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Reading Emotion in *The Battle of Brunanburh*

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Abstract This article reconsiders the emotional tone of *The Battle of Brunanburh*, which has been seen alternatively as a piece of cold, hard triumphalism or as conveying a subtle sympathy towards the defeated enemies, especially Constantine. I begin by surveying all possible explicit references to emotion in the poem, identifying a key sequence at lines 37–52 which depicts a counterfactual scene of Constantine and Anlaf boasting and exulting over the victory they did not achieve. This scene of emotional performance raises questions about how the poem itself works as an emotional performance. I suggest it functions quite differently depending on whether we see it as a praise-poem for Athelstan delivered at his court in the aftermath of the battle or—which is perhaps more probable—as composed some years later for inclusion in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. In the latter case, the poem conveys undercurrents of anxiety over victory and the ability to hold on to territory and glory. Considering how texts work as emotional performances offers a way, fraught with uncertainty yet I believe worthwhile, to approach not simply the emotion concepts but the emotional experiences of the past.

Keywords *Battle of Brunanburh* · Emotion · Performance · Anglo-Saxon Chronicle · Praise-poetry

The poem *The Battle of Brunanburh*, which appears as the annal for 937 in Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MSS A, B, C and D, is felt by many readers to be a thoroughly unsympathetic, even nasty text. John D. Niles well articulates the sense that in its treatment of conflict and death it is all craft and no heart:

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> [T]he poet views warfare from a coldly detached stance that is far from what we find in other Old English verse. There are no extravagant gestures of heroism here, no insights into human suffering… [*Brunanburh*] resists our emotional engagement. In much the same way, the hard, compact, daring, and frequently sardonic stanzas of the skalds ask for the audience's admiration and often nothing else. (Niles 1987, p. 363)

For Niles, skaldic influence helps to account for a tone that is emotionally cold. Yet *Brunanburh* has a surprising amount to say about the emotions of its characters, in particular the defeated Norsemen as they return *æwiscmode* (56), "shamed at heart", to Dublin, and the elderly King Constantine in his failure and bereavement. Passages dealing with the experiences of the losers have led some critics to find notes of pathos and indeed pity in the poem. For Frances Lipp, they exemplify a "Germanic" perspective on suffering which is, however, finally eclipsed by the poem's long-term historical vision (Lipp 1969); according to Dolores Warwick Frese, the poem conveys a covert sympathy with the losers and is ultimately concerned with "the subtly cognate fates of men" (Frese 1986, quotation p. 87).

The present discussion reconsiders the emotions conveyed by the poem through examination of the emotions it portrays. It focuses in the first place on explicit references to emotion, though in the creation of narrative effects these interact with implicit evocation of feelings and emotive details.[1] It will highlight three main aspects of emotion in the text. First, emotion is relational: references to emotion concern relationships between people, and this is more important to the portrayal of emotion than any desire to convey the inner states of individuals. Second, emotion has a truth-function: it is invoked to establish the truth and the meaning of what has happened—the poet appeals to "feeling clues", to use Arlie Russell Hochschild's term (1983, pp. 28–33). Third, the poem is prominently concerned with emotional performance and display. This question of performance leads us to the consideration of the performance or transmission context of the poem. Depending on whether one sees *Brunanburh* as a praise-poem composed for performance at Athelstan's court in the immediate aftermath of victory or as written some decades after the event for inclusion in the Chronicle, one's sense of how the portrayal of emotion relates to the overall tone or stance is materially affected.[2]

I begin by offering a list of explicit references to emotion, which for the most part cluster in the second half of the poem.[3] In earlier lines there are two instances where enemies are called *laþ*, "causing hate, evil, injury, annoyance; hateful, hated…displeasing, injurious, grievous" (Bosworth and Toller 1898): at line 9 the adjective is substantivized, *hi…wiþ laþra gehwæne land ealgodon* (8–9), "they defended the land against each foe", while at line 22 the West Saxons pursue *laþum þeodum*, "hateful peoples". The statement that many a northman and many a Scot is killed *werig, wiges*

[1] Some might question "emotion" as an analytical category, since the term has no precise equivalent in Old English or medieval Latin. For discussion of the theoretical issues, see Jorgensen (2015, pp. 3–8).

[2] There are other possibilities for the composition context, but these are the dominant hypotheses. See Walker (1992), for an alternative view.

