ЕЗИКОЗНАНИЕ

LINGUISTICS

OLD ENGLISH NATURE RELATED SIMILES

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ABSTRACT: This article explores a specific type of Old English simile where vehicles are represented by natural phenomena, shedding light on the idiosyncrasies of Anglo-Saxon associations. Simile vehicles are considered integral components of narratives, acting as auxiliary tools rather than essential plot elements. They serve to create immediate effects, drawing attention to crucial narrative moments. The impact of simile vehicles arises from short-term mental imagery triggered by both the tenor and the ground, emphasizing the importance of choosing vehicles for their strength and accuracy. The paper argues that a language's simile corpus functions as a mental image gallery, showcasing speakers' preferences for specific concepts and revealing their worldview. By focusing on ecomorphic similes, especially those with repeatedly used vehicles, the study analyzes a subcorpus of Old English similes to identify key aspects of the medieval English worldview. The findings highlight a penchant for natural comparisons, with the sun, snow, water, stone, and fire being the most commonly employed vehicles, forming certain clusters of related senses.
KEYWORDS: simile, nature, prototype, worldview, association, image, mental picture

Introduction

Modern theories of metaphor, and, therefore, simile, which is almost always considered in the light of the theories of metaphor, are primarily positioned as those standing in opposition to classical traditions. These traditions, associated primarily with Aristotle, view metaphor exclusively through the lens of its function in literature and public speaking (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 190-193; Black, 1993, p. 22; Ortony, 1993, p. 3). However, it can be argued that not only does figurative language research date back to antiquity, but key aspects of modern concepts and theories of metaphor are also rooted in ancient Greek and Roman explorations.

Over the course of two millennia, terminology related to metaphor has diversified, metalanguage has changed, and a more specific interpretation of the key parameters of metaphor has taken place, thanks to a wide range of researchers (Lakoff, 1987, 1993; Grady 1997, 1999; Gibbs & Steen, 1999; Kapranov, 2014, 2016, 2018; Гладка/Hladka, 2017; Mizin & Slavova 2023). Nevertheless, there are no revolutionary new ideas that entirely negate the views of ancient authorities. Several scientists, who find echoes of Aristotle's teachings in modern cognitive theories of metaphor, support this perspective (Swiggers, 1984; Wierzbicka, 1986; Ricoeur, 1978, 1996; Korpel, 1990; Kirby, 1997; Mahon, 1999; Novokhatko, 2017; Filonik, 2020).

In particular, P. Swiggers (Swiggers, 1984) identifies surprisingly modern trends in Aristotle's interpretation of metaphorical processes. J. Kirby (Kirby, 1997, p. 518) suggests that the somewhat condescending and sometimes even aggressive attitude towards Aristotle's theories is a matter of fashion, taking advantage of the fact that further polemics with him are impossible. J. Filonik (Filonik, 2020) discusses the incorrect interpretation and exaggeration of the difference in views on metaphor by ancient Greek and modern researchers. Filonik (ibid.) argues that the cognitive aspects of metaphor were clearly formulated in ancient Greek theoretical works, and Aristotle considered metaphor not only as a rhetorical device but also as a conceptual process. According to Filonik, this conceptualization was later partially lost in ancient Roman rhetoric, which served as the foundation for subsequent European studies.

Novohatko, studying Quintilian's linguistic interpretation of metaphor, concludes that "Though remaining terminologically within the field of rhetoric, Quintilian is quite advanced in some aspects of his cognitive, semantic and pragmatic treatment of metaphor, which comes close to what Lakoff would

call 'the main mechanism through which we comprehend abstract concepts and perform abstract reasoning'" (Novokhatko, 2017, p. 317).

It is crucial to avoid interpreting classical ideas through the lens of modern terminology. While classical thinkers did not employ the term *cognitive*, they clearly engaged with cognitive processes in their discussions of metaphor and simile. The modern development of metalanguage should not be used as grounds to undervalue their insights. The term *cognitive*, as it is used today, only acquired its contemporary meaning after being adopted into linguistics from psychology. This shift was catalyzed by Ulric Neisser's work in *Cognitive Psychology* (1967), a hallmark of the cognitive revolution of the 1960s, which redirected focus from behaviorism to the inner workings of the mind (Neisser, 2014).

In the era of classical Rhetorics, the Latin *cognatio* referred to "kinship" or "blood relationship", whereas its cognate, *cognition* – meaning "the act of knowing", "knowledge", "learning", or "awareness" – likely emerged later as Latin philosophy and legal systems became increasingly formalized (the latter term was widely used by thinkers such as Seneca and in legal texts authored by Roman jurists under the Empire). In Ancient Greek, however, concepts analogous to cognitive mechanisms were articulated using terms like γνῶσις (*gnōsis*, "knowledge") and γιγνώσκω (*gignōskō*, "to know"). Aristotle extensively employed these terms in his *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* to describe the processes involved in metaphor and simile. Thus, it would have been historically and linguistically impossible to categorize simile as a "cognitive" phenomenon during that period.

The classification of metaphorical language as a cognitive phenomenon in the 20th century is not to diminish the classical understanding of its nature. It builds on a foundation laid by earlier thinkers, demonstrating that the conceptualization of metaphor as a tool for understanding is far from a modern innovation.

Old English similes were crafted and employed in adherence to the prevailing rules of rhetorical art, where authors held varying degrees of respect and authority, while their works exhibited different levels of prevalence and influence.

