

SOURCE, METHOD, THEORY, PRACTICE: ON READING TWO OLD ENGLISH VERSE TEXTS

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But regarding the opinions to which I had hitherto given credence, I thought that I could not do better than undertake to get rid of them, all at one go, in order to replace them afterwards with better ones, or with the same ones once I had squared them with the standards of reason.

Descartes, *Discourse on method* II.¹

L'Heuristique, en effet, est aujourd'hui plus facile qu'autrefois, quoique le bon Wagner soit encore fondé à dire: 'Wie schwer sind nicht die Mittel zu erwerben/Durch die man zu den Quellen steigt!'

Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques*.²

The epigraphs to this paper are pretexts in both senses of the word. They precede what I am about to argue in time (by their origins in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries) and in space (by their location on the page), and they function in contrary ways as authorities (given their influence and their distinguished authors) and as opportunities for ironic reflection. They are points of historical reference to theory and practice and means to prepare a way for the argument which follows. They are sources.

The theoretical and pragmatic issue which my paper addresses is the necessary interaction between the practices (and institutions) of source work in Old English and the growing body of thought now

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¹ *The philosophical writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham et al., 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985–91), i, 117 ('. . . pour toutes les opinions que j'auois receuës iusques alors en ma creance, ie ne pouuois mieux faire que d'entreprendre, vne bonne fois, de les en oster, affin d'y en remettre par après, ou d'autres meilleures, ou bien les mesmes, lorsque ie les aurois aiustées au niueau de la raison'. *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, rev. edn, 12 vols (Paris: Vrin/C.N.R.S., 1964–76), vi, 13–14).

² Charles-Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1898), 3, citing Wagner in *Faust*, I.3. ['Heuristic is, in fact, easier today than it used to be, although the honest Wagner has still good grounds for saying: "How hard it is to gain the means whereby we mount to the sources"' (*Introduction to the study of history*, trans. G.G. Berry [London: Duckworth, 1898], 19).]

generally labelled 'post-modern'.³ Though not new, the issue is of immediate interest. In a 1985 essay in the volume *Sources of Anglo-Saxon culture*, Colin Chase opened discussion of the question by noting: 'In an intellectual climate partially defined by Saussure, Lacan, and Lévi-Strauss and revolutionized by Derrida, de Man, Miller, and Foucault, the value of source study is increasingly at issue'.⁴ His essay, problematizing the notion of a single text of *The life of Saint Mary of Egypt*, sees a point of meeting between the *via negativa* of the homily and the 'nihilism' of deconstruction, though, he points out, 'the resemblance may in the end be nothing more than a trick with mirrors'.⁵ For all its arguable puckishness about deconstruction, Chases's essay itself became a *fons* for later, approving citation.⁶

The practice of source work has been among the most vigorous in the field. As a crude measure, simple reference to Greenfield and Robinson's *Bibliography* demonstrates up to 1972 the proportion of all research in Old English literature dedicated to sourcing a work.⁷ Comparable reference to the bibliographies in *Anglo-Saxon England* and the *Old English Newsletter* yields similar information from the period 1972 through the present. For the past ten years, the 'Symposium on the Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture', a continuing programme held in connection with the International Congress on Medieval Studies, has involved a large number of scholars from North America and Europe.⁸ From another perspective, the ongoing collaboration since 1983 of a great many scholars in two complementary sources projects, the American *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture* (= SASLC) and the British *Fontes Anglo-*

³ For the term 'post-modern' and its definition as 'incredulity towards metanarratives' see Jean-François Lyotard, *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984 [Paris, 1979]), xxiv. See also Richard Rorty, 'Habermas and Lyotard on postmodernity' in *Philosophical papers*, vol. 2, *Essays on Heidegger and others* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 164–76. On some problematics of the post-modern see Linda Hutcheon, *A poetics of postmodernism: history, theory, fiction* (London: Routledge, 1989), 222–31.

⁴ Colin Chase, 'Source study as a trick with mirrors: annihilation of meaning in the Old English "Mary of Egypt"', in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon literary culture*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986), 23–33, at 24.

⁵ Chase, 'Source study', 31.

⁶ Allen J. Frantzen and Charles L. Venegoni, 'The desire for origins: an archeology of Anglo-Saxon studies', *Style*, 20 (1986), 142–56 at 153 n. 1; Allen J. Frantzen, *Desire for origins* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), 89; Ruth Waterhouse, "'Wæter æddre asprang": how Cuthbert's miracle pours cold water on source study', *Parergon*, 5 (1987), 1–27 at 21, n. 23; Clare A. Lees, 'Working with patristic sources: language and context in Old English homilies', in *Speaking two languages: traditional disciplines and contemporary theory in medieval studies*, ed. Allen J. Frantzen (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1991), 157–80 and 264–76 at 161 and n. 19 (266).

⁷ Stanley B. Greenfield and Fred C. Robinson, *A bibliography of publications on Old English literature to the end of 1972* (Toronto and Buffalo: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1980).

⁸ See Paul E. Szarmach, 'Marking ten years of the symposium on the sources of Anglo-Saxon culture' ([Binghamton, N.Y.: CEMERS] 1992), [ii]. See also the annual progress report for *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* in the Spring issues of the *Old English Newsletter*.

Saxonici (= *Fontes*) may be seen to argue the continuing appeal and strength of this approach to the subject.⁹ Yet despite (and also because of) its current prominence in the field, the sources enterprise has found itself open to critique from some thoughtful scholars within the Old English community. Their criticisms, levelled at the theory and practice of source criticism, the institutions engaged in it, and its position in the hierarchy of critical study, are serious and demand attention.

It is not as if source study had remained beyond critique until today. No less a philologist than J.R.R. Tolkien took a memorable swing at the sourcing of *Beowulf* in the opening of his seminal Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture of 1936, where he allegorized the enterprise: 'they pushed the tower over, with no little labour, in order to look for hidden carvings and inscriptions, or to discover whence the man's distant forefathers had obtained their building material'.¹⁰ As such criticisms tend to be, this was a space-clearing manoeuvre, designed to rescue *Beowulf* from the 'antiquaries' and open it to *literary* interpretation. Similarly, Robert Kaske on at least two occasions referred dismissively to 'the venerable pastime of simple source-hunting'.¹¹ The space-clearing operation here was to distinguish between the literary critical methods of patristic exegesis and whatever preceded it. Speaking from another tradition, Roger Dragonetti has recently written of the 'mirage of sources' in his attempt to reclaim the romance from the objective and 'scientific' claims of positivism.¹² In fact, an association of source work with some form of positivist analysis seems to underlie all three of these criticisms. In what follows, then, I should like to investigate some points where source criticism in Old English may usefully draw on elements of post-modern theory, using as a focus questions raised by some of source-work's friendly critics. Though the procedure of

⁹ Another measure might be the generative power of these projects. In an ambitious undertaking which shares methods, aims and structure with *SASLC* and *Fontes*, Thomas H. Ohlgren and Mildred O. Budney have organized the *Corpus of insular and Anglo-Saxon illuminated manuscripts*. (For a description see *Old English Newsletter*, 26.1 [1992], 27–9). Sarah Larratt Keefer has begun the *Directory of individual liturgical sources of Old English*. (For a description see *Old English Newsletter*, 23.2 [1990] 19 and 24.3 [1991], B1–4.)

