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The Husband's Message: *an allegorical sea journey**

The Husband's Message is the monologue of a messenger conveying a lord's love message to his wife. The literal meaning of the poem seems to be, at first glance, quite clear; however, the presence of some runes and an unexpected division into three sections require more attention. The aim of the present article is to investigate these peculiar aspects according to the methodology of Material Philology in particular. The analysis of the context of the Exeter Book and of the graphic cues characterizing the poem enables us to suggest a possible function for the tripartite layout of the text and to clarify the meaning of the runic message at the end. Moreover, the relation between *The Husband's Message* and the closest poems in the codex can shed new light on the meaning of the text revealing a possible, further allegorical level of interpretation. This perspective is also supported by textual analysis: various elements appear to be related to biblical symbols and seem to suggest that the sea journey described in *The Husband's Message* could be construed allegorically as the process of conversion every Christian should undergo in order to gain eternal salvation.

1. *The critics and The Husband's Message*

Traditionally categorized as an elegy¹, *The Husband's Message* presents some remarkable complexities on different levels. First of all, the tripartite structure of the poem seems quite unusual, but the reason for this layout in the Exeter Book² is not clear. The identity of the narrator is still a mystery owing to a large hole on the manuscript page in which are lost most of the lines in the first section of the poem. Moreover, the interpretation of the secret message shaped by the runes at the end of the text is still a *crux*.

The earliest editors were particularly attentive to the problem of the division of *The Husband's Message* into three parts and recognized that the presence of three capital letters throws some doubt upon the unity and the integrity of the text. Whereas Grein's edition (1857-1858) considered *The Husband's Message* as a single text starting from l. 1, Thorpe (1842: 470-475) edited ll. 1-12 as a riddle and ll. 13-54 as a 'fragment', thereby underlining the similarity between the first section of the poem and *Riddles 30b* and *60*

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¹ See Muir (2006²), Klinck (1992), Leslie (1961) in their editions. Also Pearsall (1977), Greenfield (1986²), Zimmermann (1995: 138-158), Znojemská (1999), Brunetti (2006-2008).

² The Exeter Book is the only manuscript containing *The Husband's Message* (ff. 123r-123v).

(which precede *The Husband's Message* in the manuscript). Thorpe's choice was justified by the style and the content of the first part of *The Husband's Message*, which are reminiscent of the riddles: the narrator tells us about his origin in the first person singular and seems to be a personified object. Furthermore, its possible identification with a wooden object, a rune-staff, strengthens the link between ll. 1-12 and *Riddles 30b* and *60*, where the narrators are plants (a 'tree' and a 'reed') or objects derived from plants³. Blackburn (1901) stressed the apparent continuity between *Riddle 60* and *The Husband's Message* and saw them as one poem; his idea heavily influenced subsequent critics⁴, who focused overwhelmingly on the relation between *Riddle 60* and *The Husband's Message* and refrained from examining the internal division of the text. In the most modern editions, such as Klinck's (1992: 25-27) and Muir's (2006²), the codicological aspects are still only partly described. It appears that editors have given no real thought to the exact function of the three sections in the text and to the link between the first twelve lines and those that follow.

After Leslie (1968) pointed out various valid reasons to consider *Riddle 60* independent of the following poem⁵, critics accepted l. 1 as the beginning of *The Husband's Message*⁶. The focus of investigation was now largely on aspects such as the identity of the narrator and the interpretation of the runes. Here are some preliminary remarks on these problems: some⁷ have identified the narrator as a human messenger carrying a rune-staff carved with the runes, while most⁸ have seen him as a personified object, the engraved stick⁹. However, the evidence is so scarce that we cannot rule out either of the two pos-

³ The solutions adopted for *Riddles 30b* and *60* are those suggested by Niles [(2006): 130-132], but other scholars proposed for *Riddle 30b* 'the Cross' [Talentino (1981)], for *Riddle 60* 'reed-pen' or 'reed-pipe' [Leslie (1968)] or even 'rune-staff' [Williamson (1977: 315-319) and Muir (2006²)].

⁴ Pope (1978) adopted this same hypothesis and sought to reconstruct the lost lines in *The Husband's Message* to prove that the poem and *Riddle 60* are actually a single poem about the origin of a yew tree and its transformation into a stick that was carved with runes to convey a secret message. Pope's restoration of the missing words in *The Husband's Message* is highly speculative and his interpretation has therefore not been adopted by other scholars.

⁵ Leslie's interpretation (1968: 455) was accepted by most of the critics. He pointed out that the narrative structure of *Riddle 60* seems to mirror a scheme often recurring in the Anglo-Saxon riddles: after the description of its birthplace the speaker hints at a transformation it underwent. Then it describes its new function as a different object (see *Riddles 26, 53, 73, 92*). The very possibility of guessing the solution at the end of *Riddle 60* also is in accordance with the supposed independence of this text which, according to Leslie, shows the traces of a possible, thematic influence from the Latin enigma *Harundo* by Symphosius, that also deals with a reed changed into an object [cf. Ohl (1928: 36-37)]. All these observations support the thesis that *Riddle 60* is a riddle and is independent from the following poem.

⁶ See for example Muir's (2006²) and Klinck's (1992) editions.

⁷ Among them, Leslie (1961) and Greenfield (1966).

⁸ For example Ericksen (1998), Orton (1981) and Fiocco (1999).

⁹ In contrast to other critics, Niles (2003: 203-204 and footnote 38) identified the narrator as a ship's mast, as he appears to be located *on ceolpele* 'on the ship's plank' (l. 9a). Kasse (1967: 53) comes to the same conclusion but interprets the ship's mast as a symbol for the Cross, as the ship could allegorically represent the Church.

sibilities¹⁰. The runic message *Ge-yrē ic atsomne* · 𐌊 · 𐌺 · *geador* / · 𐌹 · 𐌺 · *ond* · 𐌳 · *aþe benemnan* (ll. 50-51) has always been controversial because of a lacuna in the principal verb, *ge-yrē*, and because the sentence in which the runes are embedded is hard to construe. Almost all critics have integrated the names of the symbols in this sentence instead of their phonetic value, following Kock (1921). According to him, the first two couples of runes are compound nouns (*Sigel-Rad* 'sun's path' and *Ear-Wyn* 'joy of the earth') and the third is *Mon* 'man'. Kock detected a reference to a passage in Matthew's Gospel (5: 34-36) where sky, earth and man are elements connected to the act of swearing, and he consequently read the two compounds in *The Husband's Message* metaphorically as 'heaven' and 'earth' and the last rune as a reference to 'humankind'¹¹. Even if only a few scholars argue for a link to the Gospel, all have accepted Kock's reading of the runes and nobody has offered any new interpretation of the message, either from a syntactic point of view or for the meaning of the runic symbols. It appears that the main effort, from then on¹², has been on finding a precise correspondence between the concepts represented by the runes and the images de-

¹⁰ The hypothesis of the messenger is supported by Leslie (1961) in particular, who underlined some aspects that do not seem to match a personified runestick: see l. 6 *ful oft ic on bates...* *gesohte* ('very often I was searching, on the ... of the ship'), concerning the frequent journeys of the narrator, and l. 13b *se þisne beam agrof* ('the one who carved this stick'), where he refers to the runestick using the third person singular. Orton (1981: 45) instead pointed out that, in the conventions of prosopopoeia, a speaking object is often described as representative of a whole category of objects. Therefore, the stick in *The Husband's Message* may well be hinting at all the possible journeys of all the rune-staffs in the world. Moreover, in other poems narrators who are personified objects sometimes switch briefly into the third person singular - see *Riddle 35* ll. 13-14: *saga soðcwidum, searþoncum gleaw / wordum wisfast, hwæt þis gewæde sy* 'say, skilful man of true sayings, of cunning thoughts, / wise in words, which this vestment is' [ed. Muir (2006²)].

¹¹ The edition of *The Husband's Message* adopted here is Klinck (1992: 100-102). The runic symbols in the message correspond to, respectively, S (= *Sigel*), R (= *Rad*), EA (= *Ear*), W (= *Wyn*) and M (= *Mon*).