Researchers identify at least two stages of rhetorical traditions over the six centuries of the Old English period (Kennedy, 1999, p. 175). During this time, the authority shifted from the rhetoric of Cicero to Aristotle and Quintilian. Hence, it is reasonable to infer that the usage of similes by Old English authors and translators is a systematic application of the rules of ancient rhetoric, which strategically aligns with the broader context of the spread of Christianity.

Moreover, similes are viewed as remarkably suitable for religious writing (Wisse, 2001, pp. 155-156). Aelfric, Wulfstan, and King Alfred, who oversaw many Old English translations and interpretations, favoured similes. They often introduced additional ones which were not present in the original texts (Randal, 2010, pp. 154, 172, 267, 286).

In the era of their creation, Old English similes were interpreted in accordance with the rhetorical principles outlined in ad Herenium, the *Rhetorics* by Cicero, Aristotle, and Quintilian. Namely, they were distinguished from logical comparisons. Considered related (though not identical) to metaphor, being used primarily for explanation, embellishment, or censorship of speech, similes were designed to elicit emotions such as hatred, contempt, or praise and were recognized as asymmetric units prioritizing content over form. They were acknowledged as both cognitive formations (figures of thought) and stylistic techniques (figures of speech), cautioned against overuse in discourse. Similes were understood as constructions wherein the tenor[1] and the vehicle were distinguished, with careful consideration given to the latter. They could be further categorized as similes of equality and inequality within the broader category of comparison.

Thus, given the authors' demonstrated awareness of the nature of simile in the analysed manuscripts, the contemporary understanding of them does not appear conceptually distant. More importantly, it seems conceptually non-conflicting, allowing for a comfortable and effective application of the modern scientific paradigm to the study of Old English similes.

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[1] When discussing the constituents of a simile, I will follow the terminology of I. A. Richards (1936), who introduced technical terms to describe metaphor: the tenor (primum comparandum) and the vehicle (secundum comparatum), which later were expanded into the tenor, the vehicle and the ground (tertium comparationis). Thus, in the simile *Her lips are red like roses*, the tenor is *lips*, the vehicle is *roses* while the ground is *red*.

Results and discussion

Vehicles, integral to similes, exist outside the primary thematic narratives where they are employed. Centripetally attached, they can be extracted from the narrative without compromising the revelation of characters and events in the corresponding plots. The purpose of the vehicle is to function as an auxiliary tool, creating an immediate effect of brightness in a specific episode of the narrative and directing attention to a crucial element of the story. This effect arises from the emergence of a short-term mental picture, independent of the plot, triggered by a stimulus – the sound or written materialization of a concept expressed by the vehicle.

In this context, the choice of the vehicle is crucial, it emphasizes the need to decide on the one that will have the strongest and most accurate impact from the speaker's perspective. As a result, the simile corpus of a particular language or period functions as a display – a gallery of mental images reflecting the preferences of its speakers for specific concepts with many alternatives being available.

The consistency in selecting the same vehicle reveals a tendency among speakers to favour specific images over others, forming the idiosyncrasy of their worldview. This inclination provides insights into the logic of imagination of the language community, offering a glimpse into its psychological reality.

For the Anglo-Saxons, nature emerges as the most prolific source for vehicle borrowing. Out of the 1160 studied similes[2], 297 are ecomorphic, and 250 of them feature repeatedly used vehicles, which are going to be the subject matter of the present paper. Thus, the current article will specifically analyse the subcorpus of Old English similes with repeatedly used ecomorphic vehicles (at least twice). The repetition of the vehicle proves significant for two reasons: firstly, it reduces the risk of interpreting the occasional use of a vehicle as a typical Anglo-Saxon association, and secondly, it enhances the understanding of inherent vehicle characteristics being most frequently employed as the ground of the simile. This, in turn, helps to identify key aspects of the worldview of medieval Englishmen.

In the following sections, the paper will describe the repeatedly used ecomorphic vehicles in Anglo-Saxon similes in descending order. Due to the limitations of the article, each vehicle will be represented by one or two examples, while the remaining contexts in which these vehicles were employed will be enumerated.

- **The sun as a vehicle of Old English similes**

The most productive vehicle of Old English similes is the sun. The sun's imagery is primarily projected onto heavenly beings such as Jesus, God, angels, and the righteous who have entered paradise. This connection emphasizes the association with moral and ethical standards and signifies the transition to eternal life in heaven. Furthermore, in contexts describing the stay of the righteous on earth, they are never compared to the sun. The research material suggests that in the medieval English worldview, the ability of a person to radiate a bright glow with their whole body appears only upon transitioning to eternal life in heaven. This implies the necessity of prior compliance with high moral and ethical standards.

At the same time, those who are not yet in heaven but obviously have every chance to get there show a resemblance to the sun in certain parts of their bodies. For instance, the eyes of the bishop shine like the sun, as well as the faces of the martyrs depicted in the 10th-century *Homilies*. These martyrs, who fell asleep at the command of God 372 years before the full spread of Christianity, were given life and resurrection, causing their faces to shine like the sun when they came out of the cave.

(1) *Ða halgan martyras ða ut eodon of ðam scræfe togeanes ðam casere. and <u>heora nebwlitu scean swa swa sunne.</u>* 'The holy martyrs then went out of the cave towards the emperor, and <u>their faces shone like the sun</u>.' (ÆCHom II, 31-32 B1.2.34)

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[2] The present paper aims at giving an account of the Old English similes of equality, whose vehicles demonstrate Anglo-Saxon associations with natural phenomena, for which the DOE Web Corpus was scrutinized (DOEC). The continuous sampling method made it possible to account for 1160 similes and should be considered empirically exhaustive. DOE Web Corpus is a representative corpus of Anglo-Saxon texts which enables automatic selection and contains at least one copy of every surviving Old English manuscript.