¹⁰ J.R.R. Tolkien, 'Beowulf: the monsters, and the critics', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xxii (1936), 245–95, at 248.

¹¹ Robert E. Kaske, with Arthur Groos and Michael W. Twomey, *Medieval Christian literary imagery: a guide to interpretation* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1988), xx: 'I suppose it is obvious that my concern throughout is not with the venerable pastime of simple source-hunting, so dear to the hearts of scholars a few generations ago. For any literary artist using material in what may be highly original ways, exact sources of imagery and other imaginative details are notoriously difficult to pin down . . .'. See also R.E. Kaske, 'The defense', in *Critical approaches to medieval literature*, ed. Dorothy Bethurum (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960), 27–60 and 158–9, at 28: 'I refer, of course, not to the venerable pastime of source-hunting, but the close analysis of the traditional associations which such imagery usually brings with it into literary works . . .'.

¹² Roger Dragonetti, *Le mirage des sources: l'art du faux dans le roman médiéval* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), esp. 7–8 and 42–3.

this investigation cannot duplicate the method of Decartes, it may profit from his doubt.

In her application of narrative theory to the various versions of Cuthbert's lives, Ruth Waterhouse explores the differentiation of discourse and story and its implications (within the larger question of intertextuality) for source study.¹³ The implications of variation raised in her study lead her to question the practice of source study and what she terms the 'source/derivative relationship'.¹⁴ Two questions she asks in the course of her paper provide useful points of entry into an examination of the methods and presuppositions of current source study: the first '. . . is too much reliance being placed upon superficial resemblances between different texts in much source study?'; the second, that the 'relationship [between intertextuality and the story/discourse differentiation] calls into question the feasibility and the relevance of much source study; what exactly is its purpose?'¹⁵ The theme of positivism is raised explicitly by Martin Irvine, in his essay 'Medieval textuality and the archaeology of textual culture'.¹⁶ Drawing upon theory following Foucault, Irvine accords to the source work typified by *SASLC* and *Fontes* a backhanded compliment: 'this knowledge will be valuable for future research but remains on the positivistic, and primary archival, level'.¹⁷

'Positivism' is a term which needs no introduction. As it is commonly used, it refers to a school of historical research, begun in the late nineteenth century, which aimed at producing a 'positive' science of history, rigorous in its method, and objective in its heuristic and its narration. That version of positivist history most influential in France, England, and the United States is epitomized in the 1898 manual of Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques*. Translated into English in the same year, the book saw numerous reprints in England and the United States through 1932.¹⁸ It is enlightening to consider the alternative terminology for such historical research: in France, the historians Monod, Langlois and Seignobos are often referred to as the 'école methodique', a

¹³ Waterhouse, 'Wæter æddre asprang', 1–27.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁶ Martin Irvine, 'Medieval textuality and the archaeology of textual culture', in *Speaking two languages*, ed. Frantzen, 181–210 and 276–84.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 278, n. 16.

¹⁸ Charles-Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos, *Introduction to the study of history*, trans. G.G. Berry, with a preface by F. York Powell (London: Duckworth and New York: Henry Holt, 1898). The commendatory preface by F. York Powell offers some interesting reflections: 'There are several points on which one is unable to find oneself in agreement with MM. Langlois and Seignobos, but these occur mainly where they are dealing with theory' (!), ix. The popularity of the *Introduction* in the United States is attested by its eleven American reprints through 1932.

telling terminological distinction, which focuses not on the theory behind the history but on its goal of a method leading to 'good' history.¹⁹ The 'scientific' claims of positivist history have been thoroughly exposed as having been based on a mistaken view of science,²⁰ and its political claims are bankrupt indeed when read from the other side of World War and Cold War. But it is the claim to objectivity in method which continues to fascinate some and infuriate others. It is source work's claim of objectivity, sometimes tacit sometimes explicit, which I believe has most particularly drawn its critics' fire.

Perhaps the most thoroughgoing critique of the sources enterprise is offered by Allen Frantzen in *Desire for origins*. In a section of the chapter, 'Sources and the Search for Origins in the Academy', Frantzen examines the history and practice of source criticism within Anglo-Saxon studies, primarily (though not exclusively) through a form of institutional criticism associated with Michel Foucault.²¹ Frantzen's point of entry is the contradiction between the apparent objectivity of 'method' and the unacknowledged ideological commitments (and consequences) involved in its use. This strongly argued chapter opens philological method in general, and method for source study in particular, to scrutiny from an unaccustomed direction, since it urges acknowledgement of and action upon the political desires underlying any development of method. For its detailed critique and painstaking criticism within a number of strains of current historicist analysis, Frantzen's argument is important in the opportunity it offers the field to assess itself. But this criticism is itself embedded in an historical account of the business of Anglo-Saxon studies which emplots Anglo-Saxon studies within the development of philological method, whose origins Frantzen locates in romanticism and German nationalism.

In the search for origins, the chapter is not entirely immune to the pull of the 'origins' it seeks to expose. Its emplotment of Anglo-Saxon studies reads as a form of evolution (or possibly devolution), where the growth, development and decline of philological method is mapped onto the fortunes of the emerging nation-states in Europe and their concurrent preoccupation with racial origins (here within the Teutonic orbit). Both of the latter drew considerable support from the nineteenth century romantic reading of history. It is against this background that Frantzen reads the *current* study of sources. In his analysis, the only difference between then and now is

¹⁹ See Philippe Carrard, *Poetics of the new history* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1992), 2.

²⁰ See Peter Novick, *That noble dream: the 'objectivity question' and the American historical profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), esp. 21–46.

²¹ Frantzen, *Desire for origins*, 83–95 and 238–9.

in the language of the source: he argues ‘the replacement of the Germanic, nationalist ideal as an object of the scholarly search for origins with an entirely new point of origin – or, in modern parlance, “source” – for Anglo-Saxon in Latin literary culture’.²² While he is quite correct in his analysis of the discipline’s present interest in Latin language and culture, the terms of his analysis, with its equation of ‘origin’ and ‘source’, are subject to question.

In his analysis of method, Frantzen outlines a number of ‘limitations’ shared by the two sources projects, *SASLC* and *Fontes*.²³ These interlocking ‘limitations’ offer a far-ranging critique of the two collaborative projects with implications beyond the institutional framework of the projects themselves, insofar as these two projects are not anomalies but practice within the accepted procedures of the discipline. To focus on their methods and assumptions is to focus on the enterprise of source criticism in general, and these ‘limitations’ offer a useful point of convergence with the questions raised explicitly by Waterhouse and implicitly by Irvine. Because they are crucial to the very concept of the sources enterprise, I should like to focus on the first, fourth, and fifth of his points: 1) ‘they have not defined key terms’; 4) they ‘have not fully considered the ends to which their research will be put’; and 5) they fail to appreciate the importance of theoretical issues.²⁴ While these ‘limitations’ all address method and theory, the most fundamental of them is the question of definition.

Frantzen is specific in his charge that the sources projects have ignored definitions: ‘they have not defined key terms, including “fontes” and “books known”, or “sources” or “literary culture”. Obviously knowledge of sources increases our knowledge about literary culture, but “sources” can be variously defined according to the degree of dependence on the text that is the source. Is the *fons* of the Latin text a “beginning”, a “source”, an “origin”, or a “cause”

²² *Ibid.*, 83.

