

"cynewulf and  
cyneheard" by  
katharina moczko  
essay sample



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## **“ Cynewulf and Cyneheard” By Katharina Moczko Essay Sample**

### 1) The Manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle:

The text ‘ Cynewulf and Cyneheard’ is an excerpt from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, whose manuscripts are currently owned by the British Library in London and the Bodleian Library in Oxford. According to the Website of The University of Calgary the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is one of the most important sources for the history of the British pre-conquest period. It starts with the reign of king Alfred the Great (a. D. 871 - 899) and shows the annual record of the history of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. 1

### 2) Preliminary remarks on Cynewulf and Cyneheard

The text of Cynewulf and Cyneheard differs from the other texts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle by its length and details. The usual texts contain a mere listing of the personal changes in thrones and bishoprics during the years but ‘ Cynewulf and Cyneheard’ displays more complexity, even a narrative-like structure.

These differences in style and form have been speculated to result from a different origin of the text excerpt. It is assumed that it might have been an orally transmitted saga of the traditional storytellers, inserted by the authors of The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle at its rightful place.

When translating the text of “ Cynewulf and Cyneheard” I stumbled across some difficulties. For once Old English has a word order far more freely than modern English, for example the position of the verb, the subject and one or

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more objects. To ease the understanding of the text I therefore chose to show the original text in the first line, while the translation in the second line mainly follows the word order of Modern English syntax. I also added some words in square brackets [] which I thought necessary or helpful for the comprehension of the sentences.

Following each translated passage I will give additional information on important characteristics within the text, such as the appearance of weak and strong verbs within and their place in the Old English verbal paradigm.

For the citation of the Old English original text and its translation I used the chapter on prose texts<sup>2</sup> and the glossary<sup>3</sup> of "A Guide to Old English" by Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson.

## 2) Old English Verbs

In the Old English language verbs are divided in two categories, the weak and the strong verbs.

Strong verbs show a change of the vowel in the conjugational forms of the infinitive, the 1st person preterite, the 3rd person preterite, and the participle. According to the different kinds of vowel changes (gradation) the strong verbs are divided in seven classes. To simplify the categorization of the strong verbs I will not get into detail with the seven strong classes, but only show the vowel gradation of the verbs that appear in the text and their infinitives. The seven strong classes are notated with roman numerals.

There are three classes of weak verbs. The categorization depends on the relationship between the infinitive and the past tense forms by adding a suffix (in modE: learn-ed, walk-ed).