MOD IN THE OLD ENGLISH ‘SECULAR’ POETRY: AN INDICATOR OF ARISTOCRATIC CLASS

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When it is used in the works of Alfred and in Old English prose in general, the word mod is often translated aptly enough as ‘mind’. In some Old English poetry, however, the mod does not seem to be primarily an intellectual faculty — nor indeed an emotional or moral one: I wish to suggest that it seems rather to refer in some way to the attitudes and presuppositions of the aristocratic class. Since the concept of a noble class is central to my thesis, it should be remarked at the outset that although in reality their social organization was complex and fluid, the Anglo-Saxons, in common with some other Indo-European groups, thought of it as conforming to a rather simple scheme of three classes, which were, in the case of the Anglo-Saxons after their conversion to Christianity, the clergy, the military aristocracy and the common people. Evidence for this theoretical model of society can be found, for example, in interpolations (chapters 17 and 39 §vii) which Alfred makes into his translation of Boethius’s *De consolatione philosophiae*¹ and in a homily in Ælfric’s *Lives of saints* headed in Latin *Qui sunt oratores, bellatores, laboratores* (‘those who pray, those who fight, those who work’).² Whether or not this warrior class, with its distinctive way of life and characteristic emotional and moral attitudes existed in actual fact, it has a vivid presence in Old English poetry and it is in the context of this theoretical and poetic view of society and of the aristocracy that I place the concept of the mod. Though I consider that such an aristocratic mod can most easily be identified in what I refer to as the ‘secular’ Old English poetry, it is my view that it makes its appearance also in the overtly Christian poetry and even in the prose works in passages which are free from the influence of Latin models and sources. For the purposes of the present article, however, I leave this wider context out of account.

If one began a study of the meaning of the word *mod* in Old English with the works of Alfred, one would assume that the *mod* was an intellectual faculty: it is the most usual translation for the Latin *anima* and *mens*³ and sometimes stands for *cogitatio*, *ratio* and *intellegentia* when these appear in the works of Gregory, Boethius and Augustine. In translations of these Alfredian Old English texts into modern English *mod* is usually rendered with 'mind', a word inextricably linked with concepts of intellect and reason. So Schelp in his work on the psychological vocabulary used by Alfred, deals at length with 'mod' in the semantic field of the intellect' (pages 33-48) and refers (p.35) to 'mod as the location or vehicle of intellectual activity'⁴ and as 'the thinking substance in human beings'.⁵

The choice of *mod* to represent *mens* and *anima* and the reasoning mind in general does not appear to have been an idiosyncrasy of Alfred's: the same preference is shown by Wærfith in his translation of Gregory's *Dialogues*, by the translator of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and (as far as one can judge by comparing his very brief references with his Latin sources) by the compiler of the *Old English martyrology.*

Such unanimity among the writers of the earliest English prose may well lead one to suppose that *mod* presented itself as the best available word for this purpose, and yet one cannot help feeling that it was ill fitted for the task, since even in prose works many other words are called into service from time to time.⁶ When one turns to the Old English poetic tradition, which in the view of M.R. Godden may be taken to represent a more home-grown, Anglo-Saxon worldview than the cosmopolitan, church-orientated prose, the distance between Latin and Anglo-Saxon concepts is even more strongly

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³ For example in Alfred's translation of Boethius, of the thirty-one instances in which *anima* is represented by an equivalent word in Old English, this is *mod* in seventeen cases; of the other words used to translate it, only *sawl* (two cases) is used more than once. Of the forty-four instances where *mens* is represented by an equivalent word in Old English, this is *mod* in twenty-three cases: *God* is used five times (representing *divina mens*), *sawl* four times, *andgit* three times and *gewit* twice. No other word is used more than once. I am unable to detect any consistent difference in meaning between *anima* and *mens* in the Latin works translated by Alfred and his circle. Theoretical distinctions were sometimes drawn in ancient times: see for example the quotations from Donatus and Isidore in the *Thesaurus linguae latinae*, viii (Leipzig: Teubner, 1936-66) column 712. I concur, however, with the judgement of Hanspeter Schelp (Der geistige Mensch im Wortschatz Alfreeds des grossen (University of Göttingen Ph.D. thesis, 1956), 34, that 'It is virtually impossible to make a clear distinction between *mens*, *anima* and *cogitatio* in the late Latin works with which we are dealing'. (Eine klare Unterscheidung von 'mens', 'anima' und 'cogitatio' ist in den vorliegenden spätlateinischen Werken ... so gut wie unmöglich.)

⁴ 'mod' als Ort beziehungsweise Träger der intellektuellen Aktivität ...

⁵ die denkende Substanz im Menschen.