²³ *Ibid.*, 86–8.

²⁴ The second and third statements of ‘limitations’ are that the projects focus on the ‘written’ aspect of literacy and emphasize Latin. Within the framework of the two sources projects these objections are essentially linked. The material surviving to study is *written*, and a great amount of that is in Latin. That said, it must be acknowledged that writings in Old English also qualify as ‘sources’, as is documented, for example, in Wulfstan’s use of Ælfric’s homiletic writings. (On this point see now A.P.McD. Orchard, ‘Crying wolf: oral style and the *Sermones Lupi*’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 21 [1992], 239–64.) Donald G. Scragg treats extensively the Old English sources of the Anonymous Old English Homilies in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon literary culture: a trial version*, ed. F.M. Biggs, T.D. Hill, P.E. Szarmach (Binghamton, N.Y.: CEMERS, 1990), 124–30. Also see Scragg, ‘The corpus of vernacular homilies and prose saints’ lives before Ælfric’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 8 (1979), 223–77. To my knowledge no strictures in either project prohibit sourcing in languages other than Latin and Old English. While the textual material surviving from Anglo-Saxon England is written, recent work has demonstrated that various dimensions of the literacy lying behind these Anglo-Saxon texts may differ substantially from our own form of literacy. Further work on issues arising from the oral/literate continuum is needed to explore the ways in which orality and memory shaped reading and writing in Anglo-Saxon England.

for the Anglo-Saxon? “Source” can mean these things, and more’.²⁵ I quote this passage at length because the criticism it contains is both astute and serious.²⁶ The failure to define terms appears to have the whiff of scandal about it when it occurs within a scholarly project. Yet it is worth noting that for all the rhetorical specificity of these citations of possible definitions for ‘source’, Frantzen himself does not propose one. In fact, if we review the offered definitions – ‘beginning’, ‘origin’, ‘cause’ – we will discover that none fits precisely what we understand ‘source’ (as it is used within the discipline) to be. The reason for this difficulty, I will argue, is that we are looking at the problem from the wrong end.

What is especially important about Frantzen’s critique in point one is that it is broadly correct, though for different reasons and with an import different from his own thesis. In fairness to both Frantzen and to *SASLC*, a particular and meticulous account of method and theory was published at about the same time as *Desire for origins* and was thus unavailable to him. I refer to *Sources of Anglo-Saxon literary culture: a trial version*, in whose Introduction Thomas D. Hill offers an account of the enterprise, its procedures and presuppositions.²⁷ I will return to this below, but my focus here is the question of a definition of ‘source’ within the discipline and practice of Old English scholarship, and such a definition is very hard to come by. The word is ubiquitous, its definition scarce. I will argue that this lack of definition for ‘source’ is not accidental, not a lapse in theory or some shortsightedness or deviousness on the part of philologists. It marks a necessary absence.

While it may seem counterintuitive to say so, a source is not a *what*; rather the word ‘source’ points to a *how*. A ‘source’ so called becomes a *what* only after the fact. By this distinction I mean that in the technical sense in which Old English scholarship uses the word, nothing is constituted as a ‘source’ by its nature. There is no Aristotelian essence, no quality of generation inherent in something denominated a ‘source’, despite what the etymologies of the word might suggest.²⁸ I should like at this point to turn to Hill’s definition of ‘source’ in his Introduction to the *SASLC* volume. He writes ‘since the terms “source” and “influence” are used with a good deal of freedom in literary scholarship, let us begin by defining a literary source and its derivative as a particular mode of textual

²⁵ Frantzen, *Desire for origins*, 86.

²⁶ Clare Lees considers the absence of definition and some consequences for research in ‘Working with patristic sources’, 161.

²⁷ Hill, *Trial version*, xv–xxix.

²⁸ For *fons* in its literal sense as a spring and its derivative figurative senses see Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), 766. For *source* see *The Oxford dictionary of English etymology*, ed. C.T. Onions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 848. See esp. *The Oxford English dictionary*, 2nd edn, 20 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), xvi, 61–2, senses 4f and 6.

relationship'.²⁹ In this approach to definition, Hill makes a fundamentally important observation, and at the same time uses some unfortunate and misleading language (language shared by Waterhouse in her denomination of the source relationship³⁰). The critical importance of this mode of definition is precisely its identification of source as a term in a relationship. The mistaken part of his formulation (in my view) is that the Old English text upon which the scholar performs the inferential historical operations of source work is called 'derivative'.³¹ The adjective is unfortunate because it suggests a mechanistic process of textual generation, and, among other things, imputes a diminished status of secondariness to the Old English text being studied. Quite the contrary, the so-called 'derivative' text actually creates the source. In the sources enterprise the chronologically later (specifically, the Old English text) reforms the earlier, making it something it had not been at its inception by entering into a relationship with it. But our understanding of this operation and this relationship is only possible if our concept of source (and its definition) is allowed to float, that is, that the relationship itself is the definitional focus and not the terms composing the relationship. In recognition of the dynamic of the source relationship, I would suggest provisionally that we refer to the Old English text being studied as the 'target' text, denominating it in this way because of *our* focus on it in research.

In his difficult essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art', Heidegger writes 'to be a work means to set up a world'.³² This enigmatic epigram recalls to us that the work, which is the focus of our study, itself focuses us and the world of meaning around it. Like Wallace Stevens's jar in Tennessee, it takes dominion everywhere. When I argue that the target text creates the source, I argue within this perspective, one which inverts our usual understanding of the object of analysis. In complementary ways source and target text constitute each other. Their relationship is one of difference.

²⁹ Hill, *Trial version*, xvi.

³⁰ Waterhouse, 'Wæter æddre asprang', 18.

³¹ The word implies a mechanistic process uncomfortably close to positivist method. Compare for example the heuristic in evaluating documents in Langlois and Seignobos: 'The immense majority of the documents which furnish the historian with starting-points for his reasonings are nothing else than traces of psychological operations.

'This granted, in order to conclude from a written document to the fact which was its remote cause – that is, in order to ascertain the relation which connects the document with the fact – it is necessary to reproduce the whole series of intermediate causes which have given rise to the document. It is necessary to revive in imagination the whole of that series of acts performed by the author of the document . . . in order to arrive at the original event' (*Introduction to the study of history*, trans. G.G. Berry, 66). For Langlois and Seignobos, documents are sources: 'no documents, no history,' 17; see also 101.

³² Martin Heidegger, 'The origin of the work of art', in *Poetry, language, thought*, trans. with an introduction by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 44. For an enlightening discussion of this essay see Gerald L. Bruns, *Heidegger's estrangements: language, truth, and poetry in the later writings* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1989), 27–51.

