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THE *TRANSITUS* OF THE SOUL AND THE INTERCESSION OF THE ANGELS IN OLD ENGLISH *RESIGNATION A* 49B-56

Resignation (*A+B*) is still a subject of debate as to its textual unity and classification. Though it is usually partnered to the Old English elegies, *Resignation A* (ll. 1-70) bears more affinities with penitential poetry. The poem also echoes death liturgy. The invocation *geoca mines gæstes* ('save my soul', 46a) anticipates the soul's longing not to be captured by demons (49b-53). The plea for angels to lead her at the *transitus* recurs in antiphons, responsories, and prayers in the *Agenda mortuorum* of pre-Conquest manuscripts such as the Leofric Missal, the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, the Red Book of Darley, and the Winchcombe Sacramentary. The paper aims to confirm that *Resignation A* is a penitent's prayer, whose poet is well learned both in liturgy and theology.

1. *Introduction*

Long printed as a stand-alone poem, *Resignation (A+B)* is penned between gathering XV and XVI of the Exeter Book (*s.* x^{¾}),[1] between *The Judgment Day I* and *The Descent into Hell* at fols 117v-119r.[2] Since the dawn of pre-Conquest English literary studies, it has been rather hard to classify due to both codicological and genre issues. Early editors considered it a prayer, while in the 20th century it has been partnered with the elegies of the Exeter Book.[3] The suspicion that *Resignation (A+B)* might consist of

[1] Gameson 1996, 179, and "256. Exeter, Cathedral Library, 3500" in Lapidge, Gneuss 1914, 201-203.

[2] Line numbers and quotations from *Resignation A* and *B* are taken from Muir 2000^{2}, I, 336-338, 339-340; the title and translation of *Resignation A* follows Jones 2012, 111-115; instead, for *Resignation B*, see Bjork 2014, 109-111. All quotations and titles of other Old English poems are from *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* series. Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own.

[3] For the critical history of *Resignation* (*A+B*), see Cammarota, Cocco 2020, 120-123.

two originally separate texts arose by reason of some thematic, metrical, and linguistic irregularities.[4] It unfolds the mixture of two predominant traits: on the one hand, a spiritual tone, while, on the other, a mournful mood.

Gathering XV concludes with fol. 118v. Its final word, the preposition *mid* (70a), has no narrative continuation with the poem on fol. 119r, where gathering XVI begins. Bliss and Frantzen questioned the unity of the text. Their thorough lexical, metrical, syntactic, and thematic scrutiny proves that *Resignation* is made of two separate text types: *Resignation A* (1-70) and *Resignation B* (the remaining 49 lines).[5] The former is an unfinished prayer that ends on fol. 118v, the latter is a headless lament starting on fol. 119r.[6] As a result, Bliss and Frantzen implied the loss of a leaf after fol. 118v in the Exeter Book.[7] Such a hiatus in the text suggests that there must have been some missing lines after *mid* (l. 70) at the end of *Resignation A*. Hence, *mid* must be the first word of a new line that had to resume in the likely lost folio.[8] Few critics doubted Bliss and Frantzen's views ever since,[9] the thesis is widely accepted by scholars, who reckon a text comprising two distinct poems: *Resignation A* and *Resignation B*.[10]

[4] Schücking was the first to point out a discontinuity on a thematic level; see Schücking 1919, 21-23.

[5] Förster provided the earliest codicological scrutiny. For him, "there is no gap after fol. 118 [...] no possibility of loss", see Förster 1933, 59. Krapp and van Kirk Dobbie printed a single poem, see Krapp, van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 215-218.

[6] Bliss, Frantzen 1976, 389-390.

[7] They concluded that the textual cutoff resulted from the loss of a leaf between fol. 118v and fol. 119r, and fol. 112 would be the remaining half of a bifolium, see Bliss, Frantzen 1976, 385-402.

[8] On a linguistic level, only the first 70 lines contain Anglian words. The syntax of the two poems differs in the use of verbs, of the preposition *mid* (70a), and in their distribution. As to the metrical aspect, the last two words of fol. 118v (*wæron mid*) cannot belong to the same long line, *ibid*.

[9] Muir followed Bliss and Frantzen's views, see Pickwoad in Muir 2006. He believes Förster's study is incorrect as there must have been missing folios; he could not ascertain whether the lines on fol. 119r belong to the text on fol. 118v, or are the ending of another poem, see Muir 2000², I, 10.

[10] Klinck rejected the loss of a leaf and the metrical irregularity (Klinck

This paper focuses on *Resignation A* as a penitential poem and discusses its echoes of liturgical texts. At lines 49b-56, the soul ceases her confession of guilt and pleads to the angels to lead her. The *Agenda mortuorum* offers liturgical references to the penitent's prayer for a safe *transitus*, away from the perilous grasp of the devil's throng. The Leofric Missal, the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, the Red Book of Darley, and the Winchcombe Sacramentary contain antiphons, responsories, prayers, and rubrics that refer to the angels *in hora mortis* and their role of psychopomps and intercessors. The analysis of analogues will reveal the knowledge of rites the poet has as he made *Resignation A* an Old English poetic *commendatio animae*. The proximity to both the imagery and lexicon of liturgical sources further confirms *Resignation A* among the "poems of worship and prayer".[11]

