

The Lexical Domains of Ugliness and Aesthetic Horror in the Old English Formulaic Style

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Even though as of late there has been a renewed interest in the aesthetic ideals in early Medieval England, the conceptualisation and experience of ugliness in Old English sources has been largely neglected. Drawing on the recent research carried out on aesthetic emotions and folk aesthetics, and despite the lack of academic materials on artistic and literary canons of ugliness, the purpose of this paper is to look into the terms that rendered the experience of ugliness and its closest emotional response, aesthetic horror, in order to examine how these are employed in poetic texts. The findings from this study evidence a lack of use of terms for negative aesthetic experience in Old English poetry that suggests that the lexical domain of ugliness and related emotional responses were not fundamental constituents of the Old English formulaic style, while the lexical domain of beauty and its responses were. Additionally, this study highlights the fundamentally moral character of the idea of ugliness.

Keywords: ugliness; aesthetic emotions; Old English poetry; early Medieval England

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Los dominios léxicos de la fealdad y el horror estético en el estilo formulaico del inglés antiguo

A pesar de que últimamente hay un interés renovado en los ideales estéticos de la Inglaterra anglosajona, la conceptualización y la experiencia de la fealdad en textos en inglés antiguo no ha recibido atención por parte de la comunidad académica. Siguiendo los recientes estudios en emociones estéticas y estética folk, y a pesar de la falta de material académico sobre cánones de fealdad a nivel literario y artístico, el propósito de este artículo es investigar los

términos que se refieren a la experiencia de la fealdad y su respuesta emocional asociada más frecuente, el horror estético, y ver cómo se usan en textos poéticos. Este estudio demuestra un desuso de los términos referidos a experiencia estética negativa en la poesía en inglés antiguo que sugiere que el campo léxico de la fealdad y sus emociones asociadas no eran constituyentes fundamentales del estilo formulaico en inglés antiguo, como sí es el caso de la belleza. Adicionalmente, este estudio demuestra el carácter fundamentalmente moral de la idea de fealdad.

Palabras clave: fealdad; emociones estéticas; poesía en inglés antiguo; Inglaterra anglosajona

1. INTRODUCTION

Beauty is an aesthetic idea that is frequently explored and written about from many different theoretical angles. However, the same cannot be said for *ugliness*. Furthermore, while beauty and ugliness have been theorised about in philosophical writings and aesthetic theories, very few academic works treat the experience of these aesthetic ideas as embodied phenomena. In recent years, developments in the fields of Cognitive Linguistics and emotion research have shed new light on how it is possible to understand beauty and ugliness as emotions with particular characteristics that distinguish them from other emotions such as fear or anger, establishing a contrast between utilitarian emotions (e.g., anger) and aesthetic emotions (e.g., the experience of beauty or ugliness), as proposed by Scherer (2005). The number of academic works that deal with aesthetic emotions has grown exponentially in the last decade. Works by Juslin (2013), Menninghaus et al. (2019) and Fingerhut and Prinz (2020) are some examples of aesthetic emotion theories that detail the phenomenology and the particular traits of such emotions, and which also provide solid theoretical frameworks for the linguistic analysis of these emotions in temporally remote cultures. Similarly, and thanks to the work of cognitive linguists like Gladkova and Romero-Trillo (2014, 2021), there is a growing body of research analysing the conceptualisation of beauty and ugliness in different languages and cultures that can also provide insights into how these ideas should be approached in ancient languages, their cultures and their literatures.

In the case of Old English and early Medieval English culture and literature, aesthetic ideas, their expression and conceptualisation are a clearly underexplored domain. Over recent years, however, Old English scholars have paid notably more attention to aesthetic experience in Old English language and literature: from Hill's (2010) volume analysing different aspects of the aesthetics of Old English literature, to Ramey's (2017) inspection of beauty terminology, Díaz-Vera's (2015) analysis of the aesthetic emotion of awe, and publications by Minaya Gómez (2021a, 2022) examining the lexical domains of beauty and wonder in Old English. Following on from the latter publications, the purpose of this paper is to perform an exploration of the Old English vocabulary for aesthetic emotions as it is used in Old English verse, focusing on the terms that are frequently employed in referring to ugliness and the emotion that it most commonly triggers, categorised here as *aesthetic horror*. The secondary aims of this paper include determining the role that the Old English terms for ugliness and related emotional responses play in poetic and literary contexts and what these terms were associated with in this poetic context. Similarly, this paper aims at establishing whether the usage of these terms reveals an autonomy of ugliness as an aesthetic idea in the Old English formulaic style.

2. UGLINESS IN THE EARLY MEDIEVAL (ENGLISH) WORLD

While many volumes have been written on Western and Medieval canons of beauty, very few authors address the idea of ugliness and virtually no scholar has produced a

model for Medieval ugliness that addresses the sensory and cognitive phenomena that typically trigger it. Eco (2007, 8) concedes that, in terms of Medieval writings, “almost no one ever devoted a treatise of any length to ugliness, which was relegated to passing mentions in marginal works.” In fact, Eco (2007) is one of the few scholars who has carried out a detailed analysis of the concept of ugliness throughout Art and Literature History. In certain respects, his work on ugliness is notably similar to his volume on beauty (Eco, 2004). His approach to the moral dimension of beauty is extended to ugliness and, while he analyses ugliness, he nevertheless constantly refers to beauty, both in contrast to ugliness and in connection with it. Other contemporary works that deal with the idea of ugliness include those by Cousins (1994), Adorno (2002), Kuplen (2013), Pop and Widrich (2013) and Johnson (2019); however, they do not aim at producing a comprehensive and exhaustive analysis of this aesthetic concept as they discuss specific ideas, periods and themes that are not applicable to early English culture and literature.

