of humility and discipline to be ascended).[40] Knowledge and profound affective experience amplify one another.[41]

This emphasis on the affective experience of the psalms, on urging behavior that cultivates appropriate affective orientation, develops as the *Regularis concordia* adapts the Benedictine Rule for tenth-century England. Emphasizing the need for psalms to be recited slowly and with understanding that can only be gleaned from study,[42] the *Regularis concordia* commands that prayers

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> nimia uelocitate psallendo Deum potius ad iracundiam inconsiderate, quod absit, prouocent quam prouide ad peccaminum ueniam inuitent. Ita igitur hartante patre nostro Benedicto, omnia distincte psallendo modificentur *ut mens nostra concordet uoci nostrae* et *impleatur illud apostolicum, Psallam spiritu, psallam et mente*.
>
> [shall not be chanted at excessive speed lest rashly we provoke God to anger, which God forbid, instead of wisely beseeching Him to forgive our sins. Therefore, as our Father Benedict exhorts, let all these prayers be chanted distinctly so that mind and voice agree and that we may thus fulfil the words of the apostle: *I will sing with the spirit, I will also sing with the mind*.][43]

The agreement of mind and voice entails more than intellectual assent: The speed of recitation would make little difference to an affirmation of mere understanding or agreement, but it does have implications for the believer's state of mind and emotional engagement with the words. The admonition suggests another important aspect of the affective component of early medieval devotion: Affect may be understood as a behavior, or a result of behaviors in such a way that it is subject to the individual will. Affect must be understood in relationship to action, to behavior, and to cultivated habit.[44]

Early English literature often depicts emotion through active verbs (such as *yrsian*, to be angry, or *murnan*, to be sad) and thus not as passive states but as involving, "at some level, an act of will" on the part of the individual, as Malcolm Godden has argued.[45] Moreover, while *ratio* (reason) was a faculty understood to govern the soul, in the Old English vernacular tradition, the mind belonged to the body, as Leslie Lockett has argued, and the workings of the will were not necessarily exclusively subject to *ratio*.[46] For this reason, intellectual and emotional modes of knowledge were never so starkly distinguished in the early Middle Ages as they have become in the modern era. Moreover, the early English generally understood affect as taking place in the mind, or *mod*, and the activity of the *mod* was understood as part of the body, a hydraulic system located in the chest cavity subject to heating, surging, and cooling.[47] Affect was thus understood as embodied experience, and almost always represented in those terms. For that reason, compounded with the difficulties of rendering affect aesthetically, devotional poetry had to negotiate the workings of will, reason, and affect in concert, using the terms of the body's experience to address the faculties of the soul. In this context, appeals to affect became especially important to devotion, and potentially unpredictable.

In contemporary contexts, we might classify devotional poetry as "didactic," whatever lush imagery it conjures making way for the matter of its moral lessons.[48] Yet I suggest that this judgment reflects modern

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readers' tendencies to consider moral lessons and aesthetic pleasure as distinct categories, even when we admit that the latter may encourage the former. Such a distinction would not necessarily have occurred to writers in early medieval England: As Lockett has argued, the vernacular tradition among speakers and writers of Old English "did not localize rational thought in the brain" at all, since they actually understood the mind as embodied and located in the chest cavity, and so "they could not have developed or adopted the metonymic mapping that pits the rational head against the impassioned heart."[49] This understanding not only dissolves the conventional modern oppositions of thought and emotion but bears enormous conceptual implications: As Lockett writes, "the divide between reason and emotion that we rely heavily upon in Modern English was little used by Old English authors."[50] In this paradigm, it makes little sense to think of emotional appeals that subside in favor of rational lessons – emotion and reason work in concert, and must be used, controlled, and actively engaged in devotional discourse and practice.