⁶ Along with the examples given in note 3 which show that in his translation of Boethius Alfred used *mod* more often than any other term to render *anima* and *mens*, one should take into account the many times when he chose a different word (andgit, sawl, etc.) and the even greater number of times when he avoided giving any direct equivalent for *anima* and *mens*. Leaving aside the considerable passages of Boethius which Alfred does not translate, only in 47% of its occurrences is *anima* represented by *mod*, and *mens* only in 44%. In view of the complexity of the *Consolatio* and Alfred's exuberance as a translator, one would not expect word-for-word equivalences, but these figures suggest that *mod* only imperfectly represented the meaning of *mens* and *anima*. 
marked. Godden observes that, 'Two distinct traditions of thought about the mind are evident among the Anglo-Saxons'. The first is the Latin one of Alfred, Alcuin and Ælfric. 'Secondly', he says, 'there is a vernacular tradition, more deeply rooted in the language, represented particularly by the poets but occasionally reflected even in the work of Alfred and Ælfric. It was a tradition which preserved the ancient distinction of soul and mind, while associating the mind at least as much with passion as with intellect.'

Within the Old English poetic corpus, the distinctive features of this vernacular tradition of speculation about the nature of the mind can be most clearly seen in those poems which are not of an overtly Christian nature. The poems on biblical, doctrinal and moralizing themes: *Genesis, Christ, Soul and body* and others, related closely or more distantly to Latin sources as they are, sometimes share the Latin view of the prose writers. In the present article, the purpose of which is to examine, as far as it is retrievable, the specifically Anglo-Saxon view of the *mod*, evidence has been taken from those poems, *Beowulf* above all, which have no Latin source and do not deal, or do not deal centrally or openly with biblical narrative or Christian teaching.

It is difficult to find an adequate brief term by which to refer to these poems as a group: some of them, such as *Beowulf, Finnsburh, Widsith* and *Maldon* deal with heroic themes; others such as *Deor, The Wanderer, The Seafarer* and *The Ruin* are elegiac in tone. *The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message* and others may be classified as lyric.

Though I am aware of the disadvantages of applying the term 'secular' to them, since in some of them there is a religious element and some have been interpreted by various commentators as having a religious theme, I shall, for want of a better short description, refer to them in this way, implying by the adjective only that their subject matter is the secular world - in the context of which or through the medium of which religious matters are sometimes considered.

If one limits one's view to the 'secular' poems I believe that one can go further than Godden does and say that in this vernacular tradition the *mod* has nothing essentially to do with the intellect. In *Beowulf*, for example, the only intellectual activities that take place in people's *mod* are the coastguard's curiosity (fyrwyt) as to who Beowulf and his men were, Hrothgar's idea that he would build a great hall.

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9 ll. 232-3: Hine fyrwyt brec / modgehygdum. (ASPR, iv, 9). ('Curiosity broke into his *mod*-thoughts'.)

10 ll. 67-9: Him on mod bearn / pët healreced hatan wolde, / medoern micel, men gewyrcean (ASPR, iv, 5). ('It occurred in his *mod* that he would tell men to build a palace, a great mead-hall.')
and the longings of ‘a man of famous race’ for possessions and conquest.\(^{11}\) Except in these instances, the *mod* is nowhere concerned with an idea occurring to a person and never with thinking in a speculative or reasoning sense.

In arguing that the traditional *mod* as depicted in Old English ‘secular’ poetry is not an intellectual faculty, I am not, of course suggesting that the normal mental processes such as thinking, reflecting, remembering, willing and imagining do not happen in the poems — they do — but when they occur they are the activities of the *person*. They simply happen independently — they are not, or they seem only fortuitously to be, activities of the *mod*. Thus when Beowulf asserts (272) that ‘you know’ (*pu wast*) that a mysterious doer of evil deeds is attacking the Danes, or ‘every counsellor remembers’ (*geman*, 265) his father, Ecgtheow, or ‘I imagine’ (*wen ic*, 442) that Grendel will devour more people — none of these mental activities is said to involve the *mod*. Further examples could be multiplied.

The connection of *mod* with the intellect in these poems, then, is weak: it would be possible to make out a better case for an affinity with the emotions. Godden in the passage quoted above and H. Schabram in his work on adjectives of courage in Old English poetry\(^{12}\) suggest such a link. M. Soland\(^{13}\) also regards the *mod* as one of a number of seats of feeling, such as the *hyge*, *sefa* and *férhð*, in the Anglo-Saxon psyche. Schelp in his section on *Affekte* (pp. 49-51) comments on the frequent association of *mod* with terms denoting the emotions.

In *Beowulf*, twenty-six of the eighty occurrences of *mod* are concerned with emotion: mourning, misery, happiness, anger, sadness, uncertainty, pain, anxiety, love. That these make up only about a third of the references to *mod* in the poem seems to indicate, however, that its real function lies elsewhere: that feeling, like intellectual activity, is only casually connected with the *mod*. This view is reinforced when one considers that it is easy to find examples of emotional situations in *Beowulf* and the ‘secular’ poems in which the *mod* is not mentioned. In *Beowulf* 131 Hrothgar ‘endured sorrow for his thanes’ (*begnsorge dreah*); in 502 Beowulf’s courage gave rise in Unferth to great envy (*micel æfjunca*); the Wanderer has to mourn

\(^{11}\) ll. 1728-33: Hwilum he on lufan lætæd hworfan / monnes modgeþon mæræ cynnes, / seleð him on eþe þorþan wynne / to healdanne, hleohburh weæra, / gedeð him swa gewældene worolde dzelas, / side rice (ASPR, iv, 53). (‘Sometimes he [God] allows the mod-thought of a man of famous race to roam as it desires: he grants him the enjoyment of land in his native country, to possess a stronghold of men, and thus puts under his power regions of the world, a broad kingdom.’)

