

THE ADVERSARY OR THE DEVIL?:  
SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF *WIPER*-NOUNS IN OLD ENGLISHMARTA SYLWANOWICZ<sup>1</sup> & ANNA WOJTYŚ<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The examination of Old and Middle English religious lexis has attracted attention of many scholars. However, there are hardly any studies that would offer a comprehensive diachronic analysis of the terms denoting ‘Satan/(the)Devil’. The authors of the present study aim to fill this gap by conducting a systematic analysis of early English lexical field of ‘(the) evil spirit’, beginning with the analysis of Old English items that could potentially refer to ‘Satan/(the)Devil’.

This paper discusses *wiper*-nouns in Old English with the aim to verify which of them were applied with reference to ‘(the) evil spirit’. Thus, the texts compiled in the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* have been searched for all the above-listed items. The identification of their uses has allowed us not only to determine the frequency of the words in question but also to specify whether the sense of ‘(the) evil spirit’ was core or peripheral for each lexeme.

Keywords: Old English lexis; *wiper*; agent nouns; (the) Devil; evil spirit; corpus study.

1. Introduction: Earlier studies on the concept of ‘(the) evil spirit’<sup>3</sup>

The majority of works that concentrate on the concept of ‘(the) evil spirit’ are non-linguistic studies which offer a cultural survey of the idea and trace the

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<sup>3</sup> In available literature one can find many references to the main adversary of God, e.g., Satan, Lucifer, Beelzebub, fiend, archdemon, or devil. The last item is used as a general term with reference to ‘evil spirit, wicked person, adversary’ or, when capitalized, it denotes the ‘supreme evil spirit, Satan’ (cf. also HTE categories: Deity (01.17.04) – A devil (01.17.04.05) – The Devil/Satan (01.17.04.05)). Despite different labels or spelling conventions, all denotations of the adversary of God are usually defined as some ‘evil power, spirit’. Therefore, to avoid misunderstandings, in the present study we use the label ‘(the) evil spirit’ since it covers all potential references to what is commonly understood as Satan/Devil.

development of the image of the Devil, Satan or Lucifer from antiquity to the present days. To mention a few, Pagels (1995) focuses on the representation of Satan in the Old and New Testament, i.e., the Jewish and Christian perception of ‘evil’, tracing Christian misconceptions about Satan, which might have led to stigmatization of Jews, pagans, and heretics. Similarly, Russell, in his three-volume work shows how ‘(the) evil spirit’ was portrayed (1) from ancient times to the advent of Christianity (the Devil, 1977), (2) in early Christian tradition (Satan, 1981), and (3) in the Middle Ages (Lucifer, 1984). Interestingly, these studies reveal that Satan was not originally used with reference to any spiritual being but was perceived as an obstacle (especially in the Old Testament and the Jewish tradition), developing later into the notion of ‘enemy/adversary’ and eventually into ‘Satan, devil, evil spirit’. Stanford (1996) explores how people used the Devil to explain all the misfortunes and human suffering.<sup>4</sup>

As regards linguistic studies, there is a striking dearth of publications focusing on the origins and the use of vocabulary employed with reference to ‘(the) evil spirit’. The short list includes an article by Barton (1912), who records the names of fallen angels and demons with a brief explanation of their origin and use, Käsmann’s (1961) examination of selected references to the devil in Early Middle English (1100–1350) writings, and a study by Esquibel & Wojtyś (2012) discussing the use and distribution of two Middle English euphemisms for Satan (*fiend* and *enemy*) in religious prose.

Surprisingly, lexical units denoting ‘(the) evil spirit’ are ignored in works devoted to the religious terminology in the history of English. Łodej (2012), for instance, discusses the semantic development of the terms used with reference to Christian clergy, Newman (2006) deals with the items denoting Christian identities, while Timofeeva (2017) examines the diffusion of three loans (*gospel*, *martyr*, *magister*) in Old English. In her later studies (2018, 2019), she concentrates on the loss and survival of Old English religious vocabulary in Middle English. Even Chase (1988), whose work is a significant contribution to the studies of English religious lexis from the Anglo-Saxon times to the present, omits items denoting beings and places of the supernatural world, i.e., the lexis representing crucial religious domains such as GOD, ANGEL, DEVIL, HEAVEN or HELL. Instead, he focuses on five categories: (i) belief, doctrine, and spirituality, (ii) churches, sects, and religious movements, (iii) the institutional church, (iv) worship, ritual, and practice, and (v) artefacts (Chase 1988: 41).

On account of the above, the ultimate goal of our research is to offer a comprehensive account of the development of Old and Middle English

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<sup>4</sup> The question of the representation of Devil in literature was also addressed in doctoral studies, e.g., Johnson (1993), Dendle (2001), Robertson (2014).

vocabulary referring to the concept of ‘(the) evil spirit’. The present paper addresses one group of such words.

## 2. Aims of the study

Among Old English items used with reference to ‘evil spirit, devil, Satan’, there is a group of words containing *wiper-*, deriving from IE \**wi-* ‘separation, division’ and a comparative suffix \*-*tero-* (OED, *wither*, *adj.* and *adv.*). In the Bosworth–Toller dictionary (B–T), the element *wiper* is identified as a preposition meaning ‘against’ or an adverb ‘against, in opposition’ (B–T, *wiper*, *prep.* *adv.*). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), which classifies it as a prefix, adds two more denotations: ‘in return or compensation, counter-’ and ‘in the opposite direction, back’ (OED, *wither-*, *prefix*). Regardless of its primary function, the element *wiper-* often appeared in combinations with other lexemes, forming, among others, 14 agent nouns (B–T)<sup>5</sup>. Due to the sense of *wiper-*, the majority of such nouns carried the meaning ‘adversary, opponent’ and thus could potentially refer to ‘(the) evil spirit’. Such a hypothesis follows Forsyth’s (1989: 4) explanation that “both the Hebrew word *stn* and the Greek *diabolos* have root meanings similar to that of the English word ‘opponent’ – someone or something in the way, a stumbling block”. Thus, the core meaning of Satan’s name is that of an adversary. These findings are supported by other authors, e.g., Johnson (1993) or Esser (2006), whose studies reveal that “without the mechanism of opposition, there would also be no evil” (Esser 2006: 114). Therefore, it is assumed that all nouns with the sense ‘adversary’ had the potential of appearing with reference to ‘(the) evil spirit’.