The sun, as a vehicle in Old English similes, exhibits a gradation of brightness. The highest intensity is attributed to the Judgment of God, equated to the sun at its zenith, and the birth of Christ, likened to the appearance of the brightest summer sun in the night sky.

Beyond figures and phenomena associated with moral perfection, the sun is also linked to the brightness of the phoenix's eyes and its feathers forming a bracelet around the neck, as well as the precious stone sapphire. Radiance, however, is not the sole reason for Anglo-Saxon associations with the sun. Less common grounds include grace (associated with the Virgin Mary), longevity (linked to David's kingdom), and warmth (connected to God's light).

While the sun serves as a prominent symbol of radiant light in Old English similes, it ultimately pales in comparison to the brilliance of God's eyes, whose brilliance contains 72 suns on each lily covering the earth, thus being the ideal of bright radiance in the Old English worldview:

(2) …*and his eagan sindon xii ðusendum siða beorhtran ðonne ealles middungeardes eorðe, ðeah ðe heo sy mid ðæra beorhtestan lilian blostmum of bræded, and æghwylc blostman leaf hæbbe xii sunnan, and æghwylc blostma hæbbe xii monan, and æghwylc mona sy synderlice xii ðusendum siða beorhtra ðonne he geo wæs ær Abeles slege*… '...and his eyes are 12000 times brighter than all the earth, adorned with the brightest lilies having 12 suns on each petal, and 12 moons on each blossom, and each moon is 12000 times brighter than it was before Abel's slaying...' (Sol II B5.3)

- **Snow as a vehicle of Old English similes**

The image of snow in the analysed material is exclusively employed in relation to spiritually perfect heavenly figures. It is intricately associated with the body of a saint, the spirit of a saint embodied in a dove, and the immaculate soul of the Virgin Mary. Snow also serves as the exclusive prototype for characterizing the clothing of angels and God in various contexts:

(3) *His wlite wæs swilce líget, and <u>his reaf swa hwít swa snáw</u>..* … 'His countenance was like lightning, and <u>his raiment as white as snow</u>.' (ÆCHom I, 28 B1.1.30)

Being distinguished not only by its whiteness but also by its shining quality, snow reiterates the idea of radiance and shimmering as signs of spiritual perfection. It is noteworthy that the image of snow is employed three times less frequently in similes of equality compared to its high productivity in similes of inequality. In the latter, its purity diminishes before the whiteness of the bodies of the saints, cleansed of sins, the righteous, or, for instance, the soul of the child-martyr:

(4) *Ðær gesegon cristne men heora sawle fleogan to heofonum swa swa culfran, ond hi wæron <u>seofon siðum hwittran þonne snaw</u>*. 'There, Christian people saw their souls flying to heaven like doves, and they were <u>seven times whiter than snow</u>.' (Mart 5 (Kotzor) B19.5)

- **Water as a vehicle of Old English similes**

The image of water actualizes various characteristics in Anglo-Saxon similes, making it a prototype for several signs. In the majority of analysed examples, the image of a stream primarily represents flowing liquid matter, often associated with tears or, more frequently, blood in particular, for example, in the 11th-century *Paris Psalter*:

(5) *Hi þara bearna <u>blod</u> on byrig leton <u>swa man gute wæter</u> ymb Hierusalem; blodige lagan, nahtan byrgendas*. 'They <u>let the blood</u> of those children in the city <u>as one pours water</u> around Jerusalem; bloody corpses, not burying them at all.' (PPs A5)

At the same time, in religious texts, water is linked to the transitional state of man between sinfulness and virtue, wherein the body of a purified Christian is described as being spilled, including soft bones and heart. This depiction arises from the fluid and formless nature of water, which can be interpreted as having a transmutative property: the old form is lost to give life to a new one. This symbolism combines the meanings of death and destruction for rebirth and the transition from one form of consciousness to another.

The image of water in the analysed similes actualizes the connection between the physical and the absolute. Unlike the image of the sun, which signifies eternal metaphysical life, the image of water consistently appears in similes associated with earthly, physical life.

In particular, one point where the meanings of earthly life and water intersect is transience. The Anglo-Saxons associated transience with all creatures, youth, beauty, and earthly actions. The temporality of these elements inevitably implies loss and oblivion.

Furthermore, existing in human consciousness as an uncontrollable element, the image of water emerges when objectifying the idea of irresistible multiplicity and powerlessness in the struggle. This provides grounds for associating the enemies that surround a person from all sides with water.

Less frequently noted characteristics of water in the considered material include the following: the loud sound of its noise, which is compared to the voice; the purity and transparency of the beryl mineral; the life-giving quality in the desert, equated to the benefits granted by the Lord; the ability to evaporate; and the danger of stagnation.

- **The stone as a vehicle of Old English similes**

Within the limits of studied material, immovable people or animals are primarily associated with stone. Quite often, the idea of numbness and tension of the whole body or heart, caused by irresistible fear, is conveyed through Old English similes where the vehicle is stone.

To hyperbolize the concept of hardness or heaviness, the image of a stone is repeatedly used not only in religious texts, where it is, for instance, compared to the hardened food of the righteous or the indifference of a person's heart under the influence of the devil, but also in medical manuscripts to describe the state of internal body organs or tumours:

(6) *& þonne þu ðine handa setst ufan on þa lifre þonne beoð swa hefige swa stan & ne biþ sar.* 'And when you place your hands above the liver, then it is as heavy as stone and there is no pain.' (Bald's Leechbook (2) B21.2.1.2.2)

The stone is also linked to the downward movement of a person – falling to the ground or drowning. Less frequently noted characteristics that gave rise to Old English similes include its large size, strength, and durability, leading to the association of the whale with stone. Additionally, its abundance and affordability resulted in a comparison of the gold and silver of Jerusalem during the reign of King Solomon to stone.