¹² The interpretation that replaces the runes with the phonetic value of the symbols dates back to Hicketier (1889), Trautmann (1894) and Imelmann (1920). Recently, it has been taken into consideration again by J.E. Anderson (1974) and Fiocco (1999), but it does not seem to provide a satisfactory result. Apart from Cynewulf's 'signature' in *Juliana, Christ II, Fates of the Apostles* and *Elene*, another example of runes used as letters is provided by *Riddle 19* [ed. Muir (2006²)]. There, four groups of runes must be read backwards (SROH = HORS 'horse', NOM = MON 'man', AGEW = WEGA 'warrior', COFOAH = HAFOC, which stands for *hafoc* 'hawk') and the four words obtained altogether give the solution of the riddle: 'armed rider with hawk' [Porter (2003⁴): 134]. Another use of the runes is in compounds, where sometimes runic symbols (usually those that represent very common words like W [= *wyn* 'joy'], M [= *mon* 'man'], and Ɔ [= *epel* 'property' or 'native land']) are substituted for their names: for example, in *The Ruin* l. 23b M *dreama* stands for *mondreama* 'joy of men' [ed. Muir (2006²)]. However, *The Husband's Message* is the only case where runes replace both the elements of the compounds.

¹³ For a detailed analysis of Kock's interpretation see Par. 2.2.3.

¹⁴ See Elliott (1955: 5-7), E.R. Anderson (1973: 245), Nicholson (1982: 318) and Niles (2003: 207). See Par. 2.2.3.

scribed in the text¹⁵.

2. Another approach to the text

Faced with the problems of *The Husband's Message*, critics have seldom taken into consideration aspects that did not relate to the content of the text. Even those who, starting from the observation of codicological data, have sought to explain the function of the three sections from a structural point of view have in the end established the structure of the poem mainly on the basis of its narrative elements. In fact, they have argued for the unity of *The Husband's Message* by pointing out the thematic similarity between the first and the following two sections, and the stylistic and narrative continuity between the second and the third section. However, no serious attempt has been made to explain the function of the layout. The tripartite structure is thus a striking peculiarity of the text that deserves more attention, especially considering that in the Exeter Book short poems are rarely divided into sections¹⁶.

According to the principles of Material Philology the manuscript is an object of study in itself, because it can offer information on the transmission and the reception of the text in a given time and place: that is why - as O' Keeffe (1990), Doane (1991) and Paster-nack (1995) point out - all the graphic cues (spaces, capital letters, punctuation) should undergo careful analysis. Indeed, they are the visual signs of the copyist's interpretation of the work¹⁷ that give clues to how it was read and interpreted¹⁸. Following these prin-

¹⁵ It should be mentioned that, especially in the 1960s, some scholars investigated the relation between *The Husband's Message* and *The Wife's Lament* because the two texts, which are not consecutive in the manuscript, share the main themes of the old promise between the spouses and their separation. At first glance, the poems appear complementary in terms of content; therefore, Swanton (1964) and Bolton (1969) hypothesized that they may have been composed as a diptych and a reelaboration of *Cantica Canticorum*. *The Wife's Lament* would represent the Church lamenting the separation from Christ and *The Husband's Message* would express the Saviour's response and message of hope to his spouse. This allegorical reading suggests very interesting implications for *The Husband's Message* (see Par. 2.2.2.), but cannot be confirmed for *The Wife's Lament* because the text does not contain elements that lend themselves to an allegorical interpretation. Moreover, despite Howlett's (1978) effort to underline some lexical similarities between the two poems, there is no strict linguistic and stylistic relation, and their structure appears quite different (see Par. 2.1. for *The Husband's Message*). In conclusion, there is no evidence to prove that *The Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message* were composed one in response to the other; therefore, this hypothesis was soon neglected by the critics.

¹⁶ The only other short texts to be subdivided are *Deor* and *Judgement Day I*, both in Booklet III, and *Maxims I* in Booklet II. All other cases are long poems, especially those in Booklet I. The division of the Exeter Book into three booklets adopted here (Booklet I: ff. 8r-52v, Booklet II: ff. 53r-97v, Booklet III: ff. 98r-130v) is that hypothesized by Conner (1986).

¹⁷ According to Liuzza (1988), the figure of the copyist is very close to that of an editor, as he could potentially modify the text on many levels according to his interpretation and his taste. He could insert punctuation marks to clarify syntactic or metrical aspects of the text, or to create a pause, and he could substitute or insert new words (for example conjunctions), thereby modifying the style and, sometimes, the content of the work.

¹⁸ A clear example of this function of the graphic cues in a text is the use of one or more capital letters at the beginning and a punctuation at the end.

ciples, the graphic features of *The Husband's Message* can hardly be a fortuitous element in the poem and they should, first of all, be compared to scribal habits in the rest of the Exeter Book. In addition to the layout of the text, its positioning in the manuscript bears much importance. Liuzza (1990: 10) remarks that the structure of each manuscript is often grounded on thematic series: the compiler chose to juxtapose texts in order to bring out shared themes regardless of their genre. Consequently, a text was always part of a broader context and its position was part of a specific project¹⁹. For *The Husband's Message* critics have looked at the preceding texts, *Riddles 30b* and *60*, to show that the first section of the poem, in particular, shares some aspects with these riddles²⁰. However, they neglected the connection with other close texts like *The Ruin* and the group of homiletic poems copied before the two riddles.

The methodology of Material Philology offers a promising new approach to the complexities of *The Husband's Message*. It attaches much importance to the layout of the text and it may also shed light on more limited problems, like those of the runes. The runic symbols express concepts that do not seem to have an obvious correspondence with the content of the text. Moreover, the surrounding syntactic structure is not clear and, on a literal level, the meaning of the message remains problematic. If we look beyond the riddles that appear next to it in the manuscript, *The Husband's Message* occurs in the Exeter Book in a homiletic context. Attention to this context could reveal an alternative reading for the secret message and the text as a whole²¹, if only as understood by this anthologist.

2.1. The Husband's Message and its layout: some hypotheses

The Husband's Message is found on ff. 123r-123v, after *Riddles 30b* and *60*²² (which follow *Homiletic Fragment II*) and before *The Ruin* and the last collection of riddles (*Riddles 61-94*²³). It is the monologue of a messenger who, through a secret runic message, urges a woman to join his lord because he has overcome past misfortunes and is now ready to start a new, happy life with her. Several lines, especially at the beginning of the poem, are missing because of a hole in the page, but the content is relatively clear. Instead, a puzzle arises from the structure, for several graphic cues seem to present the poem as three different texts²⁴. In particular, three capital letters divide it into three parts (ll. 1-12,

¹⁹ Works transmitted in more than one manuscript show how texts can adapt to different contexts and contribute to the communication of different messages, as they can bear different meanings according to the context described in the manuscript. For example, *Soul and Body* appears in both the Exeter Book, where it belongs to a section of poems concerning the transience of worldly life, and the Vercelli Book, where the central theme is the Resurrection.

²⁰ See Par. 2.3.

²¹ See Parr. 2.2.2. and 2.2.3.

²² See the Exeter Book ff. 122r-123r.

²³ The enumeration and the edition of the Anglo-Saxon riddles adopted here is that of Muir (2006²).

²⁴ Klinck (1992: 25-27) points out that the copyist seems to have mistaken the poem for three short texts, probably three riddles. That is why, according to the scholar, he juxtaposed *The Husband's Message* to *Riddles 30b* and *60*, apart from some thematic similarities like the presence of a wooden object in each poem.

ll. 13-25, ll. 26-54), each one ending with *colon* and *positura* (:7). This punctuation in the Exeter Book marks the end of both short poems and different sections in a single text²⁵. All the editors of *The Husband's Message* [Krapp / Dobbie (1936: lix), Leslie (1961: 13) and Klinck (1992: 100-102)] have taken for granted that these three textual units represent a united, single work even though sections are largely confined to the long poems in Booklet I²⁶; the only other short texts which are divided into sections are *Deor* and *Judgement Day I*. While in *Deor* each part corresponds clearly to a stanza²⁷, in both *Judgement Day I* and *The Husband's Message* the internal division does not seem to have an obvious reason. Careful analysis of the codicological data is therefore necessary to define the relation between the three parts of *The Husband's Message* and verify the unity of the text. The focus of the investigation should be on the capital letters which, unexpectedly, increase from the first to the third in size and amount of decoration. In addition, in the third section the initial letter, <O>, is followed by another, smaller, capital letter, <N>, so that it looks more like the beginning of a new text than the final part of the poem.

f. 123r, 8 (l. 1 of the poem): Nu

f. 123r, 17 (l. 13 of the poem): Hwæt

f. 123v, 4 (l. 26 of the poem): ONgin²⁸

The appearance of these three openings is hard to explain. The first capital letter, <N> of *Nu*, is the least decorated and mirrors the shape and the size of the initial letters of many short texts in Booklet III, in particular the riddles²⁹. This observation, together with the fact that the next capital letter introduces a hypermetrical verse (l. 13)³⁰ and belongs to the word *Hwæt* - a typical incipit of Anglo-Saxon poetry³¹ -, suggests that *The Husband's Message* might actually start from l. 13, or at least that the copyist considered l. 13 as the

²⁵ See the end of the two sections in *Judgement Day I* and the end of some of the stanzas in *Deor*. The punctuation at the end of the sections in *The Husband's Message* does not provide further elements to decide whether the three parts all belong to the same text or are independent texts. The presence of the wrap-mark between the first and the second section does not clarify the situation, as it seems to reflect the use of the wrap-mark between the sections of the long poems of Booklet I. Therefore, it appears to be more a decoration than a separating element. In the riddles of Booklet III, instead, the wrap-mark has the function of signaling the end of a riddle and the beginning of the following riddle, although in that case the tail and the beginning of the two riddles share the same line, as opposed to the sections in *The Husband's Message*.