2. *Liturgical analogues and sources*

Early Medieval England has yielded a significant body of literature on the importance of penance. Through penitentials, homilies, liturgical-pastoral writings and educational literature, both the English and Irish Churches promoted the practice of penance and reconciliation, mainly in the 9th and 10th centuries.[12] *Resignation A* shares indeed diction, topoi and imagery with the wider body of (para)liturgical and devotional texts, and other religious analogues,[13] especially the penitential Psalms (Pss. 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, 142), and some analogues in Latin prayers of personal devotion.[14] The poem is centred on the confession of the soul's

1987, 423-430); for her, the poet has initially articulated from a penitential viewpoint and then with an elegiac tone (Klinck 1992, 28-29, 55-56). Sobol has recently reclaimed *Resignation A* and *Resignation B* as a single poem. She builds on Förster's scrutiny and Muir's. Yet, by referring to Muir's study of the codex, she omits to mention that Muir assumed some loss between fols 118-119; see Sobol 2015, 73 and Muir 1989, 288.

[11] Jones 2012, 110-115.

[12] Meens 2014, 89-100, 157-162, 249-257.

[13] Sieper 1915, 256-257.

[14] For penance as theme and image in Old English poetry as reworking

sins and her plea for a favourable *transitus*. The theme of penance stands out due to the number of words belonging to the semantic fields of both sin and sorrow.[15] *Resignation A* conveys the cultural spirit of the Benedictine Reform. In that frame of mind, the poet might have imagined the pattern of a confessional prayer, merging the poetic pace to the features of penitential literature.[16]

The fact that (para)liturgical texts in Old English could complement the canonical liturgy in Latin,[17] both for common and private devotion, is shown by confessional and devotional prayers in pre-Conquest codices.[18] *Resignation A* has a few parallels with the interpretation of *nomina sacra* in the Old English *Creed*, *Gloria I*, and *The Lord's Prayer II* and *III*.[19] The poem resembles some other penitential prayers such as *Alma confessio* in the *Book of Cerne* (Cambridge, University Library, Ms Ll.1.10 [*s.* ix[1]]),[20] *A Prayer of Confession* in London, British Library, Cotton Galba A.xiv (*s.* xi[1]), and *A Prayer* in London, Lambeth Palace 472 (*s.* xv).

Resignation A 1-2 begins with a plea: "Age mec se ælmihta god // helpe min se halga dryhten" (May almighty God keep me, may the holy Lord help me!). Sobol points out that the lines recall the introductory formula of the Hours (but for Nocturns) of the Divine Office – which corresponds to Ps. 69:2, "Deus, in adiutorium meum intende, Domine, ad adiuvandum me festina" (O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me).[21] Yet, the lexical choice in *Resignation A* 1-2 deviates from the Old English

including also (para)liturgical sources, see Frantzen 1983, 179-183, 193-197.

[15] Ruggerini 2018, 72-76.

[16] Noronha 1971, 30; Bestul 1977, 21.

[17] Pulsiano 2001, 209.

[18] Jones 2012, xix.

[19] For parallels between *Resignation A* and Old English (para)liturgical texts, see Sobol 2015, 80-81.

[20] Stanley 1955, 451. One finds especially some parallels between *Alma confessio* and *Resignation A*, mainly for the enumeration of sins (ll. 19-20a, 25b-26a); for the *Book of Cerne*, see Kuypers 1902, 95-99.

[21] Biblical references are taken from the Latin *Vulgata*, see Fischer, Weber, Gryson, 2007[5]. All English translations of the Vulgate are taken from the Douay–Rheims Bible, see <http://drbo.org> (last accessed March 20, 2024).

glossed rendering of Ps. 69:2: "God on fultum mine beheald drihten to gefultumigenne me æfest".[22] The latter verse occurs almost *litteratim* in the Old English *Regula Benedicti* xviii.1, the *Regula Canonicorum* xvi, and the Durham Ritual. Besides, *Resignation A* 1-2 is not too similar to Old English *Psalm 69*.1 – which, instead, proves to be closer to the versicle in the aforesaid *Regulae* and the Durham Ritual.[23]

Besides monastic and (para)liturgical texts,[24] *Resignation A* is a poetic example of a penitential prayer like those in missals and breviaries. The poet is acquainted with Latin sources and has an ability to rewrite religious material, at times in a more direct manner, other times rather veiledly. *Resignation A* has been related to confessional texts penned from 8th-10th insular codices – *i.e.* the prayer *Alma confessio* in the *Book of Cerne*.

There are also *verbatim* parallels in both *Resignation A* and *A Prayer of Confession in Old English begging forgiveness and protection* transcribed in London, BL, Cotton Galba A.xiv[25] – mostly for the similarity of listed items offered to God and the use of similar formulas. For instance, after the initial plea, in *Resignation A* 5b-9, the poet states:

> Ic þe, mære god,
> mine sawle bebeode ond mines sylfes lic,
> ond min word ond min weorc, witig dryhten,
> ond eal min leoþo, leohtes hyrde,
> ond þa manigfealdan mine geþohtas.

[22] Sobol 2015, 79.

[23] The text of *Psalm 69*.1 reads, "Wes, drihten god, deore fultum; // beheald, drihten, me, and me hraðe syþþan // gefultuma æt feorhþearfe. // þonne beoð gescende and scame dreogað" (Lord God, be precious help; Lord, look at me and in my extreme need, help me immediately after); see Krapp 1932, 27; O'Neill 2016, 259.