[3] All references to *Brunanburh* and to other Old English poems are to the appropriate volumes of Krapp and Dobbie (1931–1953). Translations are my own.

sæd (20), "weary, sated with war", can arguably also be read as an emotion reference.[4] The emotion content of these references is fairly unobtrusive. Emotion comes much more to the fore with the tripartite sequence at lines 37–52. The poet states that Constantine *hreman ne þorfte* (39), "had no cause to exult", at the battle, in which his son has died; that he *gelpan ne þorfte* (44), "had no cause to boast", and neither had Anlaf; and that they both *hlehhan ne þorftun* (47), "had no cause to laugh" that they were superior in battle. This sequence is central to my analysis; I shall call it the boasting sequence. Subsequent emotion references can be read in relation to it. At line 54 the Norsemen embark on their ship as *dreorig daraða laf*, "miserable leavings of spears",[5] and make for Ireland *æwiscmode* (56), "shamed in spirit". In sharp contrast, only three lines later, the West Saxon leaders Athelstan and Edmund return home *wiges hremige* (59), "exulting in war". Finally the Angles and Saxons who conquered Britain are called *wlance wigsmiþas* (72), "proud warsmiths". Given the semantic range of *wlanc* (Schabram 1965) this could be read as implying exultation or an emotion of pride following the conquest, or it could simply underscore the glory or the noble and haughty character of these victorious ancestors. The phrase itself echoes and reinforces *wiges hremige*.

The clearest cases of emotion in this list almost all relate to the enemies: Athelstan, Edmund and their followers are characterised chiefly by their powerful actions, and it is these that are to the fore in the first half of the poem, the battle-description. Moreover, little interest is shown in the emotional and cognitive processes that sustain the battle itself, even though other Old English poems (such as *The Battle of Maldon*, *Elene*, *Exodus* and *Beowulf*) have much to say about the perceptions, the intentions and the falterings and surges of courage that underlie deeds of combat. In (for example) Beowulf's fight with Grendel, attention to Grendel's inner world is central to how the poet creates drama and irony (Ringler 1966). *Brunanburh*, however, is not focused on the process of battle so much as on the outcome. The emotions it foregrounds, above all exultation and shame, belong to the aftermath of the battle and underscore the poem's main message of victory and defeat. It is worth looking in more detail at how they do this.

The two occurrences of *laþ* are a good place to start for the way they illustrate my first general point, the close connection between emotions and relationships. The emotion content of these lines is not very marked. *Laþ* is a common descriptor for enemies or wicked people in OE poetry, often used as a substantive (for example, the tempter in *Genesis B* is four times referred to as *se laða*: 489b, 496a, 492b, 601a). As an adjective it can often be translated as "inimical" and when

[4] *Werig* is an understatement for "dead", and *sæd* clearly does not yet have the sense of NE "sad" but rather means "full-up, sated", but especially in combination these terms convey that the spirit of the enemy quails and turns away from war—the Norsemen and Scots are "fed up", have "had a belly-full". See Lewis (1967, p. 77). This reading gains force in light of Lockett's work on the hydraulic conception of emotion prevalent in Anglo-Saxon literature and the sense that painful emotion produces a sense of internal pressure and fullness: sorrow, anger and the like well up and swell around the heart (Lockett 2011).

[5] "Sad" or "miserable" is a common interpretation of *dreorig*, but for other views (see Wentersdorf 1973; Gendre 1990).

substantivized as “foe”. However, the overtones of hatred are perhaps reinforced at its first occurrence in *Brunanburh* by proximity to *hettend*:

hi æt campe oft
wiþ laþra gehwæne land ealgodon,
hord and hamas. Hettend crungun,
Sceotta leoda and scipflotan
fæge feollan (8b–12a)

often in battle they defended the land, hoard and homes against each foe. The enemies perished, the people of the Scots and the ship-army, doomed to die, fell dead

Hettend derives from the weak class II verb *hatian*, “to hate”. It is a “nominalized present participle [] which function[s] as [an] agentive noun” (Hogg and Fulk 2011, §2.104–5). The form, with umlaut and gemination, indicates *hatian* originally belonged to weak class III (Hogg and Fulk 2011, §6.129–30), and it makes the relationship of *hettend* to *hatian* less than completely transparent, though speakers of Old English must have been quite used to dealing with changes of root vowel. Be that as it may, my point is that embedded in a very common locution is the idea that the relationship between opponents in war is one of hatred, and that a vocabulary of hatred can convey a relationship of enmity.