Delving into the definition and characteristics of beauty, according to Eco (2007, 46), those objects which do not “draw some superiority of shape” will be held to be ugly. Similarly, Rosenkranz (2015, 36) explains that ugliness is traditionally associated with amorphism, asymmetry and disharmony. Nevertheless, one of the most prevalent ideas in Medieval aesthetics is the identification of ugliness with immorality, which is directly imported from Greek Art and Literature (Eco 2007, 23). This idea will be central to most representations and mentions of ugliness in early English culture and literature, which are reserved for beings that are morally condemnable or evil. Eco (2007, 62) develops this idea further, stating that “verbal preaching and the images that appeared in holy places were intended to serve as reminders of the imminence of death and to cultivate the terrors of the torments of hell.” Rosenkranz (2015, 31), for whom the body is merely a recipient upon which the (moral and spiritual) qualities of the soul are projected, explains that “[h]ell is not simply ethico-religious, it is also aesthetic. We stand in the midst of evil and general wickedness, but also in the midst of ugliness.”

It is worth mentioning that, on the one hand, the devil and other morally impure figures are not described physically, but rather writers draw upon the effects that they cause (Eco 2007, 90), an observation that is supported by Fulk (1996, 68-69), who points out how, in Old English verse, the “persons of the main characters are described only sparingly, if at all.” Furthermore, and regarding Old English literature, the “habit of thought that dictates that a thing cannot be defined half so well by what it is as by what it is not” (Fulk 1996, 68-69) should also be considered. Because the cultural and literary models for beauty, as well as its lexical domain, are far more developed than their homonyms for ugliness, when poets did describe ugly characters and people, most of the time they relied on negations of the canon of the beautiful and its lexical domain. As the excerpts from the literary texts under analysis in this paper will demonstrate, formal ugliness is not a frequently discussed idea in early English sources, but it is

intrinsically connected with marked negative emotional responses, an idea that is also supported by Hagman (2005, 104), who reflects on how ugliness is associated with “intense negative affect (fear, horror, disgust and/or loathing), moral condemnation (reprehensibility) and behavioural reactions (being repelled, looking away, fleeing).” In this sense, in order to fully understand ugliness and its experience and conceptualisation, this paper will assess attestations of Old English terms for ugliness, but also lexis related to the emotions that it triggers.¹

3. METHODOLOGICAL NOTES AND THE LEXICAL DOMAINS OF UGLINESS AND AESTHETIC HORROR

This paper reports research from a larger research project that consists in an examination of the lexical field of aesthetic experience in Old English verse. Some of the research outputs of this project include Minaya Gómez (2021a, 2021b, 2022), where different fields for positive, negative and mixed aesthetic responses are examined. This research employs the Dictionary of Old English Corpus (DOEC; cf. Cameron et al. 1981; Healey et al. 2009) as its main textual resource.² Using different lexicographical tools such as the *Bosworth Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (BWT; cf. Bosworth and Toller 2013a), the *Thesaurus of Old English* (TOE; cf. Roberts et al. 2017a) and the *Dictionary of Old English* (DOE; cf. Cameron et al. 2018a), the attestations of several lexical domains for aesthetic emotion have been extracted and annotated in an Access database for ease of categorisation. This methodology is an adaptation of the Behavioural Profiles methodology (Gries 2010), and it is further developed in Minaya Gómez (2021a, 13).

Research on the lexical domain of beauty in Old English verse points to the existence of a well-developed and extensive lexical field to refer to appealing appearances and positive aesthetic experience, which constitutes a large part of the Old English poetic style (see Minaya Gómez 2021a). Furthermore, the attestations of these terms clarify exactly what is to be understood as “beautiful” in particular contexts. However, the list of Old English terms for ugliness is notably shorter, and these terms are nowhere near as frequently attested as the lexis for beauty. Furthermore, the attestations of ugliness terms are not explanatory of what was understood as “ugly” in these literary contexts. To begin with, there are no native Old English terms that refer to ugliness in extant records. Instead, some of the terms for beauty are negated through affixes to convey the idea of unpleasant appearance. The TOE (cf. Roberts et al. 2017b) lists terms for ugliness in two main categories: first, it makes reference to formal ugliness (07.10.02 *ugliness*, with the following subheadings: ‘not beautiful, ugly’, ‘dark, ugly, unfair’,

¹ For a more extensive examination of other negative aesthetic responses in Old English verse, like *disgust* and *unpleasant* personal experience and their moral dimension, see Minaya Gómez (2021b).

² As a result, the texts discussed here will be cited using the conventions adopted by the DOEC editors. Texts such as *Genesis A* and *Genesis B* or *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* will, inevitably, have to be treated as single resources. Similarly, quotations from the DOEC will not show vowel length through macrons nor acute accents.

‘mean-looking, ugly’, ‘untrimmed, ill-kept, ugly’ and ‘to become ugly’); second, it refers to deformity and appearances that inspire fear or horror.