\(^{12}\) Hans Schabram, *Die Adjective im Sinnbezirk von ‘kuhn, mutig, tapfer’ in der angelsächsischen Poesie (unter Berücksichtigung der Prosa)*, ein Beitrag zur ags. Wort-bedeutungslehre (University of Cologne Ph.D. thesis, 1954), for example, 122-3: Mod ist im Ags. ... Sitz von Denken, Fühlen und Wollen. (‘Mod in Old English is the seat of thought, emotion and will.’)

his woes alone (ceare cwipan, 9); the joys of the Lord are more ardent for the Seafarer (hatran sind / dryhtnes dreames, 64-5) than his 'dead life' is. In none of these cases is the mod mentioned and many more instances could be adduced. It could be argued, of course, that it is perhaps taken for granted that emotions happen in the mod and that there is no need therefore for the writer to specify this, just as in modern English one would expect to say 'He loves his wife' rather than 'He loves his wife in his heart'. This argument carries some weight: one does not expect a writer or speaker in any language to locate every thought or emotion explicitly in a particular area of the mind. Nonetheless in Old English one cannot make the assumption that if no location is specified, emotion happens in the mod, since there are several other possibilities: in Beowulf 473, for example, Hrothgar says that it is a sorrow to his sefa to describe Grendel's depredations (sorh is me ... on sefan minum), while in 948 he declares that after Beowulf's departure he will love him in his ferhpe (freogan on ferhbe). The Seafarer's hyge is not for a woman's love (ne bīh him ... hyge ... to wife win, 44-5). That the mod can be associated with emotion is clear, but the evidence does not suggest that in the 'secular' poems, this is its defining function.

Mod again is sometimes considered to be the seat of the moral sense. K. Otten, referring to its function specifically in Alfred's translation of Boethius, describes the mod as 'the organ in human beings responsible for good and evil'. Such a view of the mod is justified in Alfred's translation, where it has taken on the nature of the mens in Boethius, which, like Plato's soul, is morally engaged and predisposed towards goodness. It is also justified, in a different way, in works which reflect Augustinian theological views, such as some of the Vercelli homilies, in which the mod, sharing in the fallen nature of all those who are descended from Adam, is predisposed towards evil. Whether any particular writer may regard it as being inclined towards good or towards evil, he will, however, in general present the mod as showing (like the animus or mens in his source), the same proclivity in every human being.

The mod appears in the 'secular' poems, by contrast, in very varied moral postures: in Beowulf we come across the murderous mod of Grendel (730-4) and Heremod (1713), the mod of the treacherous Unferth (1167-8), the loyal mod of Hrothgar's men (1228-9), the angry mod of Grendel's mother as she sets out to avenge her son (1277). Depending on how one understands the line, one may see a reference to the wickedness or to the malicious joy of Grendel's mod.

14 Kurt Otten, König Alfrëds Boethius (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1964), 167: 'Mod' ist ... das verantwortliche Organ des Menschen zum Guten und Bösen.
15 For example Homily 2, lines 27-30: Eala hwæt, [manna] mod syndon earmlice abist[r]ode þæt hie æfre lætan sculon þæt deáþberende diofol hie on unn yrte geswipumensse ... gedwellan ... ('Alas, the mod of men are miserably darkened so that they must always let the death-bearing devil lead them astray with pernicious cunning ...') D.G. Scragg, The Vercelli Homilies and related texts, Early English Text Society, o.s. ccc (Oxford: University Press, 1992), 56.
in 810. The ‘breaking’ of Hrothgar’s *mod* apparently allows his court to sink to the worship of idols (171). In *The Wife’s Lament* a man is accused of concealing his *mod* with a cheerful demeanour while plotting wickedness (20-1). The Wanderer, moralizing on the transient nature of earthly things and the immutability of God, is described as *snottor on mode*, ‘wise in *mod*’ (111). Good men and women have a good *mod*, bad people a bad one. Morality, like thought, does not arise from the *mod*, but from other, deeper springs.

In the Old English prose, the *mod* may be characterized in some texts as the moral perceptivity of human beings, willing to be guided towards the Good which it naturally loves; in other works as the depraved human mind, fallen with the rest of human nature. In the ‘secular’ poems it is plainly neither of these. Any connection it may have with goodness or evil seems on the evidence of the examples just given to be as accidental as its connections with thought and emotion.