Relationship is also central to the boasting sequence, but it is here above all that one gains a powerful sense of emotional performance and of emotion’s truth function. The section, which deals with the defeated Norse and Scots in the aftermath of the battle, opens with the image of Anlaf fleeing in undignified fashion, itself implicitly a display of fear: *cread cnear on flot*, “the boat crowded onto the sea” (35a), as though jostling to get through a door.[6] The threefold variation on the statement that the enemy leaders have no cause to celebrate the battle reinforces this image of defeat. It does so by negating a scene of noisy celebration.

The sequence starts with the statement that Constantine has no cause to *hreman* (39b), and the following lines give some of the reasons: he is deprived of his kin and in particular of his son, who has died young in the battle (40b–44). The Toronto *Dictionary of Old English* has not yet reached h and so has no entry for *hreman*, but Bosworth and Toller give some suggestive data on the word’s connections: it is cognate with OS *hromian*, OHG *hromian, hruomian* “to exult, to exclaim”, but it is also related to the OE noun *hream* “cry, outcry, tumult”. *Hreman* thus seems to imply not just active rejoicing but noisy crying out. The noise meaning is apparently central, as *hreman* can mean “to lament” as well as “to exult”. In *Brunanburh*, the positive sense (“exult”) must be to the fore, though of course negated by the litotes.

[6] Fry (1981, pp. 65–66), reads this phrase as part of a literal description of how the boat is bounced loose from the sand to launch it, but still sees the passage as depicting “Anlaf’s frantic haste” and his “disorganized flight” (p. 65).

The next verb of the boasting sequence, *gelpan* (44b), can also mean “to exult” (*DOE* sense 1, *s.v. gylpan*). *DOE* cites passages from the Old English *Pastoral Care* where it is equivalent to Latin *gloriari*, “to glory, boast, vaunt, pride oneself in something”; on the one hand, *gelpan* seems to imply an emotional reaction of pride and exultation, and on the other a particular kind of verbal action. It belongs to the vocabulary of heroic boasting. Marie Nelson, discussing *Beowulf*, distinguishes boasting in the sense of bragging—the dominant sense of the modern English “boast”—from boasting in the sense of making a vow or heroic promise (Nelson 2005), but both are formal, codified behaviours. Here the bragging sense operates.

The third verb of the sequence, *hlehhan* (47b), denotes a somatic gesture of emotion, laughter. Tom Shippey notes how often Old English literature describes people laughing in celebration and self-satisfaction when they are about to be proved horribly wrong by events; their laughter exposes their ignorance and folly. He cites this instance as one where “the laugh is on the laughers”: the idea of Constantine and Anlaf’s triumphant laughter underscores their ignominious failure (Shippey 2000, p. 38). *Hlehhan* evokes a gesture, but it is treated syntactically in *Brunanburh* as a verb of saying, and indeed as though it were equivalent to *gelpan*: Constantine and Anlaf have no cause to laugh “that they were bettter in war-deeds on the battle-field, in the clash of standards, the meeting of spears, the meeting of men, the exchange of weapons…” (*þæt heo beaduweorca beteran wurdun/on campstede cumbolgehnastes,/garmittinge, gumena gemotes,/wæpengewrixles*) (48–51a). These lines are the poem’s most extended and conspicuous exercise in variation, that most characteristic technique of classical Old English verse, and it is noteworthy that they are in indirect speech: they suggest the poetic flights of eloquence that would have been poured out by or on behalf of Anlaf and Constantine had they won.

Hreman, *gelpan* and *hlehhan* thus, without precisely overlapping, have points of convergence with each other. Together they convey the sense of a vocal, expansive emotional performance, involving rejoicing over the victory, boasting of great deeds, and triumphant laughter. Such a performance constitutes a display of power, asserting the position of the victors and their relationship of dominance towards the losers, with a strong emphasis on narrating and communicating the victory and its meaning. This behaviour affirms the truth of the victory (“look at us, we are behaving as victors behave”) in a manner that may be raucous but is also formal, as the use of *gelpan* implies. Of course, Constantine and Anlaf are not in fact able to behave in this way, since they lost.