The main aim of the present study is to verify which *wiper-*nouns were applied with such a reference. Once those nouns have been singled out, we focus on their frequency and context of use to specify whether the sense of ‘(the) evil spirit’ was core or peripheral for each lexeme. Also, the textual distribution of *wiper-*nouns is examined to reveal if any of the words was confined to either religious or non-religious sources.

The underlying theoretical model of this study is that of prototype semantics, where a prototype is “a typical instance of a category, and other elements are assimilated to the category on the basis of perceived resemblance to the prototype; there are degrees of membership based on degrees of similarity”

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<sup>5</sup> Since the status of the element *wiper-* is uncertain, it seems impossible to determine whether the analysed lexemes are compounds or derived forms. Especially that there are no sufficient criteria that would allow for a clear distinction between the two formations, especially in Old English texts (cf. Sauer 1992: 714). Therefore, in the study all forms are discussed cumulatively.

(Langacker 1987: 371). The membership in the category is determined by following the criteria proposed by Geeraerts (1997: 11), which would allow to present the examined material as a “network of lexemes”, where the central element is surrounded by less typical examples that are not limited by any boundaries, and that reflect different level of prototypicality. Thus, there are items close to the centre, and those that are put in the far end of the category.

### 3. Data

To identify the *wiper*-nouns used with the reference to ‘(the) evil spirit’, first historical dictionaries and thesauri have been consulted. Interestingly, no such sense can be found for the nouns in question in B–T. For the majority of *wiper*-nouns the dictionary provides the sense ‘adversary’, which is assigned to 10 agent nouns: *wiperbersta*, *wiperbreca*, *wiperbroca*, *wipercora*, *wiper-flita*, *wiperling*, *wipersaca*, *wiperwengel*, *wiperwinna*, and *wiper-feohtend*. The remaining four lexemes are explained as carrying different senses: *wipercwida* and *wipersprecend* denoted ‘contradictor’, *wiperbroga* ‘terror caused to an adversary’, while *wiper-crist* meant ‘Antichrist’ (B–T).

Although ignored by B–T, the sense ‘(the) evil spirit’ is listed in the *Thesaurus of Old English* (TOE). In the category THE DEVIL, there are four *wiper*-nouns: *wiperbreca*, *wipermede*, *wiperwearda*, and *wiperwinna*. Note that the list contains two items, *wipermede* and *wiperwearda*, which B–T classifies as adjectives, rather than nouns. They have been included in the analysis, since the data show that both appeared in the nominal function:

- (1a) Ða gyt se **wiðermeda** wordum lærde folc to gefeohte... (*Andreas* (And) 1195)  
‘Then the adversary taught people to fight;...’<sup>6</sup>
- (1b) þa **wiðerwearde** me wraðe hycgeað;... (*The Paris Psalter* (PPs) 139.9)  
‘The adversaries plotted against me;...’

Additionally, TOE lists two *wiper*-nouns in the category of DEMON, DEVIL, HOSTILE SPIRIT, namely *wiperbreca* and *wiperbroga*, the former defined by B–T as ‘adversary’, the latter, surprisingly, as ‘terror caused to an adversary’. Since *wiperbreca* is found in both categories, the total number of items in question listed in TOE is five.

The second thesaurus consulted, the *Historical Thesaurus of English* (HTE), provides two different sets of data depending on the version used. In the one accessed via the OED, out of the five items found in TOE, only *wiperwinna* (in

<sup>6</sup> All translations of Old English passages are by the authors of this paper.

HTE *witherwin*) is listed in the category THE DEVIL and SATAN. This might be due to the fact that *wiperwinna* is recorded with this sense in the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED, *wither-win(e n.)*). Interestingly, on searching the HTE version on the <https://ht.ac.uk/> website, one finds all five TOE nouns under the heading THE DEVIL and SATAN. In addition, one more *wiper*-noun, *withersake* (OE *wipersaca*), is present in HTE in the related category of ENEMY, whereas *witherweard* is treated as an adjective and placed under HOSTILITY.

Although the available sources suggest that only five *wiper*-nouns were used with reference to '(the) evil spirit', the study examines all agent *wiper*-nouns mentioned above in order to verify if there were possibly more items used with that denotation, especially among those with the sense of 'adversary'. Hence, the analysis covers 16 items.