In the ‘secular’ poems, then, such association as the *mod* may have with mental operations such as thought, emotion and moral perception appears uncertain and tangential. What is much more striking and consistent is its appearance in the context of courtly life and the activities of the warrior aristocracy. Such an association is explicit in virtually all the sixty-eight occurrences of *mod* in *Beowulf* and arguable in the others, and the same connection can be seen in the other poems. *Beowulf* ‘the protector of seamen, swam to land with strong *mod*’,16 rejoicing that he had recovered Grendel’s head; the *mod*-thought of a man of famous race desired land, a stronghold, men in his service, subject peoples.17 *Beowulf* was ‘glad in *mod*’18 when Hrothgar gave him wise advice and promised him treasure. Every warrior at Hrothgar’s court was ‘true to the others, mild in *mod*, loyal to his lord’.19 The queen, ‘perfected in *mod*’, offered the proper courtesies to a guest.20 An old spear-fighter, ‘wretched in *mod*’, incited his comrade to revenge.21 The Danes ‘were wretched in *sefa*, they mourned in *mod*’ at the magnificent funeral of Scyld.22

The same picture emerges in the other ‘secular’ poems. ‘There is therefore no man so *mod*-proud on earth, nor so liberal with his gifts; in his youth so active, so brave in his deeds, with his lord so favourable to him ...’(*Seafarer* 39-41).23 ‘It seems to him in his *mod* that he

16 II. 1623-4: Com þa to lande lidmanna helm / swiðmod swymman (ASPR, iv, 50).
17 See note 11.
18 I. 1785: Geat wæs glædmód (ASPR, iv, 55).
19 II. 1228-9: obrum getrywe,/ modes milde, mandrihtne hold (ASPR, iv, 38).
20 II. 623-4: beaghroden cwen / mode gebungen, medoful æþæð ... (ASPR, iv, 21). ('ring-adorned, the queen, perfected in *mod*, carried the mead-cup.')
21 II. 2044-5: [eald ascwiæga] ongienne geomormod geongum cempan /... higes cunnian (ASPR, iv, 63). ('an old spear-warrior' begins, wretched in *mod*, to test the *hyge* of a young champion.'
22 II.49-50: him wæs geomor sefa, / murnende mod (ASPR, iv, 4).
23 Forpon nis paes modwlonc mon offer eorban, / ne his gifena þæs god, ne in georgype to þæs hwæt, / ne in his dædum to þæs deor, ne him his dryhten to þæs hold ... (ASPR, iii, 144).
embraces and kisses his lord, and places his hand and head on his knee' (Wanderer 41-3).24 'There in days of old many a warrior, glad in mod and gleaming with gold, accoutred with splendours, proud and aroused with wine, shone in his fighting gear, looked at treasure ...' (Ruin 32-5).25 Byrhtwold spoke ... he urged the warriors, 'Hyge must be the harder, heart the keener, mod must be the greater as our strength grows less. Here our leader lies cut down, the good man in the dust. Whoever thinks to turn now from this play of war, let him repent it for ever' (Maldon 309-16).26

Germanic warrior life also had its dark side, and the mod appears in less elevating contexts. Heremod 'with his mod swollen, killed his table-companions' (Beowulf 1713).27 The evil Grendel's mod laughed at the prospect of feasting on men (730-3).28 Beowulf's men 'sat sick in mod'29 when they realised they might not see him alive again (1602-3). Grendel slouched back to the lake werigmod, bleeding to death (844-7).30 Hæthcyn's soldiers were sarigmod as they cowered in Ravenswood (2941-2).31 'Hunger inwardly tormented the mod of the man weary of the sea' (Seafarer 11-12).32 A wife lamented for her husband in exile who could find no shelter and sat werigmod in the icy storm.33 The Wanderer (15) declared that 'The weary mod cannot fight against fate'.34

Mod, then, it can be argued, is bound up with aristocratic life in all its aspects, good and bad, and it may be that a certain amount of theorizing had taken place among the Anglo-Saxons about its nature and operation. As the Greeks understood it (see, for example, Plato's Republic IV, 441-2),35 the psyche was organized in three divisions: intellect, emotions and instinctive drives, all ideally controlled by the intellect. This highly abstract model of the mind has

