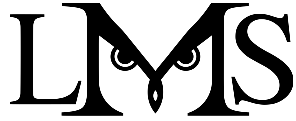

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The Animality of Work and Craft in Early Medieval English Literature

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James Paz

Abstract

Does the ability to craft make us human? Some modern philosophers have seen humanity in its role of *homo faber* as distinct from and superior to other animals. They contend that human workers manufacture with a creativity that animals do not possess. However, other scholars have argued that animals can be understood as both workers and crafters. Recent scientific studies have even shown that animals can use tools to manipulate their environments in sophisticated ways. This article brings such findings and debates into conversation with the earliest English literature. It examines when, where and how animal *weorc* (painful, passive suffering) shades into animal *cræft* (purposeful, active making) in Old English and Anglo-Latin texts. A wide range of sources, from Ælfric's *Colloquy* to the riddles of the Exeter Book, represent animals as workers who labour for, with and alongside humans. But do these animals ever display technical skill? While some early medieval writers viewed craft as a quality that makes us human, there are also multiple examples of literary animals who can craft as well as work, create as well as labour. Ultimately, I argue that we should situate representations of early medieval *weorc* and *cræft* within a continuum that includes both human and nonhuman actors, from the drudgery of the ploughman and the ox to the artistry of the goldsmith and the phoenix.

Introduction

When confronted with the question of what makes us human, some philosophers have answered that it is the ability to craft.[1] That is, the very act of making makes us human. The political philosopher Hannah Arendt, for example, sees humanity in its role of *homo faber* as distinct from animals and divided from nature. Other scholars would disagree. The sociologist Jason Hribal and anthropologist Tim Ingold have proposed that nonhuman animals should be understood as both workers and crafters, while the philosopher of technology, Ashley Shew, has contended that animals possess technological knowledge.[2] Such debates did not begin with modernity. In an early medieval English context, the Alfredian translator of the Old

[1] I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for *Leeds Medieval Studies* for their very helpful, constructive feedback on this article. My thanks, too, to Alaric Hall for additional editorial guidance and suggestions.

[2] See further Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Jason

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English *Boethius* understands craft as a gift from God loaned to human beings, while the counsellor in Ælfric's *Colloquy* commands that young monks *esto quod es* or *beo þæt þu eart* by performing a craft. And yet, in other Old English literary texts, we find worms and bees whose skills surpass the metalcraft of the smith, birds whose songcraft is more heavenly than the sound of any musical instrument and whales whose devilish craft can overpower fishermen and trick seafarers.

This article contends that early medieval writers were fascinated, and occasionally vexed, by the question of whether humans alone possess the ability to not only labour but create. The article shows that these premodern writers were willing to imagine other-than-human work, craft and creativity and it uncovers a longer literary history of animals working and crafting than has previously been recognised. For modern and premodern authors alike, working and crafting are connected yet subtly different capabilities. In this article, I will survey and analyse moments where animal *weorc* (painful, passive suffering) shades into animal *cræft* (purposeful, active making) in early medieval literary sources. I will examine how the boundaries between nonhuman *weorc* and human *cræft* were constructed and crossed in these texts.

The article focuses on four case studies: first, the Old English *Boethius*; second, Ælfric's *Colloquy*; third, Aldhelm's enigmas and the Exeter Book riddles; fourth, the poems on *The Whale* and *The Phoenix* in the Exeter Book.[3] The Old English *Boethius* emphasises the concept of craft as an inner virtue that separates humans from nonhuman beings, but it also demonstrates that abandoning craft can cause human beings to lose their own humanity and abusing craft can threaten the humanity of others. The *Colloquy* shows how everyday experiences of work and craft are shaped by animals and it represents animals as fellow workers and crafters. Even as the young monks in this dialogue try to rise above animality through intellectual labour, they still model their work on animal work. The Old English and Anglo-Latin riddles invite us to adopt nonhuman perspectives and share in animal experiences of work and craft. These experiences vary from painful work that must be endured to purposeful craft that is more creative. The riddles reveal that work and craft are produced by human-nonhuman collaborations that are sometimes cooperative and sometimes competitive. Finally, *The Whale* and *The Phoenix* depict animals as possessing and performing craft while also revealing how the natural craft of animals reflects both divine creation and devilish anti-creation, with different consequences for the bodies, minds and souls of humankind.

Overall, this article argues for the animality of work and craft in early medieval English literature. While there is evidence that some early medieval writers viewed craft as a quality

C. Hribal, 'Animals are Part of the Working Class: A Challenge to Labor History', *Labor History*, 44 (2003), 435–53; Jason C. Hribal, 'Animals, Agency and Class: Writing the History of Animals from Below', *Human Ecology Review*, 14 (2007), 101–12; Jason C. Hribal, 'Animals are Part of the Working Class Reviewed', *Borderlands*, 11 (2012), 1–37; Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011); Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013); Tim Ingold, *Correspondences* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020); Ashley Shew, *Animal Constructions and Technological Knowledge* (London: Lexington Books, 2017).

3 References to these works will be taken from: *The Old English Boethius with Verse Prologues and Epilogues Associated with King Alfred*, ed. and trans. by Susan Irvine and Malcolm R. Godden (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); *Ælfric's Colloquy*, ed. by G.N. Garmonsway (London: Methuen, 1939); *The Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition*, ed. and trans. by Andy Orchard (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021); *Old English Shorter Poems: Religious and Didactic*, ed. and trans. by Christopher A. Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012). All further references will be provided parenthetically in the main text. Translations, unless otherwise stated, are mine.

that makes us human, this concept of the 'human condition' is a precarious one because the misuse of craft can threaten the human self, turning men and women into wild beasts. What is more, there are multiple examples of animals who can craft as well as work in Old English and Anglo-Latin literature. The natural craft of animals even has implications for the afterlives of humans, lifting us to heaven or luring us into hell. In the earliest English literature, then, work and craft can be dehumanising and lead to the inhumane treatment of other beings. At the same time, work and craft are not inherently human attributes. They are more-than-human capabilities that can be taken up by hardworking, skilled and sometimes creative animals.

My focus in this article is primarily on literary, rather than historical or archaeological, evidence, but I resist reducing literary animals to nothing but metaphorical figures for human workers and crafters. This reading strategy is informed by developments in critical animal studies. These developments have problematised the tendency of literary criticism to dismiss textual animals as mere metaphors, whereby animals always signify something else and thus disappear from the text, rendered passive or silent while reproducing anthropocentric concepts of human complexity. An alternative reading strategy views literary animals as metonymic because, if metaphor functions according to difference, metonymy is characterised by closeness or likeness. Whereas metaphor has been accused of substituting the animal for something else, something other than itself, metonymy is understood as a call for self-signification. But, as Ann-Sofie Lönngren has argued, the literary animal is at once a material organism with its own phenomenological existence and a part of human epistemological systems. Lönngren therefore calls for a reading strategy that acknowledges that the literary animal is situated somewhere in between metaphor and metonymy. Literary animals are both self-signifying actors and saturated with symbolic connotations. It is in the tension between metaphor and metonymy that the 'meanings' of literary animals can be located.[4] In relation to early medieval literature, Megan Cavell argues that even highly metaphorical representations of animals — like those we encounter in Old English riddles and religious allegories — rely on an awareness of actual animal lives and those lives leave a trace in literary sources that might at first seem 'fantastical' to modern readers.[5] Accordingly, my readings of early medieval literature aim to uncover how human writers imagined the animality of work and craft *and* how the labours of actual animals have in turn shaped the human imagination, leaving their tracks in these texts for the reader to follow.

Animal Laborans and *Homo Faber*

Modern theories of craft have, understandably, focused on makers and materials. Richard Sennett and Tim Ingold have challenged models of making in which active, human makers impose preconceived forms upon passive, nonhuman matter. They argue that craft is a way of thinking through making in which the head and hand work together. For Ingold, the mind and body of the craftsperson correspond with tools and materials in the generation of form.[6] For Sennett, materials absorb our attention and shape our consciousness when we work closely

[4] Ann-Sofie Lönngren, 'Metaphor, Metonymy, More-Than-Anthropocentric. The Animal That Therefore I Read (and Follow)', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Animals and Literature*, ed. by Susan McHugh, Robert McKay and John Miller (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 37–50.

[5] Megan Cavell, 'A Community of Exiles: Whale and Human Domains in Old English Poetry', in *Handbook of Animals and Literature*, ed. by Susan McHugh, Robert McKay and John Miller, pp. 97–110 (p. 107).

[6] Ingold, *Making*, p. 31.

with them. Material resistance, and the human ability to deal with this resistance and learn through difficulty, is key to the practice of crafts.[7]

It is not always obvious where animals ought to be situated within these models of making. Are animals creative makers or are they aligned with materials and materiality? Are they a passive part of the environment or can animals actively shape their environments? On the one hand, animals could be considered 'matter' since their bodies are often used as materials and transformed by humans in crafts such as parchment-making or leather-making. On the other hand, animals could be considered 'makers' because they create their own products and structures such as bees making honey, spiders weaving webs, birds building nests or beavers constructing dams.

To accept that animals are makers is to undermine a crucial aspect of human exceptionalism. For instance, Hannah Arendt sees humanity in its role of *homo faber* as superior to other animals. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt draws a distinction between work that is laborious and work that is creative. Labour is any activity that is necessary for the maintenance of life itself. For Arendt, labour is never ending and creates nothing that lasts. Its efforts are quickly consumed and must be renewed perpetually to sustain life. This side of human existence is the closest to animal existence and so Arendt refers to humanity in this mode as *animal laborans*. Because it is bound by necessity, Arendt sees labour as characterised by a lack of freedom and the labouring human as enslaved. In contrast, creative work fabricates an artificial realm of things that endure beyond the act of creation and construct a world that is distinct from anything given in nature. Arendt names this mode of humanity as *homo faber*. The work of *homo faber* encompasses both *techne* (τέχνη) and *poiesis* (ποίησις) and its typical representatives range from the builder and architect to the craftsperson and artist. The work of *homo faber* separates humans from other animals and transforms nature according to human intentions. Whereas the work of *animal laborans* is unfree, the work of *homo faber* frees humanity from the demands of animality.[8]

Sennett picks up on the distinction that his former teacher, Arendt, draws between *homo faber* and *animal laborans*. *Animal laborans* is the human being akin to a beast of burden, a drudge condemned to routine. *Homo faber* is superior to *animal laborans* because, while *animal laborans* is completely absorbed in a task, *homo faber* stops producing and starts evaluating material labour and practice. *Animal laborans* asks 'how?' but *homo faber* asks 'why?' Sennett himself defines craft far more broadly than manual labour and takes issue with Arendt's theory that the human mind only engages once labour is done, arguing that thinking and feeling are contained within the process of making.[9] Nevertheless, Sennett follows Arendt in defining craft as an exceptionally human characteristic. He writes that craftsmanship 'names an enduring, basic human impulse' and that 'the craftsman represents the special human condition of being engaged'.[10] The figure of the craftsman that emerges from Sennett's study remains a human one.

Other scholars have gone further and argued that animals themselves should be understood as both workers and crafters. Jason Hribal, for instance, has posited animals as part of the working class. Hribal's focus is primarily on the role of animals in the development of capitalism in the modern world. But he calls into question the basic assumption that one needs

7 Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press), esp. pp. 119–46, 214–38.
8 Arendt, *Human Condition*. Part III discusses *animal laborans* and Part IV discusses *homo faber*.
9 Sennett, *Craftsman*, pp. 6–7.
10 Sennett, *Craftsman*, pp. 9, 20.

to be a human to be a worker and expands the parameters of the historical 'working class' to include animals, showing that the animal-rights movement was part of the working-class movement by the early nineteenth century and that protest against the exploitation of animal labour was always bound up with class struggle.[11] Tim Ingold, meanwhile, has contended that human acts of making are simply one part in a series of transformations involving creatures of every kind, whereby humans very often take over from where nonhumans have left off. One example that Ingold points to is when humans extract the wax secreted by bees to make the cell walls of the honeycomb for further use in the manufacture of candles. Another is the production of silk, which starts with the consumption of mulberry leaves by the grubs of the moth. One of Ingold's more extended examples of human craft relying on and taking over from products of animal origin is the making of ink and parchment in medieval Europe.[12]

In certain respects, the claim that animals should be considered fellow workers might seem an uncontroversial one. Throughout history, including medieval history, animals have been central to agriculture and industry. Often, though, animal work is regarded as drudgery, the unthinking work of the body. Their labour is dismissed as simple, repetitive and directed by human masters (the ox drawing the plough, the horse pulling the cart, the sheep grazing in the field). They do not create with their minds, but their bodies provide useful products for human tasks and inventions (leather for gloves and shoes, bone for combs or handles, fat and wax for candles). Karl Marx is perhaps the best-known philosopher who subscribed to this view. For Marx, humans change the material form of nature and realise a purpose in this materialisation process. The human worker manufactures with a creativity that other animals do not possess and so, when a bird builds a nest or a beaver constructs a dam, it is instinct and not intelligence that guides their making. For Marx, labour is an exclusively human characteristic.[13]

However, when the drudgery of animal work is recognised as more thoughtful and skilful animal craft, then human-centred models of making come under pressure. The predominant philosophical model of making has long been the hylomorphic one. Hylomorphism supposes that human practitioners impose a form (*morphe*) that is internal to the mind upon external matter (*hyle*). The hylomorphic model tends to reinforce anthropocentrism or, in some iterations, theocentrism, with humans as secondary imitators of divine creation. Creativity begins in the mind of God or man rather than emerging from, or growing out of, the world. Ingold contends that the very notion of humanity 'epitomises the predicament of a creature that can know itself and the world of which it is inextricably a part only by taking itself out of that world and reinscribing itself on another level of being: mental rather than material, cultural rather than natural'.[14] This helps to explain why the hylomorphic model elevates human nature above that of all other creatures. Ingold counters hylomorphism with a morphogenic model of making which softens the distinction between organism and artefact and which sees human making not as the imposition of form but as participation in a form-generation process that is already underway in the nonhuman world around us.[15] Ingold's morphogenic model positions human crafts as dependent upon animal production, but there is also increasing evidence that

[11] Hribal, 'Animals are Part of the Working Class', pp. 436, 453.