Given that the emotional performance of the boasting sequence is negated through litotes, what message does it convey? Litotes is most easily read in terms of opposites: if Constantine and Anlaf have no need to laugh, exult or boast, then they must sorrow or feel humiliated.[7] Indeed other cues in the text point to sorrow, in particular Constantine’s bereavement, and at line 56 the Norsemen return to Dublin *æwiscmode*, “ashamed in spirit”. Constantine and Anlaf’s dejection, even abjection, underscores the magnitude of Athelstan and Edmund’s victory. The appeal to the enemies’ perspective has parallels: in *The Battle of Maldon*, for example, the

[7] For the complex implications of litotes, see Graham (2015) (on this passage, pp. 84–85 and 87–88).

Vikings trying to cross the causeway *ongeaton and georne gesawon/þæt hi þær bricgweardas bitere fundon* ("perceived and readily saw that they encountered fierce bridge-guards there") (84–85). If your enemies acknowledge your prowess, it is prowess indeed. Here again one may note the truth-function of emotion.

However, in addition to what it says about the reactions of the losers, the boasting sequence opens up complex implications for the emotions of the poet and his audience. It is easy to read the passage as an expression of pleasure at the enemies' sorrow and humiliation; these lines are key evidence for the nasty, unsympathetic *Brunanburh*. As Niles puts it, "depriving one's enemies of the opportunity to laugh is as good as laughing at them oneself" (Niles 2000, p. 28)—though it is not, in fact, quite the same; this point will be revisited below. To whatever extent one detects gloating and pleasure, I would argue that there are certainly overtones of a powerful hostility towards Constantine in particular. Constantine is described initially in a series of epithets that vary the theme of age; he is *se froda* ("the old", "the wise") (37), *har hilderinc* ("grey-haired warrior", "hoary warrior") (39) and *beorn blandenfeax* ("warrior with mixed hair", "grey-haired warrior") (45). These may underline the magnitude of his losses—they emphasise how Constantine fits the topos of the old man whose son dies before him—but they seem respectful, in the case of *se froda* even positive. The switch to *eald inwidda* ("old wretch") (46) thus seems the more venomous by contrast. Bosworth and Toller gloss *inwidda* (an adjective) as "guileful, deceitful, evil, wicked, malicious"; it is a heavily moralised term freighted with ideas of cunning and trickery. According to the Parker manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Constantine (*Sceotta cyning*) was among the rulers who "chose [Edward the Elder] as father and lord" in 920 (Whitelock 1965, p. 68); the chronicler has subjected what was probably a truce-agreement to a degree of spin or at least misinterpretation (Davidson 2001), but the annal nonetheless gives evidence for West Saxon attitudes to Constantine and his relationship with the house of Cerdic. The D manuscript of the Chronicle has Constantine as one of the kings brought under the rule of Athelstan and establishing a peace with oaths in 926 (Whitelock 1965, pp. 68–69).[8] Following the ravaging of Scotland in 934, recorded by all Anglo-Saxon Chronicle versions (Whitelock 1965, p. 69), Constantine seems to have spent some time at the West Saxon court, where he witnesses a charter as *subregulus*; he appears again among the *subreguli* at Athelstan's plenary court at Cirencester the following year (Woolf 2007, pp. 166–167; the relevant charters are S426 and S1792). From a West Saxon perspective, the steadily worsening relationship between Constantine and the southern English kings that culminated at Brunanburh would very probably have been seen as a history of slipperiness, swearing in bad faith and failing to honour the bond with a lord. Arguably, the phrase *eald inwidda* is charged with deep anger and contempt towards a traitor. Yet, alongside hostility, scorn and anger, the boasting sequence also implies a rather different emotion on the part of Athelstan's people: relief. Both the imagery of laughter and boasting and the details of Constantine and Anlaf's humiliation and loss represent what would have happened, had not the

[8] Hudson (1994, pp. 74–76) regards this entry with suspicion, but the event is accepted as historical by Woolf (2007, p. 151).

invading forces been turned back. It could have been Athelstan beating a hurried retreat and the Scots and Norse parading their victory over the humiliated Mercians and West Saxons. This sense of relief undercuts the possibility of sympathy identified by Warwick Frese. Certainly there is empathy—the sufferings of Constantine in particular are richly imagined—but this is not accompanied by concern for the enemies. Rather, they serve as projection for egotistical fears, and they are viewed as thoroughly meriting their fall.