[24] For a survey of Old English (para)liturgical texts and monastic culture, see Keefer 2010, 16-20.

[25] See Noronha 1971, 31-33; Bestul 1977, 21.

> (To you I commend, O illustrious God, my soul and my own body, my words and my works; to you, wise Lord, guardian of light, I commend all my limbs and my manifold thoughts).

It is worthy of note that this enumeration is undeniably similar to that in the Cotton Galba *A Prayer of Confession* at fol. 104r:

> þam ic e<om and>etta <ecne> ælmihtigne god a wesendne and a wuniendne to widan feore þam ic bibiode minre sawle gehealdness<e> *and* mines lichoman min word *and* weorc *and* mine geþohtas, mine heortan *and* minne hyge, min leomu *and* mine lioðu.[26]
>
> (to Him I acknowledge an eternal, God almighty, always existing, and always everlasting. To Him I commend the custody of my soul and of my body, my words and my deeds, and my thoughts, my heart and my mind, my limbs and my joints).

For Muir, *Resignation A* 5b-9 recalls the *Confiteor*'s words: "quia peccaui in cogitatione, in locutione et opere" (for I have sinned by thought, word, and deed) in the *Confiteor*.[27] Yet the recognition of faults occurs later: "meotud, for þinre miltse, þeah þe ic ma fremede // grimra gylta þonne me god lyfde" (O creator, for the sake of your mercy, though I have committed more serious offenses than God would have permitted me, 27-28). This passage echoes Ps. 50:3, "Miserere mei Deus secundum misericordiam tuam iuxta multitudinem miserationum tuarum de iniquitates meas" (Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy. And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity). A deep need of God's *milts* ('mercy') occurs in *Resignation A* 51a and another penitential Psalm (6:5), "Convertere, Domine, et eripe animam meam; salvum me fac propter misericordiam tuam"

[26] See §64 in Muir 1988, 136, ll. 2-6.

[27] Muir 2000², II, 675. See §74 in Muir 1988, 154, ll. 1-2. For a further parallel with the *Confiteor* and the Irish tradition, see Sims-Williams 1978, 94, 101-102, 105-106.

(Turn to me, O Lord, and deliver my soul: O save me for thy mercy's sake). Ps. 6 also shares with the Old English poem the same state of prostration, a heartfelt confession (vv. 5-8), and a plea for celestial aid (vv. 9-11).

Resignation A and *A Prayer* in London, Lambeth Palace 472 both deal with penitential themes and the profession of faith. On a linguistic level, there are several imperatives to invoke God's protection.[28] However, what really draws the texts nearer is the soul's final journey and her terror of being harassed by the demons (*A Prayer* 11-13a; *Resignation A* 15b-18). In *A Prayer* 67a, 71-73, 76-77a, one reads the supplication to God:

> Ac ic þe halsige nu [...]
> and gefylste me, fæder ælmihtig,
> þæt ic þinne willan gewyrcean mæge,
> ær ic of þysum lænan lyfe gehweorfe. [...]
> læt me mid englum up siðian,
> sittan on swegle.
>
> (But I [now] invoke you, [...] and that you, almighty Father, would assist me so that I may accomplish your will before I depart this transitory life. [...] allow me to journey upward with the angels, to take my seat in heaven.)[29]

This imagery also occurs in *Resignation A* 49b-50a, 52b-56a. Yet, unlike the narration in *A Prayer*, the poet solemnly contrasts the power of God and His angels with the pride of Lucifer and of the rebellious spirits who followed him:

[28] See, for instance, the parallels between *Resignation A* 1a, 2a, 10a with *A Prayer* 2a, 9a, 22a; as well as the use of *ne* + infinitive to implore God not to abandon the soul in time of need or in the battle with the devil's temptations (*Resignation A* 15b, 52b; *A Prayer* 76a).

[29] van Kirk Dobbie 1942, 95; Jones 2012, 109.

Forlæt mec englas seþeah
geniman on þinne neawest, [...]
ne læt þu mec næfre deofol seþeah
þin lim lædan on laðne sið,
þy læs hi on þone foreþonc gefeon motan
þy þe hy him sylfum sellan þuhten
englas oferhydige þonne ece Crist.

(Let angels nevertheless bear me into your presence [...] do not ever allow devils to lead me, a limb of your body, off on the hated journey, lest they exult in the same expectation by which those proud ones supposed themselves to be better than the eternal Christ).

The poet is keen to emphasize that the angels of the devil that try to take hold of the soul at death are the prideful and rebellious spirits cast out with Lucifer from God's presence.[30]

The apprehension in *Resignation A* and *A Prayer* does not merely represent a feeling of anxiety due to the end of human life. The similarity in structure of these passages with the soul's invocation for angelic intercession ties these two penitential prayers to some traits ascribable to death liturgy;[31] in fact, there is a "precise similarity between *Resignation A* and a particular kind of liturgical prayers known as the *commendatio animae*, associated with the rituals for the dying and recently dead".[32]

3. *The role of the angels as psychopomps and intercessors*

Physical death and spiritual torment were surely two of the greatest fears in the Middle Ages. Art and literature offered a few representations of that feeling – especially of the soul's anxie-

[30] Hill 1975, 279-290.

