

Wonder, beauty, ability and the natural world: The experience of wonder as a positive aesthetic emotion in Old English verse¹

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Drawing on the recent studies on aesthetic emotions and on their recent application to the field of the Old English aesthetic emotions, this paper explores one emotion from the emotion family of AMAZEMENT in the Old English poetic corpus, attending to the type of wonder that is typically triggered by objects of beauty, excellent manufacture and by the natural world. The purpose of this paper is to understand better the poetic usage of the Old English terms for wonder as well as evidence their role in literary and everyday contexts. Through a fine-grained analysis of the above domains, this paper has shown that the wonder implicit in these texts can be triggered by perceptual or cognitive appraisals, but also by a combination of both, highlighting the complexities and particularities of the early medieval English emotion of WONDER, as well as its similarity to other emotions like the EXPERIENCE OF BEAUTY or AWE.

Keywords: Old English; Old English poetry; aesthetic emotions; history of emotions; wonder

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1. Introduction

After an extensive study of emotions of a utilitarian nature (e.g., ANGER or FEAR) on the part of the academic community (e.g., Scherer 2005), the attention now has turned to aesthetic emotions. Over the last years, several scholars have put forth different theories of aesthetic emotion, like Juslin (2013), Menninghaus et al. (2019) or Fingerhut and Prinz (2020). While more general research on utilitarian emotions like ANGER (for example, Kövesces 2010) has resulted in its application to the conceptualisation and expression of these emotions in Old English (i.e., Gevaert 2007; Izdebska 2015), this has not been the case of the Old English aesthetic emotions. Scattered publications assess individual aesthetic emotion markers (Ramey 2017), while others focus on particular aesthetic aspects in specific poems, as is the case of the volume edited by Hill (2010).

Drawing on Fingerhut and Prinz (2019; 2020) and their research on aesthetic emotions, the aim of this paper is to analyse the emotion of WONDER (categorised in their model under EMOTIONS OF AMAZEMENT, alongside AWE and THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SUBLIME) and its representation in the Old English poetic corpus. Taking into consideration previous research carried out on positive aesthetic experience (Minaya 2021) and on the potentially negative side of wonder (Minaya 2022), this paper explores three different and interconnected domains of WONDER in Old English verse. More specifically, this paper assesses the fundamentally positive dimension of early medieval English poetic WONDER, which is manifested in evaluations concerning beauty, manual ability and in the natural world. This will highlight poetic strategies as regards the usage of terms for WONDER, but it will also evidence certain relations and expectations from early medieval audiences to this emotion and the phenomena that typically trigger it.

2. WONDER from cognitive and literary perspectives

Contrary to other aesthetic emotions, like THE EXPERIENCE OF BEAUTY, the emotion of WONDER has been analysed in detail. While the points made by certain researchers (Scherer 2005; Marković 2012; Juslin 2013;

Menninghaus et al. 2019) can certainly illuminate our understanding of this emotion, other academic works delve into its analysis in more detail. In this sense, Fingerhut and Prinz (2020 and, especially, 2019) make a case for WONDER being one of the fundamental human (aesthetic) emotions. While they avoid a straight-forward definition, they analyse wonder alongside different dimensions: *core relational themes, action tendencies, expressive behaviours, cognitive styles and valence* (Fingerhut and Prinz 2019), complementing the available information with studies on related emotions, like AWE (Keltner and Haidt 2003).

Regarding appraisals, that is, evaluations that “precede and elicit emotion” (Roseman and Smith 2001: 6), Fingerhut and Prinz (2020: 116) explain that wonder can be analysed in three different dimension: a) cognitively “wonder involves appraisals of perplexity,” referring to things that can be difficult to conceptualise (hence implying some degree of need for accommodation, as Keltner and Haidt (2003) explain for AWE), b) perceptually wonder is triggered by objects that “engage and captivate our senses”, and, finally, c) spiritually “wondrous things are regarded with reverence; we look up to them.” In this paper, the areas analysed will certainly evidence the implicit degree of perplexity and fascination in the passages analysed and in the selected expressions of WONDER.

Two publications that discuss the role of wonder in literary contexts are those by Walker (1997) and Brewer (2016), who also offer an analysis of the emotion that is applicable to the material analysed here. Walker (1997: 3) begins by defining wonder as “a recognition of the singularity and significance of the thing encountered,” explaining that “only that which is really different from the knower can trigger wonder.” However, Walker (1997: 7) also remarks that wonder is closely related to “hybrids and monsters also found in the literature of entertainment.” Brewer (2016: 5) defines wonder as “a form of positive affect,” while acknowledging that wonder has “‘negative affect’ cousins in fear, dread and horror, as well as awe and reverence, suggesting that it defies strict categorisation as a positive feeling.” Indeed, these considerations are consistent with the description of mixed emotional phenomena by Menninghaus et al. (2017; 2019) or González et al. (2017), for whom emotions that combine both positive and negative valence are experienced much more intensely.