The basis for establishing a textual source relationship is verbal similarity.³³ In the most particular of cases this similarity resides in the matching of words and phrases (i.e., in the determination of a 'source' as opposed to an 'analogue' or an 'influence'). But the verbal similarity which establishes filiation is only one aspect of the source relationship. The residue of the Old English text, after the matching has been made to that text denominated 'source', is presumed peculiar to the text in question.³⁴ (For the purpose of clarity in argument, I do not consider here the case where the Old English text appears to be a wholesale appropriation of the 'source' text. In this case the difference is sought in the principal of choice, ordering, or the fact of translation.) In seeking this residue, then, the counterpart of the operation to demonstrate similarity – and its obverse – is the establishment of the degree of difference. These are necessarily dialectical operations, otherwise the process of demonstrating similarity (to establish the link) and then difference (to establish uniqueness) would be hopelessly tautological.³⁵ Let us imagine an extreme test case. Let us take a Latin work whose source we are investigating. Let us suppose further that we discover that the target text is identical to (and coterminous with) the source. The discovery of identity explodes the possibility of a source relationship, because what were previously thought two texts are actually one. Identity subverts the source relationship. The corollary of this reasoning, however, is that the source relationship is based precisely on difference. If this is the case, the relationship between target text and 'source' is predicated on lack, or absence, for what is interesting about the residue is what is *not* the same in the two texts. In such a relationship there can be no question of the 'source' text causing or determining the target text. In the choice of my extreme example I was careful to specify that the two texts in question were in the same language. The difference of language, the question of translation,

³³ See Hill, *Trial version*, xvi: 'The first step in establishing such a relationship is to demonstrate parallels between two texts which are so striking that to assume they were fortuitous would "outrage probability", to use R.E. Kaske's phrase'; and further 'In literary-historical discourse a source can consist of as little as one word or as much as thousands of lines of text. Indeed, many Anglo-Saxon texts are wholly dependent on one specific source and are conventionally defined as translations or versions of an original. But in ordinary usage the term "source" generally refers to a text that provides the antecedent for some significant portion of a derivative text, while the terms "citation", "quotation", "allusion", or "echo" refer to smaller and more limited instances of similar textual relationships' (xvii–xviii). For a probing of the limitations in verbal similarity see Lees, 'Working with patristic sources', 161.

³⁴ For a clear articulation of this process of analysis and inference see D.G. Scragg, 'An Old English homilist of archbishop Dunstan's day', in *Words, texts and manuscripts: studies presented to Helmut Gneuss*, ed. Michael Korhammer (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 181–92.

³⁵ Stanley Rosen, *The ancients and the moderns: rethinking modernity* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1989): 'We cannot think sameness except through the invocation or mediation of difference', 123–4; and further 'Dialectic is not a procedure for eliminating inconsistencies and contradictions but rather for making sense out of them', 158.

complicates the argument, but does not change it. In fact, the mere process of translation makes possible a source relationship, again by the creation of difference in the interstices of the two languages.

To isolate difference as the determining characteristic of the source relationship is necessarily to evoke the 'space' between the texts in question and, by implication, the 'absence' from which such a relationship must necessarily proceed.³⁶ It is also to acknowledge the difficult corollary that a relationship across such a void is open to play among an overwhelming plenitude of meanings.³⁷ That plenitude is the ground for the possibility of various interpretations. Yet the play of meanings does not carry with it a categorical imperative – it is more nearly an invitation than an order. This invitation the Old English community has generally preferred to explore within a commitment to historicist method.

This exploration of the definition of 'source' has led straight into questions of theory. Certainly, the question of difference at the heart of the source relationship has interesting implications for any model we construct for the activity of source hunting, but at the same time it builds into the process a productive adaptability, one questioned by Frantzen and assumed by Hill. The discussion which follows pursues the question of theory within a historical context by examining the implications of some of the practices of source study in two little read verse texts: the so-called dialogues of Solomon and Saturn. It addresses the implications of difference in the source relationship and the gap between conscious theory and actual practice. To explore these is to confront the distinction of source and origin, paradigm and grounding, strategies of legitimation, and structures of discourse.

John Mitchell Kemble's *The dialogue of Salomon and Saturnus with an historical introduction* was published by the Aelfric Society in 1848.³⁸ As we look back on it from the distance of nearly 150 years, it is difficult to know just what the book was meant to be. The edition proper of the Dialogue occupies some forty-three of a total of 326 pages. It is surrounded by so-called versions in French, German, Latin, various translations of possibly related materials, proverbs, and odd entertainments. In his Introduction, Kemble tells

³⁶ See Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), 106–7, n. 42: '... spacing is a concept which also, but not exclusively, carries the meaning of a productive, positive, generative force. Like *dissemination*, like *différance* it carries along with it a *genetic* motif: it is not only the interval, the space constituted between two things (which is the usual sense of spacing), but also *spacing*, the operation, or in any event, the movement of setting aside. This movement is inseparable from temporization-temporalization (see "*La différence*") and from *différance*, from the conflicts of force at work in them'.

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, sign, and play in the discourse of the human sciences', in *Writing and difference*, trans. with an introduction by Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), 280 and 289.

³⁸ John M. Kemble, *The dialogue of Salomon and Saturn* (London: Aelfric Society, 1848).

of the fifteen-year development of his study, begun in Cambridge in 1833. It had started as a collection of tales Kemble associated with the Reformation in Germany, though as it grew, Kemble reconceived his assemblage of the various avatars of the dialogue of Salomon and Marcolf as grist for a 'History of Fiction'.³⁹ He notes that 'fifteen years have not passed without bringing great changes in the mode in which I myself view such collections'.⁴⁰ With pointed blandness he notes that upon formation of the Aelfric Society 'the remarkable poem of Salomon and Saturn was selected for publication, and the materials previously collected formed a not uninteresting introduction to it. The reader is thus put in possession of the principal facts connected with this publication'.⁴¹

Interesting as this information is, it is not quite the 'principal facts'. In a letter to Jakob Grimm in 1835, Kemble had complained 'I am sorry to say that the English booksellers will have nothing to do with Salomon and Marcolf; they are afraid of it'.⁴² His publication problems were due in part to his continuing conflict with those he called 'Antiquarians' – Kemble's own form of space-clearing. In assuming the high road of history, Kemble claimed to be advancing 'on the broad bases of historical criticism, & by leaving the trodden path, stamped those who still pursued it, as followers of a false system'.⁴³ The historical criticism he espoused bears the hallmarks of Romanticism: Kemble's concern is to demonstrate the underlying unity of all versions of the story; and while hypothesizing an 'Eastern source' for the 'original' version, he argues the Northern character of the Old English text, which he claims as the legend's oldest version:

. . . I assign a Northern origin to one portion of the story, while I admit the admixture of an Oriental element. I propose to show that this Northern portion is an echo from the days of German heathenism, and to restore Saturnus or Marcolfus *the God* to his place in the pagan Pantheon of our ancestors.⁴⁴

The eastern origin of European fables proved a fertile and popular belief in the mid-nineteenth century, and Kemble considers this 'foreign element' of a source under the character and name of Solomon.⁴⁵ Saturn, despite the classical name, is, in Kemble's

³⁹ Kemble, *Dialogue*, iv.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, iv–v.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, v.

⁴² *John Mitchell Kemble and Jakob Grimm, a correspondence 1832–1852*, ed. and trans. Raymond A. Wiley (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), 111. Grimm dated the letter 24 July 1835.

⁴³ Letter of 8 January 1834 (Wiley, *A correspondence*, 47).

