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The 'thingness' of time in the Old English riddles of the Exeter Book and Aldhelm's Latin *enigmata*

What do we make of the transformation of things over time? Maybe one also ought to ask what things make of us over time: how are human beings transformed by the things that carry the traces of our voices and our bodies when we are gone? The Old English and Anglo-Latin riddling traditions give voice to things, as if they could answer such a question. Yet, for the most part, criticism has focused on the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia, whereby the human voice is attributed to or imposed upon a nonhuman and so the things themselves are thought to be mute, or silenced, through a process of anthropomorphism.[1] Recent trends in thing theory, however, have fought against the ingrained idea that anthropomorphism is always a simplistic and childish habit to be avoided. As Benjamin C. Tilghman has suggested, it might instead be recognised as a useful tool for making sense of the alterity of nonhuman things. Rather than reinforcing anthropocentrism, early medieval riddles can 'highlight the agency of things and the human inability to gain complete mastery over them'.[2] A significant obstacle to recognising the agency of things is the common-sense assumption that they are inert: the assumption that a 'thing' must be an inanimate material object. This too has been rethought by modern thing theorists, who have shown that all matter has a vibrant materiality.[3] Gases and liquids flow, take new forms, vanish into air. Organic solids breathe, eat, create energy, rot, decay. Even hard inorganic solids like rocks erode into sands that are sorted and carried in water down to the seas. To acknowledge the flux and fluidity of things is to acknowledge that they endure over different temporalities to human beings, sometimes radically different timescales: from the ever-transforming raincloud to the gradual decay of a stone wall.[4]

As a literary form built upon metaphor, the riddle is perfectly placed to show how all things shift shape (from ice to water, fire to

smoke, honey to mead, ox to leather, sheep to book, ore to gold) as time unfolds. In this chapter, I will listen to the voices granted to the riddle-creatures in order to uncover the impressions these animals or artefacts (or animals becoming artefacts) have left on their human counterparts. This will enable me to look at how the Anglo-Saxons interacted with the nonhuman 'things' with which they shared their world, but in particular how these interactions affected their cognizance of time and change. In keeping with the aims outlined by thing theory, I intend to recognise the agency things have as they affect the lives of humans, focusing especially on their ability to shape the temporalities of Anglo-Saxon men and women. By refusing to remain fixed within one form, the elusive riddle-creatures often invite human readers to rethink how our own bodies, as things among other things, may cross categories of age, role and gender over different stretches of time. From the outward transformation of bodies, the latter part of this chapter moves on to explore how voice can be ascribed across the human/nonhuman divide in early medieval textual and material culture. When other animals or artefacts take on our voices in riddles and enigmas, humans start to exist differently within the temporal world. These poems reveal how we may find human temporality altered when voice-bearing things talk back to us. It is the 'thingness' of these nonhuman voice-bearers that ultimately determines how human identities will endure or fade with the gradual passing of time.

Nonhuman time

When thing theory emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s, literary scholars started to publish books about early modern objects and eighteenth-century it-narratives.[5] But it is worth remembering that a fascination with how things speak, and how to speak with things, stretches into the more distant past. Accordingly, the 2001 special issue of *Critical Inquiry* on 'Things' featured an essay that discussed Old English riddles at length. In 'Lyric Substance: On Riddles, Materialism, and Poetic Obscurity', Daniel Tiffany draws our attention to what the early medieval riddling tradition tells us about the materiality of things. For Tiffany, the inscrutability of things in riddles betrays 'the inescapable role of language in depicting the nonempirical qualities – the invisible aspect – of material phenomena'.[6] Tiffany undertakes this analysis in order to

make available to literary and cultural studies a more productive sense of the ambiguity of material substance. As such, the Anglo-Saxon riddling tradition offers some key insights that can lead to the formation of a theory of things. Central to Tiffany's thesis is the notion that these riddles are essentially 'materialist allegories' as well as allegories of materialism. Unlike conventional allegory, the 'phenomenon veiled by the dark or enigmatical description is not a metaphysical entity (an abstract concept or a divinity), but a physical object or being'.[7] The weird creature (the OE *wiht*) we encounter at the outset of the poem, and veiled by its obscure speech, turns out to be a familiar phenomenon, a part of everyday experience. By taking on board the lessons of the riddles, and incorporating their approach to the material world into our critical practice, Tiffany's essay aims to encourage the humanities to abandon uncritical assumptions about the nature of material substance, for 'the reality of matter must always remain uncertain, always a problem that needs to be taken into consideration'. Therefore, the study of material culture 'should never take for granted the material existence of its objects'.[8]

I aim to extend the work that Tiffany started, by considering how riddles offer us a unique glimpse into the temporality of material things: a nonhuman temporality that we would otherwise fail to perceive, were it not captured by the playful language of the Anglo-Saxon riddles. By granting a voice to mere things, and coaxing them to talk about their former origins as well as their current and future uses, riddles do not allow us to take for granted the inertia of objects. Material artefacts that seem to be unmoving are lyrically transformed into other kinds of things as time enacts change and as processes of creation, exchange, use, decay, suffering and shape-shifting unfold. Time itself is not usually defined as an object but its movements can nevertheless be observed through the lifespan of various material bodies, a lifespan that riddles are capable of unfurling before our eyes. How, then, do early medieval riddles and enigmas play with the phenomenon of time? How do these riddles make nonhuman temporalities visible, audible and perceptible through the language of poetry?

Paradoxically, my discussion of the 'thingness' of time begins with the nothingness of time. In many senses, nothing could be less thinglike than time, so intangible, unseen, unheard, fleeting. If indeed the solution to Riddle 39 of the Exeter Book is 'time', as critics such as Trautmann have suggested,[9] then it would seem that

the Anglo-Saxons had arrived at a similar conclusion. Riddles 39 opens with the teasing proposition that:

> Gewritu secgað þæt seo wiht sy
> mid moncynne miclum tidum
> sweotol ond gesyne. Sundorcræft hafað
> maran micle, þonne hit men witen. (1–4)
>
> [Writings say that this creature is amid mankind at many times, clear and seen. It has a special power, far greater when men know it.][10]

The *wiht* we are dealing with in this riddle has neither 'fot ne folme' [foot nor hand] (10). It 'ne eagena hafað ægþer twega' [has no two eyes either] (11) and 'ne muð hafaþ' [has no mouth] (12). With no feet or hands, eyes or mouth, this entity does not have the bodily senses to see us, or touch us, or taste us. From further descriptions, we may ask how we are meant to perceive it, in turn: handless and footless, it 'ne æfre foldan hran' [never leaves its touch on the earth] (10) and with neither 'blod ne ban' [blood nor bone] (18) there is no body there for us to make sense of. And yet the opening of Riddle 39 tells us something different. Far from being invisible the *wiht* is 'mid moncynne miclum tidum sweotol ond gesyne' [amid mankind at many times, clear and seen] (2–3). Insubstantial as it may seem, the riddling entity has a 'wile' [will or desire] (5) which is to 'gesecan sundor æghwylcne feorhberendra' [to seek out separately each one of the life-bearers] (5–6). What is this nothingness that has a desire to seek us out, that moves in our midst, both known and strange, seen and unseen, dwelling with us individually, intimately, and yet never being the same – or the same being – 'niht þær oþre' [one night as another] (7)?

The phenomenon described in Riddle 39 sounds very much like one of Timothy Morton's 'hyperobjects'. Hyperobjects are so massively distributed across time and space that they appear to be everywhere and nowhere; they can be experienced partially yet any particular materialisation never reveals the totality of the hyperobject: raindrops are a local manifestation of climate but do not enable us to encounter climate itself, and a single word might allow us to speak a language but it cannot reveal the entirety of that language to us. 'Time' could be understood as the ultimate hyperobject: humans are continuously experiencing its effects but we will never be able to grasp it as a solid entity. Hyperobjects create 'a sense of the *asymmetry* between the infinite powers of cognition and the infinite being of things'.[11] Similarly, Riddle 39

posits a *wiht* at once so present and so evasive that it troubles the subject–object, self–other, interior–exterior binaries that ordinarily allow us to divide the world into the human that sees, touches, names and organises and the nonhuman that is seen, touched, named, organised.

This is a resolutely disembodied riddle. On the one hand, the insistent negation tells us what we are not dealing with: having no eyes, ears, mouth, no soul or life, leaving no mark, the entity cannot be an animal and is unlikely to be an artefact. On the other hand, via its repetition of the phrase 'ne hafað … ne hafað …' the riddle also robs us of our ability to make sense of things. As we are taken through the negative statements, we are able to eliminate solutions, to say what it is *not* called; but the affirmation that it 'leofaþ efne seþeah' [lives even so] (27) or is 'bearnum wearð geond þisne middangeard mongum to frofre' [for the children of men around this middle-earth a comfort to many] (18–19) keeps the riddling game alive, keeps us guessing. As the *wiht* oscillates between being and not being we also oscillate between sensing and not sensing, knowing and not knowing. There is no firm ground for the riddle reader to stand on. We are neither subjects who see, scrutinise and organise time nor objects on the receiving end of its action. Riddle 39 denies us our usual mode of sensory apprehension via which we act as subjects. It also denies us a solid object to scrutinise. Riddle 39 forces us into a liminal zone, an area of 'thingness'. Yet Riddle 39 does at least give us a name, for in the Old English 'time' is here described as a *wiht*. As I have demonstrated, the OE word *wiht* straddles the bounds between the abstract and tangible, immaterial and material, manmade and natural, living creature and dead artefact, and therefore shares many affinities with the 'thing' described by Brown and others.

Following the lead of Riddle 39 itself, I have so far been speaking in negative terms, relating what is taken away from us as sentient humans, unable to make sense of the bodiless entity, the *wiht* we are somehow meant to resolve: 'reselan recene gesecgan' (28). Yet if time is neither an artefact organised by us nor a being that organises us, we are granted the flexibility to exist fluidly within time. We are invited to stretch out our embodied boundedness, to expand our temporal frame.

Fluidity and flexibility, instability, stretching and expanding, flowing across thresholds, across boundaries: what better way to understand such a state of being than through water? For this

reason, I want to read Riddle 39 alongside Riddle 85 of the Exeter Book, conventionally solved as 'fish and river':

> Nis min sele swige ne ic sylfa hlud
> ymb [* * *]; unc dryhten scop
> siþ ætsomne. Ic eom swiftre þonne he,
> þragum strengra, he þreohtigra.
> Hwilum ic me reste; he sceal rinnan forð.
> Ic him in wunige a þenden ic lifge;
> gif wit unc gedælað, me bið deað witod.
>
> [My hall is not silent, myself am not loud around [* * *]; the lord shaped our course together. I am swifter than he, at times stronger, he more enduring. Sometimes I rest myself; he must run forth. I dwell in him while I live; if we are divided, my death is ordained.]