²⁶ The long poems divided into sections are *Christ I*, *Christ II* and *Christ III*, *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, *Azarias*, *The Phoenix*, *Juliana* and *Maxims I*.

²⁷ *Deor* is divided into six sections which correspond to six stanzas. Each stanza refers to a different legend and ends with a refrain.

²⁸ See the facsimile of ff. 123r-123v (*The Husband's Message*) in Muir (2006²).

²⁹ See Conner (1986: 236).

³⁰ L. 13: *Hwæt, þec þonne biddan het se þisne beam agrof* 'Look! The one who carved this stick ordered me to ask you'. Pasternack (1995: 124-125) points out that long or hypermetrical verses have a structural function in the Anglo-Saxon poetry as they often work as borders in a textual sequence, signaling the beginning of a text or breaking the rhythm (and introducing another textual unit – "movement" -) within a text.

³¹ See for example *Beowulf* and, in the Exeter Book, *Juliana* and *Vainglory*.

beginning of a new text. The analysis of the text does not seem to contradict these hypotheses. In the first section the descriptive style and the first-person narrator talking about his origin (ll. 1-8a) as if he were a plant or a tree seem at first glance reminiscent of the riddles (l. 2: *treocyn ic tudre aweox* 'the type of wood, I was born from the breed'). In contrast, in the second and third sections the exhortative mode prevails over the descriptive (cf. the imperatives at ll. 24, 26, 27³²); moreover, the narrator no longer talks about himself but only speaks on behalf of his lord, conveying his message of hope to the woman.

In light of both the codicological and the textual data, ll. 1-12 should be subjected to a closer investigation in order to establish whether they really could be read separately from the following lines, and to define what type of text they may represent (cf. Par. 2.3.). As for the other two sections, the close connection between them, forged by the recurrence of a line (l. 16 and l. 54: *þe git on ardagum oft gespracon*³³) and by the same themes and style, makes it improbable they are two independent texts, but this conclusion makes it difficult to understand why the beginning of the second section is less marked than that of the third. The only possible explanations are either that the scribe misunderstood the structure of the text³⁴ and thought *Ongin* was the beginning of a new work, or that he chose to single out the last part of the poem for a specific purpose. *Judgement Day I* presents a similar situation, which on the one hand confirms that this layout could be a deliberate strategy on the part of the copyist and, on the other hand, provides a point of comparison.

Judgement Day I is a short homiletic poem in two parts describing the Last Judgement. The narration presents three different types of men who correspond to three attitudes to the end of the world. In the first section of the poem there are the 'hardhearted man' (*gromhydige guma*, l. 14a) and the one 'who thinks little' (*lyt þæt gepenceð*, l. 77), who both sinned much during their lives and are doomed to go to hell. In the second section we find 'the one who thinks deeply' (*deophydig*, l. 96a), who reflects on his sins and worries about the final Judgement. Here there are no doubts about the unity of the poem, where the didactic tone is the same from the beginning to the end and the theme is developed coherently³⁵. Therefore, the fact that the opening of the second section is much more marked in the manuscript than that of the first is striking. In fact, the beginning of *Judgement Day I* is introduced by only a capital letter, <ð> of *ðæt*, while the second part of the text starts with a bigger initial, <W>, followed by a second capital letter, <I> (*Wille*). Even though Krapp and Dobbie (1936: xlii) state that the two sections "seem however to have

³² L. 24a *ne læt* 'don't let', l. 26a *ongin* 'start', l. 27a *onsite* 'board'.

³³ L. 16 and l. 54: 'that you two often spoke in old times'.

³⁴ The hypothesis of a careless scribe seems to be supported by Klinck (1992: 26) when she suggests that *The Husband's Message* and *The Ruin* were placed after *Riddles 30b* and *60* because they were mistaken for a series of riddles: "Since the subjects of *Riddle 30* and *60* are both objects made of wood and *The Husband's Message* features a rune-stave, the compiler must have thought he was putting together a series of tree-riddles at this point. *The Ruin* he presumably thought a riddle because of its opening, its generally descriptive nature and its rune. [...] but no careful reader would actually mistake *The Ruin* or most of *The Husband's Message* for riddles. One can only conclude that the compiler was not reading carefully here."

³⁵ Cf. also Lochrie's analysis (1986).

no structural significance”, one can suggest a logical explanation. The copyist may have marked the second capital letter to direct the reader’s attention to the last part of the poem because, in his view, it was the most meaningful passage: it contains a good example for a Christian conduct. Considering that poems were transcribed into manuscripts in *scriptio continua*, this layout testifies to the possibility of approaching the text ‘per sections’ and reading them in a non-linear order³⁶. Someone glancing through the manuscript would have noticed immediately the conspicuous opening of the second section and would probably have read those lines independently from the rest of the text. By attaching such importance to the good *exemplum* in *Judgement Day I*, the copyist begins to construct within Booklet III a thematic sequence of which, we can guess, *The Husband’s Message* is also a part. There, the third part of the poem is highlighted by the scribe because the runic message is especially relevant to the compiler’s project.

In order to interpret *The Husband’s Message* and to understand the importance of its last section, we must examine its context in Booklet III. Of particular relevance are the homiletic texts preceding the poem, which are connected by the Christian themes of repentance and conversion.

2.2.1. *The context of the manuscript:*

The Husband’s Message and the sequence of homiletic poems

Just before the two riddles that precede *The Husband’s Message* there is a group of eight homiletic texts of different length and type: *Judgement Day I*, *Contrition A* and *B*³⁷, *The Descent into Hell*, *Alms-Giving*, *Pharaoh*, *The Lord’s Prayer I* and *Homiletic Fragment II*³⁸. Even though these poems range in genre from prayer (*The Lord’s Prayer I*) to elegy (*Contrition A* and *B*), and from biblical poem (*The Descent into Hell*) to dialogue (*Pharaoh*), they all share the theme of Christ’s Second Coming, developed coherently from one text to the other³⁹. The sequence of these works therefore creates a thematic path aimed at urging the reader to repent and embrace the Christian faith, in order to be admitted into the Kingdom of Heaven. *Judgement Day I* introduces the motif of the necessity

³⁶ There are other cases in which codicological cues suggest the possibility of reading a text in a non-linear way: Buzzoni (2001: 288-292) points out that, on Ms D of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the big, red capital letter (f. 49r, line 39) that marks *Gewiton* in *The Battle of Brunanburh* (l. 53) was probably meant to catching the reader’s attention in particular from that line on.

³⁷ Even if Klinck (1992: 95-98) edits them as a single poem (*Resignation*), *Contrition A* and *Contrition B* should be treated as two different texts, like in Muir’s (2006²) edition (adopted here), because it has been shown that they are distinct poems with a leaf lost between them [see, for example, Bliss-Frantzen (1976)]. *Contrition A* and *Contrition B* are often considered as elegies [see Klinck (1992), Greenfield (1986²) and Brunetti (2006-2008)], though the homiletic element is very strong. *Contrition A* much resembles a prayer, for the narrator, aware of being a sinner, invokes God explicitly; *Contrition B* is similar to a *planctus* in which a man complains about the suffering imposed on him by God.

³⁸ See the Exeter Book ff. 115v-122v.

³⁹ Muir (2006²: *Introduction*). This theme is conventional in the Anglo-Saxon literature, for it is hinted at in many works and developed in detail in *Christ III*, in *Judgement Day II* and in *The Dream of the Rood*.

of repenting, which is developed in *Contrition A* and *B* by showing two different human attitudes towards the worldly life. *The Descent into Hell* tells of Christ's liberation of the sinners in hell after his Resurrection, a very important event in the history of salvation, while *Alms-Giving* illustrates the example of a good deed that can contribute to men's liberation from evil. *Pharaoh* hints at the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, an episode that proves that the Israelites were the chosen people. The two prayers at the end of the sequence, *The Lord's Prayer I* and *Homiletic Fragment II*, praise the Lord and invite men to fight worldly temptations through their faith in God.