⁴⁴ Kemble, *Dialogue*, 6–7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 8. On some of the dimensions of 'Orientalism' in Britain and France see Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 113–97; for a critique of its appearance in the study of medieval romance see also Hans Aarsleff, 'Scholarship and ideology: Joseph Bédier's critique of romantic medievalism', in *Historical studies and literary criticism*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 93–113, esp. 98–9.

sourcing, a Teutonic god,⁴⁶ though Kemble is hard pressed to explain the substitution of Saturn for Marcolf in the poem's earliest extant version. The most tantalizing connection between the two names occurs in the *Cosmographia* of Aethicus Ister, known to Kemble in a late medieval manuscript.⁴⁷ The reference in question is actually to the Turks, but Kemble, lured by the song of the north, read in the passage 'a vague and indistinct description of our Gothic forefathers in their settlements upon the shores of the Black Sea'.⁴⁸ There is scant allusion to possible Latin backgrounds in Kemble's hunting: he had little good to say about Rome, as his offhand reference to the 'mental castration' of the clergy bears eloquent witness.⁴⁹

At this distance, the seams, flaws and prejudices in Kemble's prodigious scholarship are readily apparent.⁵⁰ The commitment to history cannot be made without a vision of that history, and the dimensions of those visions always seem clearer from a later vantage point. In 1941 Robert Menner reedited the Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn.⁵¹ That there is a source relationship between the two editions is obvious; the dimensions of that relationship are far from clear. In a preface reminiscent of Kemble's account of the publication of his book, Menner observed that his edition outgrew its original plan and publisher, 'since the poems are hardly intelligible without extensive comment'.⁵² Twelve years in the making, Menner's edition can be read by some lights as the culmination of the historical and philological method of Old English whose birth Kemble attended. A reading to be sure, but one performed through the lenses of an evolutionary or a Whig theory of history. Much to the contrary, close attention to the content and structure of Menner's 'comment' reveals disruption in method not continuity.

By contrast with the arrangement of Kemble's text, Menner's is comfortably familiar as a scholarly edition of an Old English work. At 176 pages including indices, the book is less than half the length of Kemble's study. Its title focuses clearly on two verse texts. Its

⁴⁶ Kemble, *Dialogue*, 127: 'I do not think, then, that we must at once reject the name of Saturn as a Teutonic god, merely because the first glance at this poem would induce us to consider it the production of a pedantic monk'.

⁴⁷ London, British Library, Cotton Caligula A. iii, fol. 4. For a discussion of the connection between the *Cosmographia* and *Solomon and Saturn II* see Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, 'The geographic list of *Solomon and Saturn II*, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 20 (1991), 123–41.

⁴⁸ Kemble, *Dialogue*, 119.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5

⁵⁰ See, for example, Frantzen, *Desire for origins*, 57–9.

⁵¹ In the interim B. Assmann reedited the texts after an independent examination of the manuscripts: *Salomo und Saturn*, ed. B. Assmann, *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie*, 3.2 (Leipzig, 1898), 58–82 (304–28) and 237–8 (483–4). For a complete bibliographical listing of earlier editions see *The poetical dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, ed. Robert J. Menner (New York: Modern Language Association, 1941), 72–3.

⁵² Menner, *Poetical dialogues*, vii.

introduction covers issues of manuscript, date, and language, and a lengthy section on backgrounds. Following the introduction is the text, edited on facing pages. There follow the textual notes, glossary, and an appendix containing the prose dialogue. Forty-five of the sixty-six-page introduction are devoted to an examination of the background of the two poetic dialogues. Menner begins with a general survey of the legends associated with Solomon, primarily Hebrew and Arabic. His major focus is Solomon's magical powers and those legends which depict Solomon's powers over demons. Tracing the appearance of Solomon in Greek and Latin writings, Menner then fills in the gaps by reference to Slavic literature, from the Balkans to Russia.⁵³ The magisterial range of this construction of background is impressive, if from this distance a bit fantastic, but Menner closes this section with an astringent comment that undercuts the greatest part of his survey: 'Whether the dialogue of Solomon and Saturn came to the Old English poets through the Celtic church or from the continent, there is little doubt that the immediate *sources* of both Old English poems were written in Latin'.⁵⁴ What is so significant about this comment, is that it concludes the section called 'The Origin and Spread of the Legend'. Menner is prepared to offer a hypothesis about origins (what he at times called the 'ultimate source'), but his working sources will be local and Latin.

This distinction is more important than it may at first appear. In the next two sections, Menner hypothesizes about the relationships among what he denominates 'Oriental', 'Germanic', and 'Latin' elements of the texts. For *Solomon and Saturn I*, Menner sees little retention of earlier Solomonic legends, locating in the mention of runic letters what he calls 'Germano-Christian transformation of the Oriental legends'.⁵⁵ While Menner still reads Solomon as portraying a 'magician' in the poem, he notes that the Old Testament king has assumed a Christian role. But in counterpart to this Christian figure is the presence of the pagan magic of the runes. As Menner reads it, 'the native superstition of the pagan English has been pressed into the service of Christianity, just as has the persistent Oriental tradition of King Solomon's power over demons'.⁵⁶ For *Solomon and Saturn II*, however, there is a much different mixture of elements, a combination of 'patristic and Germanic literature'.⁵⁷ Thus Menner traces the genealogy of the second dialogue through Platonic and patristic dialogues, though this narrative is shaped as a kind of devolution. *Solomon and*

⁵³ Ibid., 24–5.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 25 (emphasis added).

⁵⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 53.

Saturn II's other line of descent is Germanic – the riddle contests of heroes and gods.

Into the blending of these two forms, dialogue and riddle, come the three elements – Oriental, Christian, and Germanic. Locating the Oriental elements in Jewish legend, Menner is especially interested in reading the *Vasa mortis* passage as descending from a legend of Solomon binding a demon. From this starting point Menner connects to these legends references to the Philistines, the Tower of Babel, and Nimrod, among others. The poem is, he says, 'full of details directly traceable to its Oriental origin'.⁵⁸ To its Germanic heritage, the poem owes its themes, particularly to its concern with Wyrd and its extensive use of riddles and gnomic reflection. Christian material in the poem includes the Fall of Lucifer, Doomsday, Heavenly Jerusalem, and the discussion of the guardian angel. All the other elements are subsumed in its Christian viewpoint. Menner's concluding gesture directly addresses the problem at hand: the question of source, method, theory and practice. He writes 'though here and there a story or observation may strike us, who know their origins, as merely curious, or crude, or inconsistent in tone with other parts of the poem, the diversity of the sources was not so obvious to the poet's contemporaries as to us'.⁵⁹

Although he is not always consistent about it, Menner distinguishes between 'origin' and 'source' at several points in his introduction. Origins are remote; sources tangible. I would argue that this distinction is played out more rigorously in the very structure of his book. His Introduction offers us two things: the historical fantasy of remote origins, clearly influenced by the orientalism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the German nationalism of early philology; it also offers us (though not labelled as such) a *grand récit*, presuming to function doubly as a literary history and a heuristic for locating sources for the text. But the textual notes contain a very different kind of information. There the great majority of information, textual commentary and suggestions for sources, lies in Latin commentary: the Vulgate and apocrypha, the Fathers, dialogues and riddles; and secondarily references to Celtic and Germanic lore. The Introduction makes the grand historical gesture in the spirit (though not the letter) of Kemble. The notes, however, offer quite another vision of the stuff of historical scholarship. Of the 505 lines of the combined texts, Menner glosses only seven with 'oriental' explanations: 11, 13, 136, 180, 203, 208, 211, 265.⁶⁰ What explanation can be offered for a

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 69–70.