Finally, it is necessary to recognise the self-reflexivity of lines 37–52. I have suggested that the ostentatious variation of 49b-51a is a reference to the poetry that might have been composed in honour of Constantine and Anlaf; it functions also as a gesture towards *Brunanburh*'s own status as poetry and the role of verse in celebrating and commemorating a great victory. By implication, the whole performance of boasting, laughter and noise is evoked in relation to Athelstan and Edmund. The only direct statement about Athelstan and Edmund's response to the battle is that they return to their homeland *wiges hremige*, "exulting in war" (59b); *hremige* echoes *hreman* in line 39b and thus creates a connection between the counterfactual and the actual celebration. However, it should be noted that it is all done by echo and suggestion. The poem does not say that Athelstan and Edmund boast or laugh; one should recall Shippey's comments on the links between laughter and folly. The relationship between *hreman* and *hremige* is part of a complex system of symmetries in the poem by which the battle is made to seem at once a meeting of equals and a meeting of opposites. There are two leaders and two peoples on each side and the battle is (in the sarcastic free indirect speech of ll. 50–51) a seemingly reciprocal *garmittinge, gumena gemotes,/wæpengewrixles* ("meeting of spears, assembly of men, exchange of weapons"). On the other hand the enemies are associated from the first with defensive weapons and with falling dead, while Athelstan and Edmund wield swords, hew and cleave (Carroll 2000). It cannot be assumed that Athelstan and Edmund do what Anlaf and Constantine would do.

The boasting sequence thus opens up a complex set of possibilities to do with the emotions of the defeated and the victors and the attitude towards them that is conveyed by the poem itself. Potentially, it foregrounds the role of the poem in just such a scene of triumph, boasting and laughter as is portrayed and denied in relation to Constantine and Anlaf. Thus, through portraying emotional performance, the poem leads us to understand it as emotional performance in itself. This point, however, raises the question of the original performance context, for different views on the context produce different views of the emotional meaning.

As mentioned earlier, there are two main alternatives regarding the poem's origins, each with some good arguments in its favour. For a long time the dominant view was that *Brunanburh* was originally composed as praise-poetry for performance at Athelstan's court. This view is supported by dialectal differences between the poem and surrounding prose entries in the Chronicle; by other evidence for the practice of praise-poetry at Athelstan's court such as the *Aðalsteinsdrápa* of Egill Skalla-Grímsson; by the generic interpretation of the poem as panegyric; and by the fact that the opening *Her* of the poem is extra-metrical and could easily have been added later (which is not the case with certain later Chronicle poems such as *The*

Death of Edgar, 975ABC). This view has been argued by Matthew Townend, who makes it the basis of a pleasingly rich hypothesis linking the flourishing of praise-poetry in the Viking Age to the restoration of 'Heroic Age' conditions, with a central role for warbands and their lords, in England as well as Scandinavia (Townend 2000). It is also the basic assumption of another recent discussion by Samantha Zacher, who reads *Brunanburh* alongside the Latin poetry produced at Athelstan's court (Zacher 2012; see also Lapidge 1980). The praise-poetry reading implicitly dates the poem to very soon after the battle.

If *Brunanburh* is connected to a court context, then it is easy to make sense of the poem's stress on performance and its self-reflexivity, as well as its concentration on the emotions of the vanquished. If the poem was indeed composed and performed for Athelstan, then the performance itself would supply and enact the victors' celebration that is implied rather than stated within the text, balancing the stress on the emotions of the defeated. Under these circumstances the animus against Constantine would also be fresh.

However, perhaps the majority opinion at present is that *Brunanburh* was composed expressly for and as part of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and thus at a remove of some years from the events it describes. This position has been strongly stated by Donald Scragg (2003), who argues that the annals for 924–955, which form a scribal unit in the Parker Chronicle (MS A), are by a single author. He detects verbal echoes between annals, especially between *Brunanburh* and *The Capture of the Five Boroughs* (942ABCD), and an overarching theme, the triumphs of King Edmund and his family. Strikingly, he reads the lines at the end of the poem about the record of the Anglo-Saxon invasions provided by *bec,/ealde uðwitan* ("books, ancient authorities") (68b–69a) as a reference to the Chronicle itself (Scragg 2003, p. 118). Similar readings emphasising the coherence of *Brunanburh* with its Chronicle context have been advanced by other recent commentators (Bredehoft 2001, pp. 72–118; Bredehoft 2011; Smith 2012, pp. 173–85; Trilling 2009, pp. 192–199). A further argument for this view is the surprising prominence of Edmund in the poem. Edmund would have been only sixteen or so at the time of the battle, quite old enough to fight but surely of much lesser stature than his brother. His attestation appears in only three of Athelstan's surviving charters, S433, S455 and S387, though in all three he signs second (of these S433 at least is probably a forgery: Keynes 1980, p. 66).[9]

