

アングロ・サクソン時代の衣服を表す言葉の一考察 (3)

— 『エクセター・ブック』の「不死鳥」の例—

Poetic Connotations of Clothes in the Anglo-Saxon Period (Part 3):

Examples from *The Phoenix in the Exeter Book* ¹⁾

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要旨

本学紀要第23集(2015)と第50集(2019)の研究ノートで、『エクセター・ブック』の謎詩における衣服を意味する *wæd* と *hrægl* が持つ表象を調査した。その中でも特徴的な意味が鳥の詩に現れていた事実を踏まえ、本論では、同写本の中の長編宗教詩「不死鳥」において、衣服の表象が作品にどのような影響をもたらすかを調査する。

ただし、「不死鳥」という作品は、前半の主人公である鳥が後半の宗教的テーマのアレゴリーとなっているため、不死鳥は鳥として表現されている。従って、衣服を意味する上記2つの語が詩の前半には存在しない。代わりに鳥の「羽」についての描写が多く、それが謎詩では衣服のメタファーとして扱われていると前稿で証明されたため、本論では「羽」の表象を考察することにする。

●キーワード：エクセター・ブック (The Exeter Book) / 不死鳥 (The Phoenix) / 羽 (Feather)

I. Introduction

In previous studies on the usage of the words '*wæd*' and '*hrægl*' in the *Riddles*, the words were determined to be metaphors of clothes in the bird songs.²⁾ They were used to denote the concepts of 'covering', 'protection', 'attire' as well as a simple set of clothes. This discovery led to the question of how these two words are used in other bird songs. Most scholars of Anglo-Saxon literature would agree that *The Phoenix* is the longest and most well-known bird song in the *Exeter Book*. It would, therefore, be practical to examine the usage of '*wæd*' and '*hrægl*' in this bird song and highlight any other metaphors for clothes.

The two words were initially expected to be repeatedly mentioned in this lengthy poem; however, they were surprisingly not mentioned at all. Instead, the word '*feþer*' appears in their place. While the words '*wæd*' and '*hrægl*' were used to represent feathers in the bird songs in the *Riddles*, the word '*feþer*' was the chosen metaphor for clothes in *The Phoenix*.³⁾ Consequently, an examination of the use of the term 'feather' will shed some light on how it specifically connotes a metaphorical

phoenix in the latter half of the poem.⁴⁾ This article aims to research the symbolism of the word '*feþer*' and how it depicts the main character in *The Phoenix*.

II. The Phoenix and Its Metaphor

The Phoenix consists of two main parts. The first half is a story of the phoenix, which probably originated from a Latin text, and the second half is about a popular character in Christianity. What the phoenix symbolises is still unclear and open to further discussion. Some scholars believe that the character in the second half of the story alludes to an exemplary creature of God, while others argue that it could possibly stand for Adam and Eve, Job, or even the ordinary Christian.⁵⁾ This article does not aim to discover the specific meaning of the phoenix, but to unveil the meaning that the word '*feþer*' holds in this poem. Given that the association between man's clothes and bird's feathers is clearly expressed in the *Riddles*, it is likely that the phoenix feathers symbolise a certain attribute of the character in the second half of *The Phoenix*.

III. The Use of 'Feþer' as an Attribute to Describe the Phoenix

The poet of *The Phoenix* tells a story about the imaginary bird through the first half of the poem. Although he mentions the feathers of the phoenix here very often, he mainly focuses on the bird's beauty and strength. Unlike the various meanings attached to the words 'wæd' and 'hrægl' in the *Riddles*, the poet of *The Phoenix* chooses to emphasise the bird's exceptional ability instead. The first emergence of feathers is depicted in line 86a, as follows:

Done wudu weardaþ wundra fæger
fugel feþrum strong, se is Fenix haten. (85-86)⁶⁾

Then lives in the forest the wondrously fair
strong bird by the wings, he is called Phoenix.