All those have been searched for in the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* (DOEC), which led to the identification of their frequency:

Table 1. The frequency of *wiper*-nouns in the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*

noun	number of records	noun	number of records
<i>wiperwinna</i>	90	<i>wiperflita</i>	3
<i>wiperweard</i>	66 (199)	<i>wipercwida</i>	2
<i>wipersaca</i>	22 (46)	<i>wiperfeohtend</i>	2
<i>wipercoren</i>	20 (29)	<i>wipermede</i>	1 (4)
<i>wiperbreca</i>	16	<i>wiperbroga</i>	1 (2)
<i>wipercora</i>	11	<i>wiperbersta</i>	1
<i>wiperbroca</i>	6	<i>wiper-crist</i>	1
<i>wiperwengel</i>	4	<i>wiperling</i>	1

The numbers in brackets refer to the total frequency of a given item in the DOEC, including uses or senses other than those implying a reference to '(the) evil spirit'. For instance, there are four hits of *wipermede* in the examined material: two records are adjectives 'contrary-minded, perverse', one is a noun used with the sense 'wrath, anger', and one with the sense 'adversary'. That last record is the only potential reference to '(the) evil spirit', hence, this example is taken into consideration in the present study. The same rule applies to *wiperbroga*, whose one occurrence is an abstract noun denoting 'terror caused to an adversary', as well as *wipercoren* (20 out of total 29 records) and *wiperweard* (66 out of total 199 records), both of which often functioned as adjectives. In the case of *wipersaca*, which is always recorded as an agent noun, twenty four items have been eliminated as they are not attested with the sense 'adversary'.

The numbers in Table 1 reveal that the most frequent words are *wiperwinna*, and *wiperweard* with 90 and 66 relevant records, respectively. They are followed by four items with the frequency ranging from 22 down to 11 records (*wipersaca*, *wipercoren*, *wiperebrea*, *wipercora*), and five items recorded fewer than 10 times (*wiperbroca*, *wiperwengel*, *wiperflita*, *wipercwida*, and *wiperfehtend*). The remaining five words (*wipermede*, *wiperbroga*, *wiperbersta*, *wiper-crist*, *wiperling*) have single occurrences in the DOEC.

Two of the least frequent items, *wiperbersta* and *wipercrist*, turned to be dubious. According to Robinson (1972: 370), *wiperbersta* is a ghost word. He notes that Kemble, the editor of the *Anglo-Saxon Dialogues of Salomon and Saturn* (1845–1848), misread the form present in the manuscript, *wiperebrea*, as *wiperbresta*. This mistake resulted in the inclusion of the word in the dictionaries, including B–T. The second questionable item is *wiper-crist*. According to B–T, the term is a translation of Lat. *pseudochristi* ‘Antichrist’ (B–T, *wiper-crist*, es; m.), with the sole attestation found in the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, cf.:

(2) **Wiðer** † leáso cristo *pseudochristi*, (Mk. Skt. Lind. 13, 22)

Even in this version of the line, it is clear that *wiðer* is used in a multiple gloss together with *leaso* ‘false’ before the word *cristo*. The manuscript shows that both *wiðer* and *leaso* are placed above Lat. *pseudo* with the following word, *cristo*, glossing *christi*, cf.:

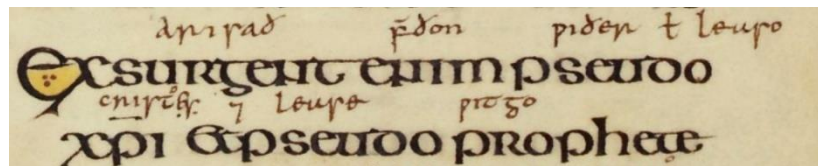


Figure 1. Gloss to Gospel of Mark (13.22) in the *Lindisfarne Gospels*. Image from <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/> (©The British Library Board)

Thus, if one assumes the existence of the word *wiper-crist*, one should also accept *leaso cristo* as another OE term for ‘Antichrist’, especially that the adjective *leaso* is, in fact, closer to the noun *cristo* than the element *wiper*. However, *leaso cristo* is listed neither in B–T nor any other available dictionary. Hence, since it is unclear whether *wiðer* and *cristo* form one lexical unit, the word has been eliminated from the present study.

Taking into account the discussion above, the final selection of *wiper*-nouns includes 14 items. All these nouns are recorded in the dictionaries and the examined sources with the sense ‘adversary’, and as such could refer to ‘(the) evil spirit’.

4. *Wiþer*-nouns with the sense ‘adversary’

As mentioned before, presumably due to the semantic content of the element *wiþer*, most identified lexemes appear in the data with the sense of ‘adversary’. From the 14 lexemes under scrutiny, merely two are never attested with such a sense, i.e., *wiþercwida* and *wiþercoren*. The former is an item of a very low frequency, the whole Old English material contains only two tokens, both of which are found in collections of glosses:

- (3a) *Rebellio wiðercwyda*. (*Latin-Old English Glossaries* (AntGl 2 (Kindschi)) 209)
- (3b) *incredulus negator infidelis contradictor unileaful wiþercwyda*. (Aldhelm, *De laude virginittatis* (prose) and *Epistola ad Ehfriðum* (AldV 1 (Goossens)) 1873)

As can be seen, the word glosses Lat. *rebellio* ‘rebel’ and *negator/contradictor* ‘denier/contradictor’. Because of the specificity of those texts, in which the words appear without any context, it is impossible to determine whether the sense of ‘rebel’ or ‘contradictor’ could approach that of ‘adversary’ or not, hence the decision has been made to ignore the word. The second item, *wiþercoren*, is much less problematic since in all of its 20 occurrences the context clarifies the sense of the word, which is that of ‘reprobate, rejected, wicked’:

- (4a) An endebyrdnyss bið ðæra **wiðercorenra** þa ðe cyððe hæfdon to gode: ac hi ne beedon heora geleafan mid godes bebodum:... (*Paul* (ÆCHom I, 27) 406.185)  
 ‘One class will be that of the rejected ones that had the knowledge of God: but they did not practice their faith with God’s commandments:...’
- (4b) ... and standað ða godan men on Godes swiðran hand, and ða **wiðercorenan** on his wynstran hand. (*Sermo de Die Iudicii*: Pope (ÆHOM 19) 130)  
 ‘...and the good men will stand on God’s right hand, and the wicked ones on his left hand.’

i.e., those who have the knowledge of God but did not live according to His commands (4a) and will stand on God’s left hand as opposed to the good ones, who will be on the right (4b).