[12] Ingold, *Being Alive*, pp. 24–26.

[13] Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I* (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), pp. 283–84. For further, more recent critiques of the contention that animals should be considered workers and a response to these critiques, see Hribal, 'Animals are Part of the Working Class Reviewed', pp. 1–37.

[14] Ingold, *Making*, p. 27.

[15] Ingold, *Making*, p. 27.

animals can fabricate their own products and even display technical capabilities independently of humans.

A profound challenge to human-centred models of making has been put forward by Ashley Shew, who acknowledges that *homo faber* sits at the centre of traditional definitions of technology but counters this view by arguing that many animal constructions, inventions, buildings, tool-making and tool-use should be considered 'technological knowledge'. Shew bases this argument on scientific studies showing that animals can manipulate their environments in significant ways and that their use of tools is far more sophisticated than previously supposed.[16] Whales, for example, are capable of advanced cognition that includes intelligent, rational behaviour and an understanding of how things work and how to manipulate them. Birds, likewise, possess a cognitive sophistication that is demonstrated by their ability to craft and use a variety of tools in ways that involve planning, manufacturing and social learning.[17] The fact that other animals can use tools, convey techniques and make artefacts shows that humanity is coextensive with animality and troubles the human-animal binary upon which the case for *homo faber* depends. The very possibility of a creative animal — of purposeful nonhuman craft — problematises anthropocentric concepts of making.

Some of the theories highlighted above take a wide-ranging historical view of work and craft, but a more focused analysis of the earliest English literature will deepen, enrich and contest modern ideas about how work and craft define and delimit the human condition. This literature deploys the Old English equivalents of my key terms — work (*weorc*) and craft (*cræft*) — in ways that sometimes align with and sometimes challenge their more recent usages. This suggests that modern ideas about work and craft, and about what kinds of beings could be considered workers or crafters, started to take shape in the early medieval period and may still exert an influence on how we understand the humanity — or animality — of work and craft today. But it also suggests that early English literature can unsettle some of the assumptions we have inherited from postmedieval philosophies and political movements. Social reformers such as William Morris looked back to the idealised figure of the medieval craftsman as a way of advocating traditional handicrafts, positioning the beauty and pleasure of craftwork against the evils of mechanised industry.[18] Thanks in large part to Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement, craft is still envisaged as the more pleasurable counterpart to work that must be endured. At its worst, the experience of work is dehumanising whereas craft is usually chosen as a pastime that allows the crafter to express creativity. Craft is imagined as an alternative to inhumane working conditions. This relationship between work as painful suffering and craft as purposeful making has some roots in the Old English language, long before the Arts and Crafts Movement.

What did the words *cræft* and *weorc* mean to Old English writers? In some ways, Old English *cræft* did align with the Modern English sense of *craft* as making things by hand with skill. The *Dictionary of Old English* notes that the most frequent Latin equivalent of Old English *cræft* is *ars* yet neither 'craft' nor 'art' conveys the wide range of meanings of *cræft*.[19]

16 Shew, *Animal Constructions*, pp. 1–3.

17 Shew, *Animal Constructions*, pp. 60–63; 67–89.

18 See further David Matthews, *Medievalism: A Critical History* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), pp. 56–57, and Jan Marsh, 'William Morris and Medievalism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Medievalism*, ed. by Joanne Parker and Corinna Wagner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 507–22.

19 *The Toronto Dictionary of Old English*, ed. by Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey, et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986–), s.v. *cræft*. Henceforth abbreviated as the *TDOE*.

A useful translation is 'skill' but the word has many other senses. *Cræft* is a semantically rich term in Old English. Its definitions include: strength, power, might; physical skill, ability, dexterity; mental or spiritual talent; an art, skill or trade, an organised body of knowledge; craft of mind, cunning; knowledge.[20] Two doctoral theses from 2013 have carried out valuable studies of the Old English word *cræft*. Helen Price explores the semantic relationship between Old English *cræft* and Modern English *technology*, arguing that the Old and Modern English terms share many connotations, particularly in the way that they refer to both intellectual and material processes of creativity. In keeping with her larger ecocritical aims, Price argues that her analysis offers 'evidence to suggest a connection between humans and nonhumans conveyed by the technical processes denoted by Old English *cræft*'.[21] Price's conclusions help to decentre the figure of the human craftsman in Old English literature while also providing a linguistic bridge between the animal *cræft* of early medieval sources and modern studies of animal *technology*. Diane Alff notes the polysemous quality of Old English *cræft* but also traces the semantic changes that *cræft* undergoes through the pre-Conquest period. These semantic changes reflect broad cultural shifts in representations of craftsmanship and in perceptions of the craftsman. Alff observes a shift from the 'old usage' where *cræft* suggests magical craftsmanship to a 'new usage' where *cræft* suggests a Christianised understanding of craftsmanship as divine endowment. While Alff also carries out studies of the craft-related terms *searu* and *orþanc*, she excludes *weorc* from the remit of her thesis.[22] But *weorc* does appear in Old English sources that represent the labours of animals, sometimes in close proximity to *cræft*, and so the main definitions of *weorc* and the conceptual relationships between *weorc* and *cræft* are worth exploring a little further here. *Weorc* has a wide range of meanings in Old English. According to Bosworth-Toller, it can be defined as: work; working or doing; in a collective sense, doings or actions; labour, occupation; any form of sustained or habitual activity; a deed, any action; a work, what is wrought; pain, travail, grief.[23]

There are some important differences between *weorc* and *cræft* that loosely correspond with modern concepts of work and craft. Across both Old and Modern English, the word 'work' retains its most common usage as 'labour'. In Old English, 'work' has the more poetic meaning of 'pain, travail, grief'. Work can thus cause both physical and psychological suffering in the early medieval period, as in modernity. Old English 'work' connotes a sustained, habitual or repetitive activity, not necessarily requiring skill. In Old English, as in Modern English, 'craft' is skill or art, indicating a creative practice requiring more talent than simple 'work'. Craft can be a quality of, or a skill performed by, the body or the mind or spirit in Old English. Craft comprises both mental and physical power. It is not confined to the labour of the body. It is also the artistry of the mind, the 'craft' of making coupled with 'craftiness' of thought.

Despite these differences, *weorc* and *cræft* are not binary opposites but interrelated terms in Old English. Craft can be work, insofar as a 'craft' can be a trade, an everyday occupation that is learned and practiced repeatedly. Work can be craft, inasmuch as a 'work' is that which

[20] *TDOE*. See also *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: Based on the Manuscript Collections of Joseph Bosworth Supplement,*ed. by Thomas Northcote Toller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), s.v. *cræft*. Henceforth abbreviated as Bosworth-Toller.

[21] Helen Price, 'Human and Nonhuman in Anglo-Saxon and British Postwar Poetry: Reshaping Literary Ecology' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2013), pp. 41–82 (p. 79).

[22] Diane Alff, 'Workers and Artisans, the Binders and the Bound: Craftsmen and Notions of Craftsmanship in Old English Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2013).

[23] Bosworth-Toller, s.v. *weorc*.

is wrought. In Riddle 26, work can describe smithcraft (*wrætlic weorc smiþa*, l. 14) and, in *Cædmon's Hymn*, work can refer to the divine act of creation (*weorc wuldor-fæder*, l. 3). Modern theories that conceive of craft as the more positive counterpart to painful, laborious work do not find straightforward correlation in Old English. There is evidence for the idea of work as a punishment that must be suffered by humankind. The postlapsarian labour with which God punishes Adam and Eve is described as *weorc*. Before the fall, the *Genesis* poet says of Adam and Eve that: 'ne hie sorge wiht / weorces wiston' ('they did not know anything at all of the sorrow of work', ll. 785–86).[24] But the relationship between bad work and good craft — where it is *weorc* that brings about suffering — could be reversed. Eve is said to be the 'geweorc Godes, þeah heo þa on deofles cræft bedroren wurde' ('the work of God, though she had been degraded by the craft of the devil', ll. 822–23). *Instructions for Christians* states that 'Sceal æghwylc man ælne swincan / on swylcum cræfte swa him Crist onlænð, / þæt willan his gewyrce georne' ('Everyone must always labour at whatever craft Christ loans to him, so that he eagerly carries out Christ's will', ll. 150–52).[25] This advice indicates that crafting is not simply about expressing creativity in a pleasurable way but about carrying out Christ's plan for us. It further suggests that *cræft* is not inherent in human beings but a gift that has been loaned (*onlænð*) to us by God and which must be fulfilled through hard labour (*swincan*). *Swincan* is a verb defined by Bosworth-Toller as: to toil, labour, work with effort; to be troubled, to be in difficulty or distress.[26] In this instance, then, crafting is akin to working with connotations of physical and psychological labour that can shade into suffering.

The conceptual overlap between *weorc* and *cræft* in Old English raises the possibility that, if early medieval animals could work, they could also craft. Work carries connotations of pain and pain is a kind of suffering that can lead to submissive passivity. Conversely, repetitive, painstaking work can turn into more skilful craft because repetition creates skill via the habitual practice of a craft over time. As Sennett contends in relation to human craft, once we have trained our bodies in repetition our minds become 'alert rather than bored because we have developed the skill of anticipation' and the 'person able to perform a duty again and again has acquired a technical skill, the rhythmic skill of a craftsman'.[27] Technique need not always be a mechanical activity, for craftworkers can feel fully and think deeply about what they are doing once they do it well.[28] Shew similarly challenges straightforward divisions between embodied, instinctive acts of making and intelligent, intentional acts of making in relation to animal craft. For Shew, some animal crafts demand a high level of cognitive skill or 'knowhow' on the part of the animal maker (e.g. crows crafting tools) whereas other animal crafts are extensions of the body into the world (e.g. spiders spinning webs). However, the artefacts produced by the latter still contain 'thing knowledge' that allows a web or dam or nest to work in a given environment and alter that environment in some way. Acts of animal making might differ in terms of how much 'knowhow' versus how much 'thing knowledge' they necessitate but this is a matter of degree rather than kind.[29] This suggests that the unthinking

[24] References to *Genesis* are taken from *Old Testament Narratives*, ed. and trans. by Daniel Anlezark (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). All further references provided parenthetically. Translations mine.

[25] Reference to *Instructions for Christians* taken from *Old English Shorter Poems: Religious and Didactic*, ed. and trans. by Christopher A. Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012). Translation mine.

[26] Bosworth-Toller, s.v. *swincan*.

[27] Sennett, *Craftsman*, pp. 177–78.

[28] Sennett, *Craftsman*, p. 20.

[29] Shew, *Animal Constructions*, pp. 116–19.

work of the body and the thoughtful craft of the mind form a continuum rather than two discrete categories that keep nonhuman labourers and human makers apart.

Modern craft movements often idealise the figure of the craftworker and draw on craft as both an idea and activity that lifts humans out of the dehumanising drudgery of mindless, mechanical labour that alienates the worker from his or her 'true' nature as a creative, self-conscious being.[30] It is in this way that 'craftsmanship' defines the human condition and reinforces human exceptionalism. Following Morris, this idealised view of the human craftsman tends to look back to the Middle Ages for inspiration. As we will see, though, the language of *weorc* and *cræft* occurs in early medieval texts about animals and Old English writers used the terms *weorc* and *cræft*to refer to the labour, suffering, strength, skill, cunning and creativity of a variety of beasts and birds. Animals can possess and perform *cræft* as well as *weorc*. Moreover, human experiences of *weorc* and *cræft* are inseparable from animal *weorc* and *cræft* in many Old English poems, riddles and narratives.

The Christian tradition that influenced these early English writers did not always lead to the assumption that craft makes us human. Rather, in biblical histories, knowledge of craft results from and causes inhumane actions and can reduce humans to animals. In the biblical Book of Genesis, it is Cain and his descendant Tubalcain who are responsible for the first human crafts. Genesis 4.1–18 states that Cain was a farmer who slew his brother, Abel, becoming the first murderer in biblical history. Cain was then cursed by God and condemned to wander the earth. As punishment, God declares that the earth itself shall refuse to yield to Cain's labours: 'Cum operatus fueris eam non dabit tibi fructos suos' ('When you shall till it, it shall not yield its fruits to you', Genesis 4.12).[31] Cain dwells as an exile on the east of Eden and builds the first city there. His descendent, Tubalcain, is the first biblical smith noted for his metalworking skill and said to be 'malleator et faber in cuncta opera aeris et ferri' ('a hammerer and artificer in every work of brass and iron', Genesis 4.22). A longstanding medieval tradition connected the two figures, observing that Cain invented murder and Tubalcain invented weapons for more widespread murder.[32] This tradition does not posit craft as a skill that improves or advances humankind but as a dark art that increases man's inhumanity to man.

As inheritors of these Christian traditions, Old English writers recognised Cain as the founder of murder which resulted in the craft of forging weapons for war. For instance, the Old English *Genesis* refers to Cain as the 'cwealmes wyrhta' ('maker of murder', l. 1004).[33] Similarly, Old English writers were aware that the founder of metalworking and inventor of the ploughshare was Tubalcain. The Old English *Genesis* identifies Tubalcain as a *smið-cræftega* who imparts his knowledge to *burh-sittende*, linking smithcraft to the civilisation of city-building and city-dwelling. The poet elaborates upon the biblical narrative and emphasises that smithcraft is an ingenious skill of the mind as much as the hand. Further, as the inventor of *sulhgeweorc*, Tubalcain technologically enhances the work of agriculture:

[30] As such, these craft movements are directly or indirectly influenced by the Marxist theory of alienation (*Entfremdung*) of human workers from their human nature or species-essence (*Gattungswesen*). The classic study is Norman Geras, *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend*(London: Verso Books, 1983).