Lines 85-86 emphasise the word 'feþer' and surround it with adjectives. The subjective 'bird' is modified by the words 'fair' and 'strong', followed by the instrumental *feþrum* with the modern meaning: 'by the wings'. This translates to: 'The bird (*fugel*) is fair (*fæger*) and strong (*strong*) because of its wings (*feþrum*)'. In other words, the bird's wings make it look beautiful and strong. Here, the wings could be representative of an individual's positive attributes.

Feathers are also mentioned in line 100 alongside the word 'wlonc'. Clark Hall defines *wlonc* as 'stately, splendid, lofty, magnificent, rich' in his dictionary.⁷⁾ The lines below emphasise the bird's excellent ability of flying high in the sky. The structure of the verse is very similar to that of lines 85-86.

Ponne waþum strong
fugel feþrum wlonc on firgenstream
under lyft ofer lagu locað georne
hwonne up cyme eastan gidan
ofer siðne sæ swegles leoma. (99b-103)

Then in flight the strong
stately bird by the wings in the ocean
under the sky over the sea watches eagerly

when that comes up to glide from the east
over the broad sea the light of the sky.

Here, 'feþer' is connected with 'wlonc', which gives the bird in flight an image of spiritual dignity and physical strength. Again, the subject, '*fugel*' (bird), is surrounded by the adjectives '*strong*' (strong) and '*wlonc*' (stately), followed by the instrumental '*feþrum*' (wings) in line 100. The repetition of the notion that a bird's strength comes from its wings is clearly evident here. The poet also introduces the same structure into lines 265-267a. If the phoenix were to be personified in the latter half of the poem, he or she would be the highest and most exemplary of all human beings.

Ponne bið aweaxen wyrtum in gemonge
fugel feþrum deal; feorh bið niwe
geong geofona ful. (265-267a)

When he is raised in the middle of plants
the stately bird by the wings; his life is new
young and full of gifts.

The word '*deal*' (proud) is used to refer to the bird's nature in line 266a.⁸⁾ Given the context of the lines surrounding '*fugel*', it must be important to clarify what the bird is 'proud' of. The half-line 266a clearly indicates that the phoenix is very proud of its wings, which enable it to gather plants for its nest. It is equally delighted to see its renewed wings after its revival from the ashes. This idea is supported by the phrases 'grow in the middle of the plants' and 'the body is new' where the mention of the wings is followed closely by the adjectives '*deal*' (proud) and '*niwe*' (new).⁹⁾

The following sets of lines are where the word 'feþer' appears most frequently in *The Phoenix*. Here, it is associated with the word '*snell*' (swift). The feathers are depicted as swift wings that aid the bird's mobility. The first example can be found in line 123:

swa se haswa fugel
beorht of þæs bearwes beame gewiteð,
fareð feþrum snell flyhte on lyfte,

swinsað ond singeð swegle toheanes. (121b-124)

so the pale-grey and
bright bird out of the tree of the forest flies
the swift bird travels by the wings
in flight in the air
makes melody and sings towards the sky.

The modern translation ‘The swift, pale-grey bird soars across the sky with its mighty wings’ in lines 121b-123 underscores the impressiveness of its flight. The word ‘feathers’ continues to be followed by *snel* in line 347a:

ond for cyning mærað
leofne leodfruman, lædað mid wynnnum
æþelne to eared, oþþæt se anhoga
oðfleogeð feþrum snel þæt him gefylgan ne mæg
drymendra gedryht, þonne duguða wyn
of þisse eorþan tyrf eþel seceð. (344b-349)

and as glorifies the king
the beloved prince, leads with joy
the noble one to home, until the only one
the swift bird flies away by the wings
so that I cannot follow him
the exulting flock, then the joy of throning
the soil of this earth visits the native land.

As the lines above show, ‘*snel*’ is right next to ‘*feþrum*’ in line 347a. The lines express the connection between the feathers and the speed of flight, as indicated by the modern translation: ‘The swift solitary being flies away by the wings’.

The final example consists of a compound word referring to swift wings, which highlights the wings even further.

Þonne swiað he
ond hlyst gefeð, heafde onbrygdeð
þrist þonces gleaw, ond þriwa ascæceð
feþre flyhthwate: fugol bið geswigeð. (142b-145)

Then he is silent

and pays attention, inspires his head
brave and wise of thought, and shakes thrice
swift-flying by the wings: the bird is silent.