The remaining 12 items denote ‘adversary’ with various frequency, ranging from 35% to 100% of all occurrences. For two words, *wiþerweard* and *wiþersaca*, the sense ‘adversary’ accounts for less than half of their attestations (44% and 48%, respectively). The former mostly means ‘opposed, depraved (person)’ and ‘Satan/devil’, the latter, i.e., *wiþersaca*, denotes ‘adversary’, ‘apostate’ being its

second frequent sense, and also refers to ‘Antichrist’, ‘rebel’, and ‘prosecutor’. For the next two words, *wipercora* and *wiperbreca*, ‘adversary’ is the prevalent sense (64% and 81%, respectively), although both also have other meanings, which are ‘reprobate’ for *wipercora* and ‘obstinate person’ for *wiperbreca*. The remaining eight nouns always appear with the sense ‘adversary’ in the Old English corpus. Figure 2 below shows the distribution of the words with the sense of ‘adversary’ on the scale from 0 to 100% of all uses:

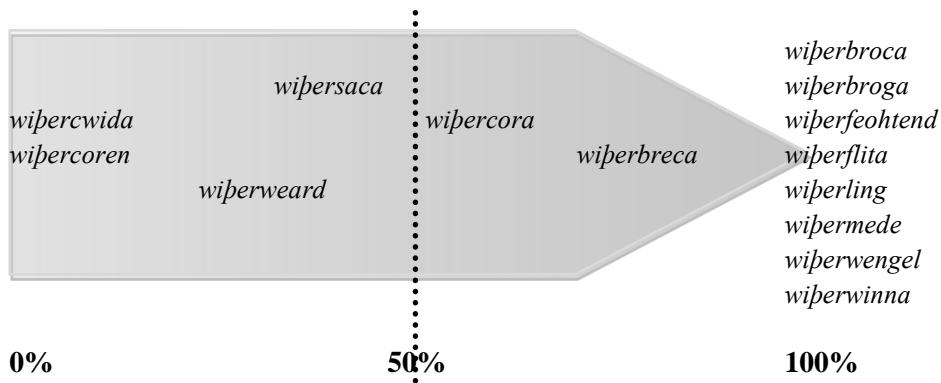


Figure 2. *Wiper*-nouns and the sense of ‘adversary’ in Old English

The semantic field of ‘adversary’ is quite broad and religious references are only a part of it. Hence, the 12 *wiper*-nouns that carried that sense have been further tested to identify those that were indeed found with such an application and those that were not. The ratio of items employed in religious and non-religious sense proved to be five to seven.

#### 4.1. ‘Adversary’ in a non-religious sense

The words that appear with the sense ‘adversary’ with a non-religious reference are *wipercora* (7 tokens), *wiperbroca* (6 tokens), *wiperwengel* (4 tokens), *wiperflita* (3 tokens), *wiperfeohtend* and *wiperbroga* (2 tokens each) as well as *wiperling* (1 token). None of the items has a considerable frequency in the Old English material, the most common word being *wipercora*, identified 11 times in the corpus, with seven uses denoting ‘adversary’, which gives the frequency of merely 3,63 per million words. For the above-listed nouns, the sense of ‘adversary’ is never associated with religion. It covers such facets of ‘adversary’ as e.g., a person opposing a certain idea (5a) or another human being (5b), or a ‘rebel’ violating the rules (5c):



- (5a) Eala, cwæð Orosius, hu lustbærlice tida on ðæm dagum wæron, swa swa þa secgað, þe þæs cristendomes **wiðerflitan** sint,... (*Orosius*, Book 2 (Or 2) 5.48.26)  
‘Oh, said Orosius, how pleasant the times were in those days, as say those that are the adversaries of Christianity,...’
- (5b) Forðon ðu sloge alle **wiðerbrocan** me butan intingan toeð synfulra ðu forðræstes. (Psalms (PsGlA) 3.6)  
‘Indeed, you struck all those opposing me without any cause and you broke sinners’ teeth.’
- (5c) þæt gif he elles gedyrstlæcð na sacerdos ac **hwiðercora** ac beo gemedemod. (*Benedict, Rule* (BenRGI) 62.104.4)  
‘That if he dares to do otherwise he will be judged not a priest but a rebel.’

The rarest item in this group, *wiperling*, is a perfect example illustrating synonymy between numerous *wiper*-nouns which could be used in identical contexts. Its sole instance is found in MS Trinity College R.17.1 of the *Canticles of the Psalter*, where it glosses the Latin form *adversarios* (6a). However, in other manuscripts containing the same text, the word is translated twice each with *wiperwengel* (6b) and *wiperwinna* (6c), as well as once each with *wiperbroca* (6d) and *wiperbreca* (6e):

- (6a) Et per multitudinem maiestatis tuae contrivisti adversarios...  
& þurh menege megen þin þu forbrittest **wiperlingas**... (*Canticles of the Psalter*, Cambridge, Trinity College, MS. R.17.1 (PsCaE (Liles) 5(4).7)  
‘And in the multitude of your glory you smashed adversaries...’
- (6b) & þurh menego megen þu forbryttest **wiperwenglas**... (*Canticles of the Psalter*, London, British Library, MS. Royal 2 B.V (PsCaD (Roeder) 5(4).7)
- (6c) & on mænigfealdnyse wuldres þines þu aledest **wiðerwinnan**... (*Canticles of the Psalter*, London, Lambeth Palace, MS. 427 (PsCaI (Lindelöf) 5(4).7)
- (6d) & ðorh mengu megenðrymmes ðines ðu forðræstes **wiðerbrocan**... (*Canticles of the Psalter*, London, British Library, MS. Cotton Vespasian A.I (PsCaA 1 (Kuhn) 5.8)
- (6e) & þurh mænigeo mægynþrymmys þinys þu forþræstyst **wiðyrbreacan**... (*Canticles of the Psalter*, Cambridge, University Library, MS. Ff.1.23 (PsCaC (Wildhagen) 5(4).7)

With so many more frequent *wiper*-items that could be employed to denote ‘adversary’, it is difficult to suggest a reason for the usage of *wiperling* in MS Trinity College R.17.1. Especially that on rejecting the above-mentioned

instances of *wiperbersta* and *wiper-crist* as most doubtful, *wiperling* becomes the only *hapax legomenon* in the analysis.