24 Princeð him on mode þæt he his mondryhten / clyppe ond cyssse, ond on cneo lecge / honda ond heafod (ASPR, iii, 135).
25 Þær iu beorn monig / glædmod ond goldbeorht gleoma gefraetwed, / wlonc ond wingal wighyrstum scan; / seah on sine ... (ASPR, iii, 228).
26 Byrhtwold mapelode, / ... beornas lærde: 'Hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre,/ mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mægen lytlad. / Her lið ure ealdor eall forheaven, / god on greote. A meɡ gnornian / se ðe nu fram þis wigplegan wenden þencð.' (ASPR, vi, 15).
27 [Heremod] bæt bolgenmod beodgenecatas (ASPR, iv, 53).
28 [Pa] his mod ahlog;/ mynte bast he gedaelde, aerbon daeg cwome, / atol aglzeca, anra gehwylces / lif wid lice (ASPR, iv, 24). ('Then his mod laughed: the dreadful wretch intended that before day came he should part the life of each one from his body.')
30 he werigmog on weg þanom, / ... on nicera mere / ... feorlastas bær. / Þær wæs on blode brim weallende (ASPR, iv, 27). ('Exhausted in mod, on the way from there ... to the water-monsters' lake, ... he carried his life-tracks. There the surface was welling up with blood.')
31 Frofor eft gelamp / sarigmodum somod ærðæge (ASPR, iv, 91). ('Comfort came to their anguished mod with early morning.')
32 hungor innan slat / merewerges mod (ASPR, iii, 143).
33 Wife's Lament 47-49: ... min freond sited / under stanhipe storme behrimed, / wine werigmod (ASPR, iii, 211). ('My friend sits by a rocky slope, covered in frost by the storm, my companion weary in mod.')
34 Ne meɡ werg mod yrde wîðstöndan (ASPR, iii, 134).
fundamentally influenced Western psychological thought, and is already to be found in the translations of Alfred and the later Old English prose literature. As far as the poems which reflect the Anglo-Saxon tradition are concerned, however, I am arguing that the theoretical framework within which thought, feeling and moral perception were brought into relationship with one another and assigned value was a perception of the properly organized society. On the evidence I have put forward the mod may be seen as a reflection — or perhaps more accurately an internalization — of the role of the warrior class within the wider society. One might say a warrior's mod was his consciousness of himself as an authentic member of his class: an internalized awareness on the part of noble men and women of the parameters within which the life of their class was lived, and of themselves operating in that context.

It was suggested above that in the 'secular' poems, any connection between the mod and thought, emotion or morality appeared to be accidental. If the mod is seen, however, as the mind-set of a person of noble class, this randomness disappears: a thought, feeling or moral perception is associated with the mod not casually but quite consistently when it is one which is typical of people of aristocratic class. For example, one of the few 'thoughts' in Beowulf which is specifically related to the mod, is, as was said earlier, Hrothgar's idea (67-72) that he would have a great hall built: 'It occurred to his mod that he would command men to build a palace, a greater mead-hall than the children of men had ever heard of, and in it he would distribute to young and old whatever God gave him'.

The great hall, a bright dwelling of modig men (312), a place for the drinking of mead (69) and banqueting (81) and for the distributing of treasure, is a central symbol of Anglo-Saxon aristocratic life. It was not by chance that the decision to build Heorot came to Hrothgar's mod, nor was it because all thoughts are generated in the mod, but because this was a particularly aristocratic conception. One suspects that if the king had been inspired to provide low-cost housing for his agricultural workers, his mod might not have been involved. Similarly, it could be argued, the 'thought of a man of famous race' in 1729 is called his modgeponc because it concerns such warrior-like matters as land and retainers, a fortress and subject peoples.

In the same way, where the mod is concerned with emotion, I would see this neither as fortuitous nor yet as an indication that all

36 Plato's analysis of the soul in the passage just referred to is based on his earlier conclusion (IV, 434) that the State is divided into three classes: legislators, warriors and traders. He continues, 'And so of the individual; we may assume that he has the same three principles in his own soul which are found in the State' (IV, 435; Jowett, 126). One might put forward the hypothesis that the Anglo-Saxons shared the Greek perception that the State and the mind of the individual were associated, but had not made the same connections between the two.

37 Him on mod beam / þær healeored hatan wolde, / medærn micel, men gewyrrcean / þonne yldo beam æfre gefrunon, / ond þær on innan eall gedælan / geongum ond ealdum, swylc him god sealde (ASPR, iv, 5).
emotions are generated in the *mod*, but rather as evidence that an emotion characteristic of aristocratic people is under discussion. Beowulf decided to fight Grendel not with a sword but with his bare hands so that his lord Hygelac would be ‘glad in *mod*’ (435-6). Hrothgar suffered from ‘grief of *mod*’ (*modcearu*, 1778) because he had not been able to secure his people from attack, as a king should. The love which a lord feels for a loyal retainer who brings glory to him is *modluju* (1823). ‘There is no man on earth’, says the Seafarer (39-40), ‘so *mod*-proud, so liberal with his gifts.’ The reciprocal duties of lords and men and the feelings which they aroused, here associated with the *mod*, are the stuff of aristocratic life.

The same line of thought can be followed in connection with morality. Good or bad actions do not, in the ‘secular’ poems, originate in the *mod*, nor is the *mod* a moral agent, either seeking the Good or tainted with sin. Rather, when the actions of a person of noble rank are brought into association with the *mod*, they are being acknowledged as characteristic of aristocratic behaviour. Within that context, to be sure, a moral judgment may then be made as to whether this *modig* action is good or bad. Thus morally approving comments are made of Beowulf’s *mod*: he exercises his power with prudence of *mod* (*modes snyttro*, 1706); he is ‘powerful in strength and wise in *mod*’ (*on mode/rod*, 1844). Hrothgar’s loyal warriors are ‘true to one another, gentle in *mod*’ (*modes milde*, 1229). The Wanderer’s sententious remarks are summed up with the comment: ‘thus the wise man spoke in his *mod*’ (swa cwæd snottor on *mod*, 111).