The categories that Walker (1997) and Brewer (2016) proposed for the literary models of wonder were also taken into consideration for the distributions of occurrences from the Old English poetic corpus into categories. Walker (1997) points out three categories: 1) a theological and philosophical approach to wonder, which is not entirely applicable in the case of Old English due to the lack of philosophical writings; 2) wonder in homilies and hagiography; 3) wonder in the literature of entertainment. Dailey (2012) further develops these categories and applies them to Old English literature. Her analysis highlights how the type of wonder that is related to the miracles and supernatural phenomena differs from the more basic wonder that will be discussed in this paper.

Brewer (2016: 5) similarly points out five distinguishing features that characterise phenomena that elicit wonder, namely that "(1) they are novel; (2) they cause excitement; (3) they are unexplained; (4) they create a desire to understand; and (5) their propensity to induce wonder is dulled with experience." Brewer (2016) explains the evolutionary purpose of wonder, from a strictly utilitarian emotion to an aesthetic one:

If wonder transforms a new phenomenon into knowledge, then its function is learning. Given that humans are the most intelligent animals on the planet and that intelligence has been a large part of our evolutionary success story, wonder should not be underestimated as a mere aesthetic emotion (Brewer 2016: 28).

This particular definition and aspect of wonder will be evident in two of the domains analysed in this paper, the contemplation of natural phenomena and the role of wonder in the Old English Riddles. In Dailey's view (2012: 465), wonder and its evocation through the Old English terms for wonder, "initiates the sequence *admiratio*, *questio*, *investigatio* and *inventio* (wonder, questioning, investigation and discovery), but once knowledge is 'achieved', wonder is dissolved and replaced by the discovered form of knowing." Therefore, wonder has to be understood with regards to the role that it plays in human processes of knowledge acquisition as well as in the literary dimension in which it has traditionally been analysed as regards the literature of entertainment.

3. WONDER and beauty

It is not uncommon to find terms for wonder co-occurring alongside other Old English aesthetic emotion markers for the experience of beauty, as some of them have been described in Minaya (2019; 2020 or 2021). In these cases, appearance, brightness, clothes, ornaments, colours or even engravings are expressed as beautiful by means of the most common poetic terms to designate beauty or beautiful objects and entities, while the terms for wonder assume a secondary role in the aesthetic evaluation, rendering amazement as a result of the preceding aesthetic evaluation, as, for example, excerpts (1) and (2) emphasise:

- (1) Cymeð wundorlic Cristes **onsyn**, æpelcyninges wlite, eastan fram roderum. (*Christ A,B,C* 910)²
‘the wonderful appearance of Christ, the beauty of his countenance, came east from the sky.’³
- (2) Ac þæt is wundorlic **wlite** and beorhtnes þe wuhta gehwæs **wlite** geberhteð. (*Met* 21.31)
‘the wonderful beauty and brightness that every creature has when their countenances are brightened.’

In these examples, among other, terms for wonder flavour the experience of beauty, but they also serve as an introduction to the connection between beauty and wonder, which is the focus of this section. In the examples that will be discussed in this category, contrary to examples (1) and (2), terms for wonder render the foremost aesthetic response.

Describing material objects, terms for wonder evaluate the excellent material qualities of objects and how they are perceived, without explicitly referring to the idea of beauty:

² I will follow the practice of placing the main term under discussion in boldface and underline the secondary terms. In these excerpts, which are extracted from the *DOEC*, vowel length is not marked.

³ The translation proposed for these extracts is my own.

- (3) þær se beorhta beag, brogden wundrum eorcnanstanum, eadigra gehwam hlifað ofer heafde. (*Phoen* 602)

‘there, the bright crown is cast with wonderful precious stones; it stands out prominently over the heads of the blessed ones.’

In this example, the excellence and appearance of the Phoenix’s crown (a metaphor for its halo, referencing the haloes of the blessed souls) causes wonder, and it is experienced with vastness (OE *hlifian* ‘to tower up, be prominent’), one of the compulsory features of the experience of AWE (Keltner and Haidt 2003). The jewels are indicative and reflective of brightness and this image adds to the positive perception of the halo, which is appreciated in exclusively positive terms as indicative of divinity. In this example, it can also be seen how terms for brightness and light (OE *beorht*) are often found in positive aesthetic emotion contexts, often acting as emotion markers (Minaya 2021). A similar situation as far as the material excellence of OE *wundor* is concerned can be found in the Old English *Judith*:

- (4) Gefrægen ic ða Holofernus winhatan wyrcean georne ond eallum **wundrum** þrymlíc girwan up swæsendo. (*Jud* 7)

‘I’ve heard it said that Holofernes made an earnest invitation to wine and many wonders, serving glorious meals.’

The food that Holofernes serves is a wonder in itself, because of its taste and quality. This is further emphasised by the adjective OE *þrymlíc* ‘glorious, magnificent’. Both these evaluations take place at sensory levels, the visual and the gustatory, indexing the amazement that results from excellence, but without lexically indicating pleasantness, tastiness or appealing appearance.