#### 4.2. ‘Adversary’ referring to ‘(the) evil spirit’

The data reveal four *wiper*-nouns (*wiperwinna*, *wiperweard*, *wipermede*, and *wipersaca*) that are employed in the Old English texts with a reference to ‘(the) evil spirit’. Note that those words cannot be claimed to have the sense ‘(the) evil spirit’ but merely that their referent is such, which can be deduced from the context.

The most frequently found item in this group is *wiperwinna*, with 22 tokens (24% of all its uses). In all those cases, the referent is identified due to various hints found in the context, cf.:

- (7a) Beoð eow syfre on bigleofan and soðlice waciað, forþan ðe eower **wiðerwinna**, þæt is se wyrsta deofol, swa swa grymettende leo færð him onbutan, secende gehwær, hwæne he forswelge. (*Homily for the Common of a Confessor* (ÆHomM 11) 46)  
‘Be temperate with food and truly alert, because your adversary, that is the worst devil, like a roaring lion prowls around, searching where and when he will devour.’
- (7b) ...þæt hi be dæle hi gereordodon, and þæt hi wurdon þe geheortran wið þam awyrgedan strangan and þone ealdan wiðerwinnan. (*Seven Sleepers* (LS 34) 217)  
‘...that they took food and refreshments in a great quantity so that they would be heartened against the cursed violent ones and the ancient one.’
- (7c) Þa deofla eft cwædon. ydele spellunge he beeode... Þa wiðerwinnan wurdon ða oferswiðde. þurh ðæs engles gewinne. and ware; (*Feria III in Letania maiore* (ÆCHom II, 22) 192.74–193.91)  
‘The devils again said: “He practiced evil discourse... The adversaries were then overcome through the angel’s fighting and care;”’
- (7d) Crist sylf gefæste XL daga & XL nihta, þurh þæt he oferswiðde þone wiðerwinnan, & him sona englas þenedon. (*Second Sunday in Lent* (HomS 11.2) 110)  
‘Christ fasted 40 days and 40 nights, through that he overcame the adversary and angels immediately recognized him.’

As (7a) shows, the text may contain an explication stating that the adversary meant is the Devil. The clue may also be found in the collocations that *wiperwinna* appears in such as *se ealda wiperwinna* ‘the old/ancient adversary’, as illustrated by (7b), or e.g., *ealles mancynnes wiperwinna* ‘the adversary of all mankind’ ((HomS 49) 137). Naturally, the referent may be deduced from the

synonyms used, as in (7c), where the text explicitly names devils and then refers to them as *wiþerwinnan* ‘adversaries’, or simply from the content, cf. the biblical event of Christ’s fasting on the desert to overcome his adversary in (7d).

Interestingly, in one instance *wiþerwinna* is employed to refer not to ‘evil spirit’ but to God:

- (8) Sathanas þa, þære hellen ealder, andswerede and cwæð, Hwæt tweonest þu of þe? Hwæt ondrædest þu þe þone **Hælend** to onfone, **minne wiðerwinne?** (*Gospel of Nicodemus Homily* (Nic (C)) 245–246)  
 ‘Then Satan, the prince of hell, answered and said: “What do you doubt of yourself? What do you fear for taking hold of your Saviour, my enemy?”’

In *Gospel of Nicodemus Homily* (MS Cotton Vespasian D.XIV), Satan asks “Why do you doubt yourself? Why are you afraid of taking hold of Jesus, my adversary?”. This usage may serve as a piece of evidence in favour of the fact that *wiþerwinna* did not belong to the semantic field of ‘(the) evil spirit’, but rather as the word denoting ‘adversary’ could easily be employed with such reference.

The other three items in this group, *wiþerwearda*, *wiþermede*, and *wiþersaca*, refer to ‘(the) evil spirit’ less frequently: there are seven such tokens for the first and single instances of the other two items. Similarly to *wiþerwinna*, those numbers refer only to instances in which the referent becomes obvious from the context.

- (9a) Ðæt **deofol** hine þa genam þridan siþe,... Hælend him ondswerede & cwæþ, Ga þu onbæcling, **wiþerwearda**; (*First Sunday in Lent* (HomS 17) 13–17)  
 ‘That devil took possession of him for the third time,... The Saviour answered him and said: “Go behind, adversary;”’
- (9b) & his gear geseleð **wælhreowum**, se se ðe in yfelra & **wiðerweardra** onwald forlæt ða hwile his lifes? (*Cura Pastoralis* (CP) 36.249.24)  
 ‘and who gives his years to the cruel one, who gives to the power of evil adversary the time of his life?’

In the case of *wiþerwearda*, it is the presence of synonyms that help identify the referent, since all relevant passages contain *deofol*, as exemplified by (9a), with the sole exception of (9b), where the word *wælhreow* ‘cruel’ is used.