[31] References to the Latin Vulgate are taken from the Douay-Rheims Bible, online at <http://www.drbo.org/http://www.drbo.org>. All further references provided parenthetically. Translations mine.

[32] For discussion, see chapter 7 of Elizabeth Coatsworth and Michael Pinder, *The Art of the Anglo-Saxon Goldsmith* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002).

[33] See also lines 191–99 of 'Maxims I', in *Old English Shorter Poems: Wisdom and Lyric*, ed. and trans. by Robert E. Bjork (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

Swylce on ðære mægðe maga wæs haten
on þa ilcan tid Tubal Cain,
se þurh snytro sped smið-cræftega wæs,
and þurh modes gemynd monna ærest,
sunu Lamehes, sulhgeweorces
fruma wæs ofer foldan, siððan folca bearn
æres cuðon and isernes,
burh-sittende, brucan wide. (ll. 1082–89)

[Also in that family at the same time there was a man called Tubalcain, son of Lamech, who through wise skill was a master of smith-craft and through his mind's intelligence was the inventor of plough-work, the first among men over the earth; afterwards the children of nations, the city-dwellers, have known widely how to make use of brass and iron.]

However, the role of Cain and his kin as originators of human craft goes hand in hand with their role as outcasts from civilisation, cursed and condemned to live like wild beasts. *Beowulf* describes how: 'Cain wearð / to ecg-banan angan breþer, fæderen-mæge; he ða fag gewat / morþre gemearcod man-dream fleon, / westen warode.' ('Cain became the sword-slayer of his only brother, his father's son. Then he departed, outlawed, marked by murder, fled from human society, dwelt in the wilderness', ll. 1261–65).[34] In some accounts, Cain had become so dehumanised that his own family hunted him like an animal. A popular apocryphal story told how Tubalcain caught sight of his grandfather, Cain, while out hunting and mistook him for a wild beast, advising his blind father Lamech to shoot Cain with an arrow.[35] The Old English *Genesis* alludes to this event when Lamech laments how: 'Ic on morðor ofsloh minra sumne / hylde-maga; honda gewemde / on Caines cwealme mine' ('I murderously killed my close kinsman, stained my hands through Cain's slaying', ll. 1093–95).

Thus, in the medieval Christian tradition, knowledge of craft is not always humanising. Conversely, craft is implicated in the origins of murder, feud and warfare and it can imperil and disrupt human communities. The kin of Cain who build the first city, invent the first plough and forge the first weapons are the same figures who must dwell apart from other humans and wander the wildernesses with beasts. The Christian tradition contrasts with other religions and mythologies where craft creates human community and civilisation. For instance, in the Qur'an, David originates material culture and is given the gift of working iron by God, who softens the iron for David and then tells him how to shape it into armour. William F. McCants observes that this is not something that early Jewish or Christian scripture would attribute to a biblical hero because, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, those who 'originate smithcraft are sinful' and the 'application of this technology to the crafting of weapons and armour leads to bloodshed and ruin'.[36] In the Homeric hymn to Hephaestus, the god is praised for teaching glorious crafts to men who used to live in caves like wild beasts. Sennett highlights this hymn as an instance in which the 'civilising craftsman' has used tools and technical skills 'for a collective good, that of ending humanity's wandering existence as hunter gatherers or rootless warriors'.[37] Christianity provided early English writers with a more ambivalent, in

[34] References to *Beowulf* are taken from *The Beowulf Manuscript*, ed. and trans. by R. D. Fulk (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). All further references provided parenthetically. Translations mine.

[35] Patrick J. Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2011), p. 146.

[36] William F. McCants, *Founding Gods, Inventing Nations: Conquest and Culture Myths from Antiquity to Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 47.

[37] Sennett, *Craftsman*, p. 21. See the 'Homeric Hymn to Hephaestus', in *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns, and Homerica*,

places sceptical, history of craft and with biblical craftsmen who are cast out from human society and whose labours work against the collective human good.

Humanising and Dehumanising Crafts in the Old English *Boethius*

A text that frequently features in discussions of craft as a concept is the Old English *Boethius.* This is a ninth-century translation and adaptation of the late antique Latin philosophical work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, by Boethius.[38] The Old English translator makes several significant changes to the Boethian source text, including transforming a reference to the Roman hero Fabricius into a passage discussing the craft of the legendary Germanic smith, Weland. Previous studies of the Old English *Boethius* have highlighted the Alfredian translator's fondness for the word *cræft* and idiosyncratic usage of the term.[39]

Prose 29 of the *Boethius* provides evidence for what appears to be a hylomorphic model of divine craftsmanship in its explanation of the difference between providence and fate. God conceives of divine providence in the same way that a craftsperson plans their creation: 'swa swa ælc cræftega ðencð and mearcað his weorc on his mode aer aer he hit wyrce and wyrcð siððan eall' ('as every craftsman thinks and marks out his work in his mind before making it and afterwards makes the whole thing', Prose 29.6). This passage aligns divine and human craft and understands the work (*weorc*) of the craftsperson (*cræftega*) as originating in their mind (*mod*) before being realised in the material world. Immediately after this explanation, however, the translator describes how God effects fate or *wyrd* through good angels and devils, the stars, the souls of men and the lives of other creatures (Prose 29.7). Humans are ensouled yet not particularly separated from other beings, including animals, angels and the planets. We are all the tools and materials of the divine craftsman who uses our bodies and spirits to make his heavenly work manifest. Humans are not so much makers as instruments of making in this instance.

The Alfredian translator thinks of a good king as a craftsman, too. Like God, the king uses those below him in a cosmic and social hierarchy as tools and materials to carry out his *weorc*:

> Ðæt bið ælces cræftes andweorc þæt mon þone cræft butan wyrcan ne mæg. Þæt bið þonne cyninges andweorc and his tol mid to ricisianne þæt he hæbbe his lond fullmonnad. He sceal habban gebedmen and ferdmen and weorcmen. Hwæt þu wast þætte butan þissan tolan nan cyning his cræft ne mæg cyðan. (Prose 9.2)

trans. by H. G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge: Harvard Loeb Classical Library, 1914), p. 447.

38 I occasionally refer to the translator as 'Alfredian' to indicate that the Old English *Boethius* has traditionally been associated with King Alfred and his court while acknowledging that the authorship is disputed and may not be attributable to the king himself. In favour of Alfred as author, see Janet M. Bately, 'Alfred as Author and Translator', in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. by Nicole Guenther Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach (Leiden: Brill, 2015) and Janet M. Bately, 'Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything?', *Medium Ævum*, 78 (2009), 189–215. Against Alfred as author, see Malcolm R. Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', *Medium Ævum*, 76 (2007), 1–23 and Malcolm R. Godden, 'The Player King: Identification and Self-Representation in King Alfred's Writings', in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*, ed. by Timothy Reuter (Aldershot: Routledge, 2003), pp. 137–50.

39 See especially Peter Clemoes, 'King Alfred's Debt to Vernacular Poetry: the Evidence of *Ellen* and *Cræft*', in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture presented to Helmut Gneuss*, ed. by Michael Korhammer, Karl Reichl, and Hans Sauer (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), pp. 213–38; Nicole Guenther Discenza, 'Power, Skill and Virtue in the Old English *Boethius*', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 26 (1997), 81–108.

[The material for any craft is that without which one cannot carry out that craft. Then the material for a king and his tools for ruling are that he has his land fully manned. He must have men who pray and men who fight and men who work. You should understand that without these tools no king can make his craft known.]

The translator's understanding of what it means to know and carry out a craft goes beyond the modern sense of skilful making. The Old English *Boethius* famously develops the concept of *cræft* as an inner virtue. Peter Clemoes shows that Alfred regularly translates the Latin *virtus* as Old English *cræft* and Nicole Guenther Discenza notes that, in doing so, he 'unites the concepts of power, skill and virtue in one word'.[40] For Clemoes, Alfred saw a craft as an inborn talent to serve a moral purpose. Discenza adds that Alfred treats labour as comparable to more spiritual strivings, in that both fulfil the responsibilities given one by God.

In some ways, this emphasis on *cræft* as virtue makes it a quality that is specific to humans. Understanding and reason are said to be the 'þa cræftas eoweres ingeðonces' ('crafts of your inner mind', Prose 9.12) and the virtuous *cræft* of reason is possessed by no animals except for humans alone: 'hit nænig hafað neat buton monnum' ('no animal but humans have it', Metre 20.189). Therefore, to abandon crafts — in the sense of virtues — is to lose humanity. From Prose 25 to Prose 26, *cræftas* (virtues) are contrasted with *unðeawas* (vices) and when unrighteous, earthly kings abandon the former and follow the latter, they lose their humanity and become beastlike. Even though these kings are outwardly adorned with the material products of craftwork — fine garments, glittering gems, decorated weapons — their inner minds are so inflamed with pride that they behave not like men but like mad dogs: 'ac he reðigmod ræst on gehwilcne, / wedehunde wuhta gelicost; bið to up ahæfen inne on mode' ('but fierce-minded he rushes at everyone, of all creatures most like a mad-hound; he is too puffed up within his mind', Metre 25.17–18).

Abandoning craft can cause someone to lose their own humanity, but abusing craft can deprive others of their humanity, turning men and women into wild beasts. Shortly after the description of the beastlike earthly kings, Metre 26 narrates the story of the sorceress Circe. Circe can perform *dry-cræftas* and with *balo-cræftum* she transforms Ulysses' men into animals, fettering them with chains and depriving them of both freedom and speech:

Ða ongunnon wercan   wer-ðeoda spell,
sædon þæt hio sceolde   mid hire scinlace
beornas forbredan   and mid balo-cræftum
wraðum weorpan   on wildra lic
cyninges þegnas,   cyspan siððan
and mid racentan eac   ræpan mænigne. (Metre 26.73–78)

[Then the people started to produce stories, said that she changed the men with her magic and warped the king's thanes with baleful crafts into the likeness of wild beasts, and then fettered them and also tied many up with chains.]

Circe's magical crafts can quite literally dehumanise her victims. Yet the inner minds of these bestial men, even though they are bound by sorrow, remain human: 'Næfdon hi mare monnum gelices, / eorð-buendum, ðonne in-geþonc' ('They had nothing remaining similar to men, to earth-dwellers, but for their inner minds', Metre 26.93–94). The translator asserts that *dry-cræft* cannot change the human mind, only the body. The power (*mægen-cræft micel*) of the mind over the body is said to be wondrous and the skills and strengths (*listas and*

[40] Clemoes, 'King Alfred's Debt'; Discenza, 'Power, Skill and Virtue', p. 96.

cræftas) of the body come to everyone from the mind. The translator raises the disquieting possibility that magical crafts exist, crafts with the power to alter human nature, deprive men of their humanity, and turn them into animals, only to insist that such crafts are fictions or false stories (*leasum spellum*) and to reassert the superior, virtuous craft of the inner mind over the strengths and skills of the body. As Jennifer Lorden has recently shown, however, the Old English *Boethius* complicates the moral conclusion drawn by its Latin source text. Whereas the Latin simply observes that the power to control the body does not entail the power to influence the human heart, the Old English explains that each sailor was changed into the form of whatever animal he was most like previously in his life. As such, Circe's craft reveals and materialises 'the animalistic mental qualities' that each man already possessed within his inner self.[41] Virtuous craft might be able to raise human beings above animality but, equally, the unvirtuous abuse of craft can bring out the brutishness, the latent beast, lurking within our psyches.

Elsewhere, the *Boethius* alludes to another figure who abuses craft to dehumanise his victims. This is the figure of the pagan craftsman, Weland the Smith, this time from Germanic rather than Graeco-Roman myth. In his Old Norse incarnation as Vǫlundr, the smith is captured by King Níðuðr who severs the sinews behind his knees, hamstringing Vǫlundr to prevent him from escaping. King Níðuðr imprisons Vǫlundr on an island and enslaves him by forcing him to work as a royal craftsman. It is not long before Vǫlundr takes revenge on Níðuðr by killing the king's sons when they visit his forge. The smith then uses his craft skills to transform their skulls into goblets, their eyes into gems, their teeth into brooches, and sends these artefacts to their unsuspecting family members. Later, King Níðuðr's daughter, Böðvildr, brings Vǫlundr a golden ring to repair, but the smith gives her drugged beer and rapes her, impregnating her. Finally, Vǫlundr crafts a pair of wings from bird feathers, before rising into the air, boasting of his revenge to a distraught King Níðuðr, and flying free from his captor.[42]

As this narrative suggests, Vǫlundr or Weland abuses craft to commit inhumane acts of vengeance and change his victims into nonhuman forms. Whereas Circe turns the living bodies of her victims into animals, Weland turns the dead bodies of his victims into artefacts. Weland then uses his craft to transform his own body into a human-animal hybrid, becoming a birdman and flying away on handmade wings. The story of Weland could be read as a story of back-and-forth transitions between the modes of *animal laborans* and *homo faber*. To begin with, Weland is the archetypal *homo faber* whose craft fabricates an artificial world of things. Yet King Niðhad's enslavement of Weland turns the smith's craft into enforced labour and moves Weland into the mode of *animal laborans*, a drudge condemned to repetitive tasks and whose labour is characterised by unfreedom. The unfree labour of Weland may have had some basis in historical reality, if we consider the legal evidence that at least some early English

[41] Jennifer A. Lorden, 'Tale and Parable: Theorizing Fictions in the Old English *Boethius*', *PMLA*, 136 (2021), 340–55 (p. 352). For further discussion of how the Old English translator transforms the classical myth of Circe, see Susan Irvine, 'Ulysses and Circe in King Alfred's Boethius: A Classical Myth Transformed,' in *Studies in English Language and Literature: "Doubt Wisely": Papers in Honour of E.G. Stanley*, ed. by M. J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 387–401.