However, in most of the cases, though wonder is the main emotion in a given example, there are also mentions to beauty. In cases (1) and (2), wonder was chiefly rendered by OE *wundorlic*, the adjective. Therefore, it made reference to additional qualities that modulated the experience of beauty. Conversely, in the excerpts in this category, the

process is the inverse: the experience of wonder is the core emotional phenomenon, while lexis for beauty contribute to the example's explanation of what is additionally appealing about this marvel or excellent object. Take this example:

- (5) þonne of þam ade æples gelicnes on þære ascan bið eft gemeted,
of þam weaxeð wurm, **wundrum** fæger, swylce he of ægerum ut
alæde, scir of scylle. (*Phoen* 230)

'then something similar to an apple is found on the ashes; from it, a worm grows, a beautiful wonder, as it exits the egg, shining from the shell.'

The noun OE *wundor* is applied to the worm and to its process of rebirth, which takes a new shape from the embers of its funeral pyre. From inside the egg, the worm breaks the shell and this action in itself is said to be a beautiful wonder. This evaluation operates in two levels: in the supernatural causality of the event, which is the cause for wonder and in the aesthetic appeal of the Phoenix. The following two excerpts depict this relation between beauty and wonder more directly:

- (6) ðonne **wundriað** weras ofer eorþan wlite ond wæstmā. (*Phoen* 331)

'then people on the Earth marvel at the beauty and shape [of the Phoenix].'

- (7) þeoda wlitad, **wundrum** wafiað, hu seo wilgedryht wildne weorþiað.
(*Phoen* 341)

'people look at them, marvelling at the wonder, how the wild, glad band honour him.'

In the first example, the object of the evaluation is the shape of the bird, which, due to its beauty, causes amazement. In the second example, however, the wonder is not the shape and beauty of the

Phoenix, but the multitude that honours and worships it. Both excerpts showcase lexis related to visual perception (OE *wlitan*) or an emphasis on visual qualities (OE *wlite* and *wæstm*). Similar remarks to those made in (6) can be found in *Juliana*:

- (8) Duguð **wafade** on þære fæmnan wlite. (*Ju*/162)

‘the multitude looked with wonder at the woman’s beauty.’

The verb OE *wafian* is applied to the wonder that Juliana’s beauty represents. Because her beauty is a moral one, and it is perceived throughout the poem as a luminous sort of beauty, those who look upon her marvel at it. Beauty, once again, causes wonder in a strictly positive sense. Nevertheless, in this example, the emphasis is placed on wonder, by means of the verb, while beauty is the object that it refers to.

Brightness and abundance of colour, lexical domains that act as figurative aesthetic emotion markers as Minaya (2021) discusses, are similarly applied to objects that cause both wonder and beauty. Take these two examples:

- (9) Geher nu an spell be ðæm ofermodum unrihtwisum eorðan cyningum, ða her nu manegum and mislicum wædum wlitebeorhtum **wundrum** scinað on heahsetlum, hrofe getenge, golde gegerede and gimcynnum, utan ymbestandne mid unrime ðegna and eorla. (*Met* 25.1)

‘Hear now a story about proud and unrighteous earthly kings, them who in beauty-bright and variegated clothing shine wondrously on their high throne, near the roof, adorned with gold and precious stones, surrounded by their standing thanes and earls.’

- (10) þis leohte beorht cymeð morgna gehwam ofer misthleoðu wadan ofer wægas **wundrum** gegierwed, ond mid ærdæge eastan snoweð wlitig ond wynsum wera cneorissum. (*OrW* 57)

‘this bright light comes up every morning over the mist-covered hills, going over its way wonderfully dressed, and in the early day it proceeds from the east, beautiful and pleasant for men.’

Just as terms for beauty are found in excerpts where the outer, exceedingly pleasant appearance of a given person conceals an unjust and morally deplorable way of acting, so are terms for wonder, as example (9) attests, where OE *wundor* is used in a positive aesthetic judgment despite making reference to somebody who is not beautiful in a moral sense. In example (10), the figurative usage of terms for wonder is also appreciable, in which the sun is referred to as being dressed wonderfully, OE *wundor* being used in a personification of the sun, drawing on the usage of wonder-related terms for the description of excellent clothing. This allusion is exclusively sensory and it further stresses the inclusion of wonder-related terms as part of the paradigm of positive aesthetic emotion in Old English poetry.

All in all, while there are two perspectives to the relation between beauty and wonder, whenever terms for beauty are present alongside terms for wonder, the hierarchy that they establish in semantic terms is based on the predominance of terms for beauty over those for wonder most of the times, and the examples mentioned above are but the exception that further proves the rule. When they co-occur, more often than not, wonder words are relegated to rendering the amazement with which the beautiful object being depicted is met, particularly when OE *wundor* is used adjectivally, or when OE *wundorlic* describes this aesthetic object. Notably less frequently, and when OE *wundor* is used nominally and there are adjectives rendering ‘beautiful’, these adjectives comment on the beauty of a given situation or object that causes wonder, not as a result of its beauty, but as a result of other characteristics that include virtue, supernatural causality, and, above all, ability. This is the focus of the next section, which discusses a group of attestations that evaluate objects as wonders resulting from an evaluation of their beauty or the skill involved in their manufacture, without explicitly alluding to beauty.