Equally, bad behaviour is recognized as *modig*. Grendel ‘by wickedness of *mod* had formerly committed many crimes against mankind’ (809-11). ‘Thryth, the bold queen of the people, showed *mod* and terrible wickedness’ (1931-2) by condemning any man who looked at her to a violent death. Heremod murdered his companions when his *mod* was swollen (1713). Hrothgar and Hrothulf were quite prepared to believe that Unferth ‘had great *mod*, although he had not acted honourably by his kinsmen in battle’ (1167-8). Committing crimes against mankind, sending men to their death because of an imagined insult, murdering one’s friends and acting dishonourably to one’s family are none of them good deeds, but their prevalence among the aristocratic classes is well known: the literature of chivalry is full of such goings on, and they are therefore, according to the present argument, properly associated with the *mod*. It may be noted that every one of the opponents whom Beowulf fights is said to have *mod*, from the fish which attacked him during his

38 *Forþon nís þæs modwlonc man ofer eorpan, ne his gifena þæs god...* (ASPR, iii, 144).
39 *se þe fela æror / modes myrdc manna cyne/, fyrene gefremede* (ASPR, iv, 26). The translation given in the text is not the only one possible.
40 *Mod Prybo weag/, fremu folces cwen, firen ondrysne* (ASPR, iv, 59). Again, other interpretations are possible here.
41 *... hæfde mod micel, þeah de he his magum nære / arfaest ecga gelacum* (ASPR, iv, 37).
swimming contest to the dragon which killed him. It is expected that the enemies of a good warrior will be bad, but it also expected that they will be *modig*.\(^1\) Similarly the woman who utters *The Wife's Lament* has *mod* and so (depending on how one understands the poem) does her husband, but so also does the man who has wronged them. The *mod* does not judge whether an action is good or bad, rather it acts as a yardstick by which thoughts, emotions and moral acts may be judged for their warrior-like quality. One is reminded of the situation in the closing chapters of the Indian epic, the *Mahābhārata* (c. 500 B.C. – A.D. 500), when the hero Yudhishthira finally attained heaven and was dismayed to find his enemy Duryodhana there:\(^2\) he recalled the devastations of the civil war which had been caused by Duryodhana’s greed and recklessness, his public humiliation of Yudhishtira’s wife and his part in the fraudulent and catastrophic game of dice. The divine poet, Narada, however, reminded Yudhishthira that by his observance of the way of life of the warrior caste, by his fearlessness and by dying in battle, Duryodhana had deserved heaven. The Vedic heaven, like the northern Valhalla,\(^3\) was not for the good, but for warriors.

If one may assume that heaven in a context of this sort symbolizes what the people who created the stories regarded as the ultimate good, one will have to conclude that in these cultures, and perhaps in pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon society also, to be warriorlike was a greater virtue than merely to be honest or honourable, or to act reasonably.\(^4\) One should note, however, that ‘warriorlikeness’ had its own code of morality: the virtues of Duryodhana which Narada pointed out suggest corresponding vices which presumably would debar one from aristocratic acceptance: failing to observe the warrior way of life, cowardice and dying in bed. *Beowulf* displays all Duryodhana’s virtues. Conversely the word *mod* is not used in association with his cowardly followers who shirked the fight with the dragon.

Although the *mod* seems to be so firmly attached to the warrior class, the occasional commoner is endowed with it. In Alfred’s translation of Boethius (ch.39 §vi), we are told that ‘every craftsman

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\(1\) One may compare the episode in the Indian *Mahābhārata* in which Karna, who was believed to be the son of a chariot-driver, was held to be ineligible to fight the warrior Arjuna. *The Mahābhārata*, trans. and ed. J.A.B. van Buiten, 3 vols (Chicago: University Press, 1973-8), i, 281.


\(4\) If such a situation ever obtained among the pagan Anglo-Saxons, it is not reflected in the Christian *Beowulf* in which the good hero’s soul sought ‘the glory of the righteous’ (2820), while hell received the soul of the wicked Grendel (852). That Grendel had *mod* was of no avail. One might compare also Alcuin’s assertion in his letter to bishop Hygebald of Lindisfarne that the legendary and undoubtedly *modig* Germanic hero Ingeld ‘was damned and groans in hell’ (perditus, plangit in inferno). *Alcuvni Epistolae*, no. 124, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae*, iv, ed. E. Dümmler (Berlin: Weidmann, 1895), 183.
thinks out and designs his work in his *mod* before he executes it*.⁴⁶ In
the Old English poetic *Genesis* 1084-6, amidst all the horse-riding,
mail-clad patriarchs, we come across Tubal Cain, ‘the son of Lamech,
who, through abundance of wisdom was a smith, and through the
recollection of his *mod* was the first of men to make a plough’.⁴⁷ Here
again, and this time in poetry, the craftsman’s skill lies in his *mod*. In
Alfred’s translation of Gregory’s *Pastoral Care*, chapter 17⁴⁸ the wicked
servant in the parable recorded in Matt. 24:48 ‘says in his *mod*, “It
will be a long time before the Lord comes ...”’. Also in one of Ælfric’s
*Catholic homilies* we read that, ‘It is necessary for a person who is
resolute in his service of God that his *mod* should not return to
occupations which draw him away from God’.⁴⁹ Fishing (St Peter’s
employment) is then held up as a commendable way of life in this
respect; tax-gathering (St Matthew’s) is not. Here again commoners
are credited with *mod* and it is linked with their occupation.