The necessity of reaffirming the Christian faith, expressed in different ways in these poems, appears to be closely linked to Christ's Second Coming, when he will return to earth to judge humankind and accompany the good up to Heaven. In addition, a further motif can be detected in this group of texts. Muir⁴⁰ points to several hints at baptism, which is in a way associated with Judgement Day. At the end of the world the body and soul will be resurrected together, while in baptism only the soul is purified and starts a new life. In fact this sacrament represents the very first phase of the spiritual journey towards God⁴¹. As a new birth for the faithful, baptism is directly related to the Easter liturgy because of the connection to Christ's Resurrection; the victory of life over death⁴². This correspondence is particularly clear in *The Descent into Hell*, a poem about Christ's new life after the Resurrection, where the figure of John the Baptist is of special relevance (ll. 133-137). *Pharaoh* is also of significance in light of the history of salvation because it hints at baptism as well through the image of the waters of the Red Sea which, by drowning the Egyptians, represent freedom and renewal for the Israelites. The focus on this sacrament is also confirmed by a reference in *Homiletic Fragment II*, where it is listed together with the other principal elements in the Christian faith⁴³. Moreover, it may also appear allegorically in the frequent references to water contained in *The Ruin*⁴⁴, even if this elegy is detached from the group of homiletic texts⁴⁵. *The Ruin* describes the thermal waters of a bath, often identified with the Roman baths in the city of Bath⁴⁶. These waters, which are used to wash the body, could also be interpreted as an allegory of the baptismal water purifying

⁴⁰ Muir (2006: *Introduction*).

⁴¹ Caie (1976: 85).

⁴² The association with the Easter liturgy is also proved by the fact that baptisms were conventionally held at the Easter Vigil service.

⁴³ *Homiletic Fragment II* ll. 8-11a: *An is geleafa, an lifgende, / an is fulwiht, an fæder ece, / an is folces fruma, se þas foldan geseop, / dugode ond dreamas* 'One is the faith, one living [God], / one baptism, an eternal Father, / one prince of all the peoples who created this world, / his blessings and joys'.

⁴⁴ See *The Ruin* ll. 38-46: *Stanhofu stodan, stream hate wearp / widan wylme; weal eall befeng / beorhtan bosme, þær þa baþu wæron, / hat on hreþre. Pæt was hydelic. [þing] / Leton þonne geotan [...] ofer harne stan hate streamas / un [...] / [o]þ þæt hringmere hate [...] / [...] þær þa baþu wæron* 'The stone buildings stood, a stream threw up heat / in wide surge; the wall enclosed all / in its bright bosom, where the baths were / hot in the heart. That was convenient. Then they let pour over the grey stone hot streams / ... / until the ringed sea hot / ... where the bats were'.

⁴⁵ *The Ruin* is on ff. 123v-124r immediately after *The Husband's Message*.

⁴⁶ The first who suggested this interpretation were Leo (1865) and Earle (1870-1873). Klinck (1992: 61-62) also seems to identify the city in *The Ruin* with a Roman city.

the soul from the original sin⁴⁷. The religious reading of this image is legitimated by the presence of many other Christian symbols in the text, such as the *wealstan* ('wall-stone', l. 1a), which recalls the biblical *lapis angularis* - a metaphor for Christ as a solid base on which men can ground their faith⁴⁸. Moreover, the theme of the ruins, which highlights the concept of the transitoriness of the worldly life, is eschatological: the destruction of men's works recalls the end of the world after Christ's Second Coming⁴⁹.

It would appear that, through several motifs relevant to the history of salvation, the group of homiletic texts shape a recognizable pattern centring on penitence and conversion, and this pattern in Booklet III leads to *The Husband's Message* (and, immediately after, seems also to be recalled by *The Ruin*). The content of this poem is not openly religious because, at first glance, it sounds like a lord's love message to his wife. A man wants his wife to join him in a distant land and sends her a runic message to remind her of their old promises to convince her to start the journey. However, the position of *The Husband's Message* in the manuscript also provides a different perspective. After the long path of repentance described by the homiletic poems, the request for a reunion from a lord to his wife after hardships have been overcome seems to represent, metaphorically, an open invitation to get close to God, addressed to every Christian who has redeemed himself from sin. This allegorical reading of *The Husband's Message* can be supported by several textual elements especially in the second and third section of the poem (cf. Par. 2.2.2.), and it also gives rise to new hypotheses about the genre. The traditional classification as elegy is not completely convincing due to the total absence of terms related to suffering and sadness, which are usual in the Anglo-Saxon 'elegies', and to the reversal of the typical elegiac scheme in which the happiness of the past is opposed to the misery of the present. In *The Husband's Message* the positive mood suggests that the message expressed is a joyful one foreshadowing happiness in the present and in the future. The exhortatory tone and use of imperatives - aimed at convincing the wife to rejoin her husband and instructing her what to do - are not shared by the other elegies and to some extent are more redolent of precepts and wisdom poetry⁵⁰.

All these aspects, which call the genre of *The Husband's Message* into question, together with the homiletic context of Booklet III contribute to cast a different light on the poem. Moreover, textual analysis reveals that the two principal themes - the sea journey and the pact between a man and a woman - constantly suggest Biblical imagery. The treatment of these motifs allows for an allegorical interpretation, according to which *The Husband's Message* announces the attainment of eternal salvation after Christ's Second

⁴⁷ Murgia (2007-2008: 115-116).

⁴⁸ Cf. Cammarota (1997: 29-30).

⁴⁹ Swanton (1964: 284).

⁵⁰ See *The Husband's Message: ne læt 'don't let' (l. 24a), ongin 'start' (l. 26a) and onsite 'board' (l. 27a)*. The imperative mood is used in other homiletic poems in Booklet III: for example in *Homiletic Fragment II ll. 1-3 Gefeoh nu on ferðe ond to frofre gefeoh / dryhtne þinum, ond þinne dom arær, / heald hordlocan, hyge fæste bind* 'Rejoice now in your spirit and, as a consolation, flourish / in your Lord, and raise your glory, / keep your thought, bind fast your mind'.

Coming for those who have completed the spiritual journey described from *Judgement Day I* on⁵¹.

2.2.2. Allegorical interpretation of the main themes in *The Husband's Message*

The theme of the sea journey is particularly relevant in *The Husband's Message*, for it is developed from two different perspectives. There is the husband's escape from a 'feud' (l. 19b *fæhþo*) in the past and the woman's journey in the present as the message urges her to reunite with the husband.

Not many details about the man are given. He had to leave his people (ll. 19b-20a: *hine fæhþo adraf / of sigeþeode* 'a feud drove him away / from the glorious people'), and his journey is described as a necessary one (l. 41a *nyde gebæded* 'forced by necessity') and connected to a time of suffering (ll. 44b-45a *nu se mon hafað / wean oferwunnen* 'now that man has / overcome the hardships'). On a symbolic level, these aspects remind us of Christ's return to the Father through the experience of death on the cross. There is more than one image supporting this parallel. First of all, the epithet 'glorious' applied to the man's people (*sigeþeode* 'glorious people', l. 20a) could be linked to the 'Chosen People' of Israel, as maybe also in *Psalms* 95.3 ll. 1-2: *Secgeað his wuldor geond sigeþeode, / and on eallum folcum his fægere wundor*⁵². With respect to the image of the sea journey, the journey in *naviculam*⁵³ in Matthew's Gospel metaphorically represents Christ's life and death because, as Bede underlines in his commentary to this passage, the ship can be a symbol of the cross⁵⁴. Indeed, the metaphor of sailing is commonly associated with Christ and often connected to his Passion and return to the Father, as in the old homily *De cruce dominica (uiator factus est [Christus], ut te sine labore faceret; nauigauit, ut te sine timore redderet [...])*⁵⁵. Therefore, as Christ courageously faces his destiny to provide eternal salvation for mankind, the man in *The Husband's Message* is willing to start the journey (l. 43 *forðsipes*

⁵¹ There have been other allegorical readings of *The Husband's Message* in the past which pointed to several textual elements that could be associated with Christian symbols from the Old and the New Testament. However, these views were soon abandoned by later critics because they all seek a precise Biblical source for the Anglo-Saxon text. The comparison with *Cantica Canticorum* [Swanton (1964) and Bolton (1969)] or with *Psalms* 45 [Goldsmith (1975)] reveals some resemblances but does not actually confirm exact correspondences with *The Husband's Message*, where the poetic composition seems rather to lack a specific model.