⁶⁰ Compare *The Anglo-Saxon minor poems*, ed. Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon poetic records, vol. vi (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1942), who barely mentions 'oriental' material. See Aarsleff, 'Scholarship and ideology', 98–100, on the nineteenth-century belief that the plot-lines of the fabliaux ultimately derived from India.

difference of this magnitude? The very structure of the book is a dissociation of origins from sources (as the edited text separates the historical fantasy of the Introduction from the textual commentary which follows). This distinction is the more impressive because it happens in spite of Menner's overt heuristic. I would suggest that Menner, in fact if not in theory, distinguished between the two projects: the search for origins and the search for sources. As much as anything else, this practical distinction marks the remaking of 'philology' as a method separable from the presuppositions of its own historical origins. His practice speaks more eloquently than his theory.

With this analysis of Kemble and Menner behind us, the difficulty with Frantzen's conflation of 'origin' and 'source' should be clear. The mapping of source work as an enterprise on the 'desire for origins' involves a crucial methodological error which threatens to vitiate the strength of his critique. From the perspective of its historical narrative, his account of Anglo-Saxon studies is as evolutionary as the mode of romantic history he critiques. Its error is genealogical, since it reads the current study of sources as the inevitable product of the source work conceived and undertaken in the nineteenth century.⁶¹ In analytical terms, 'origin' functions as a magical concept, somehow self-identical and beyond the touch of history throughout its use in the early nineteenth century and the late twentieth.⁶² In order for Frantzen to conflate 'origin' with 'source' (a fundamental mistake in my view) he must invest in a definition of 'source' which the word (given its use within the Old English community) simply cannot sustain. While the word 'origin' implies a necessary teleology, 'source', in the technical way it is used within the discipline, cannot. It would seem then that there are, actually, two conflations in his account: in identifying the pursuit of sources with that of origins, he produces a further conflation of the present with the past, as if the words 'origin' and 'source' (and the practices for which they stand) were privileged to transcend history in a way nothing else can.

⁶¹ Frantzen, *Desire for origins*, 'the most striking change in Anglo-Saxon studies demarcating this period from the earlier part of the century is the replacement of the Germanic, nationalist ideal as an object of the scholarly search for origins with an entirely new point of origin – or, in modern parlance, "source" – for Anglo-Saxon in Latin literary culture. The origins desired in the last century were supposed to exist in the woodlands of Northern Europe; the origins desired by Anglo-Saxon scholars in this century seem to be in Rome, or failing that source, a monastic library in Anglo-Saxon England', 82.

⁶² See especially Frantzen's definition of 'origin': "'Origin" is itself a commonplace word that nevertheless requires definition. I use it to designate that from which a thing or person begins – a source or root, and also a cause. The search for origins is never disinterested; those wishing to trace an idea or tradition to its historical, linguistic, and textual beginnings have always done so with a thesis in mind, and the origin they have found has often been an origin they have produced. Their reasons for going to the source – their desire for origins – is my concern' *Desire for origins*, xii.

Turning now from the question of definition (of origin and source) to the question of theory, broadly construed, my point of departure this time is not an absence but an assumption of closure. And the relatively small volume of research on the *Solomon and Saturn* verse texts in the fifty years since Menner's edition is testimony to the larger community's tacit agreement in that closure. The point in question is most easily illustrated by examining Menner's brilliant technical emendation of 330b. The manuscript reads 'ac sæge me hwæt nærende wæron', and the problem lies squarely in the form *nærende*. Editors have attempted to make sense of this word in various ways (and with varying degrees of failure).⁶³ Menner's elegant emendation preserved *næren* as the subjunctive preterite plural of 'not to be', and emended the following 'd' to an eth. His emendation produced 'næren ðe wæron'. Menner argued, 'I suggest that we have hidden in the question the "shadow" or "light" riddle, which is itself one of a larger group of "Quid est, quod est et non est?" puzzles'.⁶⁴ Menner then goes on to cite two possible parallels: one from the *Disputatio Pippini cum Albino*, where he claims that 'echo' is the answer to the puzzle; and the second from the *Strassburger Rätselbuch*, where the answer to the riddle is the shadow of the sun or of a light.

I should like to claim that Menner's emendation is almost certainly right, but that the hypothesis, the interpretative frame, and ensuing explanation supporting it are almost certainly wrong. That riddles of the type 'quid est, quod est et non est?' circulated in the ninth century is an interesting and initially useful piece of information. Certainly, riddling exchanges were popular literary forms, and various scholars of the poem have pointed to the *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Alvismál* as parallels to demonstrate the 'Germanic' content of the poem.⁶⁵ This 'Germanic' content in turn fitted neatly into the dominant interpretative narrative, which read *Solomon and Saturn II* as the site for the conflict and resolution of various Germanic and Christian elements. The problem with this account, however, is that the riddle itself and its putative answer have no predictive value for the exchange in *Solomon and Saturn II*. That is, the riddle cannot provide a context within which to understand the exchange of questions and answers in the larger

⁶³ The text's first editor, Kemble, *Dialogue* (151), read *nærende* as 'saviours', translating 'But tell me what were the saviours!' As Dobbie notes (ASPR 6, 167), the major difficulty with this reading is the assumption that this Mercian spelling was not levelled to West Saxon when the spelling of *nergend* in the previous half-line was. Grein, the next editor after Kemble, suggested that *nærende* was a present participle of the verb 'not to be'. This is a fascinating suggestion conceptually, whose only difficulty is a practical one – it is grammatically impossible, since the expected form would be **nesende* or perhaps Mercian **næsende* (see Menner, *Poetical dialogues*, p. 134).

⁶⁴ Menner, *Poetical dialogues*, 134.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

context of the passage under examination. The pricetag for using a riddle as model for Solomon's question is no less than our ability to see coherence in the sequence of questions the two wise men ask. I propose a different model – with greater explanatory power – which sees evidence of difficult, even abstruse learning behind the poem. Of course, this too, has a pricetag, and what I may have to trade away is the framework of conflict between the 'Germanic' and the 'Christian'.

My point is this: to seek the answer to Solomon's puzzling question in the riddle format is to cast this difficult and contradictory text in a 'ludic' frame which effectively prevents our seeing its intellectual relationship with a number of learned and technical texts. This is not a difficulty inherent in Menner's philological method nor in his conception of a source. The difficulty lies squarely in the paradoxical power of a theoretical frame to disable at the same time that it enables thought. The riddle provided Menner the form he needed to postulate that *Solomon and Saturn II* showed the interweaving of Classical and Germanic learning. It thus was a choice which both derived from his hypothesis and simultaneously supported it.