Simon Walker has argued for the composition of *Brunanburh* at Worcester in Edmund's reign, to account for the prominence of both Edmund and Mercia (Walker 1992). Against Walker's view, the Mercian dimension could be explained by Athelstan's own strong associations with Mercia—according to William of Malmesbury, he was fostered at Æthelflæd's court (Mynors et al. 1998, p. 210). Both Edmund and Mercia also enhance the symmetrical structure of the poem: Edmund and Athelstan, West Saxons and Mercians, versus Constantine and Anlaf, Scots and Dublin Norse. However, to create such symmetry has also required modification of the enemy side with the elision of the Strathclyde Britons (who

[9] Records for these charters and references to secondary literature assessing their authenticity can be found online in the Electronic Sawyer website, www.esawyer.org.uk [consulted 13/8/15].

might have been harder to omit closer in time to the actual event, one speculates).[10] It is easier to presume that Edmund's prominence was part of the initial idea around which the symmetrical confrontation of forces has been constructed; and, unless *Brunanburh* was a factional production designed to promote the atheling's status at his brother's court (which is not impossible), it makes most sense to see the stress on Edmund as reflecting a late date, whether or not one accepts Walker's proposed location for composition. Jayne Carroll (2007, pp. 230–232) notes that the poem does not claim that Athelstan or Edmund is ruler of Mercia. It is uncertain how far this point should be pressed in relation to the poem's date. Certainly it would not seem to fit well with the scenario of praise-poetry for Athelstan in the immediate aftermath of the battle: as Carroll remarks, "*Brunanburh* is positively modest in its claims about the extent of Athelstan's power" (p. 231) and in this respect contrasts with the Latin praise-poetry of his reign. It could be taken as an indication of composition before 942, as the Chronicle tells us Edmund overran the Five Boroughs in 942, and perhaps as support for Walker's hypothesis of composition at Worcester, whose denizens might want to emphasise Mercia's separate identity.

Even if the poem is viewed as originally independent of the Chronicle (and the arguments in favour of composition for the Chronicle seem to me to be strong), one still needs to consider how its presentation of emotions works as part of an annalistic record. The most obvious feature of *Brunanburh* within the Chronicle is how markedly different it is from the prose annals that precede it. As Scragg observes (2003, p. 116), *Brunanburh* is a very consciously poetic poem, making heavy use of formulaic and poetic diction, motifs such as the Beasts of Battle, and the device of variation. Renée Trilling interprets this as a deliberate effect and aligns this section of the Chronicle with the genre of prosimetrum, in which poetic passages stand out against but also elaborate and reinforce the surrounding prose (Trilling 2009, pp. 178–81). *Brunanburh*'s interest in emotion is one of the features that differentiates it from the Chronicle at large and marks the poetic register; Anglo-Saxon poets are notably interested in the operations of the *mod* (Harbus 2002; Mize 2013), but the Chronicle is generally terse, event-focused and factual (Clark 1971; Stodnick 2010). However, there are a few mentions of emotion in annals preceding 937, and where they appear the emphases cohere with what we find in *Brunanburh*. (In all the following examples, the annal year-numbers and text are those of the Parker Manuscript, quoted from Bately 1986). In the annals for 457 and 473 we find explicit and implicit references to the enemies' fear: *Her Hengest 7 Æsc gefuhton wiþ Brettas…7 þa Brettas…mid micel ege flugon to Lundenbyrig* (*s.a.* 457) ("In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Britons…and the Britons…fled with great fear to London"); *þa Walas flugon þa Englan swa [þę̨r] fyr* (*s.a.* 473) ("the Britons fled from the English as if from fire"). The Britons' fear demonstrates the power and dominance of the English over them. In 823 the king of the East Angles and his people seek protection from King Egbert because of their fear of the Mercians (*Miercna ege*). Three instances convey the relationship of kings to their peoples by stressing affection for leaders. In 855 we are told that the West Saxons are *gefægene*

[10] See Lawlor (1973, pp. 61–64), on the *Brunanburh*-poet's use of antithesis, including the construction of symmetrical two-against-two forces in the battle.