In 145a, ‘*feþre*’ (feathers) is followed by ‘*flyhthwate*’ (swift-flight). Here, the poet explicitly affirms that speed of flight is an essential characteristic of the phoenix.

As substantiated by the lines mentioned above, the essence of phoenix’s nature is intrinsically tied with its ability to fly. While the bird’s feathers were associated with a sense of protection, covering, and attire in the bird songs in the *Riddles*, it is interesting to find another symbolism used by the poet of *The Phoenix*, where feathers are associated with completely different descriptions such as ‘fair’, ‘strong’, ‘swift’, ‘stately’, ‘exulting’, and ‘new’. This hints at the possible similarity between the phoenix and the character in the second half of the poem. The feathers suggest one’s attribute just as a set of clothes did in the *Riddles*.

IV. *Feþer* as Attire

There are also cases wherein feathers are depicted as ‘trappings’ or a set of clothes. Lines 239a and 306b are clear instances of them:

ond æfter þon
feþrum gefrætwad swylc he æt frymðe wæs
beorht geblowen. (238b-240a)

and after that
embellishes by the feathers
he was so in the beginning
bright and bloomed.

Is ymb þone sweoran, swylce sunnan hring,
beaga beorhtast brogden feðrum. (305-306)

Around his neck is, such a ring of the sun,
the brightest plumage furnished by feathers.

Feþrum gefrætwad in line 239a means ‘adorned with feathers’, while *brogden feþrum* in line 306b means ‘furnished with feathers’. The poet focuses on the

bird's beauty in these lines and likens its handling of its feathers to a man sprucing up his outfit.

The phrase 'body and feathers (*lic ond feþre*)' can be found in line 205b.

ond ymbseteð utan
in þam leafsceade lic ond feþre
on healfa gehware halgum stencum
ond þam æþelestum eorþan bledum. (204b-207)

and surrounded around
in the leafy shade the body and the feathers
in each side by holy fragrance
and the noblest by the earth's fruits.

In these lines, the poet describes how the bird is surrounded by 'holy fragrance' and 'the earth's fruits'. The feathers appear to allude to the body; the body and the feathers create a poetic phrase that describes the bird's appearance.

This simple use of '*feþer*' as a set of clothes for a bird can also be found in line 380a.

Forgeaf him se meahta moncynnes Fruma
þæt he swa wrætlice weorþan sceolde
eft þæt ilce þæt he ær þon wæs
feþrum bifongen, þeah hine fyr nime. (377-380)

Gave him the power the Creator of mankind
that so wonderfully he should become
again the same that he formerly was
clad in feathers, although the fire took him away.

In line 380a, the phoenix is depicted as being dressed in feathers. The modern English translation of *feþrum bifongen* is 'wearing feathers' and this type of usage of 'feathers' closely corresponds to its connotations in the *Riddles*.

V. The Use of *Feþer* in Metaphors

It is important to note that there are specific instances wherein feathers do not pertain to a physical or external feature. For example, 'a swan's wing' is one

of the most distinctive phrases in Anglo-Saxon poetry. It usually does not refer to a wing itself, but to the distinctive sound of a flying swan. The phrase also appears in *Riddle 5* whose solution, 'swan', is widely accepted, imbuing the lines with an elegiac atmosphere. Only two occurrences of this have been discovered in Anglo-Saxon poetry, and *The Phoenix* is one of them:

ne hearpan hlyn ne hæleþa stefn
ænges on eorþan ne organan,
swegleopres geswin ne swanes feðre
ne ænig þara dreama þe Dryhten gescop
gumum to gliwe in þas geomran woruld. (135-139)

no sound of harp no voice of man
in any way on the earth no organ,
strain of melody no swan's feathers
not any of the sounds the Lord created
for joy of man in this sorrowful world.