[31] Nelson 1983, 138. Some scholars had already offered a reading of *Resignation* (*A*) as a *commendatio animae* prayer; see Cross 1965, 105-106; Malmberg 1979, 3.

[32] Jones 2012, xxii.

ty before the dispute between angels and devils at her *transitus*. The doctrinal core is the pericope with the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:17-31). Nuremberg, Germanisches National-museum, 156142 (*s.* xi[1]), fol. 78r depicts the gospel passage: in the middle, angels bring Lazarus's soul to the *sinu Abrahæ* ('Abraham's bosom'),[33] while at the bottom some demons drag down Dives to Hell [see fig. 1].[34] The *visiones* of the afterlife prove that medieval audiences enjoyed them greatly.[35] Given the popularity of this topic, texts and images from some medieval manuscripts will be combined to best reconstruct the destiny of the soul.

The contention between angelic and evil forces has enjoyed wide literary fortune; it draws on several sources, especially in the episode in the *Visio Pauli* 14. This chapter outlines the attention of both heavenly and evil spirits in one's soul at death: "et ante quam exiret de mundo, asteterunt sancti angeli simul et impii" (and before he went out of the world the holy and the impious angels both attended).[36] This account on the contention

[33] The exegetical interpretations of the *sinus Abrahae* as to its function and location are many and, at times, controversial: (1) Irenaeus of Lyon understands it as a temporary abode before the Last Judgment (*Adversus haereses* ii, 34.1); (2) Tertullian reads it as a *refrigerium interim* (*Adversus Marcionem* iv, 34.14), and (3) Augustine believes it to be populated by patriarchs and prophets (*Tractatus xliv,* Io XI: 11-15); see van der Lof 1995, 109-123. As regards Early Medieval England, in homiletic sources the *sinus Abrahae* also occurs as *locus refrigerii* or *paradisus*: (1) Wulfstan reads it as a place for the righteous souls till the Day of Judgement (*Homily xlvi*, 'Lârspell', ll. 6-7), (2) the *Vercelli Homily xviii* interprets it as a place of rest ('De sancto Martino confessore', l. 294); Ælfric defines it 'Abraham's dwelling' or *neorxnawang* ('paradise') and asserts its *interim* status and the presence of the Apostles (*Catholic Homily V*, 'Dominica in septuaginta', ll. 139-140). For further theological references to the *sinus Abrahae*, see both Kabir 2004, 37-48, 132-140, and Foxhall Forbes 2010, 680-682.

[34] Nilgel 1998, 271-272.

[35] For an overview of afterlife *visiones* in late Latin literature, see Amat 1985, 377.

[36] The Latin redaction of the text referred to is from the manuscript Paris, Nouv. acq. 1631, Bibliothèque Naationale de France, see Silverstein, Hilhorst

between angels and demons over one's soul highlights the eternal tension between good and evil.[37] Early Christian literature abounds with tales about the afterlife: from Late Antiquity with Gregory the Great's *Dialogi*,[38] to the continental *Visio Baronti*,[39] to the influential corpus of early English visionary literature,[40] both in Latin and the vernacular – such as the Anglo-Latin insular *Vision of Dryhthelm* in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* (V.12-14),[41]

1997, 86; for the translation, see Elliot 1993, 624.

[37] As to the contention between angels and devils, the Old English translator rewrites ch. 15. The Latin text "Et post haec uenerunt simul sancti angeli et maligni, et anima defuncta uidit utrosque" (Then came the holy angels and the evil angels, and the departed soul saw both) is rendered with "and ðær ætsomne coman ða halgan ænglas and ða <yfelan> gastas, ac ða haligan gastas nan geweald on ðara sawle næfdon, ac ða yfela gatas, hige læddon ða sawle" (and there the holy angels and the evil spirits came together, but the holy spirits had no authority over these souls, but the evil spirits led the soul). For the reconstructed Latin text and its rendering, see DiPaolo Healey 1978, 68-69. In the Old English text *ða <yfelan> gastas* is emended; the manuscript reads *ða godan gastas*, see n. 127 in DiPaolo Healey 1978, 80.

[38] Gregory the Great's last book of the *Dialogi* has been a forerunner of the *visiones* of the afterlife, thus defying a prosperous literary genre. In IV.32, 37-38, Gregory narrates a soul's journey to the next world, the struggle between angels and devils to possess the soul fought between good and evil, and how it came back to life to tell the journey it had taken, see Keshiaho 2020, 232-240.

[39] Inspired by Gregory's account in *Dialogi* IV.32, 37-38, the *Visio Baronti* circulated all through both Carolingian Europe and Early Medieval England together with the *Vita Fursei*, the *Visio Rotcharii*, and the *Visio Wettini*. The *Visio Baronti* recounts of two demons and the archangel Raphael fighting over the monk, until the angel separates Barontus's soul from his body, see Hen 2020, 33-36.

[40] After reading the Latin *Visio Pauli*, Gregory the Great's *Dialogi*, or the *Vita Fursei*, stories began to be told in pre-Conquest England of native Early English men who had experienced visions themselves, see Wieland 2020, 79-84.