Sense and Feeling

Poetic use of conventions drawn from across literary genres is, essentially, aesthetic in the original sense of the word *aisthesis*, that is, *perception*, in that these devices of art function to mold the perceptions of their audiences. In the context of medieval Christianity and devotional literature, the use and understanding of forms and figures bears the additional weight of its implications for exegesis. Origen's commentary on the Song of Songs speaks of the inner and outer perception required to appropriately direct one's understanding of that biblical text.[51] Bede used the Latin translation of this commentary when he wrote his own commentary on the Song of Songs, which also deals with these problems as well as those of the *spiritalis sensus*.[52] A similar treatment of sense perception is found in Origen's commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, in which Origen introduces the term *aisthesis* to render the "knowledge of God" in Proverbs 2:5.[53] In the Latin translation, the term *aisthesis* is also rendered as *sensus*.[54] These texts, and Bede's commentary drawing on them, emphasize the role of perception in the formation of intellectual and spiritual understanding. Such a close relation of aesthetics to sense perception is not wholly alien to later aesthetic theory, even if the spiritual *sensus* may be a far cry from ideas of "art for art's sake."[55] Perception matters to early medieval aesthetics precisely because medieval art exists within a particular web of cultivated devotional understanding and culturally resonant conventions.

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Modern frameworks may obscure aspects of early medieval concepts of emotion and affect, and a study of how medieval concepts differ from our own may in turn make visible the assumptions upon which contemporary theories have come to rest. Much of modern aesthetic theory has revolved around the separation of aesthetic and rational judgments. When Kant treated aesthetic perception in his *Critique of Pure Judgment*, he separated this faculty from that of "pure reason," yet required that judgments of beauty subsume intuitions into the understanding, such that the perception of beauty will always accord with certain universal principles.[56] Theorists since Kant have not tended to think of aesthetics as a means of acquiring *information*. The truth related to beauty is of a different kind. So Ludwig Wittgenstein may remark "that a poem, although it is composed in the language of information, is not used in the language-game of giving information."[57] Jakobson offers a useful complication to this apparent distinction between language that gives information and language that functions poetically, defining "poetics" as "that part of linguistics which treats the poetic function in its relationship to the other functions of language."[58] This definition of poetic function significantly does not limit itself to what would conventionally be considered "poems." Yet here still we find a distinction between the "poetic" function and "other functions" which would likely have made little difference to a premodern audience, or to one for whom the affective, aesthetic, and intellectual experience of reading a text were never so starkly distinguished. By contrast, early medieval poetry blithely represents much of the same theological information contained in prose, even if presented allusively or obliquely, and, of course, the literary artifice of prose seeks to persuade as well as to transmit information.

Although modern thought began to exclude the aesthetic from the rational, a senior contemporary of Kant's, Alexander Baumgarten, offered an alternative way to imagine the relationship between aesthetics and reason.[59] Baumgarten, like Kant, considers aesthetics as distinct from reason but does not exclude aesthetic perception from having a positive influence upon reason. His theory asserts sensual perception as a means of acquiring knowledge in a way that emphasizes how aesthetic perception can inform or influence rational understanding. In contrast to later aesthetic theory, Baumgarten's still retains a space for meaning and knowledge to exist within literary objects beyond that of intellectual content or mere information – a space in which we might imagine the aesthetic and affective experience of an oft-recited psalm may in fact bring deeper knowledge of its meaning precisely because it is not limited to the rational. Baumgarten's

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criteria for aesthetic knowledge has been represented by one critic, at least, as a return to traditional rhetorical ideals.[60] Kant himself was influenced by Baumgarten, whose ideas, although less famous than Kant's, offer us a useful reminder that the affective aesthetic of early medieval devotional literature did not distinguish between affect and intellect; that this distinction is a relatively recent one that we might question or suspend. We must remember that only in the theory of our own cultural moment might that possibility begin to seem strange.