Despite the fact that this section of the TOE (Roberts et al. 2017a) lists a total of eight terms, only three of them occur in poetic texts. One of them is OE *fūl* ‘foul, loathsome’, but since its prototypical meaning refers to negative aesthetic experience triggered via proximity to the senses, it has been analysed in its connection with the bodily layer of negative aesthetic emotion in Old English poetry.³ The three remaining terms are related to lexemes denoting lack of beauty or appearance in Old English. They are a) the adjective OE *unfæger* “not fair, not beautiful, foul, ugly, horrid” (Bosworth and Toller 2013b, adj.), its adverbial version and verbally negated forms of OE *fæger*; b) OE *wlitelēas* “without beauty, uncomely, hideous” (Bosworth and Toller 2013c, adj.); and c) the adjective OE *unwlitig*. It is worth mentioning that OE *unfæger* and *wlitelēas* are found in poetic texts, but that OE *unwlitig* only occurs in prose texts. Furthermore, this and the lack of annotations to this effect in the TOE (Roberts et al. 2017a) indicates that these terms are not part of the core Old English poetic vocabulary. The available lexical tools pertaining to Old English do not provide greatly illuminating insights on the usage of these terms: the DOE (Cameron et al. 2018a) does not index them, as they begin with letters ‘u’ and ‘w’ and BWT (Bosworth and Toller 2013a) only offers brief definitions and Present-Day English synonyms. In glosses and glossaries, the Latin adjective *deformis* ‘deformed’ but also ‘ugly or disgusting’ is glossed in *OCCGI* 89.3 as both *unfæger* and *wlitelēas*.

Regarding the relation between these Old English terms and their attestations in the poetic texts under analysis and the Latin texts upon which some of them are based, this research assumes that the process of translation implies a conceptual, cultural adaptation that, in Mize’s (2013, 3) terms, “anglicises” the foreign material. This assumption is based not only on previous research on aesthetic emotions in Old English verse (Minaya Gómez 2021a, 2021b, 2022) but also on other research on Old English emotion vocabulary (Diaz-Vera, 2015), which evidences culture-specific preferences and responses, and, more specifically, on the research by Lockett (2011), Harbus (2012) and Jorgensen (2015), who point out how, despite the fact that poetic texts rely on Latin sources, the resulting Old English poems reflect and evidence a different way of looking at the world and of understanding the mind, the senses and the emotions, as well as, in this case, aesthetic categories.

In the TOE (Roberts et al. 2017a), an additional section indexes certain terms for ugliness and disfigurement and the emotions that figures appraised as such may trigger: 07.10.02.01 *Deformed, ugly*. The central negative aesthetic emotion term that renders this response in the poetic corpus is OE *atol*. According to the DOE (Cameron et al. 2018a), the adjective OE *atol* prototypically means “1. horrible, hideous, dire”

³ See Minaya Gómez (2021b), which discusses negative aesthetic experience and emotions of disgust in Old English verse.

(Cameron et al. 2018b, adj, 1). This sense has several subdivisions that move beyond the aesthetic spectrum towards responses akin to the emotion of fear (for an analysis of this emotion in early Medieval England see Díaz-Vera, 2011), but they are tightly interconnected with the concepts of horror and ugliness, for instance: “1.a. exciting horror or terror: horrible, terrible, hideous, dire” (Cameron et al. 2018b, adj., 1.a.), an idea that is consistent with its Latin gloss to *atrox* ‘horrible, hideous, frightening’ in *AldV* 9, 14 and 7.1. This definition outlines the negative aesthetic emotion episode that it represents in textual sources: from the extreme ugliness perceived in the aesthetic object to the horror and terror that it triggers. In this sense, the term refers to a very particular sort of aesthetic and emotional response. This apparent ugliness operates on a visual level, but also on a cognitive one: “1.c. revolting to the moral sense” (Cameron et al. 2018b, adj., 1.c.). Moreover, this term also showcases semantic elements that relate to other lexical domains, like that of disgust: “1.b. exciting revulsion or loathing: hideous, loathsome, unsightly” (Cameron et al. 2018b, adj., 1.b.). However, because these are secondary senses, it will be assumed here that OE *atol* refers prototypically to visually monstrous and fear-inspiring figures, and that the connections with other senses result from figurative usages of language. Other terms also render horror and a fearful response to ugliness, for instance OE *forsceōppan*, mentioned in the previous section, and OE *fræcne* and *unbire*, ‘horrible, savage’ and ‘dreadful, savage’, respectively. However, these terms are not as common in the poetic corpus as OE *atol*. The TOE (Roberts et al. 2017a) also points to other terms, like OE *forniman*, *awlætan* and *unwlitignes*. However, the first term is an extremely polysemic one and it only refers to ugliness in the sense of a beauty that is ‘taken away’ (see Cameron et al. 2018c, vb., 4.d.). Furthermore, while the second and third terms could have been poetic negative aesthetic emotion markers, they do not occur in poetic texts.

4. UGLINESS IN OLD ENGLISH VERSE

According to some of the academic works mentioned in section 2, ugliness should be understood from a fundamentally visual standpoint, based on notions of form that are the opposite of those represented by the canon of the beautiful. An aesthetic object is assumed to be experienced negatively if it does not comply with the ideals of symmetry, shape, colour, order, proportion, texture and the clarity of said figure against a background, as both Rosenkranz (2015) and Eco (2007) suggest. Similarly, regarding morality, and considering the eminently religious nature of a great percentage of the texts in the Old English poetic corpus, it can be assumed that descriptions of ugliness would have been reserved for people who did not act according to Christian morals, as well as for descriptions of hell and the devil, just as the opposite, namely ideations and descriptions of beauty, was true for religious figures and people who acted in accordance with Christian precepts, as is discussed in Minaya Gómez (2021a). Departing from these assumptions and analysing the existing descriptions of ugliness in this subset

of texts will determine if this is also the case for Old English poetry or if Old English literary models of ugliness depend on different premises.