Andy Orchard has argued that, if we allow ourselves to look beyond similar Latin *enigmata* by Alcuin and Symphosius, and the conventional 'fish and river' solution they offer us, then we might well understand this as a 'soul and body' riddle.[12] Patrick J. Murphy concurs, arguing that, while the correct solution must be a fish in the river, the 'descriptive proposition is shaped by something more – the unspoken metaphor of the soul and body' so that the emphasis 'is on exploring the contrasting relationship of guest with hall'.[13]

I, too, wish to shift the focus away from the simple 'fish and river' solution and run with this contrasting guest and hall relationship, exploring what it might have to say about temporality. Here, we are invited to apprehend our life course, our movement through time, from a split perspective. Unlike the probable source of this riddle, Symphosius's Riddle 12, *Flumen et Piscis*, the Exeter Book reworking does not give its answer away. More than that, Riddle 85 does not even open and close with the usual riddling formulae, the conventional 'Ic seah' or the final 'Saga hwæt ic hatte'. With no immediately identifiable perspective, the reader must dive into a voice in the first person. The initial statements, as with much of Riddle 39, are negative: 'Nis min sele swige, ne ic sylfa hlud ymb …' [My hall is not silent, myself am not loud around …] (1–2). Speaker and environment are contrasted in a way that would have run counter to Anglo-Saxon expectations of how voice-bearing creatures behave. For instance, in *Beowulf* the din of the hall that so troubles Grendel is not made by the hall itself but by the men and women within the hall, their singing and harping and storytelling. In Riddle 85, though, it is the speaker who is not loud and

the hall (*sele*) that is not silent, reversing the sense of vocality and agency. Ostensibly, the substance around or about (*ymb*) which the speaker in Riddle 85 moves seems quite different to that which moves around us in Riddle 39, where the latter 'ne muð hafaþ, ne wiþ monnum spræc' [has no mouth, nor does it speak with men] (12). However, the *fisc ond flod* are entwined in their course, bound together by the lord: 'unc dryhten scop siþ ætsomne' [the lord shaped our course/fate together] (2–3). Similarly, the entity or substance in Riddle 39 has a will, a desire to seek out each of the life-bearers (*feorhberendra*) and, not unlike the exiled speakers in *The Wanderer* and *Seafarer*, it must 'wideferh wreccan laste hamleas hweorfan' [widely roam the road of exiles, homeless] (8–9). It never 'heofonum hran, ne to helle mot, ac hio sceal wideferh wuldorcyninges larum lifgan' [reaches heaven, or to hell, but it must always live within the king of glory's laws] (20–2). Time is thus depicted as a fellow wanderer in this world, bound by God's laws and teachings as we are. Even while this entity is in many senses unknowable to us, there are ways by which we *can* know our fellow traveller. According to Augustine we must know this fellow traveller (that is, time) if we are to make sense of our journey at all:

> A temporum autem delectatione, dum in temporibus vivimus, propter aeternitatem in qua vivere volumus abstinendum et ieiunandum est, quamvis temporum cursibus ipsa nobis insinuetur doctrina contemnendorum temporum et appetendorum aeternorum.
>
> [While we live in the temporal order, we must fast and abstain from the enjoyment of what is temporal, for the sake of the eternity in which we desire to live, but it is actually the passage of time by which the lesson of despising the temporal and seeking the eternal is brought home to us.][14]

Human perspective is inextricably shaped by the movements of time and the alterations it enacts on temporal things even as the perspective of the 'I' in Riddle 85 is shaped by its watery environment. The *fisc* can only comprehend its life course in relation to the *flod*. As with the first line of the riddle, the speaker ('Ic') continues to contrast itself with its home ('he'): 'Ic eom swiftre þonne he, þragum strengra, he þreohtigra' [I am swifter than he, at times stronger, he more enduring] (3–4). It is in this way that Riddle 85 presents us with a split perspective. As readers we can only comprehend the speaker in relation to its hall, the 'I' in relation to 'he'. As a result, we not only read or speak the 'I' of the fish but enter into the body of water, the watery body, it inhabits,

seeing and hearing the fish as silent, insignificant, scarcely animate in contrast to the long endurance of the river, its continuation as it 'sceal rinnan forð' [must run forth] (5) while the fish rests, still flowing on well beyond the fish's lifespan, stretching back into a history and forward into a future that the piscine speaker can neither conceive nor express: 'Ic him in wunige a þenden ic lifge; gif wit unc gedælað, me bið deað witod' [I dwell in him while I live; if we are divided, my death is ordained] (6–7). We are invited, then, to comprehend our life course in a nonhuman, expanded temporal frame. By way of comparison, consider Bede's famous sparrow:

> 'Talis,' inquiens, 'mihi uidetur, rex, uita hominum praesens in terris, ad conparationem eius, quod nobis incertum est, temporis, quale cum te residente ad caenam cum ducibus ac ministris tuis tempore brumali, accenso quidem foco in medio, et calido effecto caenaculo, furentibus autem foris per omnia turbinibus hiemalium pluuiarum uel niuium, adueniens unus passeium domum citissime peruolauerit; qui cum per unum ostium ingrediens, mox per aliud exierit. Ipso quidem tempore, quo intus est, hiemis tempestate non tangitur, sed tamen paruissimo spatio serenitatis ad momentum excurso, mox de hieme in hiemem regrediens, tuis oculis elabitur. Ita haec uita hominum ad modicum apparet; quid autem sequatur, quidue praecesserit, prorsus ignoramus.'
>
> ['This is how the present life of man on earth, O King, appears to me in comparison with that time which is unknown to us. You are sitting feasting with your ealdormen and thegns in winter time; the fire is burning on the hearth in the middle of the hall and all inside is warm, while outside the wintry storms of rain and snow are raging; and a sparrow flies swiftly through the hall. It enters in at one door and quickly flies out through the other. For the few moments it is inside, the storm and wintry tempest cannot touch it, but after the briefest moment of calm, it flits from your sight, out of the wintry storm and into it again. So this life of man appears but for a moment; what follows or indeed what went before, we know not at all.'][15]

Separated from the hall, our bodies die. Yet what Riddle 85 reminds us is that the hall itself endures beyond our passing. In the riddle, the *sele* is fluid, and is stretched, and in turn we shrink almost to nothingness, and the sound and fury of our brief life is not loud. *Fisc* and *flod* are bound up in their course, and yet the *siþ* (fate or movement) shaped for them unfolds differently, or, rather, they unfold differently along their course: one swift, the other slow; one stronger, the other more enduring; one always running forth, while the other rests.

In Riddle 39, we are likewise being asked to read and unriddle something that humankind is entwined with in this world. Nevertheless, this substance exists or unfolds differently to us. As the fish seems silent, small and fleeting to long-enduring water, the *wiht* of Riddle 39 seems almost unknowable to embodied humans. As the 'earmost ealra wihta þara þe æfter gecyndum cenned wære' [swiftest of all creatures after its kind ever conceived] (14–15), its movements through this world – always faring forth on its way, never staying still, never the same being one night after another, never leaving its mark on the earth – mean that there is no temporal moment in which we might make sense of its blood or bone, hear its words or see its eyes. This encourages us to shed our finite form, for the duration of the riddling game, and start to see ourselves as things among other things, and to see time *through* other things. An important contradiction within Riddle 39 is that, while it emphasises the unknowable character of time, it also teases us with the notion that, in fact, we can and do know time. Intangible and inaudible to us, the way to know this substance, the riddle suggests, is through the insubstantial: mind and words. Its 'special power' or *sundorcræft* is far greater 'þonne hit men witen' [when men know it] (3–4). It is a *wiht* that is 'cenned': from *cennan*, to conceive. Moreover, 'Soð is æghwylc þara þe ymb þas wiht wordum becneð' [true is each and every one of those things signified by words about this being] (25–6). We can know the 'truth' about this *wiht* through words. The poetic language of the riddle, in particular, can render the obscurity of time, its nonempirical qualities, visible. But, like Augustine in his *Confessions*, we must still mentally wrestle with the elusive concept of time: 'inde mihi visum est nihil esse aliud tempus quam distentionem; sed cuius rei, nescio, et mirum, si non ipsius animi' [it seems to me that time is nothing other than a stretching-apart; but of what, I do not know, and I would marvel if it is not a stretching-apart of consciousness itself].[16]

The paradox of time is that of a non-physical entity which presents itself to our consciousness through physical change. For all the 'immaterial' interaction we may have with this entity, we cannot get away from the bodily images summoned forth by Riddle 39's negative statements: blood, bone, limb, touch, foot, hand, eyes, mouth. What this poem seems to be telling us is that, although we may shed our human skins, we can still only think through tangible things. In the riddling game, human subjects are always becoming some other thing. Even the 'nothingness' of time must be accessed

through interactions with other bodies, other animals, other material objects.

Time, then, can only be conceived through things. Time, in turn, influences how we comprehend the 'thingness' of any given creature or artefact – for this thingness is relative to their existence within time, their transience or endurance. Time determines the manner in which we divide the world – into animate and inanimate, alive and dead, still and active, silent and loud. In relation to a long-lasting body of water, the fish of Riddle 85 is fleeting and not loud. What would the *wiht* of Riddle 39, the swiftest of all creatures, make of us, with voices too slow, or not slow enough, to be heard, and with bodies too brittle to endure, as it seeks us out and goes again on its way?

Time and change in material things

In her discussion of the premodern object, Kellie Robertson reminds us that it is post-Enlightenment 'common sense' that 'encourages us to view things as inert, mute witnesses to the life of active agents, to train our attention on the human subjects who look at, move around, and organize nonhuman things'.[17] As a result, we have become accustomed to clocks acting as objects rather than things, as windows onto the human whose sole existence is to tell us the time that we have imposed upon them, rarely impressing their own temporal existence upon us. However, Anglo-Saxon notions of time could often be enmeshed with the very 'thingness' of the artefact being used as a measuring or recording device. This is not to say that the Anglo-Saxons had no way of organising and segmenting the days or months or years apart from the rhythms of the external world. What will be seen in the section to follow, for instance, is a tension between 'natural' and 'social' time. Yet this tension is exactly that: a two-way tussle, a to and fro between what humankind wants and needs time to be and do, and the resistance of nonhuman things with their own, often contradictory, being-in-the-world. Candles and stones do not act as mute witnesses but might be understood as asserting a kind of agency. They have their own say in what time is and does.