As a vehicle in Old English similes of inequality, the stone bears two characteristics – hardness and heaviness – by which it is surpassed by God. Moreover, it is surpassed in hardness by the whips and rods of the angel of God, as well as by the Jews who did not recognize Christ. Thus, the image of a stone is associated with the hardest and heaviest matter, which simultaneously pales before the hardness and heaviness of God and the phenomena related to Him, as in 9th-century *Solomon and Saturn*:

(7) *He is modigra middangearde, staðole strengra ðonne ealra stana gripe.* 'It is [God's word] braver than the entire world, more steadfast than the grip of all the stones.' (MSol A13)

- **Fire as a vehicle of Old English similes**

Most of the Old English similes employing fire as a vehicle are found in plots related to the Holy Spirit. Consequently, it can be argued that in the Anglo-Saxon worldview, fire is primarily associated with spiritual energy, serving as the earthly representation of the absolute. An angry God is linked with fire, ready to destroy His own creation, interpreting fire, among other things, as a force of power and destructive influence. Additionally, fire can bridge the realms of spiritual energy and passion, particularly evident in the 11th-century psalms:

(8) *Gehatode heorte min binnon me & smeagung min abarn swa fyr* 'My heart burned within me, and my contemplation burst forth like fire.' (PsGlJ (Oess) C7.5)

In the analysed material, the image of fire, in the vast majority of cases, implies surpassing the limits of human capabilities – both in terms of physiology and cognition. Consequently, the properties of the bodies of non-human beings, such as the eyes and breath of monsters, are likened to flames. Additionally, incomprehensible celestial phenomena, like a fiery sky or a fiery chariot, are also compared to fire.

Therefore, the image of fire represents the idea of both physical and spiritual energy – a dominant force frequently associated with power over others, as well as the earthly manifestation of divine decisions.

- **Honey as a vehicle of Old English similes**

The distinctive feature of this vehicle in Old English similes is its exclusive use in similes of inequality. This characteristic suggests its status as a phraseological unit even in medieval times. The

fact that it is employed as a prototype for pleasant sweets, which are the only signifiers inferior in taste to the Word of God, Commandments of God, or God Himself, elevates it to a prototype of exceptionally delicious sweet food. This is exemplified in 10th-century Riddle No. 40:

(9) *Ic eom on goman gena* <u>*swetra þonne þu beobread blende mid hunige*</u>… 'I am in joy <u>sweeter than when you blend the beebread with honey...</u>' (Rid 40 A3.22.40)

- **Wax as a vehicle of Old English similes**

Despite being one of the most frequently used vehicles in Old English similes, wax actualizes only one property: melting. It is associated with everything that is subject to destruction, including people, weapons, mountains, sculpture, and even sinners. While the image of wax is predominantly linked with the inevitable cessation of existence, several similes with this vehicle imply the idea of rebirth. In these instances, the loss of the primary form does not equate to final death; rather, melted wax transforms into a 'pre-form' substance, a malleable matter capable of assuming a desired configuration. Objectifying the concept of spiritual transformation, the image of wax becomes synonymous with the image of water. In such cases, wax is compared to the heart and/or bones, as notably depicted in the 11th-century *Cambridge Psalter*:

(10) *Swa swa wæter utagoten ic eom & tostrede synd ealle ban mine geworden is* <u>*heorte min swa swa weax miltende*</u> *on middele innoðes mines*. 'Like water poured out, I am scattered, and all my bones are broken. <u>My heart is like wax, melting</u> in the midst of my bowels.' (PsGlF (Kimmens) C7.10)

The interpretation of wax as preform matter is further supported by the image of a wax apple, symbolizing all existing creatures, being squeezed by God with His right hand.

- **The star as a vehicle of Old English similes**

While analysing the contexts in which the star acts as a vehicle in Old English similes, it becomes evident that in most meanings, it is conceptually close to the image of the sun, occupying a lower position on the scale of brightness and serving as a token of the presence of a spiritual principle. Believers who live among sinful people are often associated with stars. Less frequently, the comparison extends to the souls of the righteous in heaven, whose radiance varies based on the degree of their piety during their earthly life. Stars are also likened to the bones of forty holy soldiers who became martyrs for the establishment of Christianity, a palm branch given by an angel, an educated bishop who converted pagans to Christianity, and a preacher of the word of God. However, the brightness of the stars fades before the light of the crucifixion, and all the constellations in the sky are inferior in purity and brightness to the heart of God and His sword.

In non-religious texts, particularly in the 11th-century *Lapidary*, the image of a star is used without implications of the connection between the spiritual and the earthly. Instead, the focus is on the shimmering and shining of precious stones such as sapphire and chrysoprase. The latter is associated with green stars:

(11) *Nigoþa is crisoprassus haten, se is grenum lece gelic, &* <u>*swilce him grene steorran of scinan*</u>. 'The ninth is called chrysoprase, <u>it is like a green leek</u>, and it shines with green stars.' (Lap B22.3)

The considered vehicle also embodies the idea of multiplicity, as descendants of the blessed Jewish family are frequently likened to countless stars.