In fact, one of the few occurrences where terms for negative appearance are applied to people comes from the Old English verse *Genesis*. After Seth's kin begin looking for wives amongst Cain's relatives, God shows his wrath, punishing them with the deadly deluge. God's motivation for this is described in this excerpt:

(1) *þa geseah selfa sigoro waldend hwæt wæs monna manes on eorðan and þæt hie wæron womma ðriste, inwitfulle. He þæt unfægere wera cneorissum gewrecaþ þobte, forgripan gumcynne grimme and sare, heardum mihtum* (Gen A, B 1270).⁴

"The ruler of victories himself saw what wickedness of men there was on the earth and that they were daring in iniquity and full of guile. He meant to punish the generations of [hideous] men for that, to seize upon the human race grimly and sorely with unbending powers" (Anlezark 2011, 93).⁵

Even though the women descended from Cain are described as beautiful and shiny (*scyne and fægere*, Gen A, B 1245), the men and their generation as a whole are described in negative aesthetic terms. They are said to be stained (OE *wamm*), which is a visual way of inferring that somebody has sinned or that they do not lead a good life. A similar observation is made in *Christ A, B, C 1530*, where those who have sinned are referred to as *womfulra scolu* 'troop of the stained'. In excerpt (1), the idea of sin is complemented by negative emotion terms like OE *unfæger*, through which these moral connotations take on a more explicitly visual dimension, extrapolating the idea of moral beauty to an ugliness that is indicative of improper morals and religious behaviour.

As has been mentioned above, on other occasions negative appearance is rendered by different negations of beauty-related terms, for instance:

(2) *ac þæt fyr fyr scyde to ðam þe ða scylde worhton, hwearf on þa bæðenan hæftas fram þam halgan cnihton, werigra wlite minsode, þa ðe ðy worce gefægon* (Dan 265).

"But the fire rushed against those who committed the crime, turned towards the pagan slaves from the holy youths, diminished the beauty of those wretches, those who rejoiced in the work" (Anlezark 2011, 267).

In this excerpt from *Daniel*, when the angel comes from heaven to save the Three Youths, the fire turns towards those who were in charge of their execution. The apparent

⁴ These excerpts are taken from the DOEC and, as a result, vowel length and line breaks are not marked in them.

⁵ Translations for these excerpts are taken mainly from the Old English editions and translations by *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* or from Williamson's (2017) translation of the complete Old English poems. However, when the available translation did not illustrate the main idea under discussion, I have provided my own translation.

disfiguration of these men after they have been burned by the fire is not expressed by means of lexis pertaining to monstrosity or disfigurement but by modifying the noun OE *wlite* with the verb OE *minsian* ‘to lessen, diminish’. Furthermore, after the boys have been saved, the fact that they have not been damaged by the fire is expressed with similar lexis: *næs byra wlite gewemmed* (Dan 436) ‘their beauty/appearance was not stained’. It is interesting to note that this evaluation does not reference whether they were hurt or not, or whether they were physically affected health-wise, but simply that their beauty had not been altered. These passages ultimately link divine intervention with either the preservation of beauty or with disfiguration and ugliness by drawing on the characters’ morality, and this is emphasised through the usage of ideologically charged lexis like OE *hæðen* ‘heathen’ for the executioners, and OE *hālig* ‘holy’ for the three youths.

With the clear motivation of moralising to their potential audience, other poems describe these ‘troops of the stained’ in additional negative appearance terms:

(3) *Feores unwyrðe, egsan gepread, ondweard gode won ond wliteleas hafað werges bleo* (Christ A, B, C 1580).

“Unworthy of life, overwhelmed by terror, dark and ugly in the presence of the creator, he will have the appearance of a criminal, a sign of the evil of his life” (Clayton 2013, 81).

This excerpt also features terms from the lexical domain of darkness as being indicative of negative aesthetic experience. However, the core idea in this passage is that those who sin and do not act according to God’s wishes will, first, be afraid when they face divine judgment and, second, will bear external visible marks of their sins, emphasising the metaphor pointed out by Harbus (2012, 61) THE OUTER IS AN INDEX OF THE INNER. Through the association between the inner (morality) and the outer (ugliness), ugliness becomes indicative of defective moral practices and sinful behaviour.

In hagiographical poetry, the same associative trend between stains as sins and (un) pleasant appearances can also be appreciated. Take the following two passages from the poems *Judith* and *Juliana*:

(4) *ða gen sio halge stod ungewemde wlite. Næs byre wloh ne brægl, ne feax ne fel fyre gemaed, ne lic ne leofu* (Jul 589).

“Then the holy one stood up again, her beauty undefiled. Neither her hems or clothes, hair or skin, soul or limbs, were stained by the fire.”

(5) *þa wearð se brema on mode bliðe, burga ealdor, þobte ða beorbtan idese mid widle ond mid womme besmitan* (Jud 57).

“Then the famous one [Holofernes], lord of the cities, became blithe in mood, the lord of the town, as he intended to smite the beauty-bright woman with filth and sin.”

Excerpt (5) clearly portrays the connection between sin-as-a-stain and ugliness, even if the latter is not explicitly addressed. Fragment (4) takes place in the scene in the Old English poem *Juliana* where the saint is being tortured so that she relinquishes her faith. Because, however, she holds firm to it, her beauty and appearance are not stained by sin and/or ugliness and the fire does not hurt, harm or disfigure her.

Outside saintly female beauty, the topic of the physical appearance of women is an interesting aspect to consider. In this regard, the works by Bettella (2005) and Eco (2007) are important in that they analyse positive and negative female appearance in connection to morality. Eco (2007, 159) explains that when women are portrayed as ugly in Medieval times “their ugliness reveals their inner malice and pernicious powers of seduction.” Indeed, one of the Old English *Maxims* makes such a comment:

(6) *Fæmne æt hyre bordan geriseð; widgongel wif word gespringeð, oft by mon wommum bilibð, hæleð by hospe mænað, oft hyre bleor abreopeð* (Max I 63).