[42] Summary based upon *Völundarkviða*, probably composed *c.* 900–1050. It is possible that *Völundarkviða* was produced in an area of early medieval England under Scandinavian influence. See John McKinnell, 'The Context of *Völundarkviða*', in *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, ed. by Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 198–212.

smiths were kept in compulsory service to their lords.[43] Weland continues to work and to craft things for the king but is unable to realise a purpose through these acts of making. Weland then reasserts his role as *homo faber* by reshaping the world according to his own desires. Weland materialises his inner desire for vengeance and combines the 'craft' of making with 'craftiness' of thought when he turns the body parts of the boys into artefacts, deceiving the king by craftily concealing a skull within a goblet, an eye within a gem, a tooth within a brooch. In doing so, though, and in crafting his own body into the form of a winged birdman, he violates ontological boundaries between the human, the animal and the artefactual. Weland may represent *homo faber* in certain respects, but ultimately his transformative crafts could not be said to raise humanity above animality or separate humans from the rest of nature. Rather, *Welandes geweorc* has the power to turn the human self into a nonhuman other.

The Old English *Boethius* retells the tale of Circe but leaves the tale of Weland untold. It is possible that the narrative of Weland, if recounted in full, would have posed problems for the Alfredian translator's Christian emphasis on *cræft* as a virtue that makes us human as well as for the role that *cræft* plays in his vision of a properly ordered human society, with the craftsman-king at its head. It is usually assumed that the name of Weland has replaced that of Fabricius because of a pun on the Latin *faber*. But this substitution also introduces a much more fraught king-craftsman dynamic to the Old English *Boethius*. As Isobel Rennie Robertson has noted, Fabricius, an early Roman consul, was known for his austere incorruptibility, famously declining gifts and bribes. Robertson suggests that Weland may have been seen as a fitting alternative to Fabricius due to the theme of greed that runs through the Germanic legend.[44] Indeed, the most powerful figure in the Weland story, King Niðhad, is quite the opposite of the incorruptible Fabricius. Niðhad, whose greed for material treasures motivates his enslavement of Weland, seems more like those animalistic kings of Metre 25 who abandon virtuous *cræftas* and lose their humanity in the pursuit of vices, even as they shimmer in fine garments and sparkle with gold and gems and decorated weapons. For this reason, Weland's rebellion might be thought of as legitimate vengeance against a corrupt earthly authority. Alternatively, Robertson points out that Weland's status as an enslaved smith complicates the rights and wrongs of his vengeance from a legal viewpoint. In the context of early medieval English and Scandinavian laws, Weland's revenge is 'an action forbidden by law' whereas Niðhad's cruelty 'becomes the legal right of a master to punish and exploit his property'[45] Either way, the complex subversive power of Weland never quite comes to the fore in the Old English *Boethius*. In the *Boethius*, Weland is mortalised, killed and buried. The translator asks:

> Hwær sint nu þæs wisan   Welandes ban,
> þæs goldsmiðes,   þe wæs geo mærost?
> Forþy ic cwæð þæs wisan   Welandes ban,
> forðy ængum ne mæg   eorðbuendra
> se cræft losian   þe him Crist onlænð.
> Ne mæg mon æfre   þy eð ænne wræccan
> his cræftes beniman,   þe mon oncerran mæg

[43] David A. Hinton, 'Anglo-Saxon Smiths and Myths', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 80.1 (1998), 3–22 (p. 10).

[44] Isobel Rennie Robertson, 'Wayland Smith: A Cultural Historical Biography' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2020), pp. 32–33.

[45] Robertson, 'Wayland Smith', p. 134.

sunnan onswifan, and ðisne swiftan rodor
of his rihtryne rinca ænig.
Hwa wat nu þæs wisan Welandes ban,
on hwelcum hlæwa hrusan þeccen? (Metre 10.33–43)

[Where now are the bones of the wise Weland, the goldsmith, who was formerly very famous? I said the bones of wise Weland because the craft which Christ loans to any earth-dweller cannot be lost by him. Nor can anyone ever deprive a wretch of his craft more easily than any man can divert and turn aside the sun and this swift sky from its correct course. Who now knows in which mound the bones of wise Weland cover the earthen floor?]

Weland is referred to as a wise (*wisan*) goldsmith who was once famous (*geo mærost*). Yet he is fixed firmly in the past and reduced to bones in the present, bones that are buried and hidden within an earthen mound. The wisdom of Weland is linked to his *cræft* but the text gives no hint of the brutal ways in which Weland misused his talents in metalworking. Rather, the gift of *cræft* is attributed to Christ who loans (*onlænð*) skills to mortals. The cross alliteration of line 37 clearly links craft (*cræft*) to Christ (*Crist*) and reassures the reader that the gift of craft cannot be lost (*losian*) but also reminds us that craft is only ever loaned (*onlænð*) to earth-dwellers, including the renowned Weland. The heavenly gift of craft, granted by Christ, is contrasted with the earthly body of the pagan craftsman, Weland. The imagery of the sun (*sunnan*) and swift heavens (*swiftan rodor*) reinforces the divine quality of *cræft* and separates it from the dead bones (*ban*) of the human craftsman who now inhabits the ground (*hrusan*). The Alfredian translator inserts the name of Weland into the Old English *Boethius* only to repress the power of this smith, mortalising as opposed to immortalising him, and maintaining a social and cosmic order ruled over by the king as a regal craftsman and Christ as a holy craftsman. *Cræft* can thus retain its positive sense of an inner virtue that is loaned to us by the Christian God for a moral purpose, while the body of the less than virtuous goldsmith decays and the memory of his dreadful deeds begins to fade.

The Old English *Boethius* reveals what is at stake in literary representations of craft. Craft is an act of divine workmanship that can be imitated by human makers, but craft has a darker, inhumane side that can threaten our bodies, if not our minds and souls, and turn us into nonhuman animals or even artefacts. Although the *Boethius* develops a Christianised concept of *cræft* as an inner virtue that separates humans from other animals, there is a lingering anxiety about how the pagan crafts of characters such as Circe and Weland can disrupt human communities and have a dehumanising effect upon the self and others.

Working and Crafting with Animals in Ælfric's *Colloquy*

Where the Old English *Boethius* considers the philosophical implications of craft, Ælfric's *Colloquy* sheds light on more everyday experiences of working and crafting. We should not read the account of various occupations, trades and skills in the *Colloquy* as a straightforward social record. The text is a formal dialogue between a master and pupils for the purpose of learning Latin, and it has long been recognised that the pupils are playing the roles of secular workers rather than really belonging to those social orders.[46] The *Colloquy* has been ascribed

[46] Earl R. Anderson, 'Social Idealism in Ælfric's Colloquy', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3 (1974), 153–62 (pp. 158–59).

to the late tenth-century English abbot Ælfric of Eynsham. An Old English gloss was later added to Ælfric's Latin text, perhaps by a pupil of his.

Despite its primary function as a pedagogical tool, the *Colloquy* does give an imaginative glimpse into the working lives of ploughmen, shepherds, oxherds, hunters, fishermen, fowlers and others. The literary representations of these occupations, and the beasts and birds that are central to them, support the idea that human work is defined by and dependent upon animals. More than this, it demonstrates that animals are fellow workers who, as Hribal would put it, produce, resist and actively shape the world. Hribal has shown that, in the case of the modern world, advances in agriculture and industry relied heavily on the skilled labour of horses, cows, pigs, sheep and other beasts.[47] At the same time, resistance characterises animal labour and humans counter this resistance with painful, punishing methods of control. Animals might break, leap, climb or flee from enclosures, might charge, kick, bite or peck their handlers, or might stubbornly refuse to work. Human masters and owners of these labouring animals recognise this resistance as such and react by imprisoning 'their' workers within hedges or fences, mutilating them by cutting tendons or clipping wings, or controlling their behaviour with devices like the spur or whip.[48] Although the *Colloquy* is a premodern text, some of the same observations about animal labour apply. We find animals working but sometimes crafting in a more skilful way. We see animals assisting but sometimes resisting human work and craft.

The dialogue opens with an exchange between the master (*magister*) and pupils (*pueri*) in which the pupils ask to be taught how to speak correctly and claim that they would rather be beaten for the sake of learning than to not know it. The master asks the first student what work he pursues, and the pupil answers that he is a professed monk. The monk then introduces several companions, the first of whom is an enslaved ploughman. The master asks: 'Quid dicis tu, arator? Quomodo exerces opus tuum?' ('What do you say, ploughman? How do you keep busy at your work?', l. 22). The ploughman answers: 'O, mi domine, nimium laboro. Exeo diluculo minando boues ad campum, et iungo eos ad aratrum' ('Oh, my lord, I labour very hard. I go out at dawn, driving oxen to the field, and yoke them to a plough', ll. 23–24). The ploughman explains that, besides ploughing a full acre or more each day, he must fill the oxen's bins with hay, water them and carry out their dung. He complains, 'Etiam, magnus labor est, quia non sum liber' ('Indeed, it is a lot of work, because I am not free', l. 35). The shepherd describes a similar experience of work, driving sheep to the pasture and standing over them in heat and cold lest wolves devour them, leading them to their pens and milking them twice a day. The shepherd is followed by an oxherd who must lead the oxen to pasture, watch over them all night, then return them fed and watered to the ploughman in the morning.

The *weorc* of the ploughman, shepherd and oxherd is clearly inseparable from animals. The dialogue describes a very close relationship between human and nonhuman workers where it is not always clear who is working for whom or who is serving whom. The men feed, water, milk, clean, carry dung and watch over their beasts and they bemoan the fact that this leaves them with little free time. Their working lives are bound to and bound by the needs, wants, habits and threats experienced by beasts. They all describe their work as drudgery, with the glossator mainly using the Old English term *deorf* (labour, trouble, tribulation) to describe their lot. The ploughman exclaims, 'Eala, leof hlaford, þearle ic deorfe' ('Alas, dear lord, I

[47] Hribal, 'Animals are Part of the Working Class', p. 445.
[48] Hribal, 'Animals are Part of the Working Class', p. 448–49.

work very hard', l. 23) and 'micel gedeorf hit ys, forþam ic neom freoh' ('it is very hard work, because I am not free', l. 35) while the oxherd says, 'Eala, hlaford min, micel ic gedeorfe' ('Alas, my lord, I work very hard', l. 44). The first three figures carry out hard labour yet their work is characterised by endurance and hardship as opposed to skill or talent.

The *Colloquy* then moves on to the figures of the hunter, fisherman and fowler. Once more, the skills or crafts of these characters are defined by the animals they work with and against. In all three cases, the *cræft* that is practiced by the men is produced in cooperation and competition with beasts and birds. The hunter marks a turning point in the working relationship between men and beasts, since hunting asserts dominance over animals by seeking, capturing, taming or killing wild creatures. The craft of the hunter involves some skill in making nets, and the knowhow of setting them in the right spot, but the remainder of this craft is largely carried out by the dogs who chase game into the nets (ll. 56–64). The fisherman is a similarly skilled worker, who uses craft to catch fish by casting a net into the water and throwing in a hook or bait and baskets. But human craft meets its match in the power of the mighty whale, with the fisherman declaring that he would not dare to catch a whale, 'Quia carius est mihi capere piscem quem possum occidere, quam illum, qui non solum me sed etiam meos socios uno ictu potest mergere aut mortificare' ('Because I prefer to catch a fish that I can kill than a fish that can drown and destroy not only me but all of my companions with one blow', ll. 116–18). The whale therefore tests the limits of the fisherman's skills. The fisherman's inability to catch a whale contrasts with the skill of the fowler in taming hawks. The fowler is certainly a crafty character, using a range of skills to snare birds: 'Multis modis decipio aues: aliquando retibus, aliquando laqueis, aliquando glutino, aliquando sibilo, aliquando accipitre, aliquando decipula' ('I snare birds in a lot of ways: sometimes with nets, with nooses, with lime, with whistles, with a hawk, with a trap', ll. 124–26). However, the master fixates on the tame hawk that carries out the fowler's craft for him by snaring other birds. It would be more accurate to say that the hawk is semi-tame and semi-wild, participating in a partly dependent and partly independent relationship with the fowler. For example, the fowler explains how the hawk feeds him in winter and flies away to the woods in the spring: 'Ipsi pascunt se et me in hieme, et in uere dimitto eos auolare ad siluam' ('They feed themselves and me in the winter, and in spring I let them fly to the woods', ll. 138–39).

In the first half of the *Colloquy*, human experiences of *weorc* and *cræft* are shaped by the animals we labour alongside. Significantly, the Old English glossator uses the term *weorc* when discussing the labour of the ploughman and oxherd but switches to *cræft* when speaking to the hunter and fisherman about their skills. 'Hu begæst þu weorc þin?' ('How do you keep busy at your work?', l. 22) the master asks the ploughman, and to the oxherd: 'Eala, oxanhyrde, hwæt wyrcst þu?' ('So, oxherd, what work do you do?', l. 43). When the master turns to the hunter and asks 'Canst þu ænig þing?' ('Do you know anything?', l. 50), the hunter replies: 'Ænne cræft ic cann' ('I know one craft', l. 51). The master then enquires: 'Hu begæst þu cræft þinne?' ('How do you keep busy at your craft?', l. 56). Likewise, the master asks the fisherman: 'Hwylcne cræft canst þu?' ('What craft do you know?', l. 86).

This transition from *weorc* to *cræft* has implications for how the different characters reflect upon their working lives. The ploughman, shepherd and oxherd appear to be less free and more miserable, suffering more for their work when compared to the hunter, fisherman and fowler, all of whom appear somewhat happier in their crafts and to experience more freedom and rewards. Where the ploughman, shepherd and oxherd describe their labour in Old English

as *deorf* and complain that they are not *freoh*, the hunter explains that the king rewards him with food, clothes and horses 'þæt þe lustlicor cræft minne ic begancge' ('so that I'll perform my craft more happily', l. 85). Although the fisherman fears the might of the whale, he has the freedom to choose not to risk his life at sea: 'Forþam leofre ys me gefon fisc þæne ic mæg ofslean' ('Because I prefer to catch a fish that I can kill', l. 116).