- **The plant as a vehicle of Old English similes**

Vegetal images, predominantly represented by herbaceous plants, serve to depict people solely in the context of their bodily shell, confined to the realm of earthly existence. When the context involves interspersing spiritual elements such as obedience to God and righteousness, there is a tendency to employ images of a vineyard and a tree as vehicles. Due to plants' ability to actively grow, bloom, remain in a withered state, and their aesthetic and tactile (un)attractiveness, plant images possess a vast associative potential, covering a broad spectrum of anthropocentric meanings. For instance, pagans are compared to thistles or thorns; sinners to weeds; the corruption of human flesh to withered grass or a hedge; a young beautiful body to a blossom, destined to soon lose its attractiveness; an old dying person to hay or a falling flower or leaf, as depicted in the 11th-century Old English version of the *Heptateuch*:

(12) *For þæm* <u>*swyþe hraþe forseariað swa fileðe, and hy gefeallað swiðe hrædlice, swa swa*</u> <u>*wyrta leaf, oþþe blostman*</u>. 'For <u>they quickly wither like the leaves, and they fall very swiftly, like the leaves of herbs or blossoms</u>.' (Judg B8.1.7.2)

- **The rose and the lily as vehicles of Old English similes**

The rose and the lily stand out as the sole floral representatives whose species are specified in Old English similes. Typically, they are combined as homogeneous prototypes of a salient feature. These flowers are primarily associated with a pleasant, persistent smell or extraordinary beauty. In the analysed manuscripts, these attributes are mainly attributed to the Virgin Mary or saints, as exemplified by:

(13) *Ða wearð þæt brydbed mid* <u>*bræðe*</u> *afylled* <u>*swylce þær lægon lilie and rose*</u>. 'Then the bridal bed was filled with <u>fragrance, as if lilies and roses lay there</u>.' (ÆLS (Julian & Basilissa) B1.3.5)

This is how Saints Julian and Vasilisa are described in the 10th-century *Lives of Saints* by Aelfric. Less frequently, the image of a rose is employed to distinguish the worthy among the mass of the unworthy, serving as a standard of righteousness against the backdrop of sinners personified in the image of thistles. The rose also symbolizes the red colour of blood or beautiful women's clothing, which enhances a woman's attractiveness. Simultaneously, in such narratives, it is emphasized that beauty is only temporary and fleeting.

- **Gold as a vehicle of Old English similes**

Gold, as a vehicle in Old English similes, carries the same psychological implications as the star or the sun: its shine and radiance signify something higher, worthy of glory and imitation. Creating a kindred effect of sparkling against the background of other 'non-shimmering' matter, gold, sometimes in combination with silver, prominently appears in scenes dedicated to saints, monks, the souls of the righteous, and those who have been cleansed of sin. However, unlike other 'shimmering' vehicles, gold, due to its natural existence, requires purification to be used as a precious commodity. Consequently, gold always involves a process of formation, improvement, and refinement:

(14) *Hie* <u>*asodene*</u> *beoð, asundrod fram synnum,* <u>*swa smæte gold þæt in wylme bið womma*</u> <u>*gehwylces þurh ofnes fyr eall geclænsod, amered ond gemylted*</u>. 'They are <u>purified</u>, separated from sins, <u>like pure gold that, in the crucible, is cleansed of every blemish through the fire of the furnace, refined and melted</u>.' (El A2.6)

This is how the purification of man from sins is depicted in the 10th century *Elena*, once again actualizing the idea of liquid 'pre-form' matter (analogous to the images of water and wax), symbolizing the transformative transition from one spiritual state to another. It's worth noting that the image of gold is quite productive in the Old English simile of inequality, where it is deemed inferior in value to the wise man, the test of faith, the commandments, and the word of God. The lustre of all the gold and silver on earth also fades before the radiance of God's heart, interpreted as the perfection and the ideal of bright light. Outside the contexts of spiritual development and distinguishing the worthy, phoenix feathers, a pattern on a leaf, and topaz are associated with gold.

- **The sea as a vehicle of Old English similes**

Functioning as a vehicle in Old English similes, the image of the sea encapsulates two meanings: the lack of stability and the inaccessibility of borders. The first emanates from the perception of the sea as an active substance, giving rise to associations with both physical movement and psychological restlessness:

(15) *...se apostol sæde se þe soðlice* <u>*twynað gelic he ys yþe sæ seo fram winde byð astyrud &*</u> <u>*byð upp ferud.*</u> '...the apostle said, "He who truly doubts is like the turbulent sea stirred by the wind and is driven upward."' (LibSc C15)

This example is drawn from a glossed translation of the 11th-century *Liber Scintillarum*, with a similar thematic comparison found in the 9th-century *Pastoral Care*, likening earthly life to a turbulent sea. The inaccessibility of boundaries implies both a vertical and a horizontal vector: in the first case, the depth of the sea is compared to the Judgment of God and the fiery lake of hell, aligning with the well-known psychological implication of death encoded in downward movement. In the second case, God Himself and the praise of God are equated to the breadth of the ocean and the sea. Simultaneously,

in the Anglo-Saxon worldview, the unattainability of boundaries can still be surpassed, as it is considered possible for the word of God to transcend the bounds of immensity.