[41] *The Vision of Dryhthelm* is innovative in several aspects. For instance, Bede turns the struggle between angels and devils into a peaceful agreement. His *visio* is an elaboration of the fourfold grouping of the souls at Doomsday Gregory the Great outlines in *Moralia in Iob* XXVI.xxvii.50-51, see Biggs 1989-1990, 36-51 and Foxhall Forbes 2010, 680-682. Following Gregory the Great's idea of purgatory, Bede's view of the afterlife is innovative; he presents

the *Vision of the Monk of Much-Wenlock* in the epistolary of St Boniface,[42] or St Guthlac's strife with the devils in *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* (31-33).[43]

The illustrations of the parable of Dives and Lazarus in Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 156142 (fol. 78r), the accounts in the *Visio Pauli*, as well all the other Christian texts from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages, also recur in *Resignation A*. An analogous scenario to that in the eschatological description in *Resignation A* 49b-56a in which the soul is the prey of a battle between angels and devils also occurs in Old High German *Muspilli* 2-5; there, the account is more detailed and expands on the possible outcomes:

> uuanta sar so sih diu sela in den sind arheuit,
> enti si den lihhamun likkan lazzit,
> so quimit ein heri fona himilzungalon,
> daz andar fona pehhe: dar pagant siu umpi.[44]
>
> (For at the moment when the soul rises on her journey and leaves the body on the ground, a host comes from the firmament, another from the pitch: there they fight over it.)

Muspilli 6-13 further clarifies the terror of the soul in falling prey to the demons and its consequences:

> sorgen mac diu sela, unzi diu suona arget,
> za uuederemo herie si gihalot uuerde.
> uuanta ipu sia daz Satanazses kisindi kiuuinnit,
> daz leitit sia sar dar iru leid uuirdit,

a four-tiered otherworld, two interim regions, see Wright 2014, I, 311, 395-396.

[42] Without pretending to emphasise the 'Englishness' of his account, Boniface provides the first *visio* of a native Early English person with the account of the monk of Wenlock, who witnesses himself angels and demons fighting over the soul of a departed soul, see Sims-Williams 2005, 249-258.

[43] Colgrave 1956, 100-109.

[44] Braune 1969, 86.

> in fuir enti in finstri: daz ist rehto uirinlih ding.
> upi sia auar kihalont die die dar fona himile quemant,
> enti si dero engilo eigan uuirdit,
> die pringent sia sar uf in himilo rihi.[45]
>
> (The soul must worry until the verdict comes as to which of the two armies will take her away. For if Satan's hosts conquer her, they take her forthwith to where her sorrow will originate, into fire and darkness: it is a truly terrible thing. If, on the other hand, those who come from Heaven take her away, and she becomes the property of the angels, they take her straight up into the Kingdom of Heaven).

There is supporting literary and iconographic material from pre-Conquest England that underpins the dramatic eschatological scenario in *Muspilli* 2-13 and the same sentiment of anxiety in *Resignation A* 49b-56a. In one of his epistles, St Boniface shares a vision of the afterlife he was granted: "Et maximum inter se miserrimos spiritus et sanctos angelos de animabus egredientibus de corpore disputationem habuisse" (the miserable spirits and the holy angels had a dispute over the souls leaving the body).[46] The final desire of a Christian is to face death escorted by the angels just as London, BL, Harley Roll Y.6, Roundel 14 (*s*. xii/xii) portrays St Guthlac's soul being led to Heaven by heavenly messengers [see fig. 2].[47] Similar imagery is found in *Homily xxxvii* 'Sanctus Furseus gesihðe' in London, BL, Cotton Vespasian, D.xiv (*s*. xii), where St Fursa is brought to God's presence by angels.[48]

[45] Braune 1969, 86. For detailed references on *Muspilli* 2-13, see Di Venosa 2013, 31-33.

[46] See *S. Bonifatii et Lulli Epistolae. 10* in Dümmler 1892, 253.

[47] Though produced chronologically after *Resignation A*, the representation at fol. 85r of Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, W. 284 (s. xv) blends the battle between angels and demons for the fate of the departed, and the use of funeral liturgy in cloistered life. There, monks are portrayed while praying at a wake, sitting behind a corpse. The upper part of the illustration depicts the archangel St Michael and a devil fighting over the soul of the late brother for whom the monks recite the *commendatio animae* [see fig. 3].

[48] Warner 1917, 109 (ll. 29-32). See also Ælfric's *Homily XX* 'Item in

Though it is neither the life of a saint nor a vision, the plea for angelic intervention in *Resignation A* follows an analogous architecture to the literary and iconographic examples analysed so far. The turning point in the poem is found at ll. 41-46a:

> Nu ic fundige to þe, fæder moncynnes,
> of þisse worulde, nu ic wat þæt ic sceal,
> ful unfyr faca; feorma me þonne,
> wyrda waldend, in þinne wuldordream,
> ond mec geleoran læt, leofra dryhten,
> geoca mines gæstes.
>
> (From this world I now hasten to you, Father of humankind, since I know that I must leave it in a very short while; receive me then, ruler of destinies into your glorious happiness, and allow me to depart. O Lord of the beloved, rescuer of my soul.)