4. WONDER and craft

The role between some aesthetic emotion markers and the notions of engraving, intricacy and ornamentation has been discussed before, for example in the adjective OE *wrætlic* (Ramey 2017; Minaya 2021). Often, this adjective is found in aesthetic evaluations of stonework, jewels and battle gear, referring to the beauty triggered by them and their engraved patterns. Terms for wonder similarly evaluate these objects and other manually wrought items and refer to them as a wonder or wonderful thing in an evaluation of the skill that is involved in their creation.

Regarding stonework, there are three instances in the Old English poetic corpus that describe aesthetic objects that are the result of skilled masonry using OE *wundor*.

- (11) Stondeð nu on laste leofre duguþe weal **wundrum** heah, wyrmlicum fah. (*Wan* 97)

'[what's left of the tribe] is a standing wall of wondrous height, carved with reptilian figures.'

- (12) Is ðeos burch breome geond Breotenrice, steppa gestaðolad, stanas ymbutan **wundrum** gewæxen (*Dur* 1)

'this is a famous city in Britain, founded in a steep place, the stones around it wondrously produced.'

- (13) *hygerof gebond weallwalan* wirum **wundrum** togædre (*Ruin* 12)

'the strong-minded bound the wall's foundation together wonderfully with ornamental wires.'

In the first example, in the world of desolation that is found in *The Wanderer*, this wall stands out as a cultural reflection of the extinct tribe that left it behind. It is experienced as vast (OE *heāh* 'high'), which

causes wonder. This is a typical feature of the experience of AWE, but in this case the subject does not need to accommodate their mental structures in order to fully comprehend the object standing before them. Instead, the pattern in it, *wyrmlicu fah*, is pointed out as contributing to the wonder that the height and artistry of the wall causes. In the second example, the city of Durham's placement is discussed. It was once built on steep slopes (OE *steāp*), hinting at sublimity, and enclosed wonderfully with stones. In this case, OE *wundor* refers to the way in which these stones are carved and placed around the city, the excellent quality of which causes people to regard it with wonder. The last example discusses the creative act as a wonder.

In the Old English poem *Exodus*, there is mention of the marvellous things that God gives Moses as a result of his appreciation for him:

- (14) [God] mid his sylfes miht gewyrðode, and him **wundra** fela in æht
forgeaf. (*Ex* 8)

'God, with his might, valued Moses, and gave him many wonders in his possession.'

Initially, there is no further comment on what these wonders are and, as is the case of most of the instances in the complete poetic corpus, when there is no specific detail as to what these wonders as gifts from God are, they usually refer to fruits of the earth and water. However, several lines ahead, this is further explained:

- (15) heah wæs þæt handlean and him hold frea, gesealde **wæpna**
geweald wið wraðra gryre (*Ex* 19)

lofty was the recompense given by the hand of the gracious Lord,
he gave [Moses] weapons to wield against the terrors of evil.'

These wonders are weapons, which according to Ramey's (2017) and Minaya's (2021) analyses of OE *wræltic*, are often referred to as objects of beauty and wonder and are evaluated taking into account the craft

behind their manufacture as well as their physically observable qualities. More detailed depictions of battle gear are found in *Beowulf*.

- (16) se hwita helm hafelan werede, [...] since geweorðad, befongen freawrasnum, swa hine fyrndagum worhte wæpna smið, **wundrum** teode, besette swinlicum, þæt hine syðþan no brond ne beadomecas bitan ne meahton. (*Beo* 1448)

‘the bright helmet guarded his head [...] made worthy with treasure, encircled with noble chains, just like the weapon-smith made it in the olden days, formed wonderfully, set with images of boars, so that no fire-brand or battle-sword would ever bite it.’

- (17) ða wæs gylden hilt gamelum rince, harum hildfruman, on hand gyfen, enta ærgeweorc. Hit on æht gehwearf æfter deofla hryre Denigea frean, **wundorsmiþa** geweorc. (*Beo* 1677)

‘then the golden hilt was now the possession of the lord of the Danes, piece of workmanship of wonderfully skilful smiths, the ancient treasure of giants was hand-given to the old warrior, hoary battle-leader.’

The helmet that Beowulf wears is described with all the recurrent early medieval English ornamental elements, OE *sinc* ‘treasure, gold, silver or jewels’ and OE *freāwrāsen* ‘noble chains’, and it is decorated with images of boars (*besette swinlicum*). In the second example, the hilt of the sword is described quite similarly, indexing the idea of wonder in the compound OE *wundorsmiþ* ‘smith who creates wonderful things’. Ultimately, this beauty and appealing visual qualities are all a reflection of the skill with which the weapon-smiths work the helmet and the weapon and turn them into wonderful works of art, even though they are generally perceived as utilitarian objects.⁴ In short, skill is

⁴ Following on Scherer (2005) and Juslin (2013) aesthetic emotion is supposed to be triggered after the contemplation and appraisal of objects from a non-pragmatic perspective. That is to say, while these objects serve a function, they are not evaluated in terms of how useful they are, but

sometimes a necessary trait to create material objects that trigger wonder.

Indeed, *Beowulf* is filled with such pieces of jewels, ornaments and woven banners, it being the only poem that takes poetic pleasure in the description of these elements as unlinked from religious or supernatural connotations or without using them in order to reflect on the transience of earthly goods. For example:

(18) *byrelas sealdon win of **wunderfatum**. (Beo 1160)*

'cup-bearers poured wine from wonderful vessels.'