⁵² Ed. Krapp (1933: 143). *Psalms* 95.3 ll. 1-2: 'Tell his glory among the glorious people / and his splendid wonder among all the peoples'.

⁵³ *Evangelium secundum Matthaeum* 8: 23: *Et ascendente eo in naviculam, secuti sunt eum discipuli eius* [ed. AA. VV. (1890: II vol.)].

⁵⁴ Ed. Charles (1913: 42): *Mare quod dominus [...] transire desiderat praesentis saeculi tenebrosus accipit aëstus. Navicula quam ascendunt nulla melius quam dominicae passionis arbor intellegitur, de qua alibi dicitur, si quis vult post me venire tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me*. About the image of sailing as a metaphor for Christ's passion and death, see also Kaske [(1967): 55].

⁵⁵ Ed. Froben / Episcopus (1547: 839). *De cruce dominica* was translated from Greek to Latin in the V century.

*georn*⁵⁶ ‘willing to sail away’), but will not leave forever: he will overcome his troubles and be reunited with his wife, just as Jesus, resurrected and victorious in death, comes back to take the redeemed with him.

According to this allegorical interpretation, the journey taken by the husband may represent the arduous path walked by Christ to rejoin the Father. The union between the man and the woman foreseen and urged afterwards could instead mirror the union of Christ with his Church or, more narrowly, the worshipper’s soul⁵⁷. The possible identification of the addressee of the husband’s message as the Church is substantiated in some epithets like ‘prince’s daughter’ (l. 48a *þeodnes dohtor*) and ‘adorned with jewels’ (l. 14a *sinchroden*). These reflect the description of the Church in *Cantica Canticorum*, where it is invoked by Christ as *filia principis* and appears *inter innaures* and *inter monilia*⁵⁸. Moreover, the motif of the Church or the soul as Christ’s spouse is very common in the Bible⁵⁹ and was well-known in Anglo-Saxon England - for example, it appears in *Juliana* ll. 106-107⁶⁰. Urged to leave home and seek her husband (ll. 24-28), the woman in *The Husband’s Message* can be compared to the Church in *Psalmus 45* where she is exhorted to leave everything she owns and follow God⁶¹. Another metaphorical element is the direction of the woman’s voyage, *sud heonan* (‘southward from here’, l. 27b), which acquires a religious meaning because it corresponds to the sun’s course, and the Sun is a symbol of Christ⁶². Consequently, the destination is the Kingdom of Heaven⁶³. After Jesus’ Resurrec-

⁵⁶ The formula *forðsipes georn* recalls expressions such as *utsipes georn* ‘eager for the exodus’ and *gæst sipes georn* ‘the spirit longs for the journey’, which are similarly used in an allegorical sense to describe the soul’s desire to leave the body when it dies in *Guthlac B* ll. 1267b and 1045a [ed. Muir (2006⁵)].

⁵⁷ Bolton (1969: 344). Bede underlines the correspondence between Church and devout soul in *In Cantica Canticorum: Quanto devotius Ecclesia sive anima quaeque sancta diligit Deum, tanto familiarius habet amicum Deum* [ed. Hurst / Hudson (1983: 236)].

⁵⁸ See *Cantica Canticorum 7: 2: Quam pulchri sunt gressus tui in calceamentis, filia principis!* and *Cantica Canticorum 1: 10: Pulchrae sunt genae tuae inter innaures, collum tuum inter monilia*. Ed. AA. VV. (1890: I vol.).

⁵⁹ The theme of Christ’s spouse referring to the Church, Mary or other saints is in *Cantica Canticorum* and in Paul, *Epistula ad Ephesios 5: 22-24* [ed. AA. VV. (1890: II vol.)].

⁶⁰ *Juliana* ll. 106-107: *Juliana (hio to gode hæfde / freondrædenne fæste gestapelad)* ‘Juliana (to God she had / firmly consecrated her friendship)’ [ed. Muir (2006⁵)]. In this case the relationship involves the soul rather than the Church, and God the Father rather than Christ.

⁶¹ *Psalmus 45: 11-12: Audi, filia, et vide, et inclina aurem tuam: et obliviscere populum tuum et domum patris tui. Et concupiscet rex decorem tuum: quoniam ipse est Dominus Deus tuus [...]*. Ed. AA. VV. (1890: I vol.).

⁶² See *Liber Isaiae 60: 19: Non erit tibi amplius sol ad lucendum per diem, nec splendor lunae illuminabit te: sed erit tibi Dominus in lucem sempiternam, et Deus tuus in gloriam tuam*. Ed. AA. VV. (1890: I vol.).

⁶³ See this correspondence in Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum 4.3: audiuit repente, ut postea referebat, uocem suauissimam cantantium atque laetantium de caelo ad terras usque descendere; quam uidilicet uocem ab eurauro, id est ab alto brumalis exortus, primo se audisse dicebat* [ed. Colgrave / Mynors (1969: 340)]. In *Genesis B*, when Eve tells Adam of how her eyes have been opened by eating the apple and how she can now see God enthroned, a reference to the southeast represents where God dwells: ll. 666b-667: *ic mæg heonan geseon / hwær he sylf sited, (þæt is sud and east)*, ‘I can see from here / where he is sitting, (that is south and east)’ [ed. Krapp (1969²: 23)]. Vickrey (1969: 91) underlines that in *Genesis B* “the southeast may be considered a minor motif of the accounts of judgment”.

tion, the Church is expected to follow a path of reconciliation towards Him to gain eternal salvation. The sea journey in the poem comes to represent a *peregrinatio pro amore Dei* corresponding to a spiritual pilgrimage⁶⁴.

Several times in the poem the woman is reminded of an old pledge between her and the man. The expressions that refer to this theme are *aþe* ('by an oath', l. 51b), *eald gebeot* ('old promises', l. 49a), *wordbeotunga* ('the spoken vows', l. 15b) and *þa wære ond þa winetreowe* ('the pledge and the vow of friendship', l. 52), which literally describe the promises of love and fidelity between two spouses. In particular, both *wordbeotunga* and *þa wære ond þa winetreowe*, followed by *þe git on ardagum oft gespracon* ('that you two often spoke in old times', ll. 16 and 54), reveal that these promises are not only very old, but also firmly established⁶⁵. These characteristics may recall the old pacts between God and man described in the Old Testament, especially that with Abraham, who left home and moved from his land towards the South (from Carran to Caanan, then to Sichem, Negheb and Egypt) following the promise of numerous descendants⁶⁶. In the history of salvation this pact is particularly relevant, for it is the original covenant between God and the Chosen People. Therefore, when the woman in *The Husband's Message*, representing the Church or the soul, is urged to obey her Lord we think of Abraham and his example. This old pledge is sealed with the runes at the end of the poem, when the secret message reconfirms through new vows the continuity of their union. The runes also could be read allegorically: the M-rune (l. 51b) corresponds to 'Man' and could represent mankind, and the S-rune, 'Sun' (l. 50b), could be a reference to Christ, as has been suggested in relation to *suð heonan* (cf. Par. 2.2.3.). The runes S and M, together with the other runic signs, could hint at the two contracted parties of the old pact.

⁶³ See this correspondence in Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* 4.3: *audiuit repente, ut postea referebat, uocem suauissimam cantantium atque laetantium de caelo ad terras usque descendere; quam uidilicet uocem ab euraustro, id est ab alto brumalis exortus, primo se audisse dicebat* [ed. Colgrave / Mynors (1969: 340)]. In *Genesis B*, when Eve tells Adam of how her eyes have been opened by eating the apple and how she can now see God enthroned, a reference to the southeast represents where God dwells: ll. 666b-667: *ic mæg heonan geseon / hwær he sylf siteð, (þæt is suð and east)*, 'I can see from here / where he is sitting, (that is south and east)' [ed. Krapp (1969: 23)]. Vickrey (1969: 91) underlines that in *Genesis B* "the southeast may be considered a minor motif of the accounts of judgment".

⁶⁴ The Christian allegory of the ship which has to face a risky journey across the sea to reach a safe harbour is common both in the Bible (*Evangelium secundum Marcum* 4: 37-40) and in the Anglo-Saxon literature (*Christ II* ll. 850-863, *Andreas* ll. 443b-454a). Ed. AA. VV. (1890: II vol.); ed. Muir (2006²), ed. Krapp (1932: 3-51). Critics have also examined the sea journey described in *The Seafarer* and given many different interpretations, among which that of a literal *peregrinatio* by a living man [for example Whitelock (1950)] or, in a strictly allegorical sense, the journey of the soul after death [Smithers (1959)]. Klinck (1992: 37) does not deny the literal level of the poem's meaning but also considers the journey as symbolic of man's search for God.