“It is proper for a maid to be at her embroidery; a wandering woman spreads words, often she is blamed for wrongs, men speak of her with reproach, her cheek often withers” (Bjork 2014, 71).

This passage clearly represents and develops the dichotomy between the virtuous woman and the prostitute. The woman who embroiders is a housewife, a woman who takes care of her household and family; she is saint-like and described like the ideal wives in other Old English poems (for instance Abraham’s wife, Sarah in the verse *Genesis*). However, the prototype of the ‘wandering woman’ causes people to talk negatively about her. Additionally, such women are morally corrupted by men, and this is visibly appreciable in their countenance, rendering a visual dimension to their lack of morality and improper behaviour. Ultimately, this passage from the *Maxims* moralises about both men and women: men should not cheat on their wives and women should not allow men to take advantage of them. The sexual act outside of marriage is seen as a sinful one that visibly marks women while creating shame in men, as the continuation to that maxim reinforces.

The connection between ugliness and morality implies that the devil and other demons should be depicted and referred to through terms from this domain as well. From the moment that they fall from Heaven, they are deprived of their beauty:

(7) *Waldend sende laðwendne here on langne sið, geomre gastas; wæs him gylp forod, beat forborsten, and forbiged þrym, wlite gewemmed* (Gen A, B, 67).

“The ruler sent the hostile army on a long journey, the sad spirits; their vaunting was exhausted, the boast utterly broken, their triumph humbled, beauty defiled” (Anlezark 2011, 7).

(8) *Feollon þa ufon of beofnum þurblonge swa þreo niht and dagas, þa englas of beofnum on belle, and heo ealle forsceop drihten to deoflum* (Gen A, B 306).

“Then they fell from the heavens above continuously for three nights and days, the angels from heaven into hell, and the Lord misshaped them all into devils” (Anlezark 2011, 25).

When the angels are described through positive aesthetic emotion lexis, their beauty is complemented by holiness, majesty and glory. In the case of the angels that, along with Satan, rebelled against God, they are dispossessed of such qualities, their lack of beauty being the ultimate indicator of their defective moral character. Note in example (8) the usage of *forsceop*, from the verb OE *forsceōppan*. This verb is composed of the verb OE *scippan* ‘to shape, form, create’ and the prefix *for-*, which according to the BWT “deteriorates, or gives an opposite sense” (Bosworth and Toller 2013d, prefix). The DOE defines this verb as “to change, metamorphose, transform (someone / some creature) for the worse” (Cameron et al. 2018d, vb.). The connection between shape and beauty or ugliness is not unheard of, as is discussed in Minaya Gómez (2021b) regarding the polysemy of OE *hūw* ‘shape, colour’ but also ‘beauty’. Because the inner disposition of these fallen angels is now different, it is only logical from a poetic perspective that angels and devils should be differently shaped and polarly opposed as regards beauty and ugliness. However, while the beauty of the angels is developed in visual terms, often involving other sensory evaluations, the poetic depictions of devils are limited to stressing the emotional effect that these creatures would and should cause on the subject.

There is, nevertheless, an additional instance that concerns the sensory depiction of devils that involves an aural evaluation:

(9) *þær by mislice mongum reordum on þam westenne wode hofun bludne herecirm, hiwes binotene, dreamum bidrorene* (Guth A, B 898).

“In that wild wasteland, bereft of beauty, stripped of joy, those evil demons bellowed and bawled, shouted and screeched, raising a hubbub, a clamour of sounds, a cacophony of tongues” (Williamson 2017, 391).

This scene concerns one of the episodes where Saint Guthlac is disturbed by the various devils that appear near his place of residence. In the Old English excerpt, these devils are described as being deprived of shape; if one chooses to take OE *hūw* to mean ‘beauty’, as Cameron et al. (2018a) suggests in some of its secondary senses, the devils are portrayed on three different levels, all of which are aesthetic. First, at a visual level, in terms of ugliness; second, at a negative aural level, since their screams are said to be loud and similar to those heard in war (OE *herecirm* ‘war-shout’); and third, at an experiential level, namely, devoid of joy and pleasure. A similar phenomenon can be observed in *Andreas*:

(10) *þa for þære dugode deoful ætywde, wann ond wliteleas, hæfde weriges biw* (And 1168).

“Then a devil appeared in front of the people, dark and ugly; he had the appearance of a criminal” (Clayton 2013, 261).

In the middle of a confrontation scene, a devil appears to instigate aggression against Andrew. The narrator describes this devil in fairly abundant visual terms, considering the brevity with which negative aesthetic emotion episodes are narrated. First, there is reference to darkness. It does not specify whether this darkness refers to the skin of the devil or to a figurative darkness that surrounds him, indicative of evil. OE *wlitel as* refers to an absolute lack of beauty, which is further reinforced by *weriges biw*, where *wearg* can either mean ‘villain, criminal’ if applied to human beings, or ‘monster’ if applied to other creatures (see Bosworth and Toller 2013e, n., I and II). The depiction of devils is therefore constructed around notions of darkness and horror, which encode ugliness.

Continuing with the idea of monstrosity, there is one final attestation in this lexical domain that employs appearance-related terms to convey negative aesthetic experience. *Beowulf* contains many attestations of negative aesthetic emotion terms, but, incidentally, only this one belongs to the lexical domain of appearance:

(11) *Rape æfter þon on fagne flor feond treddode, eode yrremod; him of eagam stod ligge gelicost leobt unfæger* (Beo 724).

“The fiend stalked the floor, swollen with anger, fierce in his fury. Out of his lurid eyes, leapt like a flame, an unfair light” (Williamson 2017, 626).