The first three characters could be understood as workers and the following three as crafters, and the language of the Old English gloss reinforces this, but the distinction also depends upon on the natures, behaviours and habitats of the beasts, birds and fish that they work with. In this dialogue, then, animals determine whether humans define themselves as workers who passively endure hard labour or as crafters who actively carry out their tasks with skill. While the oxen and sheep that the ploughman and herders work with are domesticated, enslaved and servile, the hunter, fowler and fisherman rely upon and seek out wilder animals such as harts and boars, hawks and whales. These animals participate in work and craft with varying degrees of agency. Harriet Soper notes that animals, and cattle in particular, appear in Ælfrician texts as creatures who do not possess the power of choice.[49] This is true of domesticated *nytenu* but could the same always be said of wild *deor*? Cattle may not possess the power to choose nor, in turn, the ability to refuse a life of enforced drudgery. Yet some of the wilder animals represented in the *Colloquy*, like the hawk and whale, do display the skills required to resist, evade or even overpower human crafts that try to capture or tame or enslave them. The *Colloquy* aligns beasts that do not have the power of choice (e.g. oxen) with unfree, enslaved workers (e.g. ploughmen) whose work is laborious. Conversely, beasts and birds that are wilder (e.g. harts, hawks) are aligned with freer, more skilful craftsmen (e.g. huntsmen, fowlers). At the same time, the difficulty and risk of human work increases as the nature of our animal co-workers changes. The work of the ploughman or shepherd is harsh yet not particularly troubled by the servile oxen or sheep (only by the wild wolves that prey on their flocks) whereas the crafts of the hunter, fisherman and fowler exist in a more fraught relationship with the boars, hawks and whales that are able to flee, defy or attack them.

Towards the end of the *Colloquy*, the wise counsellor (*consiliarius*) declares in the words of the Old English gloss: 'And þis geþeaht ic sylle eallum wyrhtum, þæt anra gehwylc cræft his geornlice begange, forþam se þe cræft his forlæt, he byþ forlæten fram þam cræfte' ('And this counsel I offer to all workers, that each one go about his craft diligently, because he who neglects his craft will be forsaken by the craft', ll. 237–40). The counsellor tells his audience in Latin 'esto quod es' or in Old English 'beo þæt þu eart' ('be what you are') because 'micel hynð and sceamu hyt is menn nellan wesan þæt þæt he ys and þæt þe he wesan sceal' ('it is much humiliation and shame for a man not to want to be that which he is and that which he must be', ll. 242–43). As we have seen, that which each person 'is' or 'should be' is largely defined by, or against, their working relationship with birds and beasts. The phrasing of this speech further suggests that craft is not inherent in human beings. Craft cannot be taken for granted but must be continuously performed and, if not practised routinely and repeatedly, craft can forsake (*forlæt*) the craftsperson who neglects it. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe observes that the consequence of not practising a craft is being abandoned by it, left incoherent and without substance.[50] This is because, in the *Colloquy*, doing an occupation produces being within

[49] Harriet Soper, 'Reading the Exeter Book Riddles as Life-Writing', *Review of English Studies*, 68 (2017), 841–65 (p. 858).

[50] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 105.

an identity. She situates this reading in relation to a Benedictine monastic identity that was conferred but also naturalised through continuous labour. The phrase *esto quod es* called oblated children to the willed labour of becoming in life what they had been made by their gift.[51] In the *Colloquy*, the spirit of obedience upon which this 'willed labour' depends is reinforced by beating and whipping the boys. This monastic obedience finds an apt parallel in Ælfric's homily for the feast of St Paul. Saul is warned that if he does not choose to obey Christ, then he is kicking against the goad and, if the ox kicks against the goad, it hurts him.[52] Rebellion and resistance results in pain. This pain may be understood as psychological or spiritual in the case of St Paul, but it is physicalised for the boys in the *Colloquy*. Hence, the pupils are treated in the same way as the oxen that appear at the start of the dialogue. They are physically hurt to coerce them into obedience. As the ploughman says, 'Habeo quendam puerum minantem boues cum stimulo' ('I have a young boy driving the oxen with a goad', l. 29).

O'Brien O'Keeffe argues that the *Colloquy* awakens a dangerous desire to be other, even as it defends against this desire. The *Colloquy* arouses the desire to be someone or something else by providing an opportunity for the creative play, perhaps the temporary pleasure, of abandoning monastic identity and taking up the work or craft of a ploughman, hunter, fowler, cook or smith. Each of these characters 'opens an alternative world of identity' for the young monks.[53] What I would add is that the identities that the monks are not supposed to desire include those of the animals that the secular workers labour alongside. The young monks declare that they want to learn and be beaten for the sake of learning 'Quia nolumus esse sicut bruta animalia, que nihil sciunt, nisi herbam et aquam' ('Because we do not wish to be like the brute beasts, who know nothing but grass and water', ll. 250–51). Although the *Colloquy* shows how society is built upon animal bodies, animal labour and sometimes animal skill, the young monks ultimately resist this concept of work and craft. Their expressed desire is to rise above animality and gain their humanity through intellectual labour.

The narrative of the *Colloquy* reflects this steady progression from beastlike work to more skilful craft and eventually intellectual labour. It moves through different kinds of crafts, from those that rely heavily on animal labour towards those that are more dependent upon human skills that transform raw materials or that simply buy and sell manufactured products: the ploughman, shepherd, oxherd, hunter, fisherman and fowler are followed by the merchant, shoemaker, salter, baker, cook and smith. Yet this implied hierarchy is temporarily inverted. While the *consiliarius* states that the service of God is the superior work, he then declares that the work of the ploughman, with whom we began, is the most useful of the secular crafts. Why so? The explicit answer is that the tilling of the earth 'nos omnes pascit' ('feeds us all', l. 219). Perhaps a more implicit answer, however, is that the work of the enslaved ploughman and his oxen serves as the closest counterpart for the work of God, in which young monks perform the labour of obedience and bend their will to the authority of their monastic superiors. If they kick against the goad, it hurts them. Paradoxically, if the young monks do not wish to be like brute beasts, then their labour must resemble that of the oxen. And so, even as the monks attempt to rise above animality through their work, they seek to model their labours upon the labour of beasts.

[51] O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience*, p. 125.
[52] O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience*, p. 143.
[53] O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience*, p. 112.

All in all, the *Colloquy* shows how human experiences of work and craft are inseparable from the animals who act as our co-workers and co-crafters. In this dialogue, the agency of working and crafting is formed by animality as much as humanity. The work of unfree labourers is bound to and bound by enslaved beasts, while crafts such as hunting or fishing are at once assisted and resisted by the skills and strengths of wilder beasts and birds. The identities of human workers and crafters are similarly formed by animals. In the dialogue, performing an occupation produces an identity but many of these human identities are defined by, or against, a close working relationship with animals. The dialogue could be read as progressing from humanity in the mode of *animal laborans* to that of *homo faber*, from the drudgery of the ploughman to the skills of the smith, but this hierarchy is eventually subverted. Although the young monks in this dialogue try to rise above animality, defining their humanity against brutish beasts and focusing their minds on divinity through intellectual labour, they return to the labouring animal as the most apt parallel for performing the work of God. Where the *Colloquy* draws our attention to how human experiences of work and craft are shaped by animals, the Old English and Anglo-Latin riddles prompt an even deeper exploration of nonhuman experiences of work and craft in the early medieval period.

Animal Workers and Crafters in Old English and Anglo-Latin Riddles

Ælfric's *Colloquy* reminds us that, like humans, some animals experience more freedom and creativity in their work than others. Should we expect to find enslaved, domesticated beasts working and wild, free creatures crafting in early English sources? Old English did make a distinction between *nytencynn* and *deorcynn*, with a *nyten* as a domesticated animal and a *deor* as a wild beast.[54] The Old English and Anglo-Latin riddles do not shy away from the role of enforced labour, the servitude and slavery of both humans and animals. But the divide between domestic *nytenu* and wild *deor* is not always clear cut and does not always map neatly onto *weorc* and *cræft* respectively. We glimpse moments of creativity in riddles about oxen and sheep while riddles about birds and bees depict their skill as both dependent upon and independent from human craft.

Hribal contends that, under capitalism, animal labourers lose freedom, agency and autonomy. As the centuries progressed 'more animals than ever were plowing, drilling, mowing, and harvesting' but as the exploitation increased 'so did the resistance to it — both by laboring animals and concerned humans'.[55] Old English riddles offer imaginative, sympathetic insights into the working lives of animals before capitalism. Here, we find a similar tension between freedom and exploitation in animal work along with moments of resistance to, and protest against, that exploitation. The early medieval period did not see an organised animal rights (or indeed working class) movement but the plights of nonhuman workers did not go unacknowledged in the literature of the time.

The most obvious examples of animal *weorc* as painful suffering are provided by the ox, bull and leather riddles. Eusebius's Latin Enigma 12 (*bos*) portrays the bull as a long-suffering

[54] *TDOE*, s.v. *deor*; Bosworth-Toller, s.v. *niten*. For discussion, see Michael Raby, 'The Lives of *Nytenu*: Imagining the Animal in the Old English *Boethius* and *Soliloquies*', *New Medieval Literatures*, 17 (2017), 1–33 (p. 9). See also Michael D. J. Bintley, 'Where the Wild Things are in Old English Poetry', in *Representing Beasts in Early Medieval England and Scandinavia*, ed. by Michael D. J. Bintley and Thomas J. T. Williams (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), pp. 205–28.

[55] Hribal, 'Animals are Part of the Working Class', p. 452.

servant whose work wears it down: 'Nunc aro, nunc operor, consumor in omnibus annis' ('Now I plough, now I labour, worn down throughout the years', l. 1). The talking ox of Exeter Book Riddle 72 relates how it trudged across the moors, bound under a beam, with a ring around its neck: 'wean on laste weorc þrowade, / earfoða dæl' ('on a path of grief, enduring pain, a share of sorrows', ll. 14–15). The ox expresses the psychological sorrow of its work along with the physical pain caused by the goad: 'Oft mec isern scod / sare on sidan' ('Often iron struck me sorely in the side', ll. 15–16). This is the aspect of animal work that has received the most attention in recent years, with scholars such as Corinne Dale observing that oxen take part in the pain, misery and suffering of postlapsarian labour.[56] These ox riddles draw attention to the inhumane aspects of *weorc* and acknowledge that animals suffer and feel pain when they labour. However, *cræft* is not always the more pleasurable, creative counterpart to *weorc* in the riddles. Rather, the riddles recognise that human craft can also inflict pain upon nonhuman bodies in the process of making. Craft is akin to torture when experienced from the perspective of the animal that is acted upon rather than the human craftsperson. The speaking sheep, goat or cow of Riddle 26 describes in detail how it was brutally killed, soaked, dipped in water, deprived of its hairs, and cut up by a knife as part of parchment-making: 'Heard mec siþþan / snað seaxses ecg, sindrum begrunden' ('Afterwards the hard edge of a knife, its roughness ground away, slashed me', ll. 5–6).

The riddle, as a genre, encourages us to share in this painful experience of craft and to imagine what it feels like to be on the receiving end of torturous transformations. Where the *Colloquy* enabled young monks to imagine alternative human identities as workers and crafters, the riddles ask us to adopt the perspectives of nonhuman creatures.[57] As a result, working the land and crafting artefacts become sensuous, embodied activities that arise from the 'I' of human poets playing the roles of nonhuman beings. Instead of detached, rational minds planning out and then imposing form upon inert matter, material things are generated through the shared sentience and shared suffering of human and nonhuman bodies in the riddles. This appears less like the hylomorphic model of making that we find in the *Boethius* and more like morphogenic making. The riddles speak to Ingold's concept of craft as 'correspondence' whereby the flow of consciousness and flow of materials correspond. To make is to correspond with the world, mixing the movements of sentient awareness with the flows of animate life. Ingold writes that in the midst of making 'sentience and materials twine around one another on their double thread' until they become indistinguishable.[58] Early medieval riddles anticipate this concept of craft and connect it to compassion, to the sympathy that arises from the suffering-together of humans and nonhumans in the making and unmaking of artefacts.

In Riddle 12, sensuous and sensual making occurs through a collaboration between the Welsh slave woman, the speaking ox and its hide. Painful animal *weorc* and pleasurable human *cræft* fold into one another in this riddle. Like the oxen in similar riddles, the speaking ox

[56] Corinne Dale, *The Natural World in the Exeter Book Riddles* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017), pp. 57–85. Cavell similarly observes that the ox of Riddle 72 participates in a discourse of slavery and enforced labour, in *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies: The Poetics of Human Experience in Old English Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), pp. 157–64. See also Soper, 'Riddles as Life-Writing', pp. 854–59.

[57] The nonhuman perspectives of the Exeter Book riddles have been explored more broadly in recent ecocritical studies of Old English literature. See especially Dale, *Natural World*, but also Chapter 5 of Heide Estes, *Anglo-Saxon Literary Landscapes* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017) and Chapter 3 of Courtney Catherine Barajas, *Old English Ecotheology* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021).