The noun is also found in the *Durham Ritual*, where it twice appears in the phrase *ðe wiðirworda god diul* ‘the adversary of God, devil’, which, surprisingly, in both instances glosses Lat. *Asmodeus demon*, cf.:

- (10a) ... in hac messe operatur sed sicut **asmadeus demon** qui fugitiuus est...  
 ... in ðissvm hrippe gewyrce ah svæ **se wiðirwearda god diul** se ðe  
 aflemed is... (Liturgical Texts, *Durham Ritual* (DurRitGl 2 (Thomp-  
 Lind)) 146.16)  
 ‘...in this reaping (mass) works like demon Asmadeus who is a fugitive’
- (10b) ... diaboli et uolatilia sicut fugit **asmadeus demon** qui fugitiuus est...  
 ... diables & flegendo svæ gefleg **ðe wiðirworda god diul** se ðe gefleme  
 is... (Liturgical Texts, *Durham Ritual* (DurRitGl 2 (Thomp-Lind)) 147.4)  
 ‘...devils and fugitives like demon Asmadeus who is a fugitive’

On consulting the manuscripts, one finds the phrase *se wiðirwearda god* placed directly above the proper name Asmadeus:

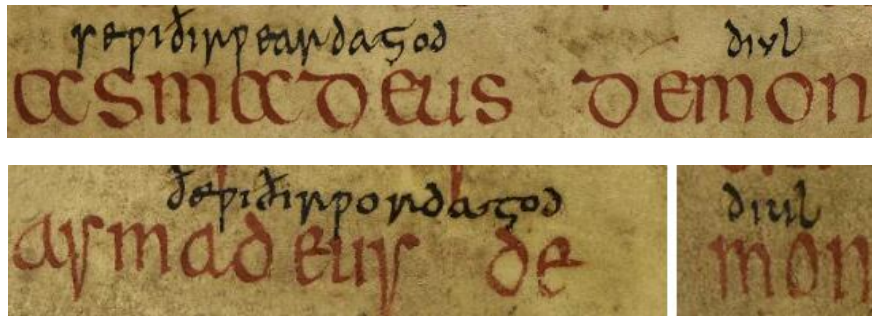


Figure 3. Gloss to the *Durham Ritual*. (© Durham Priory Library Project CC-BY-NC 4.0.)

Naturally, this cannot be interpreted as an equivalent of the name, it rather functions as an explanation of the role of Asmadeus, i.e., ‘the adversary of God’.

As mentioned above, the remaining two items, *wiþermede* and *wiþersaca*, have only one instance each:

- (11a) ...ond þe syððan a <Satan> nemdon, ða ðe dryhtnes a deman cuðon. Ða gyt **se wiðermeda** wordum lærde folc to gefeohte, feondes cræfte:....  
 (*Andreas* (And) 1190–1195)  
 ‘...And called you a Satan, those that knew how to value the Lord’s law. Then the adversary with devil’s power taught people to fight;...’
- (11b) ...& ateowodnysse þæs awyrgoden **Antecristes** tocyme, ... þæt is **se wiðersace & se deofol** þe æt frymðe wið Godes gesceafte gewann,... (*The Coming of Antichrist* (Notes 21 (Warn)) 7)  
 ‘... and manifestation of the accursed Antichrist’s coming, ... that is the adversary and the devil, who at the beginning fought against God’s creation,...’

Example (11a) is the sole instance of *wiþermede* used in the nominal function in the Old English material. The passage is about the creature that was thrown into darkness in chains and, since then, has been called Satan, the ‘adversary’ that taught people fiendish craft. The last item, *wiþersaca*, is the only one in that group that pertains to Antichrist (11b), who is described as “the adversary and the devil”.<sup>7</sup> Although in the Bible the idea of Antichrist is often unclear, as the figure is depicted as “the Beast” (Revelation to John 11:7, 13:1), “the man of sin” or “son of perdition” (II Thessalonians 2:1–12), in the Middle Ages, Antichrist was often viewed as an incarnation/son of Satan that would come in the end of days (cf. Russell 1984: 154; Dendle 2001: 15). This belief may have been partly influenced by a 10<sup>th</sup> century treatise written by a French Benedictine monk, Adso of Montier-en-Der, whose work became a standard reference work on Antichrist (*Britannica*, s.v. *Adso of Montier-en-Der*). Adso describes Antichrist, among others, as “the son of devil” (McGinn 1979). Therefore, the noun *wiþersaca* should be treated as an item referring to ‘(the) evil spirit’.

#### 4.3. ‘Adversary’ or ‘(the) evil spirit’?

After the discussion of items that referred to ‘(the) evil spirit’, the study moves to present those that could indeed have that sense in Old English, which can be said about merely two items. Such an inference is based exclusively on the fact that those words are employed in glosses for the name Satan employed in Latin.

The first word is *wiþerweard*, which possibly carries the sense ‘(the) evil spirit’ in 15 cases (23% of all its nominal uses). All those tokens are employed in glosses to the *Lindisfarne Gospels* and the *Rushworth Gospels*, as exemplified by (12ab):

- (12a) Intrauit autem satanas in iudam qui uocatur scarioth...  
 ‘Then the adversary entered Judas who is called Scarioth...’ ðonne **se wiðerworda** in iudas seðe geceged is <scarioth>... (*The Lindisfarne Gospels* (Lk) (LkGl (Li)) 22.3)
- (12b) Intrauit autem satanas in iudam qui cognominatur scarioth...  
 ðonne **ðe wiðerworda** in iudeas seðe giceged is scariothisca... (*The Rushworth Gospels* (Lk) (LkGl (Ru)) 22.3)

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<sup>7</sup> In DOEC there are six other records of *wiþersaca* with reference to Antichrist. However, a close examination of the material has revealed that all these instances refer to a human being and not ‘(the) evil spirit’, e.g., Simon Magus, who is “often seen as a type of Antichrist. Both Simon and Antichrist are magicians who claim to be God and attempt to prove their divinity by working signs and wonders” (Lionaros 2010: 65).