- **Shadow as a vehicle of Old English similes**

Shadow, as the opposite of bright light, directly correlates with the semantics implied by these two vehicles. If shine and light primarily signify the spiritual perfection of those in heaven, the image of the shadow is employed in contexts related to the earthly existence of the flesh, portrayed as primitive and extremely fleeting. The leitmotif across all similes using the image of a shadow as a vehicle is the disappearance without a trace, exemplified, for instance, in the 11th-century *Homilies*:

(16) *Hwæt wunaþ þysses mid ðam men oferhydum in ðære byrgenne, nemþe ðas seonuwa & þara bana dust in þære eorðan? – gewiteð swa swa glidende scuwa*. 'What dwells with that person in the arrogance of pride in the burial place, except the sins and the dust of those bodies in the earth? – <u>Depart like a gliding shadow</u>.' (HomS 43 (ScraggVerc 13) B3.2.43)

- **Smoke as a vehicle of Old English similes**

The image of smoke in Old English similes objectifies meanings related to those of a shadow, and at times, these are combined as homogeneous within the same prototype. A variable component of the semantics of the image of smoke, however, is that it denotes not so much the transience of a certain process as the suddenness or traceless disappearance. Smoke is associated not only with life or the concept of fear but also with dark forces, such as the devil or an evil spirit, as exemplified in the legend of *Guthlak* from the 10th-century *Lives of Saints*:

(17) *Þa sona æfter þam wordum se <u>awyrigeda gast efne swa smic</u> beforan his ansyne aidlode.* 'Then immediately after those words, the accursed spirit <u>disappeared as smoke</u> before his face.' (LS 10.1 (Guthlac) B3.3.10.1)

- **Wind as a vehicle of Old English similes**

The image of the wind, as a vehicle in the similes in question, reveals a tendency toward ambiguity. In its active mode of being, it actualizes meanings adjacent to the image of the sea, characterizing an unstable person. However, in a positive sense, the image of the wind aims to evoke the tactile sensation of pleasant coolness, associated with the presence of an angel.

The force of the wind allows for its use as a vehicle for the loud sound associated with the threatening voice of the heavens and the destruction that a conqueror brings with them. The invisibility and traceless disappearance of the wind provide reasons for the Anglo-Saxons to equate it with the earth, which can vanish without a trace, and the words of the tempters, depicted in the 10th-century legend of Agatha as devoid of any value:

(18) *Eower <u>word syndon winde gelice</u>, ac hi ne magon afyllan min fæstræde geþanc, þe is gegrundstaþelod*. '<u>Your words are like the wind</u>, but they cannot shake my steadfast thought, which is well-founded.' (ÆLS (Agatha) B1.3.9)

- **The tree as a vehicle of Old English similes**

In most cases of the use of a tree as a vehicle in Old English similes, its genus is not specified, although olive trees and cedars of Lebanon are mentioned in three similes. Generally, the image of a tree in the analysed constructions represents human nature with an emphasis on its moral behaviour. A tree can be alive, receiving enough moisture, and fruitful; it may be alive but infertile; as well as dead raw material. These three states of the tree correspond to three categories of people, classified according to the parameters of faith and spirituality in the Anglo-Saxon worldview: a righteous Christian is associated with a living fruitful tree; an unbelieving person is compared to a living tree that does not bear fruit; and a dead, dry tree, easily burnt, represents the sinner.

An intriguing example from the 11th-century Old English version of the *Heptateuch* compares Satan to the cedars of Lebanon, traditionally considered a symbol of devotion to the Christian faith:

(19) *Ic geseah þone <u>unrihtwisan swiðe up ahafenne, swa swa sum cedertreow on Libanus munte</u>*. 'I saw the <u>unrighteous</u> one exalted very high, <u>like a cedar tree on Mount Lebanon</u>.' (Judg B8.1.7.2)

The comparison of dark forces represented by the ecomorphic image of a tall tree, positioned on a mountain, is quite atypical within the rest of the sampling. According to Christian symbolism, this image should signify considerable moral sublimity of the signifier. However, it stands out as another piece of evidence suggesting the addition of simile in the translation from Latin, absent in the original work cited by P. O'Neill (O'Neill, 2016, p. xiii).

The motivation behind the translator's decision to transform the image of cedars, initially a spatial indicator of height, into a vehicle cannot be established with certainty. However, it can be assumed that the translator aimed to supplement the implication of the text, making the psalm more instructive. The devil disappeared without a trace not only because he approached a deadly distance from heaven but also due to excessive pride, the impudence of equating oneself unworthily with the symbolic bearer of high morality.

- **Dew as a vehicle of Old English similes**

The dew descending from heaven, within the vehicles of the studied similes, is depicted as a carrier of God's holy grace and a harbinger of positive events. It is likened to the Virgin Mary, sermons, and God's mercy. In particular, in the legend of *Martin* found in the 10th century Aelfric's *Lives of Saints*, the dew is accompanied by a miraculous relief of the suffering of a saint engulfed in flames:

(20) *... and þær wearð þa geworden micel wundor þurh God, swa þæt hine forbeah on ælce healfe þæt fyr, and he orsorh abad on þam bryne middan, þurh Drihtnes mihte, swilce he on deawe wære.* ... and there a great wonder happened through God, so that the fire avoided him on every side, and he endured unharmed in the midst of the blaze, through the Lord's power, as if he were in dew.' (ÆLS (Martin) B1.3.30)

- **Sand as a vehicle of Old English similes**

Sand, particularly sea sand, functions as a vehicle in Old English similes with a singular focus - representing an uncountable abundance. It shares synonymous imagery in this regard with stars and dust. Notably, such abundance consistently carries a positive connotation, signifying a desired and bestowed blessing from higher forces. Instances include comparisons to the abundance of meat that fell from heaven and the plentiful harvest of grain in Egypt during a time of famine in other lands. However, sand is most frequently linked to themes of procreation, primarily associated with the Jewish people:

(21) *Ic ðe nu bletsige & ðinne ofspringe gemenigfylde swa swa steorran on heofonum & swa swa sandceosel on sæ.* 'I now bless you and multiply your offspring as stars in the heavens and as sand on the sea.' (Gen B8.1.4.1)