[58] Ingold, *Making*, p. 108.

endures the drudgery of tilling the earth during its life: 'Fotum ic fere, foldan slite, / grene wongas, þenden ic gæst bere' ('I go on foot, tear the earth, green fields, while I bear a soul', ll. 1–2). Intriguingly, the ox declares that it possesses an inner spirit (*gæst*) while it carries out its work, calling into question the assumption that animal labour is solely the labour of the body and not of the mind or soul. Longstanding human abuses of animals motivate us to conceive of animals in ways that are compatible with their continued mistreatment. We kill animals for food, exploit them as raw materials, put them to work. As such, if animals are 'conceived as intelligent, sensitive beings, these ways of treating them might seem monstrous'.[59] By attributing an inner spirit or even soul to the ox, and by exploring the psychology as well as the physicality of its painful labour, the riddle presents us with a beast that is much more than an unthinking body and confronts us with the inhumane conditions of its working life. After death, the ox undergoes a series of transformations as its hide is crafted into leather artefacts. The riddle plays on the relationship between binding and loosing when it describes how, 'Gif me feorh losað, fæste binde / swearte Wealas' ('If life gets loose from me, I bind fast dark Welshmen', ll. 3–4). The quickening spirit (*feorh*) is loosened from the body of the ox before that dead body, in the form of leather, binds Welshmen or foreign slaves (*wealas*) and turns human beings into workers as unfree as the living ox was.[60] For Riddle 12, though, enforced labour is not the end of the story. In the creative hands of the Welsh woman, the making of what might be a leather bottle subtly shades into the sexual satisfaction of a leather dildo.[61] Her grasp reshapes the body of the labouring ox for a different purpose, turning the pain of *weorc* into the pleasure of *cræft*:

> hwilum feorran broht
> won-feax Wale   wegeð ond þyð,
> dol drunk-mennen   deorcum nihtum,
> wæteð in wætre,   wyrmeð hwilum,
> fægre to fyre;   me on fæðme sticaþ
> hyge-galan hond,   hwyrfeð geneahhe,
> swifeð me geond sweartne. (ll. 7–13)

> [sometimes a dark-haired Welsh woman, brought from afar, grips and grasps me, the dim drunken slave in dark nights wets me in water, sometimes warms me pleasantly by the fire; a lustful hand shoves me into a lap, turns around enough, and touches me throughout the dark.]

Other riddle creatures can craft through their own skill, without help from human hands. Riddle 27 describes the making of mead, starting with the production of honey by bees. The first five lines concentrate on the creativity of the bees:

> Ic eom weorð werum,   wide funden,
> brungen of bearwum   ond of burg-hleoþum,
> of denum ond of dunum.   Dæges mec wægun

[59] James Rachels, *Created from Animals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 129.

[60] This wordplay is noted by Sarah L. Higley, 'The Wanton Hand: Reading and Reaching into Grammars and Bodies in Old English Riddle 12', in *Naked Before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Benjamin C. Withers and Jonathan Wilcox (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003), pp. 29–59 (p. 39).

[61] Nina Rulon-Miller, 'Sexual Humour and Fettered Desire Exeter Book Riddle 12', in *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. by Jonathan Wilcox (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 99–126. I follow Rulon-Miller's argument that the Welsh woman in Riddle 12 can be read as crafting a leather bottle but also using that leather bottle as a dildo.

feþre on lifte, feredon mid liste
under hrofes hleo. (ll. 1–5)

[I am valuable to men, widely found, fetched from forests and mountain slopes, from dales and downs. By day, feathers brought me with skill, carried me in the air, under the shelter of a roof.]

The bees are said to carry the nectar with skill or craft (*mid liste*). *List* is defined by Bosworth-Toller as art, skill, craft, cunning or artifice.[62] Drawing on actor-network theory, Price contends that the 'bee acts as an important mediator' in the mead-making process by providing 'the means by which the nectar is transported from the rural environs into the domestic environment of a human settlement'. Price argues that the 'the bee remains a presence once the riddle has seemingly entered a description of what may be seen to be the social and human act of mead consuming'.[63] This presence is felt through the aggressive action of the bees overlapping with the painful effects of mead upon inebriated bodies, as the stinger becomes a binder and beater. In Riddle 27, then, the craft of making mead involves both human and nonhuman actors in a way that is at once collaborative and combative. The honey starts off as something valuable to men but, as soon as a man takes over from the work of the bees, bathing the speaker in a barrel, the mead turns violent and destructive: 'Nu ic eom bindere / ond swingere' ('Now I am a binder and beater', ll. 6–7). The mead inflicts bodily pain and deprives drinkers of their rational minds, muddling their words and binding them to the earth: 'strengo bistolen, strong on spræce, / mægene binumen, nah his modes geweald, / fota ne folma' ('stripped of strength, strident in speech, deprived of might, he has no control over his mind, feet or hands', ll. 13–15). Here we find another, more everyday instance of how the misuse of craft can threaten one's humanity and turn humans into animals. In this case, overconsuming the product of craftwork brings out the brutishness of the drunkard. Lacking reason, speech and knocked down on all fours, the drinker is reduced to the level of a beast by this bee-made beverage. Riddle 27 reveals that the violence of craft can work both ways, with human and nonhuman bodies alike suffering through the making of things. It also shows how 'insects are among the most prolific producers in the animal kingdom of materials subsequently taken up for human use'.[64] As such, 27 reverses the dynamic of other riddles where a nonhuman animal suffers at the hands of a human craftsperson. Now bees are the active, creative makers and men are the passive victims of their potent craft.

The riddles represent other kinds of creatures, besides bees, taking part in the creative processes of craft. In some instances, animal body parts continue to collaborate with human beings beyond the death of the beast or bird. This is evident in Old English and Anglo-Latin riddles on writing tools. Riddle 26 is spoken post-mortem by a sheep, goat or cow whose skin has been torturously transformed into parchment. But the suffering speaker also relates how feathers (*fugles wyn*) leave tracks on its surface, with the compound evoking the psychological pleasure or delight (*wyn*) once experienced by the living bird (*fugel*) in flight. Then a man (*hæleð*) adorns it with the wondrous work of smiths (*wrætlic weorcsmiþa*). The pain of the sheep or goat or cow, the pleasure of the bird, and the wonder of smithcraft come together in the making of this manuscript which is presented as an affective and affecting process for

62 Bosworth-Toller, s.v. *list*.
63 Helen Price, 'A Hive of Activity: Realigning the Figure of the Bee in the Mead-Making Network of Exeter Book Riddle 27', *Postmedieval*, 8 (2017), 444–62 (pp. 450–51).
64 Ingold, *Being Alive*, p. 25.

humans and nonhumans alike. Aldhelm's Enigma 32 on writing tablets announces: 'Melligeris apibus mea prima processit origo, / sed pars exterior crescebat cetera silvis; / calciamenta mihi tradebant tergora dura' ('My main parts came from honey-laden bees, though my other part, the exterior one, grew in the woods; shoe-leather furnished my tough spine', ll. 1–3). In both riddles, the sentient agency of making is distributed across human and nonhuman, living and dead, actors: the parchment maker, the work of smiths, sheepskin, bird feathers, oak gall, wasps and bees, oxen and leather.

Aldhelm's other Latin enigmas likewise depict creative creatures, especially insects, fabricating products. Quite often in Aldhelm's enigmas, human-nonhuman cooperation in craft is framed as competition. In Enigma 12, the silkworm (*bombix*) explains that its innards overflow with hairy threads when the time for weaving resumes: 'Annua dum redeunt texendi tempora telas, / Lurida setigeris redundant viscera filis' (ll. 1–2). For this insect, the craft of weaving (*texendi telas*) exists in a symbiotic relationship with its own body which responds by spontaneously producing the material for its artwork. The silkworm then climbs leafy peaks of broom to craft small balls (*globulos fabricans*). The climb itself is laborious because the insect is weighed down by its overflowing (*replentur*) innards. Yet the physical rising of the silkworm leads this lowliest of creatures to metaphysical heights, the phrase *fati sorte* suggesting that the insect has fulfilled its creative destiny, aligning its artistry with the tapestry of fate. The textual craft of the silkworm parallels that of early English poets who wove the craft of words (*wordcræft wæf*). In a more material way, the craft of the silkworm would have been taken up by smiths and embroiderers in early medieval England. For example, silk was discovered in the seventh-century smith's grave at Tattershall Thorpe and the textiles found in St Cuthbert's coffin attest to the use of silk by embroiderers.[65]

In Enigma 20, the bee (*apis*) boasts of its technical skill (*ars*). Like the silkworm, the bee is at once a wonder of creation and a wondrous creator. It describes how: 'Mirificis formata modis, sine semine creta / dulcia florigeris onero praecordia praedis; / arte mea crocea flavescunt fercula regum' ('I was created in wondrous ways; produced without seed, I stock my sweet insides with what I plunder from flowers; by my craft the yellow plates of kings grow golden', ll. 1–3). In the next line, the creative bee turns combative: 'Semper acuta gero crudelis spicula belli' ('I always carry the sharp spears of cruel war', l. 4). Even without hands (*carens manibus*), the stinging blade of the bee surpasses the metalcraft of the smith (*fabrorum vinco metalla*). In its dual role as artisan and attacker, the bee troubles the human division of labour between those who work and those who fight. This insect can perform the craft of making and the art of battle together. The fact that the handless bee can outdo smithcraft poses a further challenge to anthropocentric concepts of craft, especially the idea that, standing upright with hands free for tool use, the human form is better suited to creative making. The bee appears as a crafter, and even as a kind of artist, elsewhere in the early medieval riddle tradition. In Bern Riddle 20, honey (*melle*) declares that 'Milia me quaerunt, ales sed invenit una / Aureamque mihi domum depingit ab ore' ('Thousands seek me, but only the flyer finds me and paints a golden home for me with its mouth', ll. 5–6). Once more, humans are depicted as passive consumers of bee-made products. While multitudes of men and women seek the sweet taste of honey, only the flying insect (*ales*) can actively find and use the substance to paint (*depingit*) a golden home. This observation is based on natural behaviour — bees create honeycomb cells using regurgitated wax — but figures the bee as

[65] Kevin Leahy, *Anglo-Saxon Crafts* (Stroud: Tempus, 2003), p. 62.

both artist and architect. As in Aldhelm's enigma, the bee can create without hands. This time, the insect uses its mouth (*ab ore*) to make art.[66]

These enigmatic descriptions of silkworms and bees speak to the point made at the outset of this article. Namely, that literary animals are both self-signifying actors and saturated with symbolic connotations and that, therefore, even highly metaphorical representations of animals rely on an awareness of actual animal lives. The silkworm may be figured as a kind of poet and the bee as an artist, but these figurations are not arbitrary; they emerge from the natural behaviours of these creative insects. Literary representations of craft are not simply imposed upon nonhuman actors but are formed, informed and transformed by their real qualities. What it means to be a smith, artist or poet in the early English imagination arises from a two-way conversation between human and nonhuman creatures and creators.

Aldhelm implicitly as well as explicitly compares the natural craft of insects with human craft and indicates that the former is superior, deflating anthropocentric pride in craftsmanship and setting up a sense of competition. Enigma 12 is directly preceded by Enigma 11 on the bellows (*poalum*) and Enigma 20 is followed by 21 on the file (*lima*). The file narrates how it smooths and polishes metal but describes itself as the roughest of things (*asperrima rerum*) whose labour produces a strident shriek: 'garrio voce carens rauco cum murmure stridens' (l. 5). In comparison to the creative creations of God, manmade machines come across as comically awkward, noisy and unwieldy. The bellows notes proudly that 'Ars mea gemmatis dedit ornamenta metallis' ('My skill ornaments bejewelled metals', l. 3). Even so, it receives no thanks 'sed capit alter honorem' ('but another steals the praise', l. 4). What is more, 'non est vita mihi, cum sint spiracula vitae' ('I have no life, although the air of life is in me', l. 2). Aldhelm implies that the crafted tools and artefacts of humans are inherently inferior to the handiwork of God, not least because God alone can provide the spirit that breathes life into his creations.

In early English riddles, animals are sometimes depicted as fellow workers who endure the pain of postlapsarian labour. Yet this is not their only role. Animals also take part in crafts. At times, they undergo torturous transformations. At times, they act as creative makers. Craft is not an exclusively human activity in these riddles. The creativity of craft results from a human-nonhuman relationship that is partly collaborative and partly competitive and combative. Furthermore, the theocentric concept of craft that is especially prominent in Aldhelm's enigmas inverts any hierarchy of creativity that would situate human makers above the rest of creation. By praising divine workmanship as superior, the natural craft of insects and animals outshines any artefacts that *homo faber* can produce. This might suggest that animal artefacts are actually the handiwork of God and that the agency of crafting belongs to God rather than to the insects or animals themselves. But the same might be said of human crafts, recalling the statement in *Instructions for Christians* that 'Sceal æghwylc man ælne swincan / on swylcum cræfte swa him Crist onlænð, / þæt willan his gewyrce georne' ('Everyone must always labour at whatever craft Christ loans to him, so that he eagerly carries out Christ's will', ll. 150–52). The Old English *Boethius* likewise states that Christ only loans (*onlænð*) crafts to earth-dwellers (Metre 10.36–37). *Cræft* is a gift loaned by God to

[66] See further Neville Mogford, 'Commentary for Bern Riddle 20', in *The Riddle Ages: Early Medieval Riddles, Translations and Commentaries*, ed. by Megan Cavell, with Matthias Ammon, Neville Mogford and Victoria Symons (28 January 2021), <https://theriddleages.bham.ac.uk/riddles/post/commentary-for-bern-riddle-20-de-melle>.

his creations, but that gift can be worked at and worked out in different ways by different creatures with varying degrees of strength, skill, cunning and creativity.

As Shew argues, technology is not an 'all-or-none' phenomenon that is the preserve of *homo faber* alone. Rather, technological behaviours exist on a spectrum that includes both human and nonhuman modes of making but that also allows for different levels of technical abilities among different groups of animals. For Shew, spiders spinning webs or beavers building dams should appear on the same spectrum as the technological behaviours of apes, whales, dolphins and crows even if they do not necessarily require the same level of technical skill, tool use or cognitive complexity.[67] As an example of the extended phenotype, a spiderweb should probably appear at the far end of a spectrum of technological behaviours because it does not seem to be the product of intention or require much innovation; but it is still an external artefact that aids its maker, alters its environment and demonstrates a significant level of complexity in its design.[68] Two of the animal groups — whales and birds — that do appear in Shew's case studies of more complex and cognitively demanding technological behaviours feature in the Old English sources I will turn to next. The poems on *The Whale* and *The Phoenix* go even further than the riddles in depicting animal crafts that are thoughtful and purposeful, a far cry from the unthinking labour of the body. While Old English poets therefore anticipate Shew's spectrum of technological behaviours — recognising that some animal crafts are more complex, and perhaps conscious, than others — their poems are situated within a very different cultural context. In particular, the whales and birds of Old English poetry are not only creative but created beings.