Continuing with different compounds containing OE *wundor*, this example draws from this term to accomplish two things: maintaining the alliteration in the clause and aesthetically describing the excellence of the wine container. Carrying on the alliterative pattern that describes an object aesthetically, the following two excerpts also use OE *wundor* thus:

(19) *Geseah ða sigehreðig, þa he bi sesse geong, magoþegn modig maððumsigla fealo, gold glitinian grunde getenge, **wundur** on wealle, ond þæs wyrmes denn, ealdes uhtflogan, orcas stonan. (Beo 2756)*

'Then, when Wiglaf, proud retainer, went triumphant around the seat, he saw many precious treasures, glinting gold near the ground, wonders on the wall, and a pitcher standing on the den of the dragon, the old dawn flier.'

(20) *Uton nu efstan oðre siðe, seon ond secean searogimma geþræc, **wundur** under wealle. (Beo 3101)*

with regards to whether they are aesthetically pleasing or not, attending to intrinsic qualities as opposed to pragmatic qualities.

'Let us haste once more to see and seek the pile of gems, wonders under the walls.'

When Wiglaf goes back to inspect the dragon's den, he is amazed by the amount of treasure and precious things that it holds, including these wonders on the wall. They are appreciated exclusively because of their beauty, manufacture and worth. In example (20), when Wiglaf is making his speech ordering the men to go into the dragon's den to retrieve jewels for Beowulf's funeral pyre, there is a clear emphasis on the skill that is necessary to shape these jewels, rendered by the first part in the compound *searugim*, OE *searu* 'design, craft, skill'. This idea is more explicitly rendered in the following example, describing a banner that is also found in the dragon's den:

- (21) Swylce he siomian geseah segn eallgylden heah ofer horde, **hondwundra** mæst, gelocen leoðocræftum; of ðam leoma stod, þæt he þone grundwong ongitan meahte, wræte giondwilitan. (*Beo* 2767)

'He saw an all-golden banner, high over the hoard, a great hand-made wonder, woven with skill; from it, light extended so he could perceive the floor, look upon the jewels.'

This banner's beauty is implicit in the references to gold (OE *ealgylden*) and on the fact that it casts light (OE *leōma*), but the central idea in its relationship with wonder is the fact that this beauty is a result of manual skill (OE *handwundor*). Skilled creation (implicit in the resulting beautiful object) is the ultimate cause of wonder in those contexts where there is not a religious assessment of reality.

Such is the case of the usage of terms for wonder in the different Old English riddles. The role of wonder in the riddles is explained in more detail by Dailey (2012), who explores the pedagogical purpose of describing the objects in the riddles with words of wonder beyond simply creating a veil and an aura of mystery around the objects that prevents the subject from initially identifying them. In the case of some riddles, this experience of wonder is indeed genuine, as Nelson (1978:

613) explains. However, in other cases, the wonder evoked is merely a stylistic recourse, as is the case of the usage of OE *wrætlīc* in these same riddles: “The riddles [...] [invoke] wonder to affect a salutary ordering of the relation of a person (and this person’s mind) to the surrounding world [...]. In the riddles, wonder coupled with curiosity becomes a lure for knowing something” (Dailey 2012: 468). In the riddles, the usage of OE *wrætlīc* in the alliterative pair *wrætlīc wiht* ‘wondrous creature’ was frequent and it served the purpose of distorting the subject’s perception of the object with these words that evoke an aura of mystery and strangeness that eventually disappears when the solution (or a possible solution) to the riddle is deciphered. OE *wundorlīc* is similarly applied to OE *wiht* ‘creature’ with similar aims to progressively describe the object, for instance:

- (22) Ic eom **wunderlicu** wiht; ne mæg word sprecan, mældan for monnum, þeah ic muþ hæbbe, wide wombe. (*Rid* 18 1)

‘I am a wonderful creature, I cannot speak, converse with men, though I have mouth and a wide womb.’

- (23) Ic seah **wundorlice** wiht; wombe hæfde micle þrypum geþrungne. (*Rid* 87 1)

‘I saw a wondrous creature; its great womb was powerfully swollen.’

These creatures and objects of wonder are, in truth, extremely mundane objects, and there is nothing in the process of their creation that could make them equal in any way to the jewels and precious objects described in the preceding pages. Solution to (22) is unclear, as is that of example (23), but Williamson (2017: 1154 and 1169) proposes an amphora or a similar wine container and bellows, respectively. Whatever the case, though wine containers are aesthetically appraised, bellows are not a part of the aesthetic paradigm of early medieval English poetry and, possibly, not even part of the everyday aesthetically appealing objects that, incidentally, were not described as beautiful in poetry. In the riddles, the alliterative pair OE *wundorlīc wiht* should be

taken as a poetic recourse that draws from the emotional and evocative force in the root OE *wund-* to create mystery at the very beginning of the riddle.

However, in the riddles, other objects that are described as OE *wundorlic* or by means of OE *wundor* are consistent with the preceding descriptions of hand-wrought items. For example:

- (24) Ic wiht geseah on wege feran, seo wæs wrætlice **wundrum** gegierwed. (*Rid* 36 1)

'I saw a creature traveling on the way; it was beautifully and wondrously adorned.'