- **Rain as a vehicle of Old English similes**

Rain, akin to celestial phenomena, consistently symbolizes the interaction between heavenly beings and the laity in Old English similes. In contrast to dew, which uniformly conveys positive connotations as a symbol of God's blessing, rain can embody both positive and negative implications. On one hand, it is associated with fertility, depicting God as akin to life-giving rain or a bountiful downpour. On the other hand, it symbolizes elemental severity, providing a basis for comparisons that equate God's punishment with rain and heavenly fire with brimstone sent to earth as a form of divine retribution – a manifestation of the wrath of the Lord:

(22) *...þa sende God færlice, sona swa Loð wæs of þære byrig alæd, ofer þam fif burhscirum fyr and swefel, swylce hit renscur wære, and mid ealle forbærnde þa fif burhscira.* '...then God sent suddenly, as soon as Lot was led out of the city, fire and sulfur over the five city-regions, as if it were a shower, and completely burned down the five city-regions.' (ÆHom 19 B1.4.19)

This is how God's punishment is depicted in the 10th-century *Homilies*, portraying it as a form of purification. Beyond illustrating the Almighty's influence on people, the image of rain is employed in similes to underscore the temporality and ephemerality of specific processes. Notably, it symbolizes the sudden appearance of excessive love for wealth in a person's life, which, just as swiftly, inevitably loses its value.

- **Dust as a vehicle of Old English similes**

Due to its fine nature, dust can evoke associations with multiplicity, serving as a prototype for an innumerable quantity and acting as a synonym for stars and sand, with which descendants are equated. The microscopic size of dust forms the basis for associating wealth with it, suggesting a maximal sharing among all. Additionally, the potential for dispersion makes dust an optimal image to characterize something destined for destruction, such as sinners and enemies, as portrayed in the epilogue of the 11th-century *Heptateuch*:

(23) *Syn hi tostencte, swa swa dust beforan winde*. 'They were scattered, as dust before the wind.' (Judg B8.1.7.2)

- **The grain (seeds) as a vehicle of Old English similes**

The grain, frequently specified as pure, appears in the researched material as an image comparable to the concept of a conscientious Christian:

(24) *Þus sind gemengde þa godan ceastergewaran. and ða yfelan. swa swa corn and ceaf. oð þæt se dema cymð ðe gegaderað þæt clæne corn into his berne. þæt sind þa rihtwisan into heofonan rice.* 'Thus are mingled the good citizens of the city and the evil, like grain and chaff, until the judge comes who gathers the clean grain into his barn. Those are the righteous into the kingdom of heaven.' (ÆCHom II, 4 B1.2.5)

The given example is taken from the 10th century *Homilies*. A grain of wheat, in large numbers, represents groups of people or entire nations in Old English similes, always with the implication of compassion for a people who are harmed or threatened. Thus, people who are threatened by Satan's influence are compared to grain, and the Celts are associated with a field of ripe wheat trampled by enemies. In addition to representing good people, grain is associated with bread divided by Christ and the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the image of grain implies both the outcome of the fruitful work of churchmen, involving the ability to discern and separate the wheat from the chaff, and a perspective of spiritual nourishment associated with development and metaphysical symbiosis.

- **Chaff as a vehicle of Old English similes**

The counterpart to the image of grain is the image of chaff, always implying a disconnect from spirituality and a lack of morality. Minor sins, transgressions, or the individuals committing these sins are associated with husks. The recurring theme in all contexts featuring similes with this particular vehicle is the inevitable destruction of chaff, primarily through burning, though wind blowing is also depicted, as seen in the 11th-century *Cambridge Psalter*.

(25) *God min sete hi swa swa hweowul & swa swa hielm beforan ansyne windys*. 'May God set them like a whirling wind and like chaff before the face of the wind.' (PsGlC beheald (Wildhagen) C7.1)

- **The mountain as a vehicle of Old English similes**

The image of the mountain in Old English similes encompasses various meanings. It signifies immense size, as seen in the comparison of an elephant to a mountain. The upward aim of a mountain aligns with the elevation of moral standards and the ascent of the spirit, embodying God's justice. Additionally, the mountain is associated with substantial hardness and stability, reflected in spiritual terms. For instance, the physical resilience of St. Lucia during torture, correlated with the mountain, symbolizes the indomitability of her spirit in the 10th century Aelfric's *Lives of Saints*.

(26) *Þa cnitton hi rapas mid reðum anginne hire to handum and fotum, and fela samod tugon, ac heo næs astyrod, ac stod swa swa munt*. 'They pulled ropes with fierce violence at her hands and feet, and many together tugged, but she was not shaken, but stood like a mountain.' (ÆLS (Lucy) B1.3.10)

- **Precious stones as a vehicle of Old English similes**

The use of precious stones as a vehicle in Old English similes is confined to one specific attribute – their glittering and shimmering. Although, at a glance, these stones might seem synonymous with the image of stars, they never imply metaphysical characteristics associated with high standards of spirituality and morality. Instead, their significance is limited to the physical signs of extreme

attractiveness and magnetism. For instance, ice, grape blossom, and certain elements of the phoenix's body (such as its eyes or beak) are likened to precious stones.

(27) *Sindon þa fiþru hwit hindanweard, ond se hals grene nioþoweard ond ufeweard, ond þæt* <u>*nebb lixeð swa glæs oþþe gim*</u>, *geaflas scyne innan ond utan.* 'The feathers are white behind, and the neck is green downward and upward, and the beak <u>gleams like glass or gem</u>, its jaws shining inside and outside.' (Phoen A3.4)

While precious stones consistently evoke positive emotions through their brilliant attractiveness, they still fall short in pleasantness compared to the Word of God.