Before turning my attention to what such things have to say, though, I will first consider the human take on determining time, the methods and meanings behind Anglo-Saxon divisions of the day, seasons and year. Frederick Tupper offered a detailed study of this matter, which shall be useful for my purposes here.[18] First

of all, Tupper deals with the Anglo-Saxon day, how it was divided and the significance of these divisions. Without the use of artificial time-keepers, the 'interval between sunrise and sunset was divided into twelve equal parts called hours, and, as this interval varied with the season, the length of the hour varied also'. Variable hours like these were called 'temporary hours' whereas at the time of the equinoxes 'both the day and night hours were of the same length as those we use' and were therefore called 'equinoctial hours'.[19] Tupper asks whether this was true of Anglo-Saxon times, whether there is also a distinction evident between temporary and equinoctial hours. In addition to Bede and Ælfric, he cites Byrhtferð's *Enchiridion* as evidence that there was a distinction between 'natural' and 'artificial' day, and that the Anglo-Saxon day began at sunrise. Byrhtferð says the following:

> On twam wisum ys se dæg gecweden: naturaliter et uulgariter, þæt ys gecyndelice and ceorlice. Þæt ys þæs dæges gecynd þæt he hæbbe feower and twentig tida fram þære sunnan upspringe þæt he eft up hyre leoman ætywe. Vulgaris uel artificialis dies est (þæt byð ceorlisc dæg oððe cræftlic) from þære sunnan anginne þæt heo to setle ga and eft cume mancynne to blisse.
>
> [Day is spoken of in two ways: *naturaliter* and *vulgariter*, natural and vulgar. It is the nature of the day to have twenty-four hours from the rising of the sun until it again displays its rising radiance. The *vulgaris* or *artificalis* (vulgar or artificial) day lasts from the sun's rising until it goes to its seat, and then it comes again as a joy to mankind.][20]

For Tupper, the evidence that unequal hours were employed by the Anglo-Saxons is 'very conclusive' and refers to Bede in *De temporum ratione*, who 'shows that the twelve hours of the Artifical day – the time from sunrise to sunset – are necessarily unequal'.[21] Further, in Anglo-Saxon England, 'unequal hours had their support in the Hours of the Canons' and while these were strictly for monks 'there can be but little doubt that with them the laity were perfectly familiar'. It is only with the introduction of clocks into England during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that 'equinoctial hours' are established, causing old temporary divisions to lose their meaning.[22]

What kind of time markers did the Anglo-Saxons have? They were not as privileged as some of their neighbours, did not have great clocks or a golden horologe or other mechanical inventions. Of water clocks and sandglasses they 'probably knew little' and

'many passages in prose and poetry show how entirely the monks and people relied upon the heavens as their guide'.[23] An intriguing case study, however, is that of Alfred the Great's candle clock, as recounted in Asser's Life of the king. Initially, the account fits well with the familiar story of the human subject's mastery of the world of objects around him. Unable to accurately estimate the lengths of the nocturnal hours, because of darkness, or of the daytime hours because of the regular density of the rain and cloud, Alfred finds a useful and intelligent solution (*invento utili et discreto consilio*).[24] The king instructs his chaplains to make six candles (*sex candelas*) out of wax, each of equal size, 'ut unaquaeque candela duodecim uncias pollicis in se signatas in longitudine haberet' [so that each candle would have twelve divisions marked longitudinally on it]. Man creates the artefact and marks its body so that it might tell him what he already knows about time: 'sex illae candelae per viginti quatuor horas die nocteque sine defectu coram sanctis multorum electorum Dei reliquiis … ardentes lucescebant' [the six candles were lit so as to burn through the twenty-four hours of each day and night, without fail, before the sacred relics of many of God's elect]. Stevenson, in the notes to his edition of the *Life of Alfred*, remarks of this passage that 'the author refers to a division of the day and night taken together into twenty-four equal hours, and not to the division of the day, the time between sunrise and sunset, and the night, the time between sunset and sunrise, into twelve hours each, the length of which, strictly speaking, varied from day to day'. For Stevenson, Alfred is 'pictured as using the equinoctial hours' in this instance and, if this is so, he has 'the credit of anticipating by several centuries the use of this, the modern, system, which is so largely the result of the introduction of the wheel-clock'.[25]

As Exeter Book Riddle 39 demonstrates, humans can know time by conceiving it, but what we conceive with the mind must also be seen and touched in material form. Alfred thinks the candle clock into being so that what he already knows about time (that each day and night is segmented into twenty-four hours) may be tangibly confirmed through a waxen body. According to Asser's account, though, the candles do not behave as Alfred intends them to, for the violence of the wind (*ventorum violentia*) blowing through doors and cracks into the churches causes the candles to burn up more quickly than they should, so that they had finished their course before their appointed hour (*exardescere citius plus debito ante eandem horam finiendo cursum suum*). Wax and wind interact

to tell Alfred something different about time, challenging the neat twenty-four hour division of day and night. It is in this manner that the candles cease acting like objects and start to assert their thingness. In this moment of resistance, Alfred's invention is sliding between candle clock and waxy amorphousness, neither formed nor unformed, neither working as intended nor idle. The candles are meant to melt – but the fact that they are doing so more swiftly than their design dictated exhibits the tension between human and nonhuman time.

While Alfred's candle clock is a means of measuring time in this world, it is also a way of creating space within the course of the day in which the king might reflect on the timelessness of the next world. Asser tells us that the reason behind the construction of the clock is so that Alfred can render to God 'dimidiam partem servitii mentis et corporis' [one half of his mental and bodily service] both by day and night. Yet the rendering of this time to God is connected to Alfred's somatic existence in this life, for the king can only offer to God 'in quantam infirmitas et possibilitas atque suppetentia permitteret' [as much as his health and means would allow] and when he thinks to increase the half of his service, he can only do so as far as his means and abilities and of course his health (*immo etiam infirmitas*) would permit. Even when intending to think on eternal bliss, while waiting to be fetched from this transitory life, Alfred remains conscious of his own body in time, its temporal limitations, its change and decay.[26]

But the candles themselves are key to how Alfred understands his bodily alterations and movement through time. He is devoting time to his Maker through the artefact he himself has made or commanded to be made. In *De civitate Dei*, St Augustine lists the many technological inventions of humankind, from weaving and building to agriculture and navigation, pottery, painting and sculpture, weapons, musical instruments and ornaments. For Augustine, such inventions merely adorn our mortal lives and would not have been necessary were it not for original sin and the resulting miseries.[27] However, in the Augustinian Christian view of technology, as the world declined into the future, the enfeebled body of postlapsarian mankind could 'improve through artifice' whereby the artefactual serves as 'a prosthesis to supplement the fallen body of mankind'.[28] The human body and the body of the artefact are bound together, a continuousness between the two formed in the act of making. Some artefacts (swords, shields, cups, books) may outlive their human makers but others, like the candle, have a shorter life course; they

deteriorate and die before human eyes, while we watch. There is an ambivalence about Alfred's candle clock. On the one hand, we witness human mastery over nature, the construction of an artefact to tell us the time, an invention that allows Alfred to take time out of this world and devote himself to what is morally and spiritually important. On the other hand, the ever-melting candles, which melt even faster when their nakedness is not covered by a wood and ox-horn lantern, a covering devised by Alfred to shelter the candles from draughts of wind, call to mind the ever-deteriorating fallen body of man, itself hastening towards the grave as the twenty-four hours of each day go by. In the Old English *Genesis A*, the naked bodies of Adam and Eve are suddenly exposed to 'wind' and 'hægles' and 'forst' and the 'beorhte sunne' (806–11) after the Fall.[29] Similarly, the candles in Asser's *Life of Alfred* are vulnerable to the wind and rain in their nakedness, and must be clothed in wood and horn. Partly due, no doubt, to the Life's debt to hagiographical conventions, Alfred's body comes down to us through Asser as a sickly one and his 'illness' is often discussed in visceral terms, relating to the king's insides.[30] Just as the candle clock that the king makes allows him to devote time to his Maker, the vulnerability and visible decay of this manmade artefact also says something about Alfred's own existence in time.

In his Latin *enigmata*, compiled before the age of Alfred, at the end of the seventh century, Aldhelm describes a candle in similarly visceral terms. Enigma LII opens with the candle's manual construction: 'Materia duplici palmis plasmabar apertis' [I was created from two materials by open hands] (1).[31] Man shapes his artefacts with his hands, but so too does God the Creator when shaping the earth and humankind in *Genesis B*.[32] In the next lines, the candle crosses between human and nature, god-made body and manmade artefact: 'Interiora mihi candescunt' [My insides shine hot] (2). *Candescere* is a verb that has connotations of both heat (like the warm human interior) and radiance. This thing also has entrails (*viscera*) but they are taken from the natural world, from flax (*lino*) and the slender rush (*gracili iunco*) (2–3). The candle's interior seems human, and yet has been formed from what is exterior to the body. Likewise, the outer surface of its body, its skin, is yellowish gold and produced from flowers: 'Sed nunc exterius flavescunt corpora flore' (4).

Having constructed the candle, enfolding outer and inner, body and nature, in the first half of the riddle, Aldhelm then describes its deterioration, again in both human and nonhuman terms. The

candle vomits or belches out fire: 'Quae flammasque focosque laremque vomentia fundunt' (5), which causes it to both melt and weep: 'Et crebro lacrimae stillant de frontibus udae' (6). In Juster's poetic translation, 'And maudlin tears keep dripping down my brow'. Once the candle has cried itself to death, its insides, shaped from nature by the hands of a maker, once radiant with life, are now scorched (*viscera tosta*) and leave only remnants of ash (*reliquias cinerum*) (8). Or, as Juster renders the final line, 'They leave ash smudges where my guts were seared'. Unsettling the divide between the body that makes and the body that is made, between that which lives and breathes and vomits and weeps, and that which shines and burns and melts, Aldhelm's riddle sheds light on what a candle can tell us about time and change. When viewed in such visceral terms, the melting candle seems to hasten somatic decay and death, serving to underscore the deterioration of the fallen human body.