- (25) Mec se wæta wong, **wundrum** freorig, of his innape ærist cende. (*Rid* 35 1)

'The wet field, a frozen wonder, from its inside first brought me forth.'

- (26) Eom ic gumcynnes anga ofer eorþan; is min agen bæc wonn ond **wundorlic**. (*Rid* 88 17)

'I am unique among mankind through the earth; my own back is dark and wonderful.'

These three instances describe, respectively, a ship, a coat of mail and an inkpot (Williamson 2017: 1158 and 1180). Coat of mail and ships are indeed present in other descriptions that feature aesthetic emotion lexis. In the three cases, the possibility that these usages of OE *wundor* or *wundorlic* indicate superb qualities (among which, the necessary skill that creating them entails) that cause amazement is perfectly plausible.

All in all, after an analysis of the attestations that feature Old English terms for wonder as applied to manual skill and hand-wrought items, it becomes clear that there is a tendency to describe these objects and the ability that is involved in their creation with great poetic attention. While terms for beauty focus on the beauty that results from this ability, terms for wonder render the final emotion felt by the subject after

beholding it: in some cases, this emotion is an emotion of amazement, not only at its sensory qualities, but, on a cognitive level, there is some degree of awe and respect implicit in these evaluations. Even if some excerpts showcase features that are typical of aesthetic emotions that are more oriented towards the negative spectrum, like vastness in the experience of awe, the usage of the Old English terms for wonder as connected with beauty and craft does not contain any negative stimuli that could orient these emotion episodes towards mixed emotional phenomena.

5. WONDER in the natural world

Nature is filled with such beautiful, enigmatic and perplexing objects and circumstances so that it is not uncommon to find terms for wonder evaluating natural phenomena. In Old English verse, there are two main perspectives in the aesthetic contemplation of the natural world: one, from a non-religious perspective, where the subject reflects on the nature of the event that they are beholding without linking it to God, and another that connects a given natural wonder with the larger role of God as the ultimate artist and creator. In this section, I will focus on the former, while further publications will discuss the relation between wonder, the miracle and the unknown.

Most of the excerpts that feature this usage are found in texts that do not have a religious background, chiefly the Old English *Meters of Boethius* and the riddles. Starting with the *Meters of Boethius*, the narrator refers to several natural processes, but the emphasis is more prominently placed on the contemplation of the firmament:

- (27) Hwa is moncynnes þæt ne **wundrie** ymb þas witegan tungl, hu hy sume habbað swiðe micle scyrtran ymbehwerft, sume scriðað leng utan ymb eall ðis? (*Met* 28.5)

'Who among mankind does not wonder at the beautiful stars, how some of them have a shorter orbit and some of them have a longer revolution around the earth?'

The stars are deemed beautiful (OE *wlitig*), but this characteristic is not what makes them a wonderful phenomenon, but rather the fact that some of them have shorter orbit (OE *ymbhwyrft* 'circular course') than others. This example does feature some degree of need for accommodation, since the reader needs to alter their mental structures to perceive the vastness and to try to understand the way in which the firmament operates. In this case, the experience of wonder and the implicit flavouring feature of beauty come closer to the experience of awe, though it is not lexically rendered. The fact that the stars do not shine during the day is also a matter of wonder:

- (28) Hwa þegna ne mæge eac **wafian** ælces stiorran, hwy hi ne scinen scirum wederum beforan ðære sunnan, swa hi symle doð middelnihum wið þone monan foran, hadrum heofone? (*Met* 28.44)
- 'What men do not wonder at every star and why they do not shine in clear weather before the sun, like they always do in the middle of the night against the moon, the light of the skies?'

This natural event causes the narrator in *Boethius* to be perplexed and they express it by means of the verb OE *wafian*, which refers to aesthetic contemplation, which, in this case, is oriented towards the wonders in the natural world. Similar remarks are made as regards the length of the day in the same text:

- (29) Hwæt, ðu, fæder, wercest sumurlange dagas swiðe hate, þæm winterdagum **wundrum** sceorta tida getiohhast. (*Met* 4.18)
- 'So, father, you work summer-long days, so hot, into such wonderfully short winter-days.'

In this example, even though there is an explicit reference to God (OE *fæder*), the emphasis is on how the course of nature is to move from long and hot summer days (an idea that is recurrently alluded to in the Old English corpus by means of the adjective OE *sumerlang* 'long as

summer days') to the days in winter the duration of which is so short compared to that of summer days that it becomes a matter of astonishment. These instances remarkably stress the role of wonder in the subject's acquisition of knowledge, an idea that is emphasised by Brewer (2016: 28), who points out that the phenomena that trigger wonder cause a desire to understand. In these cases, the firmament offers more questions than answers, and the narrator can only wonder and wish to understand the dynamics behind these processes.

Some of the excerpts in *Meters of Boethius* also ponder about human nature and its relation to wonder. These two excerpts are the most explicit:

- (30) Hwæt, nu hæleða fela swelces and swelces swiðe **wundrað**, and **ne wundrað** þætte wuhta gehwilc, men and netenu, micelne habbað and unnetne andan between him, swiðe singalne. (*Met* 28.49)

'There are many men that, much in the same way, wonder and do not wonder at every creature, man and beast, and how they have useless envy for each other, without ceasing.'