This passage conveys a feeling of haste due to impending death, as well as the *leitmotif* of the journey towards the Heavenly Kingdom. The poet clarifies that he will be departing "of þisse worulde" (out of this world, 42a). Similar penitential words occur in Cynewulf's *commendatio animae* epilogue in *The Fates of the Apostles* 109b-112a:[49] "Ic sceall feor heonan, // an elles forð, eardes neosan, // sið asettan, nat ic sylfa hwær, // of þisse worulde" (I must go far from here, alone on the way forth, seek a dwelling, take a journey from this world, I do not know where).[50]

There are further parallels between *Resignation A* and *The Fates of the Apostles* as to the loneliness of the poet and his need of friends *in hora mortis*. In *Resignation A* 41a, the words "nu ic" (now I) recall Cynewulf's first-person epilogue: "Nu ic þonne

letania maiore. Feria tertia', in Godden 1979, 191 (ll. 27-30).

[49] Rice 1977, 108. For the theme of death liturgy in *The Fates of the Apostles*, see Cocco 2019, 57-58.

[50] Krapp 1932, 54; Bjork 2013, 137, 139. For the metaphorical use of the theme of journeying in *The Fates of the Apostles* and in the poems of the Vercelli Book, see McBrine 2009, 298-299.

bidde" (now then I bid, 88a).[51] The theme of friendship has wide currency in the Old English corpus. Elegiac poetry tells of the sorrow of being 'friendless': *freondleasne* (*The Wanderer* 28a) or *wineleas* (*The Wanderer* 45b, *The Wife's Lament* 10a). *Resignation A* 45-46a reminds us of the need for friends before death or in times of need. A similar plea occurs both in *The Fates of the Apostles* 91b-92a and *The Dream of the Rood* 131b-135a. In *Resignation A* 53b the soul is afraid to end up "on laðne sið" (on the hated journey). One cannot but consider another resemblance with Cynewulf. In *Juliana* 699b-700a, the poet declares how the body shall depart from the soul to set off for a journey towards an unknown destination.[52]

4. *Resignation A and the liturgy of death*

Resignation A is not merely a prayer with a penitential nature. The supplication *geoca mines gæstes* ('save my soul', 46a) and the plea for angelic intercession in the subsequent lines (49b-53) is not random. It is embedded in a specific textual architecture, revealing a series of veiled references to the liturgy of death. Cross first defined *Resignation A* as a *commendatio animae – i.e.* a prayer to be received into the Kingdom of Heaven.[53] Much like Cynewulf,[54] the *Resignation A*-poet shows a clear ability to merge poetic craft with biblical sources and Christian rites. Thus, one can derive the profile of someone well-acquainted with missals and breviaries. Such books were part of the liturgical equipment of monastic houses.[55] Since the Synod of Whitby (664), the

[51] Krapp 1932, 54; Bjork 2013, 137. The adverb *nu* ('now', 42b, 63b 88a) conveys the penitent's urgency to depart from this world, trusting in divine mercy; see Nelson 1983, 138.

[52] See Hermann 1984, 263-281. A similar scenario is found in *The Fates of the Apostles* 91b-94.

[53] Cross 1965, 105-106.

[54] See Cocco 2019, 41-52.

[55] For the making of books in the milieu of the Benedictine Reform, see Dumville 1992, 141-146.

pre-Conquest Church embraced the *Ordo qualiter agatur in obsequium defunctorum* (*Ordo xlix*) of the *Ordines Romani*.[56] As the *Regularis Concordia* xii.65-67 proves,[57] the Benedictine Reform restored the *Officium defunctorum*,[58] while the *Agenda mortuorum* had always been part of missals.[59]

The *Agenda mortuorum* that follows draws on the responsories and antiphons copied in complete form in manuscripts which were made or circulated in pre-Conquest England:

> The Leofric Missal, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 579, 266^{r}-267^{v}, (*s.* ix^{2}, with additions in *s.* x^{2}, *s.* xi^{med})
> The Missal of Robert of Jumièges, Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 274 [Y6], fols 207^{v}-208^{v}, (*s.* xi^{1})
> The Red Book of Darley, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 422, pp. 429-490, (*s.* xi^{med})
> The Winchcombe Sacramentary, Orléans, Biliothèque municipale, MS 127 [105], pp. 332-336, (*s.* x^{2})

The *Agenda mortuorum* highlights the salvific role angels play in the *transitus* of the soul. The rite entails the recitation of the *commendatio animae*, which involves prayers, psalms, and responsories and antiphons such as *Subvenite sancti dei*, *Suscipiat te Christus*,[60] and *Chorus angelorum*.[61] Those antiphons and

[56] See Sicard 1978, 27-33, Andrieu 1956, IV, 529-530. For a complete account of the earliest Old Roman ritual for death and burial, see Paxton 1990, 37-44.

[57] Symons, 1953, pp. 64-66.

[58] For the Benedictine Reform, see Gretsch 1999, 245-249. The *Officium defunctorum* occurs in the Red Book of Darley (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 422, pp. 470-90, and p. 554 in latter hand); Wulstan Portiforium (Cambridge, CCC 391, pp. 705-712); London, BL, Harley 863 (with Nocturns).

[59] For the liturgical books from pre-Conquest England (including those with the *Agenda mortuorum* and the *Officium defunctorum*), see Keefer 1995.

[60] The responsory *Subvenite sancti dei* and the antiphon *Suscipiat te christus* are taken from the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, as the other codices indicate the recitation of *Subvenite sancti dei* and quote *Suscipiat te Christus* entirely; see Wilson 1994, 297-298.