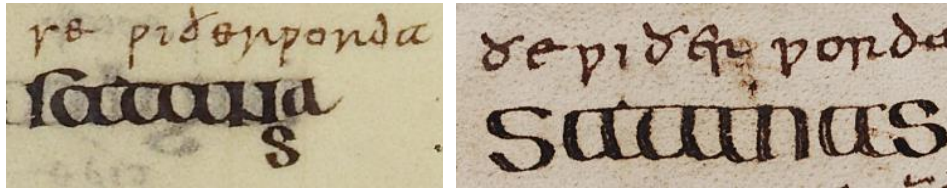


Figure 4. OE *wiperweard* glossing Lat. *satanas* in the Gospel of Luke (22.3) in the *Lindisfarne Gospels* (left) and the *Rushworth Gospels* (right). Images from <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/> (© Bodleian Library CC-BY-NC 4.0.) and <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/> (© The British Library Board)

Examples like (12ab) above seem to suggest that *wiperweard* was treated as a native equivalent of Lat. *satanas*, which would, in turn, lead to the conclusion that the Old English item indeed denoted ‘Satan’. Still, even in the above-mentioned collections of glosses, one may find pieces of evidence questioning such a straightforward relation between Lat. *satanas* and OE *wiperweard*, cf.:

- (13) ...quomodo potest satanas satanan eicere  
 ...huu mæge **ðe wiðerword ðone wiðerwearda** fordrifa ꝛ huu mæg **ðe diowl ðone diowl** fordrifa. (*The Lindisfarne Gospels* (Mk) (MkGl (Li)) 3.23)  
 ‘...how can Satan drive out Satan? (vel how can the devil drive out the devil?)’

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus’s question “How can Satan drive out Satan?” is rendered in Old English as “huu mæge ðe wiðerword ðone wiðerwearda fordrifa” with *wiperweard* employed for both instances of Lat. *satanas*. However, the scribe provided an alternate version for that question, placed on the margin (cf. Figure 5),

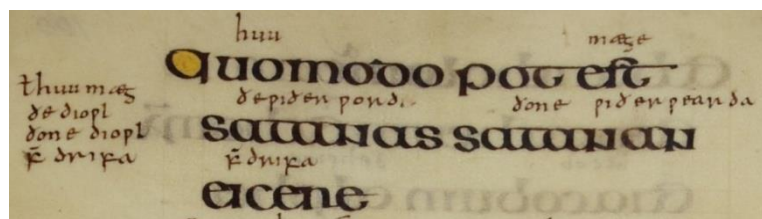


Figure 5. Gloss to the Gospel of Mark (3.23) in the *Lindisfarne Gospels*. Image from <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/> (© The British Library Board)

which reads “huu mæg ðe diowl ðone diowl fordrifa”. This version is obviously added only for the sake of providing *diowl* ‘devil’ as the equivalent for Lat. *satanas*, the rest of the text being identical to the one scribbled above the original Latin text. Hence, it seems that the scribe felt a need to further explain the sense of *satanas* in this passage, as if *wiperweard* were not sufficient or too ambiguous. Interestingly, the *Rushworth Gospels* also employs the word *diowul* in this verse, cf.:

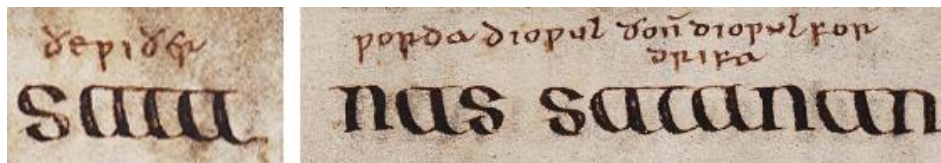


Figure 6. Gloss to the Gospel of Mark (3.23) in the *Rushworth Gospels*. Image from <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/> (© Bodleian Library CC-BY-NC 4.0.)

In the first instance, Satan, in the form *satanas*, is glossed with *ðe wiðerworda diowul*, both the original word and the translation being split into two lines, whereas for the form *satanan*, only *ðone diowul* is used. Note that in both collections, *diowl* is typically employed for Lat. *diabul* or *daemon*.

The other *wiper*-noun that might be claimed to have denoted ‘(the) evil spirit’ is *wiperbreca*. Out of its 16 identified uses, two tokens occur in the *Lindisfarne Gospels* as equivalents of Lat. *satanas*:

- (14) et si **satanas satanan** eicit aduersus se diuisus est...  
 ...gif ðæ **wiðerbraca ðone wiðerbraco** drifes wið 1 betuih him todaeled  
 wæs 1 tosliten is... (*The Lindisfarne Gospels* (Mt) (MtGl (Li)) 12.26)  
 ‘if Satan drives out Satan, he is divided from himself (vel separated vel  
 torn)...’

The passage in (14), which comes from the Gospel of Matthew, is very similar to that found in Mark and quoted as (13) above. Here, however, instead of *wiperweard*, for both instances of Lat. *satanas* the word *wiperbreca* is employed, although, interestingly, the *Rushworth Gospels* repeats the usage of *wiperweard*, the relevant line in that collection being “& gif þonne wiðerweard se wiperweard utweorpeþ wið him seolfum gedæled”. Thus, the two words have the same application and appear in identical contexts. *Wiperweard*, however, is not only more frequent in Old English (66 tokens) than *wiperbreca* (6 tokens), but it also glosses *satanas* more often, the ratio being 15 to 2 tokens.