- (31) Ne þincð þæt **wundor micel** monna ænegum þæt he mægge gesion dogora gehwilce, ac ðæt dysie folc þæs hit seldnor gesihð swiðor wundrað, þeah hit wisra gehwæm wundor ðince on his modsefan micle læsse (*Met* 28.64)

'Men do not deem a great wonder that which they can see every day, but these unwise people wonder more at what they seldom see; even if it is a great wonder, their minds think it is much less.'

Human contemplation of earthly life and human and animal interaction are areas in which the experience of wonder is often found, as example (30) attests. Moreover, example (31) also exemplifies how the appraisal

of novelty is,⁵ in certain cases, fundamental to aesthetic experience. It develops the idea that what is novel is more likely to be experienced more intensely than what is familiar, even if the familiar, in given cases, is more of a wonder than the novel.

However, the marvels of the natural world (as detached from the religious) are more explicitly developed and expressed with wonder in the riddle format. This idea that is partially developed by Dailey (2012), whose paper focuses on wonder as a response to the riddles without necessarily considering or predicting the experience of wonder that these wonder-related terms aim at triggering or rendering. For instance, *Riddle 47* refers to moths that damaged manuscripts as a wonder and a beautiful event at the same time, but, by far, water, in all its forms, is one of the most recurrent wonders described in the riddles:

- (32) An wiht is on eorþan **wundrum** acenned, hreoh ond reþe, hafað ryne strongne, grimme grymetað ond be grunde fareð (*Rid* 84 1)

‘this lonely creature is born from wonders, rough and fierce; it has a strong course, roars grimly and travels around the ground.’

- (33) Biþ sio moddor mægene eacen, **wundrum** bewreþed, wistum gehladen, hordum gehroden, hæleþum dyre. (*Rid* 84 21)

‘Our mother’s might is eternal, upheld by wonders, laden with food, adorned with hoard, dear to men.’

- (34) Hrusan bið heardra, hæleþum frodra, geofum bið gearora, gimmum deorra; worulde wlitigað, wæstmum tydreð, firene dwæsceð, oft utan beweorpeð anre þecene, **wundrum** gewlitegad, geond werþeode, þæt **wafiað** weras ofer eorþan. (*Rid* 84 36)

⁵ As it is discussed in Minaya (2021), testing whether the appraisal of novelty pointed out by Menninghaus et al. (2019) was involved in most aesthetic evaluations or otherwise should be one of the objectives of diachronic research in the expression of aesthetic emotions.

'It is harder than the earth, more prudent than men, older than mankind, dearer than gems; it beautifies the world, nourishes the fruits, puts out wicked deeds, and often out of one roof it is thrown down, wondrously beautiful across tribes, so that men marvel over the earth.'

Water, for all its transformative properties, is referred to in many different ways in this riddle: it is a creature (OE *wihþ*) and a mother (OE *mōdor*), it is hard (OE *heard*), rough (OE *hrēōh*) and fierce (OE *rēðe*), and it roars (OE *grymetan*); it produces food (OE *wist* and *wæstm*) and it plays an important role in baptism, washing away sins (OE *firen*). All this causes men to be perplexed by these powers and abilities that they try to apprehend, an idea that is rendered by many different attestations of OE *wundor* and *wafian*, but also as connected to beauty as the collocation of OE *wlitegian* alongside *wundor* attests. Yet, the nourishing and powerful qualities of water are not the only features that make it a wonder, but also the fact that it can change states:

(35) **Wundor** wearð on wege; wæter wearð to bane. (*Rid* 69 1)

'The wonder was the wave, water turned into bone.'

The fact that water (OE *wæg* 'wave' but also 'water') can change states from liquid to solid (metaphorically represented by OE *bān* 'bone'), as Williamson (2017: 1165) explains, is not easily fathomable for the early medieval English mind. Other poems also talk about water's semi-miraculous properties, like the *Meters of Boethius*:

(36) Eorðe sio cealde brengð wæstma fela **wundorlicra**, forðæm hio mid þæm wætere weorðað gepawened. (*Met* 20.100)

'The cool earth produces many wonderful fruits because it is moistened with water.'

In the chapter on positive aesthetic experience, the beauty of this liquid in large bodies of water is emphasised once again. To this depiction of its beauty, the aesthetic emotion markers that render wonder add a more cognitive layer of evaluation that, as is the case of most of the preceding 34 excerpts analysed, is exclusively positive.

Three more riddles evaluate four additional natural objects that are supposed to induce wonder. *Riddle 29* focuses on two celestial bodies that, much like water, have an important role in people's lives, the sun and moon:

(37) Ic wiht geseah **wundorlice** hornum bitweonum hupe lædan, lyftfæt
leohtlic. (*Rid* 29 1)

'I saw a wonderful creature, with its treasure between the horns,
illuminated aerial vessel.'

(38) ða cwom **wundorlicu** wiht ofer wealles hrof. (*Rid* 29 7)

'then came another amazing creature over the roof of the cave.'

