

The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry

Ideas about the human mind are culturally specific and over time vary in form and prominence. The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry presents the first extensive exploration of Anglo-Saxon beliefs about the mind and how these views informed Old English poetry. It identifies in this poetry a particular cultural focus on the mental world and formulates a multivalent model of the mind behind it, as the seat of emotions, the site of temptation, the container of knowledge, and a heroic weapon. The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry treats a wide range of Old English literary genres (in the context of their Latin sources and analogues where applicable) in order to discover how ideas about the mind shape the narrative, didactic, and linguistic design of poetic discourse. Particular attention is paid to the rich and slippery vernacular vocabulary for the mind which suggests a special interest in the subject in Old English poetry. The book argues that Anglo-Saxon poets were acutely conscious of mental functions and perceived the psychological basis not only of the cognitive world, but also of the emotions and of the spiritual life.

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