What a waxen candle has to say about time and change is very different to what stone tells us. It is hard to imagine stone telling us much at all. Whereas a candle melts before human eyes, visibly returning to its waxy formlessness as it burns down, always becoming something else, its deterioration registering the passage of time faster than the human body can, stone seems to remain inert, immutable, constant. At least, that is how humans tend to make sense of stone. Jane Hawkes has commented on the Anglo-Saxon utilisation of stone as a powerful and permanent material, and shown how Roman forts could provide a backdrop for Christian monuments – such as those of Ruthwell and Bewcastle – as a 'physical manifestation of the old *imperium*' which the Church 'appropriated and redefined' for its own purpose.[33] Stone's power was bound up with its ability to endure across multiple human lifespans, to outlive the men and women who shaped it into a monument or fortress and to carry the power of the past into the present, its stony life vaster than empires, and more slow.[34] So while stone does seem to stand solid and silent before the human, we have always been aware that its stillness through time is itself a kind of movement that renders us ephemeral in comparison.[35] As such, stone has not only been utilised as a symbol of power, but as a means to measure time in a way that other materials cannot.

One instance of stone's role in reckoning time is to be found in the Bewcastle monument, which has a sundial on its south side. This feature is significant as 'probably our earliest surviving English instrument for calculating the passage of time'.[36] For

the Anglo-Saxons, the sundial was the 'chief chronometer'[37] and is described by Byrhtferð in his *Enchiridion* in the section immediately following his discussion of the 'natural' and 'artificial' day:

> Se dæg þe hæfð feower and twentig tida, he hæfð syx and hundnigontig punctos. Feower puncti (þæt synt prican) wyrcað ane tid on þære sunnan ryne; and forþan ys se prica gecweden forþan seo sunne astihð pricmælum stihð on þam dægmæle. Me ys neod þæt ic menge þæt Lyden amang þissum Englisce. Punctus a pungendo dicitur. Forþan ys se prica gecweden forþan he pingð oðde pricað. Hawa, la cleric, hu seo sunne pricmælum stihð on þam dægmæle; þonne miht þu gleawlice ascrutnian þas prican þe we ymbe sprecað * * *
>
> [The day that has twenty-four hours has ninety-six points. Four *puncti* (points) make one hour in the sun's course; and the point is so called because the sun advances point by point on the sundial. It is necessary for me to mix some Latin in with this English. *Punctus a pungendo dicitur*. The point is so called because it pricks or stings. Observe, O clerk, how the sun advances point by point on the sundial; you may then wisely scrutinize those points that we speak of * * *][38]

A sundial thus functions instrumentally, as a tool for recording the passing of time. But a closer consideration of the Bewcastle sundial reveals how a thing of stone might not always comply with man-made temporalities.

Éamonn Ó Carragáin has noted that the sundial was likely to have had both practical and symbolic functions. On the practical side, each day it would have 'reminded ecclesiastics of their duty to celebrate the liturgical hours, and reminded all onlookers, religious or secular, that other tasks needed to be done'. Its symbolic function was to show that the 'sun was an image of Christ, the Bridegroom' and to indicate 'the logic behind the sequence on the west side, from Christ to John the Baptist' whereby Christ's conception and birth were celebrated on the 'growing days' when the sun began to overcome the winter darkness, while John's conception and birth were celebrated on the 'lessening days' when the darkness began to triumph over the sun's light. In this way, the Bewcastle sundial binds the practical with the symbolic, even as power and permanence are bound within the medium of stone. The Bewcastle monument stands and has always stood 'out of doors, within the massive vallum of a Roman fort'.[39] Its sundial means that it could not have been enclosed within a church if it was to function as intended, but its stoniness means that it could have endured the

weather as a candle clock could not have. This endurance allowed the monument and sundial to be seen by onlookers as it reminded them of their duties within the divisions of the day; and its endurance and monumental visibility is connected to power. Its presence within a Roman fort would have communicated the appropriated *imperium* of the Christian Church but this is also linked, via the sundial, to the sun's triumph over darkness and Christ's triumph over death. Lithic solidity and stability thus enables time – the daily and seasonal division of time – and power to visibly interconnect across and around the Bewcastle monument. While a candle clock measures twenty-four hours by burning and melting away far faster than the human body deteriorates within time, the stone-carved sundial witnesses and stands witness to equinox after equinox, solstice after solstice, long since its human onlookers have ceased looking.

For Orton, Wood and Lees in *Fragments of History*, Ó Carragáin is on uncertain ground when he talks about the 'symbolic reasons' for the Bewcastle sundial which, as 'an instrument that represents the sun's ordered progress, seems a strange device with which to represent the "powers of heaven … shaken", driven from their courses'.[40] However, they do note that the sundial 'must be seen and understood as an aspect of the monument's Romanness' and also remind us that the monument was erected within the remains of the Roman fort of *Fanum Cocidii*. The 'Romanness' of the monument is linked not only to power but to knowledge, given that its sundial is best understood as 'resourced' by a familiarity with Roman dials and dialling.[41] But what I want to stress here is that stone as a material, in its very stillness and solidity, substantiates this Roman-resourced knowledge and enables an artificial division of time to be observed in a way other things cannot. That is to say, no thing but stone would have sufficed in reckoning time and regularising the days and years in the ordered manner necessary for the Bewcastle community. Orton, Wood and Lees comment on how early medieval Northumbrian time would have been mainly natural time, determined by the rhythms of nature, without imaginary divisions of time, without hours – mainly natural time, but not entirely, for Northumbrian monastic society was starting to inaugurate a different kind of time: social time, the time of calendars and clocks.[42] But the beginnings of this search for social time may have depended upon stone, or at least upon a certain sort of materiality which only stone can offer.

Early Northumbrian monastic societies increasingly needed a time that was removed from nature. Stone stands in a still and stark contrast to the apparent movement of the sun across the sky, to growing and harvesting, the changing seasons, the tides, the swaying of grass in the wind, the heartbeats of animals. It would, for this reason, seem the ideal material to facilitate the move from natural to social time, registering movement while itself remaining unchanged.

Stone is nevertheless part of the natural world, even if it can be used to record the time of society, and to say that stone is still and solid is to speak only from the limited perspective of the human lifespan. Stone could outlast a hundred generations of human beings, kingdom after kingdom, but it would not remain unchanged forever. The Exeter Book poem *The Ruin* takes a broader perspective and describes how 'Wrætlic is þes wealstan, wyrde gebræcon; / burgstede burston, brosnað enta geweorc' [Wondrous is this wall-stone, broken by fate; the fortresses fell to bits, the work of giants decays] (1–2). While stone might stand for the redefined *imperium* of the Christian Church, it could simultaneously convey the crumbled *imperium* of empire. From different perspectives, a stone monument could be a solid monument or a material in flux. In his discussion of 'materials against materiality' Tim Ingold encourages us to switch our attention from stone as a material object to what happens to stone *as a material* in the course of exchanges of substance across its surface with the surrounding medium of air. Ingold demonstrates – by way of a wet stone becoming dry – that stoniness is not in the stone's nature or materiality, as such, but emerges through the stone's involvement in its total surroundings (including the human observer) and from the manifold ways in which it is engaged in the currents of the lifeworld. In place of the material world, populated by solid objects, our eyes are opened to a world of materials, in which 'all is in flux and transformation'.[43]

This may not be an exclusively modern insight. In a number of his early medieval *enigmata*, Aldhelm toys with the boundary between the inert and the active, the dead and the living. Minerals and gemstones react and interact with the life and death cycles of animate creatures. Enigma IX begins with the seeming hardness, the unyielding nature, of the 'diamond' (*adamas*): 'En ego non vereor rigidi discrimina ferri, / Flammarum neu torre cremor' [See! I do not fear the cutting of rigid iron, nor am I burned in a

furnace of flames] (1–2). In the next moment, we learn that the blood of a goat (*sanguine capri*) can affect the indomitable strength (*virtus indomiti*) of the diamond in a way that neither flame nor the sword can, causing it to undergo elemental change: 'Sic cruor exsuperat quem ferrea massa pavescit' [Thus blood overcomes that which frightens an iron mass] (4). In Enigma XXIV, a speaking stone relates how the head of a dragon generates or gives birth to it: 'Me caput horrentis fertur genuisse draconis' (1). This 'dragon-stone' interacts with gemstones and enriches their luminance. But its own rigidness, its hard stoniness, is reliant on the life force of an animate creature, for no strength will be given to this stone 'Si prius occumbat squamoso corpore natrix / Quam summo spolier capitis de vertice rubra' [If the scaly serpent should meet its death before I have been plundered, red, from the crown of its head] (4–5). Aldhelm challenges the seeming indifference of stone to the rest of the natural world, highlighting its active and reactive role in a chain or web of being. But we must be careful, while recognising the livingness of stone, not to think that it can be made to yield utterly to human whims. In his distinction between materials and materiality, Ingold attempts to escape an oscillation between the brute materiality of stone and its simple incorporation into human affairs. Rather, in the world of materials 'humans figure as much within the context for stones as do stones within the context for humans' – both belonging within an ever-unfolding continuum of organic life.[44] Our desire for stone to work for us, to be more malleable, for its life rhythms to match human life rhythms, silences the subaltern thing no less than an insistence on its deadness.

To state the obvious, a sundial only works well when the sun is shining. Orton et al. imagine that some members of the Bewcastle community, mesmerised by its novelty, 'wondered whether the dial controlled the movement of the sun rather than the sun the movement of the gnomon's shadow across the dial'.[45] Yet, unlike a modern clock, the Bewcastle sundial was not so in synch with the manmade fragmentation of life. While humans may at times wish for stone to be more flexible, more responsive, more aware of us and our time, its silence and stubborn lack of movement is its agency, even its voice, reminding us that our tiny segmentations of day and night, our divisions of light from dark, this year from that, one age or era from another, mean little when viewed from the longevity of the lithic.

The body in flux

The thing described in Exeter Book Riddle 74 has continuously shifted its shape in the minds of critics, who have sought but struggled time and again to say what it is called:

> Ic wæs fæmne geong, feaxhar cwene,
> ond ænlic rinc on ane tid;
> fleah mid fuglum ond on flode swom,
> deaf under yþe dead mid fiscum,
> ond on foldan stop, hæfde ferð cwicu.
>
> [I was a young girl, a grey-haired woman, and a singular warrior at one time; I flew with the birds and swam in the water, dove under the waves, dead with the fish, and stepped on land – I held a living spirit.]

This has been identified as everything from swan to quill pen, figurehead to barnacle goose.[46] Franz Dietrich in 1859 and then John Walz in 1896 sought a name for the entity and found a fitting one in the Latin *luligo* (squid or cuttlefish), making a connection with Aldhelm's Enigma XVI.[47] In Juster's recent translation of the Latin enigma we read:

> Nunc cernenda placent nostrae spectacula vitae;
> Cum grege piscoso scrutor maris aequora squamis.
> Cum volucrum turma quoque scando per aethera pennis,
> Et tamen aethereo non possum vivere flatu.
>
> [Seeing life's spectacles now entertains;
> With fishy, scaly flocks, I search sea plains.
> With mobs of birds I also rise through sky,
> And yet I can't survive in breeze that's high.]