The usage of OE *wiht* is reminiscent of the initial collocation that opens most riddles, combining it with either *wrætlic* or *wundorlic*, and, in this sense, it seems to have, above all, an alliterative and metric function, rather than render lexically a given experience of wonder or aim at triggering one. Nevertheless, their usage further emphasises the natural as an avenue for the experience of wonder, which is not limited only to water and heavenly bodies, but also to fire:

(39) Wiga is on eorþan **wundrum** acenned dryhtum to nytte, of dumbum
twam torht atyhted. (*Rid* 50 1)

'A warrior is wondrously born on the earth, useful for many, from the
mute pair brightly allured.'

Fire, like water, is *wundrum acenned* 'wondrously conceived', as the early medieval English mind cannot fully comprehend how it is that they came to be, or how, for example, fire is made from two stones. The experience of wonder, therefore, always includes some degree of unknowability that puzzles the subject. This is further reinforced by the *Meters of Boethius*, in which things that are common knowledge or logical for everybody are said not to be a wonder, for example the fact that new-borns come from man and woman in *Met* 17.7 or that a 'wonder' that is cold cannot be hot at the same time in *Met* 20.79.

All things considered, the experience of wonder in the natural world without religious implications is a notably limited theme in the Old English poetic corpus, and it stems from a very precise textual context: the translation of Boethius' *De consolacione Philosophiae* into Old English verse and the playful and extremely figurative early medieval English *Riddles*, which are essentially figurative. These natural wonders are limited to heavenly bodies, water, fire, the sun and the moon and, in some cases, they exhibit appraisals like need for accommodation that efface the line between awe and wonder, but, since the appraisal of vastness is not present, nor is there an appreciation of threat or supernatural causality, the experience remains closer to the latter. This group of attestations also shows, in early medieval writings, how aesthetic objects that were novel were more often met with positive aesthetic emotions and these were more intensely experienced.

6. Concluding remarks

The excerpts analysed in this paper, which are the result of a fine-grained categorisation of the existing attestations of the Old English terms for wonder evidence that, to a certain extent and pending the assessment of the occurrences for wonder that involve the appraisal of supernatural causality, this emotion stands out as a fundamentally positive one. The poetic strategies at play that can be seen in some of these occurrences draw on the evocation of the emotional responses

implicit in the Old English lexical domain of wonder to involve the audience and readership in a process of aesthetic contemplation and knowledge acquisition. Furthermore, this evidences the audience's relationship with the poems discussed here, ranging from a taste for the appreciation of natural phenomena and objects of excellent manufacture, to the utilitarian role of wonder in the identification of the object described in the riddles.

Contrasting the excerpts analysed and discussed here with Fingerhut and Prinz's (2020: 116) description of wonder, it can be seen how wonder operates along three different axes: perceptually, there is a fascination with objects that are visually appealing; cognitively, a degree of puzzlement and fascination with the manufacture and inner workings of the aesthetic reality that is being contemplated can as well be appreciated; finally, a degree of reverence is also implicit in the ways in which the contemplation of objects of beauty that trigger wonder seems to imply a reverence towards the artist that manufactured it. In this sense, the excerpts that have been analysed here also observer Brewer's (2016: 5) key points as regards the experience of wonder: novel objects do, indeed, trigger wonder more frequently while their repeated experience dulls and diminishes the intensity of the emotion that is felt, as example (31) clearly attested, this wonder commonly results in excitement and perplexity, as well as in a desire to understand.

Generally speaking, there is a dual potential to the emotion of wonder in these groups analysed here. The most fundamental wonder experience lies at the base of the emotion process: it initiates a process of acquisition of knowledge. More complex is the experience of a wonder that results from the contemplation of an aesthetic reality even if different appraisals are involved in it. As such, the contemplation of nature does feature an even more complex and multi-layered type of wonder, insofar as the appraisals involve an evaluation of its inner workings, but there is also an appraisal of beauty, the experience of which acts as an emotional input. Similar to this is the contemplation of these exquisitely manufactured objects: while they are appraised drawing on their apparent beauty, there is a degree of perplexity and reverence towards the skill involved in their creation.

In terms of appraisals and sub-emotional component, it can be seen how the experience of wonder is an emotion that does belong to the emotion family of AMAZEMENT alongside AWE. In the selected texts, the emotional experience comes close to the emotion of AWE as described by Keltner and Haidt (2003), with the marked difference that, in some cases, the two mandatory appraisals in the experience of AWE (vastness and need for accommodation) are not always present at the same time. It remains to be determined whether the appraisal of supernatural causality (an appraisal that is said to be a flavouring or peripheral one in the experience of AWE) can be responsible for turning these fundamentally positive emotions into emotional experiences of a mixed nature. While this will be the focus of further publications, the main conclusion to be derived from this paper is that the experience of WONDER in Old English texts is an extremely complex and important emotion that not only operates at aesthetic levels but also in utilitarian contexts. Like most other aesthetic emotions, this emotion contributes to the description of extremely appealing and fascinating objects and to the creation and description of wonderfully stimulating images and circumstances, in this case, for the sake of aesthetic pleasure in itself.

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