[61] For the *commendatio animae*, see Angenendt 1984, 168-171, and Gougaud 1935, 11-8, 24-27.

responsory seem to be the liturgical counterpart of the cry of the soul in *Resignation A*.

The *commendatio animae* opens with angels called on to save the soul: "Subvenite sancti dei, occurrite angeli domini suscipientes animam eius offerentes eam in cospectu altissimi" (come to aid Saints of God, hasten angels of the Lord: accept his soul and introduce him before the presence of the Highest).[62] The text of the intercession that follows may have minor changes; the Winchcombe Sacramentary reads: "et per manus sanctorum angelorum tuorum inter sanctos et electos tuos, in sinibus abrahae, [...] eam collocare digneris" (and by the hands of your holy angels may you find him worthy to place among your Saints and elect, in Abraham's bosom).[63] After the intercession, Ps. 113 ('In exitu Israël') is preceded by the antiphon "Suscipiat te christus qui creavit te et in sinu abrahae angeli deducant te" (let Christ who created you receive you and may the angels bring you into Abraham's bosom).[64]

The invocation that follows Ps. 113 restates the need for angelic intervention: "eumque [...] suscipias et angelos tuos sanctos ei obviam mittas" (receive him and send your holy angels to meet him).[65] The Missal of Robert of Jumièges (fols 214^{v}-215^{r}) and the Red Book of Darley (p. 432) are the only manuscripts to list the *Chorus angelorum* antiphon in its entirety: "Chorus angelorum te suscipiat et in sinu abrahe ibi te collocet et cum lazaro quoddam pauper aeternam habeas requiem" (may a choir of angels receive you and bring you into Abraham's bosom so that with Lazarus, once a poor man, you may obtain eternal rest).[66] After the antiphon, the section concludes with Ps. 114 ('Dilexi quoniam').

[62] Wilson 1994, 297.

[63] Davril, 1995, 263.

[64] *Ibid*.

[65] Wilson 1994, 298. The Leofric Missal (fol. 246v) reads: "emitte angelos tuos obuiam ei [...] aperi ei portas iustitiae et repelle ab ea omnes principes tenebrarum" (send your holy angels before him, disclose to him the doors of justice and ward off all the princes of darkness); see Orchard 2002, II, 367.

[66] *Ibid*., 298. For the antiphons *In paradisum* and *Chorus angelorum*, see Capelle 1967, III, 251-267.

The texts of the responsory, antiphons and intercessions from the *Agenda mortuorum* show a liturgical correspondence with the soul's plea in *Resignation A* 49b-56a as to the fundamental intercessory role of the angels in leading the soul of the dead. This aspect goes beyond the common funerary rites and portrays private devotion. In London, BL, Arundel 155 (*s.* xi^{2}), at fol. 185r, the Old English rendering of *Oratio ad XII Apostolos* reads:

> ic hreppe mid benum minum earan mildheortnesse geopena gatu neorxnawanges æfter forþsiþe minum þæt on gecorenra þinra getele gerestan me alyfe toforan englum þinum
>
> I fill the ears your mercy with my prayers; disclose the gates of Paradise after my death that I may be allowed to rest in the number of your elect, in the sight of your angels.[67]

Likewise, the *Oratio de apostolis sanctis* in the Book of Cerne (fol. 83^{v}) reads:

> Domine deus aperi mihi et portas paradisi post obitum meum, ut in electorum tuorum numero mihi requiescere liceat, coram te christe et coram angelis tuis
>
> O Lord God, open to me the portals of paradise after my death, so that I might be allowed among the number of your elect, before your presence, O Christ, and the presence of your angels.[68]

5. *Conclusions*

Resignation A draws to its conclusion with a rising plea for mercy (60b-63b). As in death liturgy, the penitent makes a *confessio in hora mortis* before receiving the *vitaticum*, and the soul admits

[67] Campbell 1963, 91.

[68] See Kuypers 1902, 166. The same plea occurs *verbatim* in the prayer *Domine Ihesu Christe qui dedisti potestatem* at fols 34v-36r in London, BL, Cotton Galba, MS A.xiv (*s.* xi^{med}).

her faults before passing: "Min is nu þa // sefa synnum fah, ond ic ymb sawle eom // feam siþum forth" (now my mind is stained with sins, and on occasion I am fearful for my soul, 63b-65a). The soul is aware that her life as a sinner is coming to an end and is ready for her final voyage. As in *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Resignation A*, as well as other poems with eschatological content, at their end, (1) evoke the journey of the soul over the *mare mundi*, (2) pray to be received into celestial bliss, (3) praise God's glory,[69] as do *The Wanderer* 106-115 and *The Seafarer* 117-124.[70]

Symbolically describing a perilous journey across the sea, *Resignation A* is endowed with this eschatological message, which would have carried a deeper spiritual meaning, provided one could read its missing lines. The poet asks God's protection from the angels of darkness to save his soul from a mighty storm (59-64a):

> Forstond þu mec ond gestyr him, þonne storm cyme
> minum gæste ongegn; geoca þonne,
> mihtig dryhten, minre sawle;
> gefreoþa hyre ond gefeorma hy, fæder moncynnes,
> hædre gehogode, hæl, ece god,
> meatod meahtum swiþ.
>
> (Defend me from them and keep them at bay whenever that storm comes against my soul; save my soul then, O mighty Lord, protect and receive it, O Father of humankind; heal it, anxiously preoccupied as it is, O eternal God, creator strong in might.)