In Aldhelm, the enigmatic speaker searches the waters of the sea with fish (*Cum grege piscoso scrutor maris aequora squamis*) and also ascends through the air with the birds (*Cum volucrum turma quoque scando per aethera pennis*) (2–3). The wonder of the cuttlefish is that, even so, it cannot live by breathing air (*Et tamen aethereo non possum vivere flatu*) (4) and its life is therefore a 'spectacle'. An ability to change age and sex, and to walk on land as well as swim and fly, is found in the Exeter Book riddle but not accounted for by Aldhelm's cuttlefish and so this answer cannot be deemed completely satisfactory.

Tupper offered the solution of 'Siren', claiming that this answer 'easily meets every demand of the text' since 'the Siren is both aged and young, centuries old and yet with the face of a girl. It

is not only a woman but sometimes a man.'[48] The allusiveness of this entity provokes Tupper to not only opt for a hybrid creature as his solution but to situate her/him at the intersection of two discourses: 'at an early period of the Middle Ages … the Teutonic conception of a fish-woman or mermaid met and mingled with the classical idea of a bird-maiden'.[49] In order to satisfy 'every demand of the text' the siren must cross boundaries of historical as well as corporeal time: young girl and old woman; at once classical and medieval. For Tupper, the combined bird and fish aspects of this classical–medieval creature explain line 3 of the riddle: 'fleah mid fuglum ond on flode swom' [I flew with the birds and swam in the water]. To meet the demands of line 4 – 'deaf under yþe dead mid fiscum' [I dove under the waves, dead with the fish] – Tupper leans more towards its classical characteristics, or rather what 'every student of myths' knows; namely, that the sirens threw themselves into the sea and were transformed into rocks when Ulysses or the Argonauts had passed by in safety.[50] For Niles, writing in 2006, it is Tupper's classical learning that has 'led him into the realm of fancy' since the 'very peripheral place of the siren in Anglo-Saxon lore' means that we cannot take this solution seriously.[51]

To my mind, Trautmann's solution of 'water in its various forms' gets closer to the thingness of this riddle creature: the young girl (*fæmne geong*) may be seen as a spring and the grey-haired woman (*feaxhar cwene*) as an ice floe, while the singular warrior (*ænlic rinc*) is snow.[52] As such, Trautmann's solution relates both a continuity across time and a continuous shifting in form, whereby the thing offers different sorts of interactions to the creatures or elements that encounter it: floating on water as ice at one time, then melting and mingling into the sea, and serving as a home or hall to fish in another stage of its life course. Thus the speaker of Riddle 74 is the same being but is never 'being' the same as time enacts alterations on it. Niles likewise deems this one of the better solutions offered, but has some doubt about whether ice, 'when it melts away into its matrix and alter ego of water, can legitimately be called "dead" '.[53] Nonetheless, it is worth keeping in mind that these riddles are designed to deliberately mislead, to say one thing and mean another, to force the reader or listener to question the conceptual categories they take for granted, to force us to ask what we mean when we say something is dead, especially when that thing is nonhuman. The trick lies not in making us see life where 'really' there is death, but in testing and stretching human categorisation itself, our ostensibly neat divisions of living being from dead thing.

As Mercedes Salvador-Bello has shown, a number of Old English as well as Anglo-Latin riddles lack transitional clues that would help distinguish living animals from the lifeless objects fashioned from them.[54] Death, indeed, is not the final word for the entity of Riddle 74, which is 'dead mid fiscum, / ond on foldan stop' [dead with the fish, and stepped on land] (3–4) so that its 'death' beneath the waves is only part of cycle in which it flies, dives and walks in air, water and earth.

Niles offers his own ingenious solution, in which the 'elusive speaking object is an *ac*, or oak-tree, which has been cut down and made into a *bat*, or boat'. The tree changes from sapling to a hoary, old oak before it is turned into a strong, warrior-like ship. This answer relies on us taking the oak tree as feminine and the boat as masculine, based on the fact that in Old English *ac* is a feminine noun, whereas *bat* is a masculine noun. Niles claims that such a reading is 'consistent with gender biases that were firmly entrenched in Anglo-Saxon society' so that trees are rooted to one spot in the same way that 'women are traditionally associated with hearth and home' whereas ships are 'daring rovers, as men have been known to be'. However, one phrase in the riddle remains as an obstacle to this solution: 'on ane tid' (2). Niles's reading is unsettled if the speaker is understood as having been a sapling (young girl) and old tree (grey-haired woman) and ship (warrior) 'at one time'. His way out is to punctuate the riddle differently from modern convention, so that it is 'the ship's motion that is single and undivided, not the speaker's identity as maiden, matron, and man'.[55]

As when the riddle tells us that a thing is 'dead', though, we ought to be alert to the riddling game and aware of those instances where the reader and would-be solver is being deliberately misled or deceived. 'On ane tid' is intentionally ambiguous, and modern punctuation, whatever choice is made, one way or another, often closes down – or perhaps falls for – the trick of the riddle. The reader wants to name, identify, solve, close; the riddle desires uncertainty, ambiguity, misdirection. The solver wants to win the game; the riddling voice wants to keep playing. This is not to say that efforts at solving the Exeter Book riddles have been futile. But what happens when we let the riddle have its own way? This starts to illuminate the distinction between objects and *things*, as formulated by Brown and other theorists. The thing always exceeds the named object; there is more to a riddle than its solution.

Where Niles, for instance, wants to name and identify the girl, woman and warrior as sapling, oak and ship, dividing one from the

other, fixing them within their own stage in time, the riddle itself wants us to ask and keep asking how these three, ostensibly discrete bodies can still be the same being at the same time. Thing theory highlights 'an amorphous characteristic or a frankly irresolvable enigma'.[56] So the thing of Riddle 74 is always sliding, always eluding us as we try to fix and name its form, and as such remains an enigma that we can only encircle again and again, which generations of critics name only to rename, time and time over. In its stubborn refusal to yield up its solution, its reluctance to be finally named, Riddle 74 simultaneously communicates wholeness and transformation, form and formlessness. It has lured critics into identifying it as a manmade, finished, solid artefact (boat or quill pen) but also as something not yet formed (sapling) or not yet formable (water). Niles himself acknowledges that OE *tid* is a 'vague term' in the Anglo-Saxon lexicon, which can mean anything from an hour to a season to an entire age. Thus the ambiguity of the phrase 'on ane tid' forces the reader to not only ask whether it is the thing's identity or motion that occurs at one time but to ask, furthermore, what sort of time these changes, these movements, unfold through. Are we dealing with a substance that changes before human eyes, in the course of a single day, like the waxen candle? Or is it something whose movements can hardly be conceived within a human timeframe, something like stone for which even an age is fleeting? By refusing to strive for a definite answer here, by resisting the need to solve the riddle, to close down its ambiguities, I am not fixing the thing within time and space, and so it retains in its being both latency and excess, its before and after all at once. That is, the thing can be this *and* that – sapling *and* oak, ice *and* water, fish *and* bird – in one time, because by not naming it, or by naming it only as a 'thing', I am not containing it within a human timeframe.

It is in this way that the unsolved thing forces the human reader to hover over a threshold, within the liminal zone in which we can start to understand what it means to be both subject and object, human and nonhuman. Bestowing a name on Riddle 74 would make it into an object, solved and named, but also reinforce the status of the reader as the human subject who solves and names. Our inability to solve this riddle may be irritating at first, but before long we might start to wonder. Wonder, according to Ian Bogost, destabilises and unhinges us from familiar systems of interpretation. Wonder is an event that detaches us from 'ordinary logics, of which human logics are but one example'.[57] Only if we know for certain that the thing in Riddle 74 is, say, a boat or ice or siren or

cuttlefish can we say that it is anthropomorphised – that the hoary oak or the ice floe is 'like' an old woman or that snow or a ship is 'like' a warrior. Yet unlike Aldhelm's Enigma XVI, Exeter Book Riddle 74 offers us no name or title and so there is no stable reference from which the human reader may enter and exit the riddling game. Instead, the human who gives voice to the riddle merges with the thing describing itself. As well as seeing and naming both form and formlessness, critics have seen and named both human and nonhuman, man, woman and animal (siren, for instance, or figurehead in the form of a girl, man or beast). This is because the riddle describes neither an animal nor an artefact that is 'like' a man or woman, nor a human that is 'like' some other creature. Rather, it merely gives us a body in flux, a thing that is what it is but is always becoming some other thing. The riddle troubles both the artificial categories that divide human from nonhuman and the categories that subdivide the human itself, by gender, age or role, revealing in addition the way that time is artificially segmented and organised to fit such categorisation. That is, *fæmne geong*, *feaxhar cwene* and *ænlic rinc* are identified as discrete roles because they are to a degree understood as different stages within time, whether in human terms or in nonhuman terms as spring, ice and snow, or as sapling, oak and ship.

This shifting exterior, though, is contrasted with a living continuity across time. Not only is this suggested by the all-at-onceness of 'on ane tid' but also by the final line of the riddle: 'hæfde ferð cwicu' (4). The usual translation of this statement is 'I had a living spirit', though Niles has also offered 'I contained living spirits', connecting Riddle 74 with Taylor riddle-type 828, 'The Dead Bears the Living', which in his reading would mean a ship carrying human cargo.[58] Either way, the *ferð cwicu* runs like a thread or a river through the shape-shifting exterior of the enigmatic thing. If we acknowledge the 'Dead Bears the Living' theme, then the changing external form might be seen as a kind of *banhus*, an outer surface or shell on which time enacts its alterations, safeguarding an inner treasure. Situated in the last line, where often the riddle reader might be asked to 'say what I am called', the statement invites us to ask what it means for a thing to be alive, or dead, and, if change is the only constant, as it is in this riddle, when does something shift from being an animal to an artefact, creature to tool, or from human to nonhuman? As the voice declares its former livingness, the final statement turns inside out so that rather than having or 'holding' a living spirit within it at one time, this

continuously mutating and mobile thing seems to have been held together over time by its own interiority. It is almost an inversion of Riddle 85, where the fluid but enduring river holds the swifter but more fleeting fish, where the hall flows on well before and far beyond the life of its inhabitant. In Exeter Book Riddle 74, it is a body in flux that can ultimately only express its multifaceted life course in relation to the force that ran through it.