("joyful") at the return of Æthelwulf from pilgrimage and in 878 the forces who rally to Alfred at Ecgbryht's stone *his gefægene wærun* ("were glad to see him"). The annal for 755 is a much more complex example, both in its length and its implications, but the relationship between Cynewulf and Cyneheard and their thegns, and especially the statement by Cyneheard's thegns that "no kinsman was dearer to them than their lord", can be grouped with the briefer references in 855 and 878 (for discussion see White 1989). The Chronicle also contains a couple of compounds in *mod*: in 750 King Cuthred fights against *þone ofermedan aldormonn* ("the arrogant ealdorman") Æthelhun, and in 828 the Welsh are reduced to *eaðmodre* ("humble") submission by King Egbert. Broadly speaking, all these references have a political force and stress the relationships between kings and subjects or dominated peoples, just as *Brunanburh* stresses Athelstan and Edmund's crushing victory over their enemies. The emotions of the kings themselves are not mentioned, with one exception: in 584 Ceawlin captures many villages and returns to his own land *[i]erre* ("in anger"). This is rather interesting, suggesting a heroic rage that sustains the martial exploits of the warleader; it economically portrays Ceawlin as both terrifying and magnificent, and magnificent partly because he is terrifying. It is comparable to *Brunanburh* line 59 where Athelstan and Edmund return to Wessex *wiges hremige* ("exulting in war"); I have read this line so far in terms of celebration following the battle, but as with Ceawlin there may well also be a sense of the sustaining of an elevated battle mood, an excitement that belongs to fighting as well as victory. Be that as it may, where references to emotion do occur in the earlier Chronicle annals they function in ways that are paralleled in *Brunanburh*. The annals also characteristically emphasise outcomes rather than processes, as does the poem.

The poem's accent on emotion remains unusual and striking in this context, however, with the emphasis on display and performance particularly hard to parallel in the prose annals. As Trilling observes, greater emotional intensity and engagement is one of the functions of poetry in prosimetrum (Trilling 2009, p. 181). *Brunanburh* dramatizes and heightens the issues of honour and shame, pride, subjection and power that underlie the Chronicle narrative, acting as a kind of gloss on all those terse notices of battles and deaths. In a section of the Chronicle that seems particularly propagandistic in its aims, the poem is engaging and motivating for the audience.

With respect to emotional performance specifically, *Brunanburh* thematizes the links between poetry and history. This self-consciously poetic poem gestures towards the role of poetry in oral performance and celebration at court, within the scene of boasting and laughter. However, it also—to return to Scragg's argument mentioned earlier—foregrounds its own position in the much more permanent record of the Chronicle, through the reference to *ealde uðwita* and their *bec*. *Ealde uðwita*, though highly suggestive, is not in itself proof of composition for this context. As Kathryn Powell has shown (2006), *uðwita* is generally applied to pagan, not Christian authorities, and, if to Christians, not to Anglo-Saxons. Patrick Conner suggests the appeal to *bec* imitates "the trope of the wisdom of ancient books fashionable in Latin poetry" (Conner 2001). However, since the Chronicle does provide exactly such a record of the coming of *Engle and Seaxe* as the poem appeals

to, *ealde uðwita* becomes a self-reflexive reference in the annalistic context whether or not it was the poet's original intention to stretch the meaning of the term. Moreover, the poem is a ring-composition; beginning and end are linked by the almost exact verbal repetition *sweorda ecgum* ("with the edges of swords") (4a), *sweordes ecgum* ("with the edges of the sword (68a), which reinforces the comparison between Athelstan and Edmund's achievements and those of their conquering ancestors. The reader is thus invited to consider how their *ealdorlangne tir* ("everlasting glory") (3a) is to be preserved. Poetry is powerfully associated with the heroic and with the production of renown, but the Chronicle can incorporate poetry, and it is more permanent.