It is worth noticing the evocation of an allegoric storm the soul must avoid in her *transitus*. As in *The Seafarer* 117-124, the end of *Resignation A* also narrates a *peregrinatio animae* over the *mare mundi*. In Holy Writ, the sea can be deceitful and cause a wreck – e.g. Christ's calming of the sea (Matt. 8:23-27), or St

[69] Wilson 1974, 65-109, 141-180.
[70] See Smithers 1957, 141-147; Smithers 1959.

Paul's voyage (Acts 27). In *Enarratio in Psalmum CXLVIII*.9, St Augustine says that the sea is the realm of darkness, its abyss is the seat of the devil.[71] The storm in *Resignation A* frightens the poet as much as that in Matt. 8 when the apostles are on a boat tossed by the waves. Just as the disciples cried to Christ to save them, so does the soul in *Resignation A*.

The Fathers of the Church taught that the *peregrinatio animae* should lead the vessel of the soul to the *portus salutis*.[72] In *Christ II* 854-855, Cynewulf vividly portrays the eschatological sailing of a ship on a sea at tempest: "yða ofermæta þe we her on lacað // geond þas wacan woruld, windge holmas" (the waves without end that we toss on here throughout this mutable world, windy the billows).[73] The poet also tells that because of Christ's mercy the ship may land into the *portus salutis* (858b-859, 864-866):

> Þa us help bicwom,
> þæt us to hælo hyþe gelædde, [...]
> Utan us to þære hyðe hyht staþelian,
> ða us gerymde rodera waldend,
> halge on heahþu, þa he heofonum astag.
>
> (Then help came to us, that led us to salvation in the harbor [...] Let us fix our hope in that harbor, which for us the Ruler of the skies, holy in the heights, opened when He ascended to heaven.)[74]

The collocation *cuman* + *storm* in *Resignation A* 59b also occurs in the glossed translation of Ps. 68:3 in the Vespasian Psalter to describe a sea-tempest: "Veni in altitudinem maris, et tempestas demersit me" = "Cym in heanisse saes & storm bisencte mec".[75]

[71] Dekkers, Fraipont 1956, III, 2171-2172.

[72] In *Divinae institutiones* VI 24.9, Lactantius explains how Christ's mercy has disclosed the *portus salutis* to mankind; see Brandt 1890, 573, ll. 1-4. For the symbolism of the *navicula animae*, see Rahner 1964, 327-329.

[73] Krapp, van Kirk Dobbie 1936, 26-27; Bjork 2013, 31.

[74] *Ibid*.

[75] Kuhn 1965, 63. The collocation *cuman* + *storm* also occurs in the glossed

The prayer of the soul not to perish in the storm in *Resignation A* 59b-63 seems to echo Ps. 68:2: "Salvum me fac, Deus, quoniam intraverunt aquæ usque ad animam meam" (Save me, O God: for the waters are come in even unto my soul). The imagery of the billowy waters being calmed by God's power ("ece god, meatod meahtum swiþ" [O eternal God, creator strong in might]) in *Resignation A* 64 recalls Ps. 88:10: "Tu dominaris potestati maris; motum autem fluctuum ejus tu mitigas" (Thou rulest the power of the sea: and appeasest the motion of the waves thereof). The Old English Paris Psalter *Psalm 88*.10 merges the *peregrinatio animae* in *Resignation A* 59-66a, *Christ II* 850-866, and Holy Writ: "þu wide sæs wealdest mihtum; // þu his yþum might ana gesteoran, // ðonne hi on wæge wind onhrere" (You control the broad seas with might, only You can restrain the waves, when the wind whips it up into billows).[76]

The plea for angelic intercession at the *transitus* in *Resignation A* 49b-56 recalls the eschatological content in the responsory and antiphons *Subvenite sancti dei*, *Suscipiat te Christus*, and *Chorus angelorum*. Though we do not know the other lines that completed *Resignation A,* in any case, the extant text of *Resignation A* is an independent penitential prayer, with a poetic *commendatio animae* that revises the liturgical extracts from the *Agenda mortuorum* or other *orationes*. Among many, the Old English translation of the *Oratio ad XII Apostolos* in London, BL, Arundel 155 upholds the circulation and use of Old English (para)liturgical texts for personal devotion in a more familiar language.[77]

Along with that practice, on the one hand, the poet proves his knowledge of the dogmatics concerning angelology and of death liturgy, while, on the other, he offers a vivid example of poetic craft to meditate over penance. Through his poetic sensibility, the poet gives voice to the penitent before death and depicts the inmost hope of an anxious soul calling upon God's promise in Ps.

translation of Ps. 49:3.

[76] Krapp 1932, 57; O'Neill 2016, 343.

[77] Jones 2012, xix.

90:11: "Quoniam angelis suis mandavit de te, ut custodiant te in omnibus viis tuis" (For he hath given his angels charge over thee; to keep thee in all thy ways).

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Fig. 1. The parable of Dives and Lazarus
Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 156142, fol. 78r

Fig. 2. Angels lead Guthlac's soul to Heaven
London, British Library, Harley Roll Y.6, Roundel 14

Fig. 3. Monks at wake
Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, W. 284, fol. 85r