Sound, speech and temporal movement

For Patrick J. Murphy, the Old English riddles 'glory not only in their variety of solutions but also in the intricacy of the links they reveal in the fabric of creation'.[59] Within that fabric we glimpse human faces and bodies among the fish and birds, stones and candles, trees and boats, rivers and skies. The human, or the category of the human, itself emerges as a riddle, something known only in relation to other things. Do we move through time like candles or like stone? Is that movement swift, like a fish, or long and slow, like a river? At what stage does a body in flux change from old woman to young warrior? When the oak tree becomes a boat, when snow turns to ice? Through the readings I have offered of the various riddles, we begin to see the nonhuman nature of the human body and so to understand what things make of us over time. But I opened this chapter with the issue of voice, and the rhetorical device of prosopopoeia. Is it possible to escape the idea that the animals and artefacts presented to us in these riddles speak in a human voice that has been imposed upon them? In this final section, I will look at those riddles that deal with sound, speech and the written word in order to question the idea of 'imposition' and reframe it as a human–nonhuman collaboration. The Exeter Book 'swan' riddle, along with Latin and Old English 'quill pen' riddles, show how voice flies and, furthermore, reveal how human speech and its spatio-temporal movement is bound up with nonhuman sound. By throwing our winged voices in this manner, human identity is able to endure in ways that our mortal bodies alone cannot. Yet our identity depends upon and is sustained by nonhuman bodies. When sound flies from one thing to be inscribed onto another, words become visible and tangible and, as such, become enmeshed with the thingness of the voice-bearing artefact.

For the modern reader, there is a significant obstacle in the way of the notion that nonhuman, and especially artefactual, things can talk in any other sense than a metaphorical one: men and women

have mouths with which to speak whereas inanimate objects do not. However, in 1990 Eric Jager wrote an article that examined the important role of the chest in relation to speech in Old English, where he uses the term 'pectorality' as a corrective to the tendency of 'orality' to deflect attention from the chest's significant verbal role. Jager notes that although 'Old English poetry sometimes mentions the mouth in connection with speech, many contexts instead specify the chest as the source of utterance and as the centre of verbal activity, usually without any mention of the mouth'.[60] Perversely, the two main examples Jager provides in his footnotes of 'oral' speech in Old English are Riddles 8 and 60 of the Exeter Book where the mouths in fact belong to nonhuman creatures: the nightingale in the former and the mouthless reed or rune staff in the latter.[61] In keeping with some of the claims I made in the introduction to this book, Jager demonstrates that speech does not always originate from 'within' the embodied self, nor is it necessarily controlled by human volition, by our individual consciousness, but enters and exits the body through the chest, often bypassing the mouth altogether.

The chest is widely treated, in OE poetry, as the spiritual, intellectual and verbal 'centre of action' in humans.[62] Words and thoughts do not always originate within us, but often enter the chest from an external source, such as when the 'living waters' of divine teaching come into human breasts from heaven, through holy books.[63] When speech does exit our bodies, into the external world, it leaves as sound, and in the case of poetic performance the sound is a blend of human and nonhuman noise. Indeed, Jager draws our attention to the Anglo-Saxon practice of holding the harp or lyre near the chest. Positioned thus, 'the harp's sound would have come from near the pectoral region traditionally considered the source of physical words and the repository of verbal art'.[64] A combination of words and music, song and sound, thereby centres on the chest, issued from and received by it. Moreover, as a container that both receives and releases, locks and unlocks, the poetic image of the *wordhord* or *breosthord* configures words as treasure as well as potential weapons. When released from the breast-coffer, they may fly or be thrown forth, as in the ritual flyting that is a feature of *Beowulf* and other poems. In this way, speech becomes 'an object carrying its significance over distance'.[65]

Exeter Book Riddle 7, usually solved as 'swan', exemplifies and extends some of the points made above. This riddle is concerned with how sound moves through time and space, and links the flight

of nonhuman sound with human speech. The first lines of the riddle, though, deal with silence, and associate this soundlessness with earth and water: 'Hrægl min swigað, þonne ic hrusan trede, / oþþe þa wic buge, oþþe wado drefe' [My dress is silent when I tread the ground, or dwell in the village, or drive the waters] (1–2). In these lines, the speaking 'I' could easily be a human among other humans. It refers to its *hrægl* (dress or garment) and walks on land, as we walk, dwells in the *wic* where men dwell, and stirs or drives the waters, as the speakers in *The Wanderer* and *Seafarer* describe themselves doing. Silent as the speaker may be, no mention is made of voice or mouth. Rather, it is its 'dress' that makes no sound. From dwelling among men, its *hyrste* (trappings or ornament) then lifts it 'ofer hæleþa byht' [over the dwellings of men] (4). *Hyrst* is used elsewhere in the Exeter Book riddles (11 and 14) to describe a gem-studded cup and a drinking horn. Riddle 11 also uses the noun *hrægl* in relation to the decorated drinking vessel. Like cups or horns or other adorned items, the entity of Riddle 7 can dwell among men, but it can also carry its significance beyond that earthbound time or place. The visual is bound up with the verbal, for even as it is the *hrægl* that remains silent on land and water, it is the *frætwe* (adornments) of the creature that start to sing when it is above the *flode and foldan*. The creature tells us that it 'torhte singað' [brightly sings] (8) when in flight, so that it is again the visual element, the brightness, being highlighted. The riddler is suggesting that this is a song to be seen, and it is this that entwines the swan's sound with human speech.

It is worth looking at what Isidore of Seville has to say about the swan (Latin: *cygnus*) in his *Etymologies* for the way that it differs from the Old English riddle creature:

> Cygnus autem a canendo est appellatus, eo quod carminis dulcedinem modulatis vocibus fundit. Ideo autem suaviter eum canere, quia collum longum et inflexum habet, et necesse est eluctantem vocem per longum et flexosum iter varias reddere modulationes.
>
> [Indeed the swan (*cygnus*) is named from its singing (*canendo*) because it pours out sweet song with modulated sounds. It sings so sweetly because it had a long and curved neck, and the voice, forcing its way through the long and winding route, necessarily utters varied modulations.][66]

For Isidore, the swan sings so sweetly because it has a long and curved neck (*quia collum longum et inflexum habet*) which its voice winds through to give out varied *modulationes*. The sound and

soundlessness of the OE swan, on the other hand, comes about through its coat and musical wings, with no mention made of throat or mouth or voice. The swan wears its song more than it vocalises it. Rather than being oral or even vocal, the swan's song is visible. It thus has more in common with pectorality than orality, where in the former human speech is presented in visual terms as treasure stored in the breast, the *wordhord*, and where silence and sound is held or released rather than voiced or not voiced. That is, in pectorality the emphasis is on a sort of visual stillness or movement where speech is either stored or worn within the body, or thrown forth like a weapon.

For Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, to make a song visible is to kill it. Speaking is in essence a 'temporal act' whereas 'writing is language made spatial'. The 'metaphors of loss' used in Anglo-Latin and Old English riddles on the technology of writing 'reflect an Anglo-Saxon understanding that speech itself is not a *thing*, but that writing, as it alienates speech from speaker, transforms living words into things'.[67] However, Riddle 7 challenges the living word versus dead thing dichotomy, in which sound and sight are kept apart, by presenting us a with a visible song in flight, a song borne on a body, like clothing or ornament, instead of mouthed. Further to this, the riddle demonstrates that human speech can be entwined with and shaped by nonhuman sound, so that speech does not always originate from a human voice in the first instance.

Dieter Bitterli points out that the solution to this riddle lies in the *sw-* sound made by the three onomatopoeic words *swigað*, *swogað* and *swinsiað*. The OE *swan* or *swon* is 'so named because it is silent (*swigað*) when it rests or swims, yet loudly sings with its feathers (*swogað … swinsiað*) when it flies'. The riddler therefore 'exhibits what may be called the latent etymology of the bird's vernacular name'.[68] But the key to the riddle depends not only on recognising the vernacular *name* but also the actual *sound* made by the swan's wingbeats, so that the *sw-sw-sw* noise that the human voice makes when reading this riddle imitates the *vaou-vaou-vaou* noise of the mute swan in flight, as described by ornithologists.[69] A sound from the nonhuman 'natural' world therefore enters into human language as the riddler asks the reader to mimic the sound of the swan. In this riddling game there is a criss-crossing of categories in which the swan, absent in body, enters the realm of human language, identified by the *sw-* sounds its body makes when visible; in turn, the human reader sees the words of the riddle but

only 'sees' those words *as* the flying swan when he or she speaks the sounds they make, using their voice to say the *words* which will allow them to cross into the nonhuman realm of *things*.

From the outset Riddle 7 alerts us to the fact that we will have to hear what we see, and see what we speak, if we are to make sense of it, for the first *sw-* sound comes from the word *swigað*. Seeing and reading 'silence' is tied to saying and hearing a sound, and so the riddle highlights the interrelation between seeing words (*swigað*) and hearing sounds (*vaou-vaou-vaou*) and seeing sounds (the feathers of a swan in flight) and hearing words (*swogað*, *swinsiað*). In the final line of the poem, the swan is described as 'ferende gæst' [a travelling spirit] (9). At times visibly in this world, as a clothed and ornamented body, the swan is audibly on its way out of this world in that closing line, where the successive alliteration on 'flode ond foldan, ferende …' means that the final 'gæst' is breathed out softly by the reader, a word that takes wing before vanishing into the air. Asking us to see its flight while mimicking its sounds, the swan finally draws us out of our earthbound bodies, invoking our voices in order to take us with it over the earth and sea. It invites us to see and say, sing and fly.

That which flies, though, must also land again. So it is with voice. In both the Old English and Latin riddles about writing tools, images of flight and landing, feathers and tracks dominate. The swan's song in Riddle 7 is both seen and heard, but it is nonetheless fleeting: a *ferende gæst*. The 'writing technology' riddles are, in a way, a continuation of the course of speech as it moves in space and alters across time, from airborne to earthbound once more, from feathers to tracks, white to black. In Aldhelm's Enigma LIX (*penna*) it is not the swan but the 'candens onocrotalus' [bright pelican] that produces the speaker as 'albam' [white] (1). Bitterli notes that, according to Pliny, the pelican resembles the swan, and so even to Aldhelm, *onocrotalus* 'was perhaps no more than an exotic name for the more familiar swan'.[70] The white feather then moves through whitened fields, but the whiteness of feather and field is contrasted with the dark tracks left by the speaker: 'Pergo per albentes directo tramite campos / Candentique viae vestigia caerula linquo' (3–4). Similarly, in Exeter Book Riddle 51 the 'wrætlice wuhte feower' [four wondrous creatures] (1) seen by the speaker 'fleag on lyfte, / deaf under yþe' [flew in the air, dived under the wave] (4–5) and yet here it is not musical wingbeats that the riddler draws our attention to, but the black tracks left behind: 'swearte wæran lastas, / swaþu swiþe blacu' (2–3).