When Grendel attacks Heorot, the rage with which Grendel enters the hall is visually rendered by means of its fiery gaze. Due to its intrinsic association with destruction and hell, fire is almost always categorised in negative terms (the only exception being *Riddle 12*, where its warmth is positively appreciated as a pleasant sensation). In this passage, the appearance of this light from Grendel’s eyes is what is evaluated negatively, constituting one of the very few instances where light is involved in a negative evaluation in the Old English poetic corpus.

5. AESTHETIC HORROR AND OE *ATOL*

Some of the attestations in the lexical domain of appearance suggest that, due to the religious nature of the texts that discuss ugliness, terms depicting a fearful response to ugliness may be more frequent in the Old English poetic corpus than prototypical terms for ugliness. As has been suggested before, cultural models for ugliness stress the lack of a common form and shape as the main trigger for negative aesthetic experience. Indeed, taking into consideration Embodiment Theory (Varela et al., 1991), and the fact that all of our experiences and emotions utilise the human body as a medium, the human shape is central to a subject’s aesthetic experience. Minaya Gómez (2021a) discussed how positive aesthetic experience is constructed around human, angelic or standard animal shapes. Nevertheless, according to Eco (2007, 92), hybrids between humans and animals (which are perceived as bestial and monstrous) or extremely threatening

creatures that are, to some extent, animal but possess human-like behaviour are, in a great percentage of cases, met with negative aesthetic emotions and only very rarely with wonder.

There are three main categories in which the horrible is found in the Old English poetic production: the human, the monstrous and that which concerns the devil. These three are related at a conceptual level via moral evaluations and the recurring connection between outer appearance and morality. First, terms for aesthetic horror are found in depictions of the devil and hell. The following excerpt showcases some of the ideas related to the loss of beauty and brightness of devils after their fall, while also describing hell as OE *atol*:

(12) *Blace hworfon scinman forscēpene, sceaðan hwearfedon, earme æglecan, geond þæt atole scref, for ðam anmedlan þe hie ær drugon* (Sat 71).

“The dark deformed demons wandered about; the evildoers, miserable warriors, roamed throughout that terrible pit because of the arrogance with which they had formerly acted” (Clayton 2013, 307).

The movement from beauty to ugliness is described as a painful one (see OE *sceaðan* ‘to scathe, hurt, injure’). Through this process, the angels-turned-demons’ formerly shining (and beautiful) appearance turns ugly, indicating evilness. Interestingly enough, the opposite of OE *blāc* ‘bright, white’ and *scīne* ‘shiny’ is not mentioned, and neither is ugliness. It is only fitting that these miserable spirits would dwell in a similarly terrible place, a *scraf*, “I. a cave, cavern, hollow place in the earth,” but also “II. a miserable dwelling, a den” (Bosworth and Toller 2013f, n, I and II). Similar remarks can be found in this excerpt:

(13) *Is ðes atola ham fyre onæled* (Sat 95).

“This horrible home is burning with fire” (Clayton 2013, 309).

The experience that OE *atol* renders in the preceding passage remains rather vague: it is not clear whether there is something particularly monstrous about hell, like its inhabitants, or if the idea of horror is applied to this place as a result of the fearsome response that its sight triggers in potential onlookers. It is likely that, while the former is the case, hell was conceptually associated with the idea of horror through its link with the devil.

Many attestations describe the devil as a monster. Indeed, in the contemporary collective imagination, the devil is imagined with animal-like and bestial characteristics. The Old English renditions of this figure, however, are slightly different:

(14) *Wæs se atola beforan, se inc bam forgeaf balewe gebostas* (Sat 485).

“The horrible being who caused evil thoughts in both of you was present there” (Clayton 2013, 335).

(15) *ða ðær ætywde se atola gast, wrað wærloga* (And 1296).

“Then the terrible spirit, the hostile traitor, appeared there” (Clayton 2013, 271).

(16) *þa þær ligesynnig on lyft astab lacende feond. Ongan þa bleoðrian belledeofol, eatol æclæca, yfela gemyndig* (El 898)

“Then the liar leapt out, the devious devil from the bowels of hell, hovering in air, a monster minded to deceive mankind” (Williamson 2017, 284).

In the first two passages, OE *atol* is used as a noun by means of the article *se*, roughly translated as ‘the horrible one’. As the three passages illustrate, no other sensory cues are found alongside OE *atol*, making it difficult to understand what exactly makes the devil so terrible or hideous in the mind of the poet. This is the same case that can be found in other depictions of hell’s demons, which are, for example, said to be *atole gastas swarte and synfulle* (Sat 51) ‘horrible spirits dark and sinful’. Moreover, the three attestations mentioned above contain some reference to an emotion, feeling or impression that is either caused by the devil or that the devil features, from the cognitive evaluation of the thoughts that the devil fosters as baleful, to his evil mind and the emotion of anger.

Second, and in relation to the unpleasant descriptions above, there is also evidence of human appearance being described in similar ways when the character does not comply with the rules of proper, morally acceptable behaviour:

(17) *þa wæs nergendes þeowen þrymful, þearle gemyndig bu heo þone atolan eadost mihte ealdre benæman ær se unsyfra, womfull, onwoce* (Jud 73).

“Then the Lord’s grim and glorious handmaiden, the Savior’s servant, thought about how she might murder the monster, ravage his heart, before he woke up from his ravenous sleep” (Williamson 2017, 695).

Holofernes is described with a term that is chiefly reserved for the devil and for other literal monsters, like Grendel. Because the Old English poem *Judith* is constructed following the mirror image of God in Judith and of Satan in Holofernes, this instance is not entirely reliable. Similarly, there are three additional instances that show OE *atol* outside the religious context in an unconventional manner. First:

(18) *Winnende fareð atol eoredþreat, egsa astigeð, micel modþrea monna cynne, brogan on burgum, þonne blace scotiað scriþende scin scearpum wæpnum* (Rid 3 48).