It should be noted, though, that all these examples are taken from overtly Christian works: none from the ‘secular’ poems. The
Old English Boethius, the *Pastoral Care* and the relevant section of
Ælfric’s homily are translations of Latin texts and the use of *mod* in
the passages quoted derives from the occurrence of *mens*, *cor* and
*animus* respectively in the Latin. It may be observed that similarly in
texts translated from Latin originals, priests and the religious (the
other class of society in Alfred’s analysis) are very frequently credited
with *mod*. One may conclude that in texts reflecting the direct
influence of the Church, *mod* is simply used to represent ‘the mind’
as it is understood in classical and Christian writing - that is, as an
aspect of the soul, and therefore common to all human beings: its
special connection with the aristocratic class has disappeared.

⁴⁶ Sedgefield, 128, ii.27-8: *ælc craeftega dencð and mearçãd his weorc on his mode ær ær
he hit wyrce. The corresponding passage in the Latin text (Book IV, prose 6) reads: *Sicut
enim artifex faciendae rei formam mente praecipiens movet operis effectum ...* (Boethius:
*philosophiae consolationis libri quinque*, ed. Karl Büchner (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 3rd edn,
1977), 87.) (*For just as the craftsman, grasping beforehand in his mind the form of the
thing to be made, begins the execution of his work ...*).

⁴⁷ *se yfelæ ñyro sped smiçæraftægwa wæs, / and þurh modes gemyynd monna ærest, / sunu
Lamehes, suhlgeworceæes* (ASPR, i, 35).

⁴⁸ *King Alfred’s West Saxon version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care* ed. Henry Sweet, Early English
Text Society o.s. xlv, i (London: Trübner, 1871,2) 121,1.11: *Se yfelæ þeow cuð on his mode: Hit
bið long hwonne se hlaford cume ...* The Latin text (J-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus,
series latina*, lxxvii (Paris: J-P. Migne, 1849), col. 37,B) at this point has *in corde suo*.

⁴⁹ *Ælfric’s catholic homilies: the second series: text*, ed. Malcolm Godden, Early English Text
Society, s.s. v (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), 165, ll. 138-40: *Is for ði neod þam ðe
to gode anrædlícse bihð. þet his móð ne geedlæcæ ðæ teolunga þe hine fram gode wemæ. Ælfric is following the twenty-fourth of Gregory’s forty homilies on the Gospels (Migne, *Patrologiae, series latina*, lxxvi (Paris: Garnier, 1878) col. 1184,C): Quae ergo ad peccatum implicat, ad haec necesse est ut post conversionem animus non recurrat. (*It is necessary, therefore, that the *animus* should not turn back after conversion to those things which entwine it into sin.*)
As far as the ‘secular’ poems in Old English are concerned, there is no evidence that people other than of the warrior class were credited with mod. It may be noted, however, that the mod of animals is sometimes referred to: in Beowulf, that of the fish which attacked him (549) and of the dragon (2281, 2296, 2581). The evidence is slight, but it seems possible that types of animal perceived to be powerful and warlike were thought to have a mod from which these qualities arose. Whether, however, the modig nature of animals was taken literally or as a metaphor, one cannot tell. The suggestion made above that a hero’s enemies should be modig may indicate the former.

Two advantages may be noted in adopting a definition of mod which relates it to the warrior class (‘warrior-nature’ might serve as a short equivalent for mod). One is that it avoids the problem, reflected in dictionary definitions of mod and in translations of it into modern languages, that mod sometimes appears to represent the whole human personality (as in Bosworth’s and Toller’s definitions ‘the inner man’, ‘the spiritual... part of man’, ‘mind’, ‘soul’, ‘heart’, ‘spirit’)\(^{50}\) and on other occasions (more rarely) to denote merely an emotion or attitude of mind (Bosworth and Toller give ‘courage’, ‘high spirit’, ‘pride’, ‘arrogance’). As Schabram observes (p. 123), mod in Old English ‘serves to denote the entire inner life ... and therefore covers an area of meaning which is indicated by “mind”, “spirit”, “disposition”, “heart”, “soul” ... Mod also denotes in a very restricted number of examples individual specific impulses and qualities of the mind such as anger, arrogance and courage’.\(^{51}\)