My choice of interpretative frame for this vexing line and immediate context which explores light, shadow, being, and nothing is the reflex of a philosophical speculation arising out of a discussion of negative concepts in the circle of Alcuin.⁶⁶ The early ninth-century letter of Fredegisus (a student of Alcuin) concerning the nature of nothing and darkness argues, from a notion that language is veridical, that *nihil*, because it has a name, must actually exist.⁶⁷ For the second prong of his argument, that darkness exists, Fredegisus first turns to Genesis 1.2: '. . . et tenebrae erant super abyssu', asking rhetorically, 'if darkness did not exist, by what warrant is it said that it "was"?'⁶⁸ In this portion of his argument, Fredegisus focuses on the constitutive function of verbs. 'Tenebrae', he says, is the subject of the verse and 'erant' is the declarative verb. The verb functions to declare that 'tenebrae' exist in some manner. By this argument Fredegisus extends to verbs his claims about the signifying force of nouns. Fredegisus is not alone in his interest in the substance of darkness. Scotus Eriugena (I invoke the name with much hesitation) offers a lengthy discussion on how light actually produces shadow, and his discussion indeed answers the question Saturn poses in the lines immediately following our passage. And

⁶⁶ For an account of philosophy during the Carolingian Renaissance see John Marenbon, *From the circle of Alcuin to the school of Auxerre* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981).

⁶⁷ Migne, PL 105, 751–6. For a discussion of the letter of Fredegisus see Marenbon, *Circle of Alcuin*, 63.

⁶⁸ PL 105.753: 'Quae si non erant, qua consequentia dicitur quia erant? Qui dicit tenebras esse, rem constituendo ponit'.

what a different text *Solomon and Saturn II* would become if it were read in the light of the *Periphyseon*.⁶⁹

My treatment here can only begin to cartoon the scope of the problem which these lines of *Solomon and Saturn II* present. I would note (though not as a gesture toward proof) that the ‘riddle’ model, whether by way of *Vafþrúðnismál* or the *Strassburger Rätselbuch*, makes the nouns the freight of the problem, but the problem with ‘næren ðe wæron’ lies in its verbs. While ‘echo’ and ‘shadow’ are both nouns answering the riddle ‘Quid est, quod est et non est?’, such a question is framed in the singular and in the present tense. But the verbs bearing the freight in the Old English passage are unambiguously preterite and plural. If ‘tenebrae’ may answer the question of what is and is not, it is by way of philosophical dispute not intellectual banter. I should like to be able to claim that the narrative my investigation builds for the poem, that *my* theoretical frame, is grounded in a way Menner’s is not, but that is not possible. The choice of frame is at base arbitrary, and the final appeal of its ‘rightness’ is its explanatory power, judged, ultimately, by the consensus of the interpretive community.⁷⁰

I should like at this point to return to the theoretical implications of Frantzen’s points four and five. To be post-modern, for better and for worse, is to be implicated in the crisis of legitimation, whose dimensions Jean-François Lyotard outlined some fifteen years ago.⁷¹ Gestures toward legitimation necessitate a certain self-consciousness about theoretical positions, for the old, assumed groundings are no longer secure. However, being post-modern means not simply to be self-conscious of one’s scholarly positions, but to acknowledge that the objects of our study, our methods of studying them, and the results of our study are all discourses, whose meaning lies not in the object of study but in the systems of discourse themselves.⁷² This double context virtually demands of its practitioners an explicit theoretical frame for the conduct of source work. Nonetheless, some aspects of Frantzen’s last two ‘limitations’ remain puzzling.⁷³ Who

⁶⁹ *Iohannis Scotti Eriugena Periphyseon*, ed. I.P. Sheldon-Williams, Book I, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 7 (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1968), 171 [= *Periphyseon* I.501C].

⁷⁰ See, for example, Hill, *Trial version*, xvii.

⁷¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The post-modern condition*. But see *The differend: phrases in dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988 [orig. publ. as *Le différend*, Paris, 1983]), xiii, where Lyotard describes a further ‘context’: ‘The weariness with regard to “theory”, and the miserable slackening that goes along with it (new this, new that, post-this, post-that, etc.)’.

⁷² See, for example, Hutcheon, *A poetics of postmodernism*, 89.

⁷³ It will be useful to quote the objections in question: ‘Fourth, source scholars have not fully considered the ends to which their research will be put’; and ‘Fifth, rich theoretical issues, themselves the subject of Anglo-Saxon texts, are ignored by the sources projects, which regard them as “thematic” (if they regard them at all)’ (*Desire for origins*, 87 and 88).

have not considered theoretical issues sufficiently or the ends to which this research will be put? It surely cannot be the numerous individual participants in the projects. It takes little bibliographical ingenuity to find explicit statements about the method and limitations of source study: instance Janet Bately on the procedures and limitations of investigating Classical sources for Old English,⁷⁴ or J.E. Cross on the limitations of recensionist editing for source work,⁷⁵ or Thomas D. Hill on the provisional nature of the enterprise.⁷⁶ Such explorations continue – most recently, Joyce Hill's important essay, 'Ælfric and Smaragdus', discusses the grounding assumptions in investigating proximate sources as opposed to ultimate sources.⁷⁷

The charge of 'limitations' then must be levelled at the articulations of the projects themselves, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that these last two 'limitations' privilege certain theoretical issues over others, particularly the question of cultural meaning and conflict and the question of false consciousness. The dimensions of the first question are difficult to pin down, but it would appear that of primary concern is that the current pursuit of Latin sources disables other forms of pursuit.⁷⁸ The charge of false consciousness, however, is quite direct and is leveled at 'the illusion that traditional methods are neutral'.⁷⁹ That these two concerns are closely connected is made clear in Frantzen's suggestion for reforming the discipline along the lines of cultural studies. He argues 'cultural studies . . . requires that we break the taboo of so-called disinterestedness in scholarship and consider the political place of our work; cultural studies require that we confront the history of our discipline'.⁸⁰

The force of the argument that emphasis on Latin sources forecloses other work is largely illusory. On a pragmatic level, source work on Old English and other vernacular cultures is ongoing. On a theoretical level, quite simply, scholarly work outside of a paradigm is impossible. We have known this for a long time, and it has been explicit in discussions of intellectual enterprises at least since Kuhn's

⁷⁴ Janet Bately, 'Evidence for the knowledge of Latin literature in Old English' in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon culture*, ed. Szarmach, 35–51, esp. 37–41.

⁷⁵ J.E. Cross, in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon culture*, ed. Szarmach, 77–101, at 83.

⁷⁶ Hill, *Trial version*, xvii.

⁷⁷ Joyce Hill, 'Ælfric and Smaragdus', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 21 (1992), 203–37 at 209 (on 'patristic bias') and 211.

⁷⁸ Frantzen, *Desire for origins*, 88: 'This failure [i.e. ignoring "rich theoretical issues"] is, I believe, related to a failure to appreciate the importance of theoretical issues in the texts and culture we study. Anglo-Saxon texts present problems of language, interpretation, and translation – not merely as themes, but as large-scale conflicts. Although the sources projects do not pretend to have solved these problems, they do present paradigmatic contexts that invite solutions along predetermined lines . . .'

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 225.

The structure of scientific revolutions.⁸¹ That the paradigm within which the discipline functions has limits, implicit and explicit, goes with the territory. But the proper question to be asked of any paradigm or enabling framework is first ‘how productive is it?’ before asking ‘is it time to replace it?’ The second point on false consciousness is more troubling. It would be a mistake to dismiss this observation as a commonplace on the blindnesses produced by ideology, for underlying this explicit questioning of the possibility of objectivity is a return of the charge that source work is at base positivist. I have contended in this paper that ‘positivist’ is a mistaken label for the source work conducted in Old English, and in what follows I should like to suggest some ways in which the posture of objectivity is separable from the pseudo-science of positivist history.