“The fighters moved on, the horrible band, climbing in fear, great torment of the mind for humankind, monsters over the city; then the brightness shoot increasingly, the shining sharp weapons.”

The riddles are characterised by their extremely creative usage of figurative language for the sake of the riddle. In this case, OE *atol* is used with the sense of horrible, but

also as in inspiring fear. The solution to the riddle, as is more or less evident from the excerpt above, is a storm, in which these fighters stand for the wind. This passage emphasises that storms could be as horrible as the devil. Second, OE *atol* is used in an aural evaluation in the following passage:

(19) *forþon wæs in wicum wop up abafen, atol æfenleoð, egesan stodon, weredon wælnet, þa se woma cwom* (Ex 200).

“Therefore in the camps a cry was raised up, a terrible evensong, panic spread—slaughter-nets trapped them—when the tumult came” (Anlezark 2011, 219).

This passage belongs to the Old English poem *Exodus*, and it recounts the episode where the Pharaoh goes after the Israelites. The cry of war, despite being figuratively referred to as a song, is perceived with an aesthetic sort of horror. In this case, and due to the lack of detail in the passage, OE *atol* could mean two things, both of which stand out as equally worthy of note: one, that this human cry is horrible and beast-like in the way it sounds; two, that the Israelites who perceive it are afraid because of what it represents. Considering the following clause, *egesān stodon* ‘they stood in fear/awe’, option number one is more likely. Third, and drawing standing in opposition to the link between beauty and youth, old age is associated with ugliness but depicted as a terrible phenomenon to experience:

(20) *Eftsona bið þæt þec adl oððe ecg eafopes getwæfed, oððe fyres feng, oððe flodes wylm, oððe gripe meces, oððe gares flibt, oððe atol ylðo; oððe eagenā bearhtm forsited ond forsworced; semninga bið þæt ðec, dryhtguma, deað oferswyðeð* (Beo 1762).

“Soon enough, disease or the edge of a blade will deprive you of your strength, the grasp of the fire or the surge of a stream, the sword’s attack, the spear in flight, or the horrible old age, the brightness in your eyes will disappear and they will become dark; immediately you will die and be swept away.”

In this passage from *Beowulf*, the fragility of human nature is emphasised through explanations of how various weapons can wound the human body, and how natural elements may do so too. However, the way in which old age is discussed seems to suggest that it is far more horrible than a sudden or early death. The continuation in the middle section of the passage, after the mention of aging, proposes that when humans grow old the brightness in their eyes, indicative of beauty and youth, disappears and darkness symbolises old age and an undesirable bodily appearance, all of which are responsible for categorising the natural process of aging as a horrible one.

Finally, and most predominantly, terms for horror are frequently applied to the two most famous monsters in the poetic corpus, Grendel and its mother. Grendel is described as follows by means of OE *atol*:

(21) *Syððan beofones gim glad ofer grundas, gæst yrre cwom, eatol, æfengrom, user neosan, ðær we gesunde sæl weardodon* (Beo 2072).

“After heaven’s gem, the glorious sun, had slipped past earth, the night-stalker came, the savage spirit seeking Hrothgar’s hall and its heap of yet unscathed warriors” (Williamson 2017, 661).

(22) *Licsar gebad atol æglæca* (Beo 815).

“Bodily wounds awaited the horrible monster.”

As can be seen, none of these instances further detail or explain what bodily traits make Grendel a horrible monster, but, for instance, example (21) does include a term for anger, OE *yrre*, as in the case of demonic descriptions. Grendel’s mother, described in *Beo 2120* as a *wif unbyre* ‘savage woman’, is elsewhere represented in very similar terms:

(23) *Grap þa togeanes, guðrinc gefeng atolan clommum* (Beo 1501).

“Then [Grendel’s mother] took hold of [Beowulf], the warrior was taken by the horrible grip.”

In the discussions of episodes of positive aesthetic emotion analysed in Minaya Gómez (2021a), some of the characteristics of the person or entity being judged were metonymically evaluated in a particular and smaller part of the said character’s body. For instance, because Jesus was said to be beautiful, his hands were often described as such. The inverse also applies in the case of Grendel’s mother; her overall monstrosity and fierceness are also indexed in her grip. Nevertheless, this is only the case when these figures carry out an action; when their body parts are dismembered, the experience is notably different. Take the following example:

(24) *þa wæs be feaxe on flet boren Grendles beafod, þær guman druncon, egeslic for eorlum ond þære idese mid, wliteseon wrætlic; weras on sawon* (Beo 1647).

“Then Grendel’s head was taken by the hair to the hall where the heroes drank, horrid and yet a wonderful spectacle for men and women to look upon.”

Grendel’s severed head is described with a couple of terms that are traditionally found in positive contexts, OE *wrætlic* and *wliteseom*, but in this passage it is clear that the evaluation is a negative one, as OE *egeslic* emphasises. This accounts for the mixed emotional nature of the episode: Grendel’s severed head is a gruesome vision, but it nevertheless causes these men to be fascinated by the wonder that it represents.