In these lines, the poet exclaims that the phoenix's voice is incomparable to any other sound, even to the sound of a flying swan (*swanes feþre*).¹⁰ The half-line 137b follows a typical sentence structure in Old English elegies wherein some lines begin with the word '*ne*' (not).¹¹

VI. Conclusion

In the beginning, the study of the words '*wæd*' and '*hrægl*' in *The Phoenix*, and their roots as metaphors for clothes in Anglo-Saxon poetry was, unfortunately, not very fruitful because neither of the two words was present in the poem. In the *Riddles*, it was evident that such words played a significant role in the rich, creative imagery created by the poet through Anglo-Saxon wordplay. The words allude to 'protection', 'covering', and 'attire' to present a world of riddling imagination.

In *The Phoenix*, however, the word '*feþer*' (feather) was used as a metaphor for clothing. Since clothes and feathers are closely associated in meaning, the contextual definition of the word '*feþer*' in this literary work was further explored. Although the phoenix is a mythical bird, it was personified as the main human character in the second half of the poem. Given that the symbolism of

clothes served as clues to solve the riddles in the *Exeter Book*, it is possible that the symbolism of the phoenix's feathers offers a hint to determine who or what exactly is being described in the second half of the story.

As discussed in this article, a study of the word 'feber' in *The Phoenix* sheds some light on the identification of its protagonist through a few key personal features: beauty, strength, dignity, swiftness, joy, and rebirth. In *The Phoenix*, all these human attributes are mentioned in connection with the phoenix's feathers (or wings). The association between the phoenix and the metaphors of feathers is apparent until the end of the poem, making readers envisage a personified phoenix in all its glory. The question remains: who or what could personify such exceptional values? The most persuasive and acceptable answer would be Jesus Christ, but this requires further research from both a linguistic and literary perspective, and is open to discussion.

NOTES

- 1) I would like to thank Editage (www.editage.jp) for English language editing.
- 2) Naoko Shirai, 'Poetic Connotations of Clothes in the Anglo-Saxon Period (Part 1): Examples from the *Riddles* in the *Exeter Book*', *Journal of Bunka Gakuen University* Vol. 23 (Tokyo: Bunka Gakuen University, 2015) 61-67. Naoko Shirai, 'Poetic Connotations of Clothes in the Anglo-Saxon Period (Part 2): Examples from the *Riddles* in the *Exeter Book*', *Journal of Bunka Gakuen University and Bunka Gakuen Junior College* Vol. 50 (Tokyo: Bunka Gakuen University, 2019) 79-84.
- 3) Shirai, *Poetic Connotations (Part 1)* 62-64, and *Poetic Connotations (Part 2)* 80-83.
- 4) Jesus Christ is one of the solutions to the allegorical meaning of the phoenix, but it has still been controversial among many scholars. For example, N. F. Blake suggests that 'The poet has kept this relationship between the phoenix and the sun because of the allegorical interpretation, for Christ is symbolized by the sun and the blessed by the phoenix'. He thinks that the phoenix does not symbolise Christ, but that the sun does.
- 5) Craig Williamson, trans., *The Complete Old English Poems* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017) 412-413.
- 6) N. F. Blake, ed., *The Phoenix* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990). All of the following citations of *The Phoenix* are attributed to this edition.
- 7) J. R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960). He prefers the spelling *wlanc* to *wlonc*.
- 8) Hall provides several examples of translation to *deal*: proud, exulting, bold, renowned (under the index *deall*). Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 83.
- 9) Blake introduces the most widespread story of the phoenix in Europe, saying 'This account states that the phoenix is a bird which lives for a long time and then at its appointed hour it flies to Heliopolis where it dies, is reborn, and begins a new life. The characteristic elements of this version are the construction of a nest of perfume and aromatic woods, the spontaneous combustion of the nest after the phoenix's death, and the phoenix's song, which is often a type of funeral song.' Blake, *The Phoenix*, 12.
- 10) Although Williamson discusses several critiques on this phrase, he himself seems sceptical about the possibility that the swan's whistling sound in flight could have been a shared tradition in Old English literature. Craig Williamson, *The Old English Riddles of the 'Exeter Book'* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977) 151-152.
- 11) See *The Seafarer*, lines 40-46, as well as *The Wanderer*, lines 66-69.