The current practice of source work is a pragmatic undertaking, which seeks to establish what might be known about texts known to and used by Anglo-Saxon authors.⁸² Unlike the undertakings of earlier generations, this work focuses on proximate sources. Working within that pragmatism, I would like to suggest a source study which cannot be purely objective, but which nonetheless pursues objectivity. Such a suggestion requires redescribing the current procedures and goals of the enterprise. To this end let me sketch some working principles drawn from the material we have been considering:

1. The denomination of a source is always provisional. By this I mean that the suggestion of a source text, pursued within a particular explanatory paradigm, is always offered under the sign ‘as if’. This provisionality is already implicit, for example, in the comments of J.E. Cross on the limitation of manuscript evidence.⁸³ It is explicit in Thomas Hill’s description of the roles of ‘intuitive judgement’, revision, and communal consensus in the acceptance of the identification of a source.⁸⁴

2. The plenitude of interpretation (exploited through various theoretical approaches) is grounded in difference, whose terms are established in the activity of sourcing. However, such a ground forecloses the possibility of a positivist reading of source teleologically – that the source in some ways ‘causes’ the target text,

⁸¹ Thomas D. Kuhn, *The structure of scientific revolutions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), 4.

⁸² As Joyce Hill has phrased it: ‘if we do not identify “sources” as a first step, *and then use this to understand the nature of the compositional dialogue* (which may be “creative” in a modern sense, polemical, interpretative, or whatever, depending on the nature of the material and the author’s agenda), we will never achieve a historically-based understanding of the nature of the texts we are studying’ (private communication, 14 April 1993).

⁸³ See J.E. Cross, ‘Towards the identification of Old English literary ideas – old workings and new seams’, in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon culture*, ed. Szarmach, 77–101, esp. 83–4.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Hill, *Trial version*, xvi–xvii.

or that the target text is 'derived' from it – precisely because difference, not similarity, is the basis for the source relationship.

3. The identification of sources can only be undertaken within an explanatory paradigm of some complexity in whose fabric are necessarily imbricated various ideologies. This paradigm is arbitrary, that is, its only ground is the productiveness of the questions it sets out to answer. By its nature it both enables and disables work within the field. For that part of source work which is directed to developing resources (e.g., *SASLC*, *Fontes*), the posture of objectivity within the paradigm is not merely useful, but desirable. Within this description, objectivity is a goal, however imperfectly attainable, not an illusion.

4. The 'discourse' of source studies is not one discourse, when considered diachronically. As Foucault reminds us, the object of study (in this case 'source') cannot constitute the field of discourse.⁸⁵ Whatever similarity one may find in the elements of method, source study is not self-identical from the nineteenth through the twentieth century.

5. New methodological questions, prompted by the development of interpretation, will continue to pose themselves. Several already framed by the post-modern concern with the limitations of the subjective are pertinent to an historicist examination of sources: to what extent does the notion of an author shape the inquiry into the sources of Old English texts? In what ways is the sources project enabled and disabled by the concept of the fixed or authoritative text? or of a single trans-historical notion of literacy? What is the relationship between source work and type of edition? Such questions may well lead to a rethinking of the investigative paradigm behind current source work.

I return to Descartes and Langlois. Descartes's move towards systematic doubt and the grounding of interpretation in the perceiving subject founded the project of modern Western rationality, but its corollary faith in the sufficiency of mathematical reason and the possibility of a pure objectivity in natural language no longer speaks with its previous authority.⁸⁶ My citation of Langlois too was not innocent. His celebration of method (one which produced a brilliant recovery of much manuscript materials) was predicated on a mistaken understanding of science⁸⁷ and its methodological applicability to the world of natural language. Its notions of finality and the sufficiency of its own paradigm appear painfully wrongheaded to us in our own fin de siècle, but as we

⁸⁵ See Michel Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 32–3.

⁸⁶ See Anthony J. Cascardi, *The subject of modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 35–7.

⁸⁷ Novick, *That noble dream*, 31–40.

rebel against its legacy, we still largely draw on its powerful methods.

Underlying the various approaches to source works taken by Waterhouse, Irvine, and Frantzen is a fundamental assumption that the arena of theoretical discourse is a space of conflict where the historicist discourse represented by source work must be contested and overcome (in a move to dismiss or assimilate it) by the discursive strategies of deconstruction (Waterhouse) or historicist 'archaeology' (variously Frantzen and Irvine). I am prepared to make quite another argument: that these two sorts of discourses (the 'documentary'⁸⁸ heuristic of source work and 'post-modern' critical analysis) are incommensurable, that they proceed from complementary presuppositions, but that they are both necessary for the development of the field when they are understood to work in conjunction. If we remove from source work the misleading label of 'positivism', and redescribe it instead as a set of procedures leading to a 'documentary' approach to textual relationships, we may see in the array of its own productions and in the systems behind its most recent critics an open set of antinomies, among whose number are history and theory, object and subject, fact and interpretation, reason and desire.⁸⁹

I would suggest that the work in Old English is actually produced in the space between two such discourses: the one seeking objectivity, the other grounding itself in the frank admission of subjective desire.⁹⁰ The use of this space is only possible if we recognize that the field is not composed of two independent forms of discourse but rather is constituted by both, each contingent on the other.⁹¹ If we view this interdependency from the perspective of individual work, i.e., discourses as embodied and practised by individuals (imagining for a moment that each form of work *could* be done in absolute separation from the other) we would say that the two discourses were in dialogue with each other, that individuals engaged in source activity constantly interrogated and were

⁸⁸ I adapt this use of 'documentary' from Dominick LaCapra, who makes a useful distinction between the 'documentary' and 'worklike' aspects of a text. (See *Rethinking intellectual history: texts, contexts, language* [Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1983], 30: 'The documentary situates the text in terms of factual or literal dimensions involving reference to empirical reality and conveying information about it. The "worklike" supplements empirical reality by adding to and subtracting from it. It thereby involves dimensions of the text not reducible to the documentary, prominently including the roles of commitment, interpretation and imagination'. See also 31: 'Clearly, the larger questions at issue turn on the relations between documentary and worklike aspects of the text and between the correlative ways of reading it'.

⁸⁹ See, e.g. Cascardi, *Subject of modernity*, 287.

⁹⁰ On the border zone where modes of discourse enter into dispute see Lyotard, *The differend*, 151, §218.

⁹¹ For a useful exploration of a model of dialogue in history see LaCapra, *Rethinking intellectual history*, 62–3.

challenged by those pursuing 'interpretation'. However, if we view the interdependency from the perspective of the larger field (i.e. the interaction of abstracted discourses) we would describe their relationship as dialectical, that is, in a constant process of affirmation, negation and redescription. My goal in this description, quite obviously, is the preservation of the enabling, generative possibilities of formal historicist discourse without giving up the tonic and astringent correctives of an ironic critique.⁹² Their interaction is vital to the sources enterprise by ensuring for it a productive adaptability within the changing field of Anglo-Saxon studies.

⁹² For this use of 'ironic', and on the limitations of ironic critique see Richard Rorty, 'Private irony and liberal hope', in *Contingency, irony, solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 73–95.