Thus it makes sense, when we read Geat wees gledmod in 1785, to take it that Beowulf was ‘glad in mind’ at Hrothgar’s promise of treasure, or that Hrothgar was ‘agitated in heart’ (on hreon mode, 1307) at Æschere’s death. It makes no sense, however, to say that Hrothgar and Hrothulf believed that Unferth ‘had great mind (haelfde mod micel, 1167), though he had acted dishonourably in battle’, or that Thryth by her frivolous behaviour ‘showed heart and terrible wrongdoing’ (Mod Brydo swæg ... firen ondrysne, 1931-2). Yet the same word mod is used in all these cases and there is no sign in the Old English texts that the writers divided up the mod into two separate categories of ‘the personality as a whole’ and ‘specific emotion’. The modern psychological concepts of ‘mind’ and ‘emotion’ are too restricted to represent the wide semantic field of mod. As far as the ‘secular’ poems are concerned, a more general definition of mod identifying it with the outlook of people of aristocratic class may be able to do so. To refer again to the four passages just quoted, when Beowulf is described

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\(^{51}\) ... dient zur Bezeichnung des gesamten inneren Lebens ... und deckt damit einen Bedeutungsbezirk ab, der durch ‘Sinn, Geist, Gemüt, Herz, Seele’ zu umschreiben ist ... mod [bezeichnet] in sehr beschränktem Umfang auch einzelne spezielle Regungen und Eigenschaften des Gemütes wie Zorn, Hochmut und Mut.
as *gleammod* in 1785, I am suggesting that what is implied is that Beowulf felt satisfied that he had been treated properly as a warrior ('his warrior-nature was glad') when Hrothgar offered him treasure. In 1307 the wise king was 'agitated in his warrior-nature' when he knew that his dearest man was dead'. The *mod* is referred to in each case because the giving and receiving of treasure and the deep affection between lord and man are characteristics of Anglo-Saxon courtly life. On the other hand it also makes sense to say that Hrothgar and Hrothulf still trusted in Unferth's warrior nature — that is, that he had done nothing which compromised his status as a warrior — even though he had been dishonourable with regard to his kin in the matter of sword play. Thryth showed her warrior nature — her aristocratic breeding — in having presumptuous men put to death. Warriors, after all, as has been pointed out above, are not necessarily good.

Some further examples may be considered. When Hrothgar said (Beowulf 384-5) 'I shall offer the man treasures for his *mod-power* (modpræcu), it was the power which inhered in Beowulf as a warrior that the king was buying. It was as a man of aristocratic class who valued these things that the lone survivor was 'grieved in his warrior-nature' (giomormod, 2267) over the departed glory of treasure and armour, harp and hawk. Widsith (106-8) boasted that 'Many men, proud in their warrior nature, who could judge well, said that they had never heard a better song'. In the *Finnsburh* fragment, Garulf is described as 'the hero, daring in his warrior-nature' (deormód hæleþ, 23). In all these cases such a reference to the warrior status of the various persons seems more relevant and pointed than a mere mention of 'mind' or 'courage', and it obviates the need to fracture the meaning of *mod* in a way which has no basis in the texts themselves.

A second problem raised by conventional translations of *mod* based on modern assumptions about the mind is that where *mod* is taken to represent an emotion, one is left guessing which emotion is intended out of the range on offer. Bosworth and Toller, as has been said, suggest 'courage', 'high spirit', 'pride', 'arrogance'; Schabram (p.123-5) gives Zorn, *sindhafter Stolz, Übermut, Hochmut, Mut* ('anger', 'sinful pride', 'high spirits', 'arrogance', 'courage'). Thryth showed 'haughtiness' (Beowulf 1931), according to Swanton, 'pride' according to Gordon — but one can hardly suppose that Hrothgar decided to offer Beowulf treasure for the strength of his haughtiness or pride (385). In Swanton's translation (p.61), 'the anger of the sea-fish was aroused' (549) at the sight of the weary Beowulf, but it would make little sense to say that the hero's followers were 'sick in

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52 *Ic þæm godan sceal / for his modbræce madmas beodan* (ASPR, iv, 14).
53 *Swa giomormod giohdo maende* (ASPR, iv, 70).
54 *bonne monige men, modum wlonce, * wordum sprecan, þa þe wel cupan, / þæt hi næfre song sellan ne hyrdon* (ASPR, iii, 152).
anger' when they believed he had been killed (1603). Naturally one does not expect *mod* or any other word representing such quicksilver concepts as the human mind and emotions to translate consistently word for word from one language to another, but the range of meaning put forward in dictionaries and translations seems too arbitrary and disparate. *Mod* presumably meant something which was general enough to be applicable in all the above cases, and a meaning such as 'warrior-nature' again seems possible.

The arrival of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England, and with it an understanding of the mind based ultimately on Plato, brought, I suggest, a radically new perspective to the meaning of *mod*. Thereafter, in overtly Christian writing, especially in prose, it became the abstract framework into which reason, emotion and instinctive drives were organized. It might be regarded as morally elevated in works of a philosophical bent or as morally fallen in those which reflected an Augustinian theology. In either case it lost the reference to the mental outlook of the aristocratic class which, however, it retained in poetry, especially of the 'secular' genres, and which one may suppose derived from a pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon understanding of the mind.