As the data show, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether any of *wiper*-nouns carried the sense ‘(the) evil spirit’ in Old English. The most likely context is that of glosses with the items appearing as equivalents of Lat. *satanas*. However, even in such a situation one cannot exclude the possibility of the words being employed as euphemisms, since, as seen before, many items carrying the sense of ‘adversary’ were commonly applied to ‘evil forces’. Additionally, it needs to be remembered that the word *satan*, although present in Old English, has a very low frequency in that period and it is never attested in the glosses to the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, while the Rushworth collection employs it only once. Interestingly, the passage in which it is found (Luke 11.18), echoes that quoted as (13) and (14) above, but here the phrase “si autem et satanas satanam iecit” (‘if Satan drives out Satan’) is rendered as “ðe wiðerworda satan awarp in him solfum”, showing that this fragment was quite problematic for the glossator. Hence, it is also likely that the *wiper*-nouns were treated as a substitute for the name that functioned as taboo.

If one assumes such an interpretation, then the tokens serving as glosses to Lat. *satanas* should be counted as denoting ‘adversary’ and not ‘devil, Satan, evil spirit’. This means Figure 2 needs a slight revision:

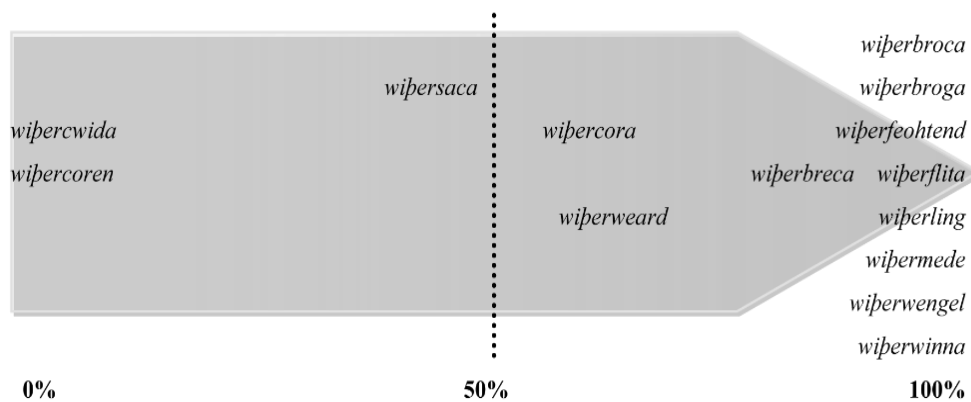


Figure 7. *Wiper*-nouns and the sense of ‘adversary’ in Old English – revised data

The items affected are obviously *wiperweard* and *wiperbreca*, since those appear as equivalents to *satanas* in gospels. The former is now treated as denoting ‘adversary’ in 44 cases (and not 29), which accounts for 67% of all its uses (as opposed to 44% on the previous version of the figure), while the latter means ‘adversary’ in 15 cases (and not 13), which gives 94% of all its uses (vs. 81%).



## 5. Contexts of use

All examined *wiper*-words are typically attested in Old English in religious texts, with the majority of tokens found in homilies, gospels, rules, and psalms. Suffice it to say, in the case of the most frequent item, *wiperwinna*, 67 out of 90 tokens (~75%) are in religious sources. Obviously, this type of textual distribution is closely connected with the sense of the words in question, which typically have religious references denoting adversaries of religion, God, and mankind. Most words examined do not exhibit any restrictions concerning the genres in which they could appear – only the items of very low frequency are limited to one type of text. However, the study clearly shows the importance of glosses and translations: two of the examined items (*wipercwida* and *wiperwengel*) appear exclusively in glossaries, and, more importantly, the only uses that could point to the *wiper*-words (*wiperweard* and *wiperbreca*) having the sense of ‘(the) evil spirit’ are also attested in glosses.

It is worth noting that the data reveal authorial and/or scribal preference for the employment of some items. Half of the tokens of *wiperwinna* are found in the texts associated with Ælfric (mostly homilies and letters). Similarly, *wipersaca* is mainly present in texts by Ælfric and Wulfstan. Additionally, both instances of *wiperflita* come from *Orosius*, where they are used in the same collocation.

## 6. Conclusions

The present paper has investigated the use of *wiper*-nouns in Old English writings with the aim to verify which of the nouns denoted and/or were used with reference to ‘(the) evil spirit’. The analysis of the Old English data shows that four *wiper*-nouns appeared in the texts with such reference. Additionally, two items are found in glosses as equivalents for Lat. *satanas*:

Table 2. *Wiper*-nouns used with reference to ‘(the) evil spirit’ in Old English

item	total frequency	references to ‘(the) evil spirit’	gloss to Lat. <i>satanas</i>
<i>wiperwinna</i>	90	22	
<i>wiperwearda</i>	66 (199)	7	15
<i>wipersaca</i>	22 (46)	1	
<i>wiperbreca</i>	16		2
<i>wipermede</i>	1 (4)	1	

Since all those words had the sense of ‘adversary’, it seems only natural that they were employed to refer to ‘(the) evil spirit’. This, however, seems to be

insufficient to claim that they denoted ‘devil’ or ‘Satan’, as suggested by TOE. As argued above, it is likely that the words such as *wiperwarda* and *wiperbreca* simply functioned as euphemisms for the name Satan avoided in the period. It is interesting to note that the words in question differed considerably in their frequency, which ranged from merely one relevant token (*wipermede*) to 90 (*wiperwinna*), thus showing that the references to ‘(the) evil spirit’ were in no way connected to the rate of occurrence.

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