So voice moves through space and in doing so changes over time; it endures through continuous transformation. It leaves a body and flies through the air and lands again, leaving tracks and trails on scrapped skin, shapeshifting between human, animal and artefact. A human voice can mimic the wingbeats of the swan, while the speech-sound that issues forth from our breast-coffers may blend with the music of a harp. Anglo-Saxon riddlers played with the idea that nonhuman sound can enter human language and reshape it. And the scribes who copied these riddles down did so by using the relics of once living creatures: goose feathers, ink horns, oak gall, sheepskins. Even the letters of the alphabet, which formed the syllables and words and sentences of these poems, were described by Aldhelm in Enigma XXX as *elementa*, the smallest component and source element of speech, whose very existence depends not upon the human mouth or hand but upon the iron of the metal stylus and the feathers of the writing quill: 'Nascimur ex ferro rursus ferro moribundae / Necnon et volucris penna volitantis ad aethram' [We are born from iron and by iron die, or from the feather of a bird flying through the sky] (3–4).[71] It becomes difficult to determine at which stage 'speech' and 'writing' is clearly human or clearly nonhuman, or at which stage it goes from living to dead. Hence it is not so straightforward as to say that speech originates with the human and 'dies' as soon as it is alienated from the speaker and transferred onto a nonhuman artefact.

How, then, do we find human temporality altered when voice-bearing things talk back to us? Riddle 60 of the Exeter Book presents us with such a voice-bearer. The speaker itself tells the reader that it carries a message: 'ic wiþ þe sceolde / for unc anum twam ærendspræce / abeodan bealdlice' [I can boldly announce an errand-speech to you, for us two alone] (14–16). What is less certain is whether this speaker is a tool that inscribes or is an artefact inscribed upon – specifically, whether it is a reed pen or rune staff. Williamson weighs the arguments for both of these solutions. Line 13, he says, where 'eorles ingeþonc ond ord somod' [the man's inner-thought and the point together] leads to a resulting message 'would tend to support "rune staff" since the activity that requires the thinking (and thus presumably the making of the message) is the cutting itself'. On the other hand, 'the habitat of the creature (in or near the water) certainly favours "reed" '. That 'the creature itself speaks in the hearer's presence' could favour 'rune staff' and yet 'by extension the pen as well as the author might be said to "speak" through the medium of the written word'.[72] Balanced as

these arguments are, it is hard to rule out either answer. I, however, lean more towards the 'reed' solution and am particularly convinced by Niles's recent take on this as the OE neuter noun *hreod*. For Niles, with this one word 'all the conditions of the riddle are met'. Pointing to the Bosworth-Toller definition of *hreod* as both a 'collective or generic term' for a reed or reeds and also 'a reed for writing' as well as the occurrence of *hreod-pipere* as a gloss for the Latin *auledus*, Niles takes us through the transformation of the single 'reed' from one thing to another during its life course.[73] First of all, the reed grows in silence by the shore: 'Ic wæs be sonde sæwealle neah / æt merefaroþe' [I was by the sand, near the sea-wall, on the shore] (1–2). Later, it becomes a flute and speaks (makes music) in the mead hall: 'Lyt ic wende / þæt ic ær oþþe sið æfre sceolde / ofer meodubence muðleas sprecan, / wordum wrixlan' [Little did I expect that I before or afterwards ever should speak, mouthless, over the mead-bench, exchanging words] (7–10). Additionally, it is shaped by 'seaxes ord ond seo swiþre hond' [the knife's point and the right hand] (12) so that it can announce its message (*ærendspræce*). As such, the reed is the source of both a flute and pen.

If one were to solve the riddle as 'rune staff' it would be easy to see the speaker as an inert object onto which the human subject visibly imposes his or her voice. It is easier still to see the reed (especially in the form of a pen) as the passive conveyer of human words, whereby Williamson, for instance, claims that it is only 'by extension' that the pen as well as the 'author' might be said to speak. In doing so, however, the active role of the reed in conveying its message would be missed, for under closer consideration the message is less human and more nonhuman than expected. The fact that Riddle 60 is followed in the Exeter Book manuscript by *The Husband's Message* has complicated its critical history and led some readers to view the two poems as one. While I do not wish to enter this particular debate here, I am interested in Williamson's assertion that the 'relationship between the personified speaker of the riddle and the intended reader is an impersonal one' whereby the 'references to *unc* and *þe* facilitate the riddlic game'. In contrast, the *ic* and *þe* of *The Husband's Message* 'both have past histories, present personalities, and contemplated future actions' and so have a 'psychological reality that the personae of the riddle do not'.[74] I do not wholly disagree with what Williamson says here, but think that he misses the nonhuman autobiography in the riddle. He is correct to say that, despite some similarities between

the speakers, the relationship between the *ic* and *þe* of the riddle is different to that in *The Husband's Message*. The *þe* in the riddle is not so actively involved in the events being narrated, whereas in *The Husband's Message* the second person is invited and instructed to recall and respond, and to travel. What leads Williamson to refer to the relationship between the *ic* and *þe* of the riddle as an 'impersonal' one, I believe, is a reversal of the subject–object roles. The human reader takes an inactive role, usually associated with the silent, inert artefact onto or via which the speaker inscribes their story. That Williamson, like other critics, should posit a human 'author' behind the words of Riddle 60 takes away much of the agency the talking thing has in delivering the message. In *The Husband's Message* we are given information about a 'lord' (*dryhten, frean*, *þeoden*) who has given commands beforehand to the messenger: 'Hwæt, þec þonne biddan het se þisne beam agrof …' [Listen, he who carved this beam ordered me to ask you …] (13). Yet in the riddle, very little information is given to us about any 'author' who dictates or commands the message being delivered. The closest we get is in lines 10–14 when the thing describes its own making or, rather, refashioning. Here, though, it is not human control but the collaboration between human and nonhuman in fashioning a message that is stressed, the hand and the artefact working in tandem:

> Þæt is wundres dæl,
> on sefan searolic þam þe swylc ne conn,
> hu mec seaxes ord ond seo swiþre hond,
> eorles ingeþonc ond ord somod,
> þingum geþydan (10b–14a)
>
> [That is the wondrous part, crafty in mind to those who know not how the knife's edge and the right hand, the man's inner-thought and the point together, pressed me for the purpose]

In the crafting of this tool or instrument, the human maker thinks both with and through the changing artefact, the thing becoming some other thing. Knife and hand and inner-thought work together, pressing the speaker for a purpose which is also a meeting and a thing (*þingum*). For the ignorant observer, lacking the advanced technological knowledge of the craftsman, such art brings skill or cunning into the mind (*on sefan searolic*). Yet the craftsman himself remains half-concealed in this riddling passage, only partially represented by his right hand (*seo swiþre hond*), a body part intimately associated with the materials it is working with. This passage

demonstrates, then, how mind and craft, hand and tool and transforming thing become enmeshed in the act of making and delivering a message, an act of collaboration rather than dictation.[75] It represents the way in which 'in the act of making the artisan couples his own movements and gestures – indeed his very life – with the becoming of his materials, joining with and following the forces and flows that bring his work to fruition'.[76]

What about the message itself? While the absence of a human author and the impersonality of the addressee may indicate a lack of 'psychological reality' in Riddle 60, the past history, present personality and future actions Williamson attributes to the personal pronouns in *The Husband's Message* are likewise features of the preceding riddle. Only, in the riddle, these do not allude to a supposedly human relationship but instead relate the transformation over time of the reed. This is not to say that the speaker is 'personified' and we need not look for a psychological 'interiority'. Its story, its autobiography, is distinctly nonhuman, even if we as humans recognise its voice as our own. The role of the human in this riddle is to serve as witness to the life and story of a thing, which talks to us, moves among us and organises or reorganises us.

The reed is closest to a 'living' being in the first few lines of the riddle, but its livingness is unseen and unheard by mankind: 'Fea ænig wæs / monna cynnes þæt minne þær / on anæde eard beheolde' [There were but few among mankind who beheld me alone in the wilderness] (3–5). Can something scarcely if ever seen, heard, touched, smelled or tasted by human beings still be said to be alive? The reed springs into action once it turns into a 'dead' thing. In the form of a flute or pipe, it is said to 'exchange words' (*wordum wrixlan*) over the mead-bench. For the verb *wrixlan*, Bosworth-Toller gives us (I) 'to change, vary, alter'; but also (III) 'of reciprocal, mutual action, to exchange, deal'; and (IIIa) 'with dat. of what is exchanged, fig. of conversation, intercourse'. The term has two senses, then. It could indicate a 'varying' or 'alternating' musical sound so that Crossley-Holland, for instance, translates *wordum wrixlan* as 'varying my pitch'.[77] Like the harp held close to the chest, this enigmatic instrument emits a blend of voice and music. Yet it also indicates a trading of words. As Jager demonstrates, in verbal transactions speech enters and exits the chest and so we can imagine a physical movement of speech-sound from one body to another, from nonhuman to human. Thus the contrast between the silent isolation of the reed during its 'life' and its more active role during its afterlife makes us rethink how we categorise the living

and the dead. What the riddle stresses above all is interaction, where it is circulation or exchange, involving both the human and nonhuman, that maintains life.

In the final lines, as the reed transforms once more from flute or pipe to pen, the more open interaction in which it partook in the mead hall narrows down to include only two (*for unc anum twam*). Having been reshaped by mind, hand and knife, the reed can now announce a private message. The speaker announces its *ærendspræce* in such a way that 'hit beorna ma / uncre wordcwidas widdor ne mænden' [no other men may spread our speech more widely] (16–17). Here, the speaker personally addresses a certain individual but at the same time reminds that 'individual' that their identity is bound up with the 'I' that has spoken this riddle. If we take the *ic* to be the reed pen and the *þe* to be the reader or even writer of this riddling message, then this talking thing seems to be reminding us that human identity, and the continuation of that identity, is always entwined with nonhuman narratives, the stories things tell – about us, but also about themselves. For whenever we read this riddle, any human 'author' we might imagine to have been behind it will necessarily be absent in body. Only a voice remains, and that voice tells of the transformation of reed to flute to pen, silent in life, noisy in death, the tracks and traces of its body present while ink and parchment lasts, even as those physical remains sustain the words of an absent other.