Animals as Artefactual Artisans in *The Whale* and *The Phoenix*

Like the Exeter Book riddles, the *Physiologus* poems in the same manuscript depict animals who possess and perform *cræft*. Just as human craft reflects divine craft, animal craft can be divine or devilish in nature. The original Greek *Physiologus* was known in the early medieval West through Latin prose versions. The Old English poet translated three chapters of the *Physiologus*, adapting them into poems on *The Panther*, *The Whale* and the fragmentary *Partridge*. Although these texts are usually categorised as religious allegories rather than scientific observations of nature, they are informed by ancient animal lore and reveal how early English authors imagined the behaviour of actual animals.

The Whale serves as an illuminating counterpart to the powerful whale that frightens the fisherman in Ælfric's *Colloquy*. The *Physiologus* whale is more than powerful, however, for it possesses a diabolical craft. The poet says that this *fisc* is skilled or crafty in guile (*facnes cræftig*) and attributes conscious yet malicious thought to the whale whose actions are likened to the ways of devils (*deofla wise*). The whale enacts this devilish craft by disguising itself as an island and, when it feels seafarers settling on its back, suddenly sinks to the seabed and drags both ships and sailors to their watery death. This is a crafty kind of craft, the wily ability to trick, mislead or deceive others that is considered evil but nonetheless artful. This is more than the unthinking work of an animal body. It is an intellectual cunning and a clever, albeit deadly, misuse of craft. Where the skill of the fisherman cannot overcome the bodily power of the whale in the *Colloquy*, it is the crafty mind of the creature that imperils seafarers in *The Whale*. Cavell notes that this deliberate deception on the part of the whale does not

[67] Shew, *Animal Constructions*, pp. 88, 93.
[68] Shew, *Animal Constructions*, p. 99.

appear in other versions of the *Physiologus* and attributes this to the interest in interiority that is particular to the Old English poetic form.[69] Thus, the Old English *Whale* represents animal craft as conscious, clever and cunning in a way that goes beyond Latin and Greek sources.

The whale's trickery is described by the Old English poet in terms of wondrous artifice: 'He hafað oþre gecynd, wæterþisa wlonc, wrætlicran gien' ('This proud water-rusher has a second habit, more wondrous still', ll. 49–50). This *wrætlic* artifice is alliteratively linked to the whale's inner pride or *wlonc*, further attributing the craft of animals to their psychology as much as their corporeality. The poet proceeds to explain that the whale opens its mouth, emitting a pleasant stench that deceives (*beswicen*) other fish who swim towards the sweet smell and are swallowed up. This craftiness aligns the whale with cunning craftsmen like Weland the Smith and maybe with the goldsmiths that the *Gifts of Men* alludes to as *searo-cræftig*.[70] *Searu* is defined by Bosworth-Toller as a device, design, contrivance, art, or that which is contrived with art, such as a machine or engine. *Searu* can be used in a good sense to suggest ingenious skill, but the term is often used in a negative sense to suggest craft, artifice, wile, deceit, treachery or plot. To be *searu-cræftig* is to be cunning of mind as well as of hand.[71] *Searu* represents a traditional expression of superlative craftsmanship associated primarily with the smith. However, an alternate negative usage of *searu* is part of a literary tradition which demonises craftsmen because their purpose of creation antagonises God's own purpose.[72] But it was not only *searo-cræftig* humans who were demonised in Old English literature. In the *Physiologus* poem, the whale is explicitly compared to Satan himself who is described by the poet as both *cræftig* and skilled in *searu*. Satan is 'bealwes cræftig' ('skilled in destruction', l. 72) and he snares human souls 'þurh sliþen searo' ('through a cruel trap', l. 42). The Old English *Genesis* portrays the devil as a skilful yet cunning angel who yearns to outshine the craft of God. Satan believes 'þæt he mægyn and cræft maran hæfde / þonne se halga God habban mihte' ('that he had greater power and skill than the holy God could have', ll. 269–70), desires to create a stronger throne 'þurh his anes cræft' (through his own craft', l. 272) and declares that he 'mæg mid handum swa fela / wundra gewyrcan' ('can work as many wonders with my hands', ll. 279–80). Alff remarks that this devilish craftsmanship shows that there is a fine line between creative ardour and sinful pride. She notes that many early English texts see the archetypal human craftsmen, smiths, as possessing a mental force that materialises a volition of the self through craft. But, where this mental force impinges on divine authority, it is expressed as pride.[73] The whale's *wlonc* in relation to its *wrætlic* artifice implies that a sinful, potentially devilish, pride in one's craft is not limited to humans.

However, like the devil, the whale does not really use its craft to create anything. It is not so much a creator as an anti-creator. It is an unmaker, an *unlond* that destroys the dwellings that seafarers build upon its back. The trick that the whale plays to lure the unwary into its hellish mouth, releasing a *wynsum stenc* from its innards, could be seen as an inversion of the divine logos, the creative power of the Word. In his *Sermo de initio creaturae*, Ælfric is eager

[69] Cavell, 'Community of Exiles', in *Handbook of Animals and Literature*, ed. by Susan McHugh, Robert McKay and John Miller, pp. 97–110 (p. 106). Cavell is drawing on Britt Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities: The Old English Poetics of Mentality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

[70] Reference to *Gifts of Men* taken from *Old English Shorter Poems: Wisdom and Lyric*, ed. and trans. by Robert E. Bjork (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.

[71] Bosworth-Toller, s.v. *searu.*

[72] Alff, 'Workers and Artisans', p. 90. For an extended refinement and critique of the definitions of *searu* provided by Bosworth-Toller, see pp. 68–90 of this doctoral thesis.

[73] Alff, 'Workers and Artisans', pp. 40–42.

to correct anyone who believes that Satan is a creator, stressing that the only craft possessed by the devil is a deceitful and destructive one:

> Nu cwædon gedwolmen þæt deofol gesceope sume gesceafta, ac hi leogað; ne mæg he nane gesceafta gescyppan, forðan ðe he nis na scyppend, ac is atelic sceocca, and mid leasunge he wile beswican and fordon þone unwaran.
>
> [Now heretics say that the devil created some creatures, but they lie; he can create no creatures, for he is not a creator, but is a loathsome fiend, and with lying he will deceive and destroy the unwary.][74]

The devilish craft of the whale threatens human bodies but can also trick our minds and imperil our souls. The poet warns readers that the devil entraps the unwary in the same crafty manner as the whale, opening the doors of hell to receive after death those who have foolishly pursued the pleasures of the body over the rights of the soul. Then the deceiver (*se fæcna*) who is skilled in evil (*bealwes cræftig*) slams the jaws of hellmouth shut forever. Although the *balo-cræft* of Circe could not harm human minds, the *balo-cræft* of the Satanic whale endangers bodies, minds and souls alike.

Of course, the depiction of craft as devilish in nature reflects a broader context in which Christianity heavily influenced cultural perceptions of craft as well as the social roles of craftworkers such as smiths — the archetypal craftsmen in early English culture. Studies into the changing roles of smiths in early medieval England have shown that they were, to some degree, liminal figures whose technological powers of transformation could be seen as quasi-magical. With the conversion to Christianity, the mysterious craft of metalworking begins to become good or evil, either aligned with the work of God or the work of Satan. On the one hand, we have figures such as Billfrith the eight-century anchorite who adorned the Lindisfarne Gospels with gold and gems and whose metalworking skills were clearly turned to the service of the Church. On the other, we have Bede's condemnatory eighth-century account of a drunken metalworker who resided in a monastery but preferred to stay in his workhouse than to go to church, and whose body was buried in the remotest part of the monastery.[75] Examining the archaeological evidence, Duncan Wright argues that the influence of Christianity meant that 'skilled smiths remained to an extent a mistrusted and maligned group, and the forge viewed as a place where the devil could be foolhardily embraced or wisely exorcised'.[76] Focusing on the literary evidence, Alff identifies a 'stark division into positive and negative portrayals' where some texts portray smiths as the epitome of saintliness but many other texts speak to a darker tradition in which the smith is associated with hell. In particular, a literary emphasis on the 'mental force' with which a legendary smith like Weland went about his craft could signal wisdom but could easily be interpreted as devilish pride in a Christian context.[77] The wondrous craft of making could slide into the wicked craftiness of an overweening mind. And so, skills such as smithcraft could be divine or they could be devilish — but the craft of Satan was only ever a twisting or warping of the true craft of God. God creates through the divine logos in the Book of Genesis, but God was also represented

[74] Ælfric, *Sermo De Initio Creaturae*, in *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: Volume I*, ed. by Benjamin Thorpe (London: Ælfric Society, 1844). Translation mine.

[75] Book V.14 in Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

[76] Duncan W. Wright, 'Crafters of Kingship: Smiths, Elite Power, and Gender in Early Medieval Europe', *Medieval Archaeology*, 63 (2019), 271–97 (p. 291).

[77] Alff, 'Workers and Artisans', pp. 51–53.

by Old English poets as a craftsman who thinks and marks out his work in his mind before making it with his hands. For instance, Adam and Eve are described by the *Genesis* poet as the *hand-geweorc* of God (l. 241). Christ was likewise a craftsman, specifically a carpenter, and was sometimes referred to as a *smiþ* as well as *smiþes sunu* in Old English literature.[78]

Accordingly, the natural craft of animals could be divine as well as devilish. Another crafty creature found in the pages of the Exeter Book is *The Phoenix*, whose heavenly craft contrasts with the hellish cunning of *The Whale*. *The Phoenix* is an Old English translation that expands its Latin source poem, the *Carmen de ave phoenice*, attributed to Lactantius. *The Phoenix* describes the habitation, appearance and resurrection of the mythical bird that dies after a thousand-year life cycle before being reborn from its own ashes. The allegorical aspect of the poem, whereby the phoenix symbolises the resurrection of Christ, resembles that of the *Physiologus* poems. Yet, as recent ecocritical interpretations of the poem have shown, the phoenix can be read as both an allegorical symbol and an actual animal that interacts materially with its environment.[79]

After the opening description of the phoenix's paradisical homeland, the poet turns to the bird itself, paying careful attention its form, colours, hues and marvellous adornments. The phoenix is described in such a way that it shifts between animal and artefact: now a bird with bright feathers, gleaming eyes and shining beak; now an artwork sparkling in the sunlight and glittering with glass, gold and gems. Lines 291–304 describe the phoenix as a *wrætlic* work crafted with *smiþa orþoncum*:

Is se fugel fæger   forweard hiwe
bleo-brygdum fag   ymb þa breost foran.
Is him þæt heafod   hindan grene,
wrætlice wrixled,   wurman geblonden.
Þonne is se finta   fægre gedæled,
sum brun, sum basu,   sum blacum splottum
searolice beseted.   Sindon þa fiþru
hwit hindanweard,   ond se hals grene
nioþoweard ond ufeweard,   ond þæt nebb lixeð
swa glæs oþþe gim,   geaflas scyne
innan ond utan.   Is seo eag-gebyrd
stearc ond hiwe   stane gelicast,
gladum gimme,   þonne in goldfate
smiþa orþoncum   biseted weorþeð. (ll. 291–304)

[The front of the bird is beautiful in appearance, coloured with various hues about its breast. Its head at the back is green blended with purple, marvellously mixed together. Then the tail is prettily parted, sometimes brown, sometimes red, sometimes skilfully displayed with dark spots. The feathers behind are white, the neck is green below and above, the beak shines like glass or gems, and the jaws are jewel-like inside and out. The

[78] Wright, 'Crafters of Kingship', p. 273, n. 8. References of this kind can be found in the gloss to Matthew 13. 55, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 140 (The Bath Old English Gospels). For discussion, see Eric G. Stanley, 'Wonder-Smiths and Others: *smið* Compounds in Old English Poetry — With an Excursus on *hleahtor*', *Neophilologus*, 101 (2017), 277–304 (p. 278) and James Bradley, 'St Joseph's Trade and Old English *Smiþ*', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 22 (1991), 21–42.

[79] Donna Beth Ellard, 'Going Interspecies, Going Interlingual, and Flying Away with *The Phoenix*', *Exemplaria*, 23.3 (2011), 268–92. See also Daniel P. O'Donnell, 'Fish and Fowl: Generic Expectations and the Relationship between the Old English *Phoenix*-Poem and Lactantius's *De Ave Phoenice*', in *Germanic Texts and Latin Models: Medieval Reconstructions*, ed. by K. Olsen, A. Harbus and T. Hofstra (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 157–71.

> eye is dazzling and formed like a stone, similar to a glorious gem set in gold by the skill of smiths.]

The morphogenic model of making suggests that we ought to soften any distinction we might draw between organism and artefact.[80] The human maker does not stand apart from nature and impose plans or designs upon inert matter. Rather, the craftsperson intervenes in worldly processes that are always already creating the natural artefacts we see around us, from feathers and webs to rock formations and the shapes of clouds. It surely makes sense to soften the distinction between organisms and artefacts in our analyses of early medieval Christian culture. After all, every living thing was believed to be the handiwork of God, meaning that animals, plants and stones must also be artefacts shaped by heavenly hands. Humans are no exception. We are similarly presented by the poet of *The Phoenix* as works of divine craft, the artefacts of God. Hilary Fox observes that 'the same hand that made the phoenix made human bodies and souls' and contends that the *Phoenix* poet presents God as a divine *aurifex* whose role is twofold: 'first, as the maker or smith of the phoenix (and of all creation), and second, as the goldsmith whose refining fire purges the human soul and body of impurities in preparation for eternal life in heaven'.[81]

The phoenix is, in fact, both a work of art and an artist, a created and creative bird. It is not simply a passive reflection of divine *cræft* but an active performer who expresses its own *cræft* in verbal, visual and material ways. It sings, builds, fabricates and decorates. Additionally, its poetic art is inspired by its internal *breost-sefa* and it uses wisdom, reason and rational observation to know and understand its life course, in order to recreate itself. Its nonhuman creativity is therefore as intelligent as it is intuitive. Its craft is thoughtful.