6. DATA DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Table 1 emphasises what has been suggested thus far: comparatively speaking, there are insufficient attestations of the Old English terms for ugliness in poetic and aesthetic

emotion contexts to arrive at significant conclusions as regards their usage. The first aim of this paper was to determine the specific characteristics of Old English ugliness and to uncover implicit associations in these terms. In theory, lack of symmetry, order and proportion, as well as an unpleasant texture, should have been found in attestations pertaining terms for appearance, following the same trends observed in Minaya Gómez (2021a) regarding terms for positive aesthetic emotions. This was, however, not the case. Regarding form, the inversion of proper man-like or angelic shapes is found, to a certain extent, in the descriptions of devils, monsters and dragons, which do not comply with traditional rules of form and which comprise a canon of the ugly. Similarly, there is an observable connection between darkness, blackness and ugliness. Fire, too, due to its intrinsically negative associations, is present in certain passages as an originator of unpleasant visual characteristics.

TABLE 1. Attestations of terms for ugliness and aesthetic horror in the Old English poetic corpus

Term	Translation	Theme	Occurrences
<i>witelēas</i> ⁶	without beauty	Appearance	7
<i>unfæger</i>	ugly, not beautiful	Appearance	5
<i>gewemman</i>	to disfigure	Appearance	3
<i>unfægere</i>	unpleasantly	Appearance	2
Subtotal	17		
<i>atol</i>	horrid, foul	Horror	24
<i>forsceōppan</i>	to deform	Horror	1
<i>frēcne</i>	horrible, savage	Horror	1
<i>unbīre</i>	dreadful, horrible	Horror	1
Subtotal ⁷	27		

As far as the relation between figure and background goes, excerpt (9) seems to suggest that a lack of contrast between the two is experienced negatively; however, the data is insufficient to draw firm conclusions. As a general rule, an ugly exterior is a mark of morally defective inner qualities. Inappropriate behaviour, whether divine or earthly, male or female, is visually represented through an ugly exterior or by specific visible marks that are metaphorical for sin. All in all, despite the fact that this lexical domain is notably scarce in occurrences, this analysis does confirm the fact that ugliness has an inextricable religious component and that the figurative recourse by which the inner is

⁶ Including verbally negated forms of OE *wlite*.

⁷ Because the terms from this lexical domain do not prototypically refer to ugliness, the attestations of these terms were only included in the database when there was an evident aesthetic evaluation.

reflected on the outside, or, as Rosenkranz (2015, 31) puts it, the fact that the body is simply a container upon which the qualities of the soul are projected, also operates in the negative dimension of the Old English poetic experience.

Moreover, after having considered all the attestations that could have possibly referred to an aesthetic kind of horror, it becomes evident that, while OE *atol* indexes ugliness and its usage is consistent with that of other terms for negative aesthetic experience, horror as a response to ugliness is not the chief negative aesthetic emotion. Aesthetic horror in Old English poetry, both in literal and figurative contexts, is unspecified and in most cases it refers to the effect that these appearances have on the subject, rather than to what it is that makes these appearances monster-like. This remark is in line with what Eco (2007, 90) suggests for the devil: that he is often described by drawing upon the effect that he causes. Ugliness and horror are, therefore, best triggered in Old English poetry by means of cognitive, moral and emotional cues, rather than through sensory ones, and, when compared to the lexical domain of positive appearance, they stand out as far more limited in terms of attestations and detailed descriptions, emphasising once again that while Old English poetry is the domain of beauty, this is not true in terms of ugliness.

The second aim of this paper was to test out whether there was an autonomous model for ugliness in Old English verse, as is more or less the case for beauty; this was not so for ugliness. Instances that discussed, involved or were aimed at triggering negative aesthetic emotions were reliant on a model for beauty that was then negated and extrapolated to suit these purposes. This underlines that, at least in the aesthetic canon that can be reconstructed from the extant poetry, there was not a true autonomy of ugliness as an aesthetic idea. As Eco (2007, 44) explains, part of the reason behind this is that the only way to carry out research into temporally and culturally remote aesthetic ideas is by means of the artistic portrayal of such ideas. Consequently, the area in which ugliness is most extensively found and developed is in its moral domain, and that is what creates possible confusion between lexical domains that can apparently operate as aesthetic emotion markers when, in fact, they draw on moral ideas.

The idea and the essential metaphor that seems to be most effective in all of the attestations of these two lexical domains is THE OUTER IS AN INDEX OF THE INNER, operating in almost exclusively religious contexts (partially conditioned by the nature of the material), but also in social ones due to religious influence. Comparing the texts in which these attestations are found, it is also worth mentioning that Old English texts like *Beowulf* or the riddles do not feature a large number of negative aesthetic emotion episodes as compared to religious literature, and when they do, they clearly parallel the usage of negative aesthetic emotion terms in portrayals of the devil and hell. In these cases, and after an overall assessment of the database, it becomes clear that texts which are more reliant on Latin originals, like Biblical paraphrases, contain terms that refer to formal ugliness and which are potentially direct linguistic equivalents of Latin terms like *atrox* or *deformis*. On the other hand, texts that are

original Old English compositions, like *Beowulf*, more frequently employ terms for aesthetic horror, thereby drawing on the emotional response that these figures cause in order to describe them, rather than using descriptive terminology, which corroborates Fulk's (1996, 68-69) thesis as to the lack of visual cues in the description of the characters depicted in Old English poems. Most of the texts that include negative aesthetic emotion terms are, in fact, religiously oriented. Because sin is associated with hell, the negative aesthetic emotions that originate in the depictions of these entities rely on the subject's awareness of him/herself as a (potential) sinner. This being so, it becomes evident that negative aesthetic emotions in Old English poetry, despite being underrepresented, are more intense in the grim picture that they paint—by means of descriptions of inhospitable hellscape, disfigured and monstrous evil creatures, the Anglo-Saxon subject is constantly cautioned not to sin if they want to avoid this fate and inhabit a more beautiful home for eternity and behold gentler, fairer faces.

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