- **The moon as a vehicle of Old English similes**

Setting aside the simile where the moon serves as the vehicle, comparing the monster's head to a night light purely based on its round shape without additional psychological implications of linguistic and cultural significance, the image of the moon in Old English similes embodies two main meanings: eternity and beauty. For instance, the kingdom of David is metaphorically aligned with the enduring nature of the moon, destined to exist forever. Conversely, in another context, the throne of David is likened to the perpetual perfection of the moon. Additionally, the beauty of the Virgin Mary finds resonance in the moon's aesthetic allure, as depicted in the 10th-century *Homilies*.

(28) *Hwæt is ðeos ðe her astihð swilce arisende dæg-rima,* <u>*swa wlitig swa móna*</u>, *swa gecoren swa sunne, and swa egeslic swa fyrd-truma*? 'What is this that rises here like the dawn, <u>as beautiful as the moon</u>, as chosen as the sun, and as awe-inspiring as a warrior's gear?' (ÆCHom I, 28 B1.1.30)

The moon, in Old English similes, uniquely serves as a vehicle of brightness in the description of God's eyes (2). However, this employment of the moon image is aimed at highlighting its current lack of luminosity, being depicted as 12,000 times dimmer than a multitude of moons, which shine brightly, reminiscent of their glow before the murder of Abel. The omission of the moon as a vehicle of bright light in other similes is possibly rooted in the association with fratricide, specifically, the murder of Abel.

- **The lightning as a vehicle of Old English similes**

The property of lightning to physically connect the sky with the earth in the direction from top to bottom aligns with the metaphorical senses it embodies as a vehicle. In the examined instances, lightning consistently symbolizes the descent of a heavenly phenomenon: be it the sudden appearance of the kingdom of God or an angel whose coming is likened to lightning. Despite the association of this celestial messenger with the forces of light, the depiction carries an element of fear, as seen in the Anglo-Saxon rendition of the 12th-century *Gospel of Nicodemus*.

(29) *…ic wat þæt his* <u>*ansyn wæs swylce ligræsc*</u> *and his reaf wæron swylce snaw swa þæt we wæron afyrhte þæt we þær lagon swylce we deade wæron.* '…I know that <u>his face was like lightning</u> and his clothing was like snow, so that we were afraid and lay there as if we were dead.' (Nic (A) B8.5.2.1)

- **Wool as a vehicle of Old English similes**

The image of wool in Old English similes intersects with the image of snow, both denoting the whiteness of specific objects. However, it's noteworthy that the signifiers of these images are distinct and not interchangeably used. While snow is commonly associated with the radiant whiteness of the clothes of angels, the Virgin Mary, or God, accompanied by the bright light emanating from their bodies, the image of wool is employed to characterize white objects that do not have a direct connection to higher forces. An example can be found in the comparison of Mary of Egypt's hair, which, having spent a considerable time in the desert, is likened to wool, similar to how snow is associated with it, as depicted in the late 7th-century *Letters of Alexander*.

(30) *Đa cwom þær micel snaw & swa miclum* <u>*sniwde swelce micel flys feolle*</u>. 'Then came a great snow, and it <u>snowed</u> so much that it seemed <u>like a lot of fleece</u> was falling.' (Alex B22.1)

- **Coal as a vehicle of Old English similes**

The black pigment of coal serves as a simile vehicle to describe the physical characteristics of the tenor, such as the colour of a carbuncle. Furthermore, the coal's colour not only represents its

tangible qualities but also triggers a psychological transition, associating its physical attributes with the metaphysical realm. This leads to its symbolic connection with the essence of dark forces.

(31) *And oþer þara* <u>*weroda bið, swa sweart swa col,*</u> *and oðer bið beorhtre þonne sunne.* 'And <u>another of those armies</u> was <u>as black as coal</u>, and another was brighter than the sun.' (HomS 5 (Willard) B3.2.5)

Conclusion

The consistent selection of certain vehicles from a wide range of options shapes the typical associations of medieval English people and contributes to the peculiarity of their worldview. This inclination towards natural comparisons is particularly evident in the high frequency of ecomorphic similes, with the sun, snow, water, stone, and fire serving as the most common vehicles. These vehicles often form clusters with related meanings, each revealing insights into the Anglo-Saxons' understanding of the world around them.

Thus, concepts that emit light or shimmer (sun, snow, stars, gold) are primarily associated with moral perfection and high ethical standards. Concepts that can change form (water, melted wax or gold) are associated with rebirth, disembodied concepts (shadow, smoke, wind) actualize the idea of transience and (sudden) disappearance, and finely dispersed concepts (sand, dust, grain) represent a vast, uncountable quantity.

The most frequently used vehicle within the analysed sampling is the sun, primarily associated with the life everlasting of the inhabitants of heaven. Other productive ecomorphic images are snow (whose dominant meaning is whiteness, denoting spiritual perfection in the metaphysical dimension), water (the prototype of transmutations, transience, and irresistibility), stone (the standard of immobility, heaviness, and hardness), and fire (a sign of divine decisions, spiritual and physical strength). Plant images are always associated with people, with their moral perfection correlating with the height and fruitfulness of the plant, while the human body shell is associated with shadow, smoke, and wind, among others.

In general, all ecomorphic images (with the exception of wool) primarily actualize the idea of spirituality and the (un)resultative interaction of higher forces with lay people to a certain degree.

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