⁶⁵ On l. 12 *þæt þu þær tirfæste treowe findest* 'that there you will find glorious loyalty', in the first section of the poem, see Par. 2.3..

⁶⁶ See *Genesis* 12: 9: *Perrexitque Abram vadens, et ultra progrediens ad meridiem* [ed. AA. VV. (1890: I vol.)]. Goldsmith (1975: 253, 256) is the first who relates allegorically the vows between man and woman in *The Husband's Message* and Abraham's pact in the Old Testament.

2.2.3. *The runic message and the third section*

vv. 49-51:

Ofer eald gebeot incer twega

ge-yre ic ætsomme · 𐌺 · 𐌺 · geador

· 𐌹 · 𐌺 · ond · 𐌺 · aþe benemnan

Introduced by l. 49 *Ofer eald gebeot incer twega* ('about the old vows of the two of you'), the runes at the end of the poem form part of a passage in which the speaker reminds the woman of the pledge of allegiance in order to convince her to start the sea journey. The passage is complex to interpret because of the difficulty of reading the runic symbols and because there is a lacuna in the main verb, *ge-yre*. The traces of the third letter of the verb look like an <n>, but <h> cannot be ruled out⁶⁷; therefore, the two main emendations proposed are *genyre* 'I contract, I constrain'⁶⁸ and *gehyre* 'I hear'⁶⁹. As Orton (1981: 49-50) points out, the verb *genyre* does not seem to suit the syntactic structure of the sentence because the infinitive dependant on it, *benemnan*, should then be taken as an 'infinitive of purpose' (ll. 50-51: *genyre ic ætsomme [...] aþe benemnan* 'I crowd together [...] in order to declare by an oath'⁷⁰). Moreover, with *genirwan* there are no other examples of this construction. Most of the critics have thus emended the verb as *gehyre* supposing that it was followed by an 'accusative with infinitive' construction, where the runes are the subject of the infinitive *benemnan*: 'I hear together ·S·R· together ·EA·W· and ·M· declare by an oath'. There are other cases of *gehyran* followed by this construction (like ll. 22-23⁷¹), so it would appear to be the best solution for the *crux*.

As regards the runes, the most popular interpretation is Kock's (1921: 122-123), the most interesting and convincing aspect of which is his detection of two compound nouns in the first four runic symbols. He thought that *Sigel-Rad* 'sun's road' reflected the Old Norse kenning *sólar jaðarr* or *sólar grund* ('path of the sun'), meaning 'sky', and detected an allegorical reference to heaven. *Ear-Wyn* he related to *eorðan wyn* in

⁶⁷ The shape of the letter resembles that of an <n>, but the upstroke of an <h> may have disappeared because of the damage to the folio. Klinck (1992: 58) also considers the possibility of a copyist's oversight: there are other cases, in the Exeter Book, where an <n> was written in place of an <h>, for example in *Juliana* l. 837b (f. 75r, line 8), where in the word *þohtun* an original <n> was clearly corrected into an <h>. Therefore, even if the scribe in *The Husband's Message* wrote *genyre*, the verb may correspond to *gehyre*.

⁶⁸ See for example Kaske (1964: 205) and E.R. Anderson (1975: 290). *Genyre* is not attested elsewhere, but it is considered by Kaske (1964: 205) the first person singular of *genirwan* 'to constrain' after the loss of the <w> because of a scribal omission.

⁶⁹ See Klinck (1992: 102), Leslie (1961: 38), Muir (2006²).

⁷⁰ Orton (1981: 49).

⁷¹ Ll. 22-23: *sipþan þu gehyrde on hlīþes oran / galan geomorne geac on bearwe* 'after you have heard on the edge of the cliff / the sad cuckoo sing in the wood'.

Beowulf l. 1730b, which Kock translated as 'the lovely earth'⁷²; thus according to him the compound in *The Husband's Message* would simply stand for 'earth'. The three elements 'heaven', 'earth' and 'man', alongside the theme of the pledge (l. 51b *ape benemnan*), reminded Kock of a passage in Matthew's Gospel expressing the prohibition of swearing by the sky, by the earth and by oneself⁷³. Therefore, he identified the runes in *The Husband's Message* with the witnesses and guarantors of the new vows between husband and wife. The translation of ll. 50-52 would be 'I place together Heaven, / Earth, and Man, confirming by an oath / that he would keep [...] the compact and the faith'⁷⁴.

The parallel between the passage from Matthew's Gospel and the runes in the poem is not exact and appears difficult to prove. For this reason many scholars⁷⁵ have focused only on the literal meaning of the message and sought correspondences with images in the text. *Sigel-Rad* as 'sun's path' may be a reference to l. 27b *onsite sænacan, þæt þu suð heonan* ('board a ship, so that southward from here you') indicating the direction of the journey, which coincides with that of the sun⁷⁶. *Ear-Wyn*, literally 'joy of the earth' or 'earthly joy', may recall l. 38a *fægre foldan* ('a beautiful land', maybe describing the lord's new nation)⁷⁷ or allude to the earthly goods listed in ll. 45-48⁷⁸. *Mon* 'man' would identify the husband himself and remind the woman of the aim of the journey - a reunion with him⁷⁹. This interpretation of the secret message appears coherent with the content of the text and seems to sum up the main topics of the narration⁸⁰ in order to convince the woman to start the journey. However, it is possible to build on Kock's reading of the runes but go beyond the literal meaning of the runic message, proposing something different from the view of earlier critics.

An interesting perspective is provided by Kock's association between *Sigel-Rad* and the Kingdom of Heaven, which is grounded on the image of the sun (*Sigel*) as a metaphor for Christ⁸¹. However, his interpretation of *Ear-Wyn* as 'earth' does not seem to satisfy

⁷² The expression *eorðan wyn* in *Beowulf* l. 1730b should rather be translated as 'the joy represented by a land': see Swanton's (1978: 117) translation of ll. 1730-1731: *seled him on eþle eorþan wynne / to healdanne, hleoburh wera*, '[He] grants him the joy of land in his own country, / a safe stronghold of men to rule over'.

⁷³ *Evangelium secundum Matthaëum* 5: 34-36: *Ego autem dico vobis: Non iurare omnino, neque per caelum, quia thronus Dei est, neque per terram, quia scabellum est pedum eius, neque per Hierosolimam, quia civitas est magni Regis; neque per caput tuum iuraveris, quia non potes unum capillum album facere aut nigrum*. Ed. AA. VV. (1890: II vol.).

⁷⁴ Kock (1921: 123), like Krapp / Dobbie (1936: 227) but differently from the other critics, adopts the form *gecyre* from *gecyrran*, meaning 'to turn, to convert'. Kock translates this verb as 'to place together', "a meaning suggested rather by the context than by normal Old English usage" [Elliott (1955: 7)].

⁷⁵ Cf. Elliott (1955), E.R. Anderson (1973), Nicholson (1982), Fiocco (1999).

⁷⁶ Elliott (1975: 7), Fiocco (1999: 180).

⁷⁷ E.R. Anderson (1973: 245).

⁷⁸ Ll. 45b-47: *nis him wilna gad / ne meara ne maðma ne meododreama / ænges ofer eorþan eorlgestreona* / 'he has no lack of joy, / of horses, of treasures, of mead-drinking / or of any of the noble treasures on earth'.

⁷⁹ Elliott (1955: 7), E.R. Anderson (1973: 245).

⁸⁰ Elliott (1955: 5-6).

⁸¹ Even in the Norwegian version of the *Rune Poem*, the S-rune, which represents the sun, is clearly associated with Christ in judgement: see stanza 11: (*sól*) *er landa ljóme; líti ek helgum dóme* 'Sun is light of the world; I bow before the divine judgement' [Ed. and trans. Rodrigues (1992: 117)].

the morphological link between the two elements of the compound, as it neglects the presence of *Wyn*. The runes perform an important role in sealing the new pledge and occupy a prominent position at the conclusion of the poem; an interpretation that essentially hides one of them scarcely does them justice. Moreover, the rune W has the function of ‘head of the compound’ in *Ear-Wyn* which, therefore, cannot be translated as ‘lovely earth’ and considered simply a reference to the earth. Instead, it should be interpreted as ‘joy of the earth’ or ‘earthly joy’. As *Ear-Wyn* is a *hapax*, it is difficult to determine whether the allusion is to a joyful event for the living or to earthly pleasures in contrast with spiritual bliss. However, syntactical analysis can clarify the meaning of the compound and the sentence as a whole.