Like the *Whale* poet, the *Phoenix* poet draws on the terminology of *cræft* to describe animal artistry. Only, this time, the creature does not emit a hellish stench but a heavenly song from its inner self. The phoenix is represented as a skilful poet who 'wrixleð woð-cræfte wundorlicor / beorhtan reorde þonne æfre byre monnes / hyrde under heofonum, siþþan heah-cyning, / wuldres wyrhta, woruld staþelode' ('varies its song-craft more wondrously than any human under heaven has heard since the high king, the worker of glory, made the world', ll. 127–30). The songcraft of the phoenix is not merely an instinct of the body, for it emerges from its inner heart or mind ('onbryrded breost-sefa', l. 126). Its singing represents a form of verbal artistry that outshines the poetical and musical arts of humans and is 'eallum song-craftum swetra ond wlitigra / ond wynsumra wrenca gehwylcum' ('sweeter and lovelier than all other song-crafts and more beautiful than every other melody', ll. 132–33). The songcraft of the phoenix is superior to any sound produced by musical artefacts such as horns and harps: 'Ne magon þam breahtme byman ne hornas, / ne hearpan hlyn' ('Neither trumpets nor horns, nor the tone of the harp, can match that sound', ll. 134–35). As such, this wondrous bird not only equals but surpasses human creativity — even when that creativity is enhanced by technical skills and artefacts. When its singing is done, the bird falls silent and is said to be 'þonces gleaw' ('wise of thought', l. 144). The wisdom of the phoenix is followed by a demonstration of its reason. It displays rationality by observing the course of the sun ('Se sceal þære sunnan sið behealdan', l. 90) and then continuously measuring the hours of day and night ('Symle he twelf siþum tida gemearcað / dæges ond nihtes', ll. 146–47) so that it can comprehend the duration of its own lifespan.

80 Ingold, *Making*, p. 22.
81 Hilary E. Fox, 'The Aesthetics of Resurrection: Goldwork, the Soul and the *Deus Aurifex* in *The Phoenix*', *Review*

As well as a creative and contemplative poet, the phoenix is a material maker. It can build a nest with skill: ‘on þam telgan timbrum onginneð, / nest gearwian’ (‘the bird begins to make a nest in those branches’, ll. 188–89). This creative act is driven by the bird’s great longing (‘neod micel’) to renew its life, with the term *neod* encompassing meanings that range from an instinctual ‘necessity’ to a much more intentional ‘eagerness’, ‘earnestness’ or ‘desire’.[82] The bird then gathers and assembles (‘somnoð ond gædrað’) leaves, herbs and spices from near and far. It carries bright treasures and builds a house:

Þær he sylf biereð
in þæt treow innan torhte frætwe;
þær se wilda fugel in þam westenne
ofer heanne beam hus getimbreð. (ll. 199–202)

[There, by itself, the creature carries bright treasures into that tree; there, in that wilderness, the wild bird builds a house at the top of the tree.]

The phoenix is depicted as a free *wilda fugel* that actively *biereð* and *getimbreð* without human intervention. To construct its nest, it uses materials that are at once natural and artefactual, carrying *torhte frætwe*, with *frætwe* connoting ornaments, adornments, decorations or treasures.[83] This creativity sparks the recreation of the phoenix’s own body and spirit. The nest burns. Fire consumes the flesh and bones of the bird. After a while, though, its ashes begin to bond back together: ‘þa yslan eft onginnað / æfter ligþræce lucan togædre, / geclungne to cleowenne’ (‘after the tumult of flames, the ashes begin once again to bond together, clinging together into a ball’, ll. 224–26). Soon after, the bird that constructed and decorated its nest is itself reconstructed and redecorated: ‘and æfter þon / feþrum gefrætwad, swylc he æt frymðe wæs, beorht geblowen’ (‘and after that it is adorned with feathers, flourishing fabulously, in the same way it had been to begin with’, ll. 238–40).

As with the hellish craft of the whale, the heavenly craft of the phoenix has profound implications for human bodies and souls. Yet where the cunning whale lured human souls to hell, the artistry of the bird offers hope of new life. The poet explains that the souls of the faithful suffer the pains of death so that they may rise again (ll. 381–92) and, in the same way that fire consumes the phoenix and its nest, so too the Last Judgement will purify and renew the bodies and souls of righteous Christian men and women (ll. 491–545).

Above, I asked whether animals should be categorised as ‘matter’ since their bodies are often used as materials in human crafts or whether animals could be considered ‘makers’ because they create their own products and structures. The dual role of the phoenix as artefact and artisan challenges this binary distinction. For in *The Phoenix*, the eponymous bird is an artefact of divine craft, as well as the craft of the human poet whose highly sensuous descriptions of this bird evoke the colours and patterns of metalwork with words. The richly crafted body of the phoenix is perceived by the senses of the reader and yet the reader also perceives the phoenix as an artisan with its own sensory apprehension of the world around it. This creative bird is described as a solitary being (*anhaga*) who is bold of heart (*deormod*), noble in mind (*heahmod*) and wise in thought (*þonces gleaw*). It beholds the rising sun (*þære sunnan sið behealdan*) and gazes eagerly (*locað georne*) across the water. Heather Maring has observed that the Old English *Phoenix* augments its Latin source by registering the bird’s

of English Studies, 63 (2012), 1–19 (p. 19).

[82] Bosworth-Toller, s.v. *neod*.

[83] *TDOE*, s.v. *frætwe*.

feelings as well as its activities. Maring writes that whereas the Latin *Carmen* describes the bird 'from an objective, third-person perspective' the Old English *Phoenix* 'employs a semiomniscient form of narration that enables a traditional, multifaceted subjectivity'. This narrative mode provides the phoenix with a deeper 'interiority' than its Latin counterpart and invites 'empathetic identification' from the audience.[84] Thus, through the medium of poetry, readers can recognise this animal not only as an artefact that attracts our senses but as an intelligent, sentient crafter in its own right. The same is true of *The Whale* whose devilish craft is revealed to readers through the verbal artistry or *woð-cræft* of the poet (ll. 1–3). The craft of the whale involves first being seen by the eyes of the seafarers as a kind of natural artefact, a rough or scaly stone: 'Is þæs hiw gelic hreofum stane' ('Its form is like a rough stone', l. 8). The artifice of the whale fools the seafarers into believing that 'hy on ealond sum eagum wliten' ('they are gazing upon an island with their eyes', l. 12). Then, in return, the sentient whale itself feels (*gefeleð*) the men upon its back before seeking the sea bottom (*grund geseceð*).

In *The Whale* and *Phoenix*, craft is once again theocentric insofar as it originates with a divine craftsman; but when that craft is worked out within and through creation, it becomes a process that is reciprocal rather than strictly hierarchical. The craft of God, the craft of the devil, the craft of human poets, and the craft of nonhuman animals correspond with one another in acts of creation, recreation and anti-creation. Within this reciprocal process, the roles of sensuous artefact and sentient artisan are not fixed but fluid. When Ingold argues that in the midst of making 'sentience and materials twine around one another on their double thread' until they become indistinguishable, the sentience belongs to a human maker. However, in *The Whale* and *Phoenix*, this sentience can belong to artisanal animals who are conscious beings with the ability to think and feel through their craft. Therefore, while these creatures may appear before our senses as divinely and humanly constructed artefacts, they are far from inanimate objects — for they also perform as sentient subjects who can make or unmake the world.

This reciprocal model of craft offered by *The Whale* and *Phoenix* shares some affinities with the 'thing knowledge' discussed by Shew, whereby working knowledge is materially instantiated and demonstrated by the construction of artefacts that can be used by human or nonhuman creatures without the advanced knowledge of that artefact's creator. Knowledge is thus embedded within artefacts, including some animal artefacts, rather than always or only being embodied by the clever creators who make the artefacts work. Those creators play an important part in making their knowledge manifest through the things they create, but the knowledge encoded by the artefact can be understood, and used, in intelligent ways by other sentient beings. These 'things' that encode and engender knowledge cross the categories of organic and artefactual because the natural world also contains things that convey knowledge and these things can be acted upon by creatures who are capable of reshaping their environments.[85] Similarly, in *The Whale* and *Phoenix*, craft is not simply embodied in human makers and then enacted on nature unidirectionally, for it moves between and among human

[84] Heather Maring, 'Birds of Creation in the Old English Exeter Book', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 120.4 (2021), 429–64 (p. 461).

[85] The term 'thing knowledge' is developed by Shew in relation to animal artefacts in *Animal Constructions*, pp. 6–8, 30–33, but originates with Davis Baird, *Thing Knowledge: A Philosophy of Scientific Instruments* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2004). Shew counters Baird's contention that only human artefacts, and not animal artefacts like spider webs and beaver dams, can have thing knowledge. See especially pp. 113–15 of *Animal Constructions*.

and nonhuman makers, between and among the artefacts that they make and the artefacts that they become. The body of the phoenix is a material artefact, crafted by a divine goldsmith, but so too are human bodies and souls. The body of the phoenix can be perceived by the human poet and inspire that poet to recreate the phoenix with verbal craft; but the phoenix itself is able to perceive the divinely created cosmos and then create poetic and material artefacts of its own.

Conclusion

I opened this article by raising the question of whether the ability to craft makes us human and by highlighting some arguments for and against this claim within modern scholarly discourses. How would early English writers have responded to this question? Their answers would, of course, be as nuanced as those found in modernity and would vary depending on the author, text and context. But the evidence from the sources analysed in this article suggests that many early English writers understood craft to be a more-than-human quality and that some of these writers would accept the possibility of animal work, craft and creativity. As demonstrated, the Old English *Boethius* attempts to conceive of craft as a distinctly human attribute that separates us from and lifts us above animality, but this is accompanied by an anxiety about how the abuse of crafts can threaten the humanity of the self and others. Ælfric's *Colloquy* shows how human experiences of work and craft are inseparable from the animals who act as our co-workers and co-crafters. Even when we attempt to rise above animality through intellectual labour, we still model our work on that of animals, sometimes identifying with and sometimes defining ourselves against beasts and birds. Aldhelm's Latin enigmas and the Old English riddles of the Exeter Book provide further evidence for the roles that early medieval animals played as fellow workers and crafters. Rather than denying the nonhumanity of work and craft, these texts encourage us to share the experiences of animals, from the pain of work to the more creative pleasures of craft. *The Whale* and *Phoenix* go even further than the riddles in depicting animal crafts that are thoughtful and purposeful, a far cry from the unthinking labour of the body. These poems also remind us that animal crafts can be divine or devilish in nature and can affect human bodies, minds and souls in profound ways in this life and the next. Overall, in the Old English and Anglo-Latin literature analysed throughout this article, human work and craft cannot be disentangled from the animals that we labour and create with, for, alongside or against.

A key question for this article was whether animal *weorc* ever shades into animal *cræft* in early medieval literary sources. Or is the ability to craft an exclusive part of the human condition? The Old English and Anglo-Latin literature discussed in this article demonstrates that animals could craft creatively as well as work laboriously, but it also shows that some animal crafts were more complex, and perhaps conscious, than others. The same could be said about the creativity of human labour, which ranges from the drudgery of the ploughman and the hardships endured by the shepherd to the skills of the smith and the artistry of the poet. Thus, it would make sense to situate these representations of early medieval *weorc* and *cræft* within a continuum that includes both human and nonhuman actors. At one extreme, we might find the laborious work of the ploughman and the ox but, a little further on, we might find the more skilful craft of the fowler and indeed of the hawk who can snare other birds. While the production of the silkworm may be considered an extension of its body, the more conscious creativity of the phoenix is closer to the smithcraft of a figure like Tubalcain,

whose work was described as an ingenious skill of the mind as much as the body, and the cunning craft of the whale could be seen as analogous to the craftiness of Weland. As one would expect from a deeply Christian literary culture, many of our sources posit God as the supreme craftsman whose handiwork outshines any artefact made by mere mortals. Those sources suggest that *cræft* originates with God, but *cræft* is also a gift loaned by Christ to his earth-dwelling creations and the gifts of *cræft* can be worked at and worked out in different ways by different creatures with varying degrees of strength, skill, cunning and creativity.

The findings of this article have wider implications that reach beyond the field of early medieval studies. Although the medieval period predates the concept of a working class, the representations of animals at work in Old English texts support the idea that one does not need to be human to be a worker. I have shown that human labour relied upon animal bodies, efforts, techniques and talents long before the rise of capitalism. However, I have also complicated straightforward divisions between those who work and those who craft, showing how the former shades into the latter in both human and nonhuman experiences of labour. Old English texts can help us to grasp how and when human creativity is distinctive and where it overlaps with, or takes over from, the creative work of animals. These texts can help us to recognise how and when our tools and technologies go too far in their torturous transformations of animal bodies, turning the creaturely pain that results from sentience into inhumane harm. At the same time, this literature offers a more ethical way of understanding the animality of work and craft. For humans and nonhumans alike, creative pleasure can never be completely released from painful, painstaking labour. But these Old English texts ask us to think carefully about the relationship between compassion and sympathy in processes of working and crafting. That is, the compassion that emerges from suffering with our animal co-workers and co-crafters can give rise to a sympathetic awareness of, and attention to, their modes of making. Craft may not make us human, after all, but we can make the work of craft more humane.