Brunanburh thus raises the possibility that history can extend or preserve the moment of celebration and boasting, but it also points to the difference between singing of great deeds in their immediate aftermath and remembering them from a distance of years. If we view *Brunanburh* as composed some years after the battle it is in any case harder to see it is as charged with the fresh joy, relief and hatred of a bitter conflict. Nor can the boasting sequence work so straightforwardly as a projection of the poem's own actual context. Instead, the poem becomes an attempt to recoup the glory of an event now some eighteen years in the past. This gives a rather different perspective both on the litotes—we are told of what the vanquished don't do, not of what the victors or the poet do—and on the bodiliness of the imagined emotional performance, its noise, its gestural largeness. *Brunanburh* is a poem full of bodies that are lost, departing or destroyed: it contains only brief descriptions of active fighting, but numerous and repeated references to dying and the dead. It is also preoccupied with leaving and with remnants: swords are *hamoran lafan* ("the leavings of hammers") (6b), the Norsemen are *dreorig daraða laf*, Constantine leaves (*forlet*) his dead son on the battlefield (42b–43a) and the departing armies leave behind them (*letan him behindan*) (60) the carrion beasts to feast on the slain. In the absence of a performance context where the bodies of the victors are actually present, this theme of absence and loss conveys less of a sense of triumphalism and more one of an underlying anxiety. In the Chronicle record as preserved in the Parker manuscript there are genuine, territorial losses that the annals clearly try to minimize and recoup: the record of Edmund's victories in the years following 937, for example the recapture of the Five Boroughs in 942, is only possible because many of Athelstan's territorial gains, and even some of Edward's, were lost early in Edmund's reign. *Brunanburh* does not only invoke the heroism of the migration age but also tries to recapture the glory days of the recent past.

This article has revisited the vexed question of the emotional import or tone of *The Battle of Brunanburh*, focusing particularly on the (negated) scene of emotional display in lines 37–52. The poem has not emerged as a subtle expression of pity, tender towards the feelings of the defeated, but it is not entirely cold and detached either. On one level, the emotion language is functional: it dramatizes the enmity between Athelstan, Edmund and their followers, on the one hand, and Constantine, Anlaf and their followers, on the other, and emphasizes the magnitude of the latter's defeat. As Britt Mize writes, "the continual reference to qualities and states of mind in classical Old English poetry works less to create distinctive fictional persons than to evoke a system of ethical positions and relationships" (2013, p. 19). Emotion talk

is one of the codes available for conferring meaning on the battle; it does not only provide a subjective dimension, but reinforces the truth and reality of events (according to the poet's view of them) and gives a means of powerfully communicating them. However, the poem's attention to the display of emotion, especially the boasting sequence with its self-conscious evocation of poetic performance, raises complex questions in relation not only to the implications of such a display in a court context—is laughter asking for trouble?—but within the nexus of poetry and history and the oral and the textual. Pressing the implications of the Chronicle context, which may well have been the composition context as well as the main vehicle of transmission and reception, one can hypothesize troubling emotional undercurrents to this text that have to do not so much with sympathy for Constantine as the vulnerability of any human triumph. The long view of history, the glance to the Anglo-Saxon *adventus*, asserts Anglo-Saxon identity as conquerors of Britain, but in the shorter term *Brunanburh* speaks to the instability of a political landscape in which allies can become enemies and power be quickly gained and lost. Frese's phrase "the subtly cognate fates of men" proves apt after all, though I have taken a very different route to hers in arriving at it.

To conclude with a few words on the broader issue of "reading for emotion": this discussion began from what a text says *about* emotion, including some rather marginal cases of emotion talk such as the use of *laþ* as an epithet for enemies, and explored the possible implications for the lived emotions expressed or performed through the text. Such an exercise must take careful account of the implications of context; *Brunanburh* means rather different things depending where we place it. Literary readings such as the present one, that cast their net wide, also need to be balanced by scrupulous work on the Old English vocabulary of emotion (such as Fabiszak 2001; Izdebska 2015), and on folk psychologies (notably Lockett 2011; see Jorgensen 2015 for further discussion and references). However, it seems to me that the most promising direction for accessing the actual emotions of the past, as opposed to emotional concepts or norms, is to think about the extent to which our surviving texts might have done emotional work or functioned as emotional performances. Inevitably this involves a degree of imaginative engagement, hypothesis, and perhaps historical distortion as a result of deeply-embedded modern biases, but it is a necessary work of humanizing the past that has implications for cross-cultural understanding today.

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