In l. 50 the presence of the synonyms *atsomne* and *geador* (‘together’) is striking, because a repetition is unexpected in a short, secret message that requires decoding. The only example where *atsomne* and *geador* are together is in *Beowulf* l. 491: *Geatmæcgun geador atsomne*⁸² (‘for the Geat warriors altogether’), but in that case the adverbs are close to one another and the repetition clearly strengthens the idea of unity⁸³, whereas in *The Husband’s Message* this is not obvious. Scholars who have adopted the reading *genyre* supposed that the two adverbs probably have different functions in the sentence. In particular, Kaske (1964: 206) translated *atsomne* as a modifier of the main verb and *geador* as an element linking the first couple of runes, as did E.R. Anderson (1975: 290) later. Their translations were respectively ‘I constrain into unity *sigel-rad* combined, *ear, wyn, and mann*’ and ‘I superimpose on the old promise between you two ·S·R· together, ·EA·W· and ·M· to declare by oath’⁸⁴. The critics who adopted the reading *gehyre*, instead, did not linger too much on the presence of two synonymous adverbs and only translated one of them (*gehyre ic atsomne* ‘I hear together’). Only Orton (1981: 50) takes the second adverb, *geador*, into consideration and explicitly regards it as the indicator that the first and the second runes have to be taken as a compound⁸⁵.

Assuming that *atsomne* and *geador*, being two different words, are probably not perfect synonyms and have a different expressive function in ll. 50-51, another possible solution can be suggested while maintaining the reading *gehyre*. *Ætsomne* could modify the verb *gehyre*, uniting the two contracted parties of the pledge: *gehyre ic atsomne [...]* *aþe benemnan* ‘I hear together [...] declare by an oath’. Even if in a different syntactic construction, this use of *atsomne* linked to a similar context is also in *Christ III* ll. 583b-

⁸² Ed. Klaeber (1950³: 19).

⁸³ Kaske (1964: 206), among different possibilities, also proposed that the presence of both *atsomne* and *geador* reflected the use of *Beowulf* l. 491. Therefore, ll. 50-51 should be translated as ‘I constrain *sigel-rad, ear-wyn* and *mann*, all together, to declare by oath’.

⁸⁴ In E.R. Anderson (1975: 290) ‘I superimpose on’ translates *genyre atsomne ofer* from which, according to the scholar, *eald gebeot incer twega* (‘the old promise between you two’) is dependant.

⁸⁵ Orton (1981: 50): “The first and second runes are separated from the later three by the word *geador*, ‘together’, and are accordingly to be joined as *sigel-rad*, ‘sun’s path’, i.e. ‘sky’; the third and fourth runes, separated from the fifth by *ond*, ‘and’, together give *ear-wynn*, probably ‘lovely earth’; the fifth rune means *mon*, ‘man’”.

584: *Wær is ætsomme / godes ond monna, gæsthalig treow*⁸⁶. The two contracted parties may be recalled by the S- and the M-rune, associated with Christ and Mankind, like in Abraham's pact. *Geador* is placed between the first and the second couple of runes, and its function may be that of linking together the two compounds, ·S·R· and ·EA·W·, and placing them on the same level. Reading *Sigel-Rad geador Ear-Wyn* 'path of the sun' [i.e. sky] and together 'joy of the earth' , it is possible to recognize two epithets for Christ, who represents the sky - i.e. the very Kingdom of Heaven - and, 'at the same time', the only possible joy for the living (and, more specifically, for his Church on earth). According to this view, in *The Husband's Message Ear-Wyn* would not come to represent the transitory, earthly pleasures in opposition to the eternal salvation in the afterlife (*Sigel-Rad*, linked to the Kingdom of Heaven). Instead, it would be connected to God's presence in Heaven as well as on earth, where he became incarnate in Christ⁸⁷, after whose life the Christian community was born. If both compounds identify the first contracting party of the pledge, the only single rune of the message, ·M·, probably describes the second one: thus ll. 50-51 can be translated as 'I hear 'Heaven', (who is) altogether 'joy of the earth' [Christ], and Mankind declare together by an oath'.

In this reading of the runes, they are representative of the allegory indicated by the whole poem. In reminding the woman of the old pact between God and humankind, the message confirms the correspondence between her and the Church of Christ on earth. After Christ's death and resurrection the Church - made up of the souls of the faithful - should aim at a spiritual reunion with God in order to reach Heaven in the afterlife. However, given the syntactic complexity of ll. 49-51 together with the difficulty of finding the referents of *Sigel-Rad* and *Ear-Wyn* – both of which occur nowhere else –, this allegorical interpretation of the message necessarily remains a hypothesis.

The runes make the third section of the text especially meaningful also in the context of Booklet III: the possibility of eternal salvation, the only consolation Christians can aspire to, is foreseen in the preceding homiletic texts and urged in a secret code in *The Husband's Message*. Taking that into consideration, the situation of the biggest capital letter at the beginning of this part does not seem fortuitous. Moreover, a link emerges between the marked sections in *Judgement Day I* and *The Husband's Message*. Framing all the other homiletic poems, they seem to express the same, positive message. Through the figure of the *deophydig*, *Judgement Day I* insists on the concept of repentance and atonement for those who want to go to Heaven. By means of the runes, *The Husband's Message* confirms that, in the name of an old vow, eternal salvation is possible for those who keep

⁸⁶ *Christ III* ll. 583b-584: 'There is a promise / between God and Man together, a holy pledge'. Ed. Muir (2006²).

⁸⁷ The idea of God, thus of Christ, as joy harbinger for the living can be found for example in *Psalmus* 65: 8: *Et timebunt qui habitant terminos a signis tuis: exitus matutini et vespere delectabit*; in *Liber Isaiaie* 14: 5-7: *Contrivit Dominus baculum impiorum, virgam dominantium [...] Conquievit et siluit omnis terra, gavisus est et exultavit*; in *Liber Isaiaie* 44: 23: *Laudate caeli, quoniam misericordiam fecit Dominus: jubilate extrema terrae, resonate montes laudationem, saltus et omne lignum ejus: quoniam redemit Dominus Jacob, et Israel gloriabitur*. Ed. AA. VV. (1890: 1 vol.).

their faith and search for God. Therefore, not only does *The Husband's Message* integrate perfectly in the homiletic sequence of texts in Booklet III, but it also represents the end of a process of conversion, where the focus finally shifts from the importance of penance to God's message of hope, and where the exhortation plays on the idea of the 'reward' that will follow for the faithful: eternal life in Heaven.

2.3. The Husband's Message, ll. 1-12: a transitional text?

So far, this analysis has borne out the continuity between the second and third sections of *The Husband's Message*, which show a coherent development of the themes of the sea journey and the pledge. The runic message, at the end, represents the completion of the long exhortation addressed to the woman.

As regards the first section, it has already been underlined that its initial, because of the size, resembles those of the riddles (Par. 2.1.) and, even though more than one line has been lost, the style of the text is also reminiscent of that genre. The focus is exclusively on the first-person speaker and the narration is mostly descriptive: a personified object tells its story starting from its origin (ll. 1-8a) and then suddenly switches to the present, hinting at its new function after a transformation (ll. 8b-12)⁸⁸. The hypothesis that ll. 1-12 should be classified as a riddle is not supported by the structure of the passage as there is no enigma to solve at the end. However, the first word *Nu* 'now' seems to establish a connection to the preceding text, *Riddle 60*, as the adverb starts the narration *in medias res*. Moreover, l. 1 *Nu ic onsundran þe secgan wille* suggests a private conversation and appears related to the end of *Riddle 60*, which refers to the transmission of a secret message (ll. 14b-17: *þæt ic wiþ þe sceolde / for unc anum twam ærendspræce / abeodan bealdlice, swa hit beorna ma / uncre wordcwidas widdor ne mænden*)⁸⁹.