Human temporality is reordered by the nonhuman voice-bearer, and the relation between living and speaking and dying and not speaking is changed. And so if human voices are still to be heard when our bodies are absent in space or time, due to distance or death, then this nonhuman autobiography is also how we, as things that talk, will be read and unriddled through time. Always some other thing will say what we are called.

Notes

1 Margaret Schlauch provides a useful definition of prosopopoeia in Old English literature as being a first-person monologue by an animal or object that feels and speaks like a person in her classic article 'The "Dream of the Rood" as Prosopopoeia', in P. W. Long (ed.), *Essays and Studies in Honour of Carleton Brown* (New York: New York University Press, 1940), pp. 23–34.

2 Tilghman, 'On the Enigmatic Nature of Things', p. 5. Tilghman is drawing on arguments made by Bennett in *Vibrant Matter*, pp. 119–20.

For a lively re-examination of anthropomorphism, see also Lorraine Daston and Greg Mitman (eds), *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

3 See especially Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

4 I draw upon Hodder, *Entangled*, pp. 4–5. Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004).

5 See, for example, Margreta De Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass (eds), *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Mark Blackwell (ed.), *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects and It-Narratives in Eighteenth Century England* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007).

6 Tiffany, 'Lyric Substance', p. 75.

7 Ibid., p. 79.

8 Ibid., p. 97.

9 Moritz Trautmann (ed.), *Die altenglischen Ratsel (die Ratsel des Exeterbuchs)* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1915). Alternative solutions have included 'day': Franz Eduard Dietrich, 'Die Rathsel des Exeterbuchs: Wurdigung, Losung und Herstellung', *ZfdA*, 11 (1859), 448–90; 'cloud': Christopher B. Kennedy, 'Old English Riddle No. 39', *ELN*, 13 (1975), 81–5; 'speech': Craig Williamson (ed.), *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), pp. 258–65; 'dream': Antonina Harbus, '*Exeter Book Riddle 39* Reconsidered', *SN*, 70 (1998), 139–48.

10 References to the Old English riddles are taken from Muir's *Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*. Unless indicated otherwise, translations are my own.

11 Morton, *Hyperobjects*, p. 22.

12 Andy Orchard, 'Enigma Variations: The Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Tradition', in Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe and Andy Orchard (eds), *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, vol. 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 284–304, at 294.

13 Patrick J. Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), pp. 19–20.

14 St Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, 2.16, ed. and trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 86–7.

15 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, II.13, ed. Colgrave and Mynors. Translation from Judith McClure and Roger Collins (eds), *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

16 St Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.26, ed. James J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

17 Robertson, 'Medieval Things', p. 1063.
18 Frederick Tupper, Jr., 'Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl', *PMLA*, 10:2 (1885), 111–241.
19 Ibid., p. 118.
20 Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*, II.3, ed. and trans. Peter S. Baker and Michael Lapidge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 104–5.
21 Tupper, 'Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl', p. 121.
22 Ibid., pp. 121, 165.
23 See Tupper, p. 129.
24 Asser, *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, chs 103–4, in *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. William Henry Stevenson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 89–91. Translations from the Latin are my own.
25 Ibid., p. 339.
26 Cf. David Pratt, 'Persuasion and Invention at the Court of King Alfred the Great', in Catherine Cubitt (ed.), *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 189–222. Pratt suggests that further candle clocks may have been manufactured for King Alfred's noble readers as a means of gaining wisdom. Pratt notes Alfred's use of the expression *modes eagan* in his translations, whereby the eyes of the mind are associated with divine gifts such as wisdom through which minds share immortality even as men's bodies grow old.
27 St Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 24, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. William H. Green (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 330–1.
28 Scott Lightsey, *Manmade Marvels in Medieval Culture and Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), pp. 13–14. Lightsey is discussing *De civitate Dei* here.
29 See A. N. Doane (ed.), *Genesis A: A New Edition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).
30 For instance, G. Craig offers a modern medical assessment of his symptoms in, 'Alfred the Great: A Diagnosis', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 84 (May 1991), 303–5. Craig claims that 'the evidence available points to inflammatory bowel disease with a particular inclination towards Crohn's disease', at 305.
31 All references to Aldhelm are taken from A. M. Juster (trans.), *Saint Aldhelm's Riddles* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015). Translations are my own, though I have drawn on Juster's excellent new translations for guidance. I have also consulted Aldhelm, *The Poetic Works*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge and James L. Rosier (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985).
32 See for instance lines 247, 251 in A. N. Doane (ed.), *The Saxon Genesis: An Edition of the West Saxon Genesis B and the Old Saxon Vatican Genesis* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).
33 Jane Hawkes, 'Sacraments in Stone: The Mysteries of Christ in Anglo-Saxon Sculpture', in Martin Carver (ed.), *The Cross Goes*

North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300–1300 (Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2003), pp. 351–70, at 352.

34 Andrew Marvell, 'To His Coy Mistress', in *The Complete Poems*, ed. Jonathan Bate (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005), p. 50.

35 Here and below I echo some of the thoughts of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Stories of Stone', *Postmedieval*, 1:2 (Spring/Summer 2010), 56–63. His recent book *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015) also investigates the power and abiding companionship of this seemingly inert substance. I will return to some of these ideas in Chapter 5.

36 Fred Orton and Ian Wood with Clare A. Lees, *Fragments of History: Rethinking the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Monuments* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 131.

37 Tupper, 'Anglo-Saxon Dæg-Mæl', p. 129.

38 Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion*, pp. 104–5.

39 Éamonn Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood: Liturgical Images and the Old English Poems of the Dream of the Rood Tradition* (London: British Library, 2005), p. 46.

40 Orton and Wood with Lees, *Fragments of History*, p. 132.

41 Ibid., pp. 137–40.

42 Ibid., p. 134.

43 Ingold, *Being Alive*, pp. 15–32.

44 Ingold, *Being Alive*, pp. 30–1. In this section, Ingold is critiquing Christopher Tilley's *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2004).

45 Orton and Wood with Lees, *Fragments of History*, p. 142.

46 'Swan': Ferdinand Holthausen, 'Anglosaxonica Minora', *Beiblatt zur Anglia*, 36 (1925), 219–20; 'quill pen': F. H. Whitman, *Old English Riddles* (Ottawa: Canadian Federation for the Humanities, 1982), pp. 144–8; 'figurehead': see Williamson, *Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book*, pp. 349–52; 'barnacle goose': Daniel Donoghue, 'An *Anser* for Exeter Book Riddle 74', in Peter S. Baker and Nicholas Howe (eds), *Words and Works: Studies in Medieval English Language and Literature in Honour of Fred C. Robinson* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 45–58.

47 Franz Eduard Dietrich, 'Die Rathsel des Exeterbuchs: Wurdigung, Losung und Herstellung', *ZfdA*, 2 (1859), 448–90; John A. Walz, 'Notes on the Anglo-Saxon Riddles', *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, 5 (1896), 261–8.

48 Frederick Tupper, Jr., 'Solutions of the Exeter Book Riddles', *Modern Language Notes*, 21:4 (1906), 97–105, at 103.

49 Ibid, pp. 103–4.

50 Ibid, p. 104.

51 Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, p. 19.

52 Trautmann, *Die altenglischen Ratsel*, p. 128. This solution has been taken up more recently by Thomas Klein, 'Of Water and the

Spirit: Metaphorical Focus in Exeter Book Riddle 74', *Review of English Studies*, 66:273 (2014), 1–19. Building upon the work of Patrick J. Murphy, Klein nuances the argument by proposing that the spoken solution of 'water' is also shaped by an unnamed metaphorical focus alluding to the 'Holy Spirit'.

53 Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, p. 19.

54 Mercedes Salvador-Bello, *Isidorean Perceptions of Order: The Exeter Book Riddles and Medieval Latin Enigmata* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2015), p. 317. Specific examples are Exeter Book Riddle 12 (ox/leather) and 14 (auroch/horn) and Aldhelm's Enigma LXXXVI (ram/battering ram) and XCVI (elephant/ivory).

55 See Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, pp. 35–9. Niles's solution has been supported but refined by Mark Griffith, 'Exeter Book Riddle 74 *Ac* "Oak" and *Bat* "Boat"', *Notes and Queries*, 55 (2008), 393–6.

56 Brown, 'Thing Theory', p. 4.

57 Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, p. 124.

58 Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, pp. 42–3.

59 Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles*, pp. 236–7. The Roman grammarian Donatus, well known in Anglo-Saxon England, made the similar observation that 'Aenigma est obscura sententia per occultam similitudinem rerum'. Taken from Donatus, *Ars maior*, in *Grammatici latini*, ed. Heinrich Keil, vol. 4 (Leipzig, 1850–80), 402.

60 Eric Jager, 'Speech and the Chest in Old English Poetry: Orality or Pectorality?', *Speculum*, 65:4 (1990), 845–59, at 845.

61 See ibid.

62 Ibid., pp. 847–8.

63 See, for instance, the metrical epilogue to *The Pastoral Care*, in N. R. Ker (ed.), *The Pastoral Care*, EEMF 6 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1956).

64 Jager, 'Speech and the Chest', p. 848.

65 Ibid., p. 852.

66 Isidore, *Etymologies*, 12.7, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911).

67 O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, pp. 4, 54.

68 Dieter Bitterli, *Say What I Am Called: The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book and the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), p. 45. Cf. Roberta Frank, 'The Unbearable Lightness of Being a Philologist', *JEGP*, 96 (1997), 486–513.

69 See Stanley Cramp et al. (eds), *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa: The Birds of the Western Palearctic*, 9 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977–94), 1:372, 377.

70 Bitterli, *Say What I Am Called*, p. 143.

71 For further discussion, see Salvador-Bello, *Isidorean Perceptions of Order*, pp. 192–3.

72 Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, p. 318.

73 See Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, pp. 131–2.
74 Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, pp. 316–17.
75 For a discussion of the ways in which Anglo-Saxon poetic texts (particularly riddles) actively and self-consciously explore the interaction between intellectual creativity and material processes, see the first and second chapters of Helen Price's doctoral thesis, 'Human and NonHuman'. Price also conducts a very useful linguistic case study on the etymology of the Old English word *cræft* and its semantic relation to the modern term and concept of *technology*.
76 Ingold, *Making*, p. 31; cf. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. 60.
77 Crossley-Holland (trans.), *The Exeter Book Riddles*, p. 63.