While some critical commonplaces of the modern era must be suspended in considering the Middle Ages, contemporary theoretical ideas nonetheless offer vocabulary for, and thus a means of access to, the process of establishing affective associations with poetic conventions. The accretive, associative nature of Old English formulaic poetry parallels in some way what Sara Ahmed describes as the habit of acquiring taste: "It is not only that we acquire good taste through habits; rather the association between objects and affects is preserved through habit."[61] For Ahmed, drawing on the work of Edmund Husserl and others, subjects are "oriented" toward objects, which they may turn toward or away from.[62] The poetic conventions of early English devotional art depend on the habitualness and the familiarity of those conventions, but also redirect those conventions toward devotional objects. The chapters that follow argue that devotional art makes aesthetic sense, both in terms of poetry and in terms of *aisthesis* as a habit of perception. By suspending the imperatives of the autotelic aesthetic of modern thought, we understand medieval art anew, in the context of the intellectual cultures that give its devotional aesthetic its full complexity.

Mixed Feelings across the Conquest

The chapters that follow form two clusters: the first demonstrating the hybrid conventions for conveying affect in pre-Conquest English poetry, and the second exploring how these forms shift, but also persist, as they are mixed with newly available forms in devotional poetry after the Conquest. While the pre-Conquest poems are often more difficult to place chronologically, even in relation to one another, each chapter instead coalesces around a particular devotional topos and the poetic conventions that attend upon it. Since their affective content so often depends on allusion and association, these poetic topoi govern the chapters that follow, rather than particular words for affective states.[63] The first three chapters thus begin in what might have seemed an unlikely place, with Old English

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poetry thought to exemplify the very absence of affective piety, while the final two chapters explore how the conventions of affective piety shift over time, in Middle English verse that deploys, for example, romantic metaphors whose emotional resonances have been much more readily understood by modern audiences. The integration of these later tropes has been taken to be a result of the rise of affective piety itself. But instead, these chapters demonstrate that these innovations complement the surprising continuity and persistence of the affective tropes of earlier eras in devotional literature across the medieval period.

Chapter 1 confronts the dilemma of the earliest English verse on the suffering of Christ and the saints. The apparent lack of expressions of suffering from holy figures has been viewed as a stark contrast with the evocations of pity for holy suffering in the central and later Middle Ages. Yet as I argue, these poems use variations on the vernacular tropes of loyalty to one's lord to evoke empathy and affective identification with suffering. The very set of conventions that would seem to preclude affectively engaged devotion thus dynamically produce it, in a way unique to this literary context. I show how poems such as *The Dream of the Rood* in the late tenth-century Vercelli Book, thought to display a stoical approach to devotional material, actually model profound sympathy and deeply felt religious devotion – but devotional feeling which must be displaced from holy figures onto their followers. Although heroic poetic conventions have dominated readings of *The Dream of the Rood*, the language of lordship in this poem contributes to the affective anguish modeled by the Cross, and in turn, by the Dreamer whose sins necessitate such great suffering. I next consider the *Guthlac* poems in the Exeter Book to demonstrate how verse saints' lives both teach devotional lessons and model them through the life of a saint audiences might identify with and seek to emulate. Such hagiographic poetry also offers the most direct challenge to scholarly assumptions about the rise of affective piety.

The second and third chapters explore how pre-Conquest devotional poetry evinces a devotional aesthetic relying upon affective associations – of guilt with images of the cross, of shame associated with thoughts of Judgment Day – which are evoked by homiletic, hagiographic, and penitential conventions. This devotional verse uses such conventions allusively, employing their affective associations in portrayals of powerful devotional affect. Thus Chapter 2 begins with *The Phoenix* to show that Old English poetic depictions of Paradise simultaneously rely upon and forbid delight in luxury objects, depicted through conventional formulas for treasure in heroic verse. Particularly in the Old English *Genesis B*, the capacity to