Compared to the second and third sections of *The Husband's Message*, ll. 1-12 seem quite different but, at the same time, not completely detached. A closer look at the content - particularly ll. 8b-12 - reveals a connection with the main themes of *The Husband's Message*: the narrator sailed on a ship to meet the woman on behalf of his lord, and he now promises her commitment and loyalty. As in the other two sections, some expressions - especially those concerning the sea journey - lend themselves to a religious interpretation. *Sealte streamas* (l. 5a) is reminiscent of a similar formula, *sealtne sæ*, which in the Preface

⁸⁸ *The Husband's Message* ll. 1-12: *Nu ic onsundran þe secgan wille / treocyn ic tudre aweox. / I[n] mec æld... sceal ellor londes / setta[n]c / sealte strea[mas]sse. / Ful oft ic on bates gesohte / þær mec mondryhten min / ofer heah hafu. Eom nu her cumen / on ceolþele, ond nu cunnan scealt / hu þu ymb modlufan mines frean / on hyge hycge. Ic gehatan dear / þæt þu þær tirstæste treowe findest 'Now secretly I want to tell you / the type of wood I grew from the offspring. / In me men everywhere on earth I have to / set / salty streams / Very often on of the ship I sought / where my lord me / over stormy seas. Now I have come here / on the deck of a ship, and you have to know / what you might think about the love of my lord / in your heart. I dare promise / that there you will find glorious loyalty'.*

⁸⁹ *Riddle 60* ll. 14b-17: 'so that, before us two only, / instantly I can declare / a verbal message to you, so that more men / will not tell more widely our words' [ed. Klinck (1992: 99)].

of Alfred's *Cura Pastoralis* is associated with a journey *ofer sealtne sæ suðan* 'beyond the salty sea, from the south', literally referring to the distance covered by St. Augustine from Rome to England in order to convert the English population to the Christian faith⁹⁰. The comparison with the formula and the context described in *Cura Pastoralis* may strengthen the symbolic value of the sea journey hinted at by *sealte streamas* also in association with *suð heonan* ('southward from here', l. 27b)⁹¹. Here the theme of sailing may recall a spiritual pilgrimage, the prospect of conversion and salvation that the sea journey seems to entail in the whole poem⁹². Regarding *þæt þu þær tirfæste treowe findest* (l. 12), an almost perfect correspondence to *Psalm 100.6* l. 3 *hwær ic tirfæste treowe funde*⁹³ suggests a great similarity between the two contexts. Consequently, the devotion characterizing the relationship between man and woman in *The Husband's Message* reflects the deep bond between God and the worshipper, strengthening the identification between the husband and the figure of Christ as suggested especially in the following sections.

The general impression of the first section of *The Husband's Message* is that of a text which shares aspects with the preceding riddles and, at the same time, with the rest of the poem. It is therefore possible to read these twelve lines as a 'transitional passage' composed or inserted by the copyist in order to link *The Husband's Message* with *Riddles 30b* and *60*, and to create a sort of thematic sequence concerning personified wooden objects⁹⁴. The key to this interpretation is the first word *Nu* which, besides catching the audience's attention⁹⁵, seems to carry an undeniable connective force. This aspect emerges also clearly between two of the three texts of the Anglo-Saxon *Physiologus*, a group of allegorical poems where a first-person narrator describes Christ and Satan through images of animals⁹⁶. The adverb *nu* in *The Whale* ll. 1-2 *Nu ic fitte gen ymb*

⁹⁰ Lendinara (2001: 242). See *Metrical Preface to the Pastoral Care* ll. 1-5a: *Pis arendgewrit Agustinus / ofer sealtne sæ suðan brohte / iegbuendum, swa hit ær fore / adithode dryhtnes cempa / Rome papa* 'Augustine brought this message / beyond the salty sea, from south / to the inhabitants of the isle, as previously / the God's champion had written, / the Pope of Rome'. Ed. Dobbie (1942: 110).

⁹¹ Comparing the expression *suð heonan* ('southward from here') in *The Husband's Message* with *suðan* ('from the south') in the Preface of *Cura Pastoralis*, *suð heonan* may recall, symbolically, a journey from England to Rome that would come to represent the path of conversion which the woman is urged to start.

⁹² The formula *sealte streamas* in *The Husband's Message* can also establish an intertextual link with *hate streamas* 'hot streams' in the following text, *The Ruin* l. 43b. There, *hate streamas*, literally describing the thermal water of a bath, could allegorically refer to baptism (see Par. 2.2.1.), and therefore to conversion and renewal in a Christian sense, a theme developed by the homiletic section in Booklet III. This possible connection between the two formulas can thus give *sealte streamas* an unexpected, religious connotation.

⁹³ *Psalm 100.6* l. 3: 'where I found glorious loyalty'. Ed. Krapp (1933: 149).

⁹⁴ See Klinck (1992: 24-26).

⁹⁵ Leslie (1961: 14). The same rhetorical effect is also in *Cædmon's Hymn* and in *An Exhortation to Christian Living*, both starting with *Nu*.

⁹⁶ *The Panther* describes Christ, *The Whale* represents Satan. Because of the loss of a page in the manuscript only the very beginning of *The Partridge* is left: ll. 1-2: *Hyrde ic secgan gen bi sumum fugle / wundorlicne [...]* 'I have also heard a story about a bird / wonderful [...]''. Ed. Muir (2006²).

*fisca cynn / wille woðcraefte wordum cyban*⁹⁷ shapes a narrative frame that links this text to the preceding poem, *The Panther*. Consequently, the complementarity and opposition between the whale and the panther - symbols of, respectively, Satan and Christ - is given prominence. Similarly, the adverb *nu* in l. 1 of *The Husband's Message* may establish a connection with *Riddle 60*.

Regarding the nature of the whole first section of *The Husband's Message*, namely its possible classification as a 'hinge-poem' aimed at linking the text with the preceding riddles, another example in the Exeter Book can support this view: ll. 1-29 of *Guthlac A*. Analysing this passage Liuzza (1990: 9) underlines that the content seems to be in *apò koinoū* "between the Judgement Day theme [in *Christ III*] and the image of righteousness personified by *Guthlac*". Liuzza⁹⁸ considers these twenty-nine lines a second prologue added to *Guthlac A* to connect it with *Christ III*; he points out that the formula at l. 30 *Monge sindon geond middangeard*⁹⁹ is a typical opening in Anglo-Saxon poetry (see also *The Panther* l. 1). This interpretation draws on our increasing awareness that medieval compilers and scribes both altered existing texts by adding new material and adapted adjacent texts to form a coherent sequence in the manuscripts¹⁰⁰. *The Husband's Message* seems also to be one of those cases: codicological, stylistic and thematic elements all suggest that the first section was placed between *Riddle 60* and *The Husband's Message* in order to create a link between these texts. A serious implication of this interpretation is that the actual beginning of *The Husband's Message* should correspond to l. 13: *Hwæt, þec þonne biddan het se þisne beam agrof*¹⁰¹.

3. Conclusion

The analysis of *The Husband's Message* in light of the principles of Material Philology has offered interesting solutions to some of the thorniest problems of the poem. The division into three sections seems to be the choice of the copyist responding to the structure he perceived in the text. Beside the smaller size of the capital letter at the beginning, the style and the content suggest that the first section may have been added as a 'transitional passage' to establish a connection between *The Husband's Message* and the preceding riddles, in turn creating a thematic section inside Booklet III. Sharing an identical line (ll. 16 and 54) and the same exhortatory tone, and developing the same themes, the second and the third sections present a coherent narrative development. Speaking on behalf of his lord, the narrator reminds the woman of an old vow, and he urges her to start the sea journey and join her husband. The speech culminates with the reading of a secret runic message. Taking into consideration the position of *The Husband's Message* in the manuscript,

⁹⁷ *The Whale* l. 1: 'Now, again, I will tell a song, / with art of poetry in my words, about a species of fish'. Ed. Muir (2006²).

⁹⁸ Liuzza (1990: 9).

⁹⁹ *Guthlac A* l. 30: 'Many, in the world, are'. Ed. Muir (2006²).

¹⁰⁰ Liuzza (1990: 9).

¹⁰¹ L. 13: 'Look! The one who carved this stick ordered me to ask you'.

the context provided by the close sequence of homiletic works and grounded on the theme of redemption before Christ's Second Coming casts a different light on the text. These poems create a path of conversion according to which *The Husband's Message* acquires an allegorical meaning. The exhortation from the man to the woman seems to reflect an invitation from Christ to his Church or to the soul and, overall, the announcement that eternal salvation will be possible for those who follow Him.

From this interpretation issues a new reading of the runes at the end of the text. Through the presence of the symbols S (*Sigel*) and M (*Mon*), together with the other runes, the message appears to recall God and man, the two contracted parties of Abraham's pledge; in the name of that old pact the woman should renew her vows and join her husband. The importance of the runic message is such that perhaps the copyist chose deliberately to mark the third section with the biggest and most adorned capital letter, in order to make it immediately visible to a reader. This passage indeed represents the essence of *The Husband's Message* and the most meaningful contribution to the general, Christian message transmitted by the sequence of homiletic texts in Booklet III.

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