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perceive beauty serves as both an aid and a danger to spiritual discernment, but ones necessary for devotional poetry to do its work. Chapter 3 shows how early medieval poems on Judgment Day (*De die judicii*, *Judgment Day II*) rely upon their audiences' familiarity with conventional beliefs on the coming Judgment to enhance their allusive and elliptical evocations of horror. Further, as the Old English *Soul and Body* poems illustrate, conventional evocations of shame draw upon heroic poetic conventions, in particular, to erase the temporal divide between the future Judgment and the audience's present. Shame, more than fear or grief, determines how equally ravaged bodies will be read differently, by the poem's audience as by God at the Last Judgment. The consistency in these conventional evocations of shame shows not only that pre-Conquest devotional poetry sought to evoke an affective response in its readers, but also that this poetry associated particular affects with certain devotional contexts across different poems. These affects are, moreover, taken for granted rather than explained: The poem expects that the grounds for shame at the Last Judgment will be already understood by its audience.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine how devotional poems across the early Middle English period continually create new hybrid forms for different devotional contexts. Chapter 4 returns to the soul and body tradition considered in Chapter 3, turning now to the ways its highly conventional tropes continue and change across the centuries following the Norman Conquest. This chapter shows how, even as poetic *forms* change in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, we see active survivals of older vernacular *conventions* thought no longer to exist. Taking up strains of lament familiar from a poetics thought long dead by this point in history, late Old English and many early Middle English poems (*The Grave*, *The Soul's Address to the Body*, *Latemest Day*, *When the Turf Is Thy Tower*, and others) evince crucial survivals of poetic convention within early English literature. By contrast, Chapter 5 considers what does shift over time in devotional lyrics on Christ and the Virgin Mary. The final chapter thus brings the arc full circle, so to speak, to devotional poems depicting Christ and the crucifixion. Unlike the Old English *Dream of the Rood* explored in Chapter 1, the Middle English crucifixion poems in Chapter 5 urge pity and love for Christ himself, now referred to as a "leman" or sweetheart. Beginning with the Marian depictions in the *Advent Lyrics*, we witness conventions for the speakers of Old English poetry give way to those of Middle English devotional poetry. These arise in part from the devotional thought of writers like Bernard of Clairvaux, filtered through vernacular devotional texts including those of the Wooing Group. Middle English

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devotional poems also increasingly shift from alliterative to rhymed verse, and incorporate conventions of French literature newly introduced to the English literary landscape, including those of the lay and the ballad. In lyrics such as *My Lemman on the Rood*, *Man's Leman on the Rood*, *On God Ureisen of Ure Lefdi*, and Thomas de Hales's *Luue Ron*, we see how these conventions in large part replace the language of devotion to one's lord, rather than to one's love, that combined with pre-Conquest devotional tropes. But even in these lyrics, we see elements of decorative alliteration and elegiac tropes of the waning world that document continuity with early English devotional verse.

Modern readers and scholars do not necessarily know how medieval poems should make them feel. And perhaps we have not been helped in this by scholars who judged earlier medieval poetry to be "the rude exclamations of a rude people, with a rude language, greeting their chieftains," as Sharon Turner once had it,[64] or who judged its audience as men "not chosen mainly for intellectual qualities," who "should not be thought of as learned in legendary history or allusion," as Kenneth Sisam once wrote.[65] This critical legacy lingers and still obscures the sophistication of the earliest literature this language has left to us. But I argue that the earliest English devotional poetry combines vernacular poetic convention and devotional tropes to produce highly sophisticated, deeply affective works. Some of these tropes have been as unfamiliar and alienating to modern scholars as they were familiar and evocative for their original audiences. Moreover, their affective qualities cannot be dismissed as merely didactic, an easy means to teach those who lacked understanding of theological concepts already. Just as William Carlos Williams would observe, in a later era, "It is difficult / to get the news from poems,"[66] so an early medieval believer might have found that it was very hard to get theology from them, too. But just as poetry speaks to those who have some experience of the world's news, so early English devotional poetry was experienced by those who had learned much already, and much of what they had learned was the fundamental doctrines of salvation and loss upon which devotional poems meditate: a deeply held foundation capable of eliciting powerful emotion.

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