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The Poetics of Old English

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To James

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Poetics in the wider sense of the word deals with the poetic function not only in poetry, where this function is superimposed upon the other functions of language, but also outside poetry, when some other function is superimposed upon the poetic function.

Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*

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Introduction

> "Here is a verbal contraption. How does it work?"
>
> W.H. Auden, *The Dyer's Hand*, 50

In his 1936 lecture on the state of *Beowulf* criticism, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," J.R.R. Tolkien argued allegorically that there was a mismatch between the priorities of the critics and the priorities of the poet and his poem. First, he alleged, the muse-like "fairy godmothers" in attendance on the poem were missing a key member, Poesis:

> As it set out upon its adventures among the modern scholars, *Beowulf* was christened by Wanley Poesis—*Poeseos Anglo-Saxonicæ egregium exemplum*. But the fairy godmother later invited to superintend its fortunes was Historia. And she brought with her Philologia, Mythologia, Archaeologia, and Laographia.[1] Excellent ladies. But where was the child's name-sake? Poesis was usually forgotten; occasionally admitted by a side-door; sometimes dismissed upon the door-step. (104)

That a crucial perspective was missing from the scholarship laid the preliminary claim for its readmission. A second allegory, that of the tower made of ancient stone, argued that scholars had missed the literary aspects of the text in their determination to mine it for historical and philological evidence. The man in the allegory is the *Beowulf* poet, and the tower is the poem:

> A man inherited a field in which was an accumulation of old stone, part of an older hall. Of the old stone some had already been used in building the house in which he actually lived, not far from the old house of his fathers. Of the rest he took some and built a tower. But his friends coming perceived at once (without troubling to climb the steps) that these stones had formerly belonged to a more ancient building. So 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. Some suspecting a deposit of coal under the soil began to dig for it, and forgot even the stones. They all said: "This tower is most interesting." But they also said (after pushing it over): "What a muddle it is in!" And even the man's own descendants, who might have been expected to consider what he had been about, were heard to murmur: "He is such an odd fellow! Imagine his using these old stones just to build a nonsensical tower! Why did not he restore the old house? He had no sense of proportion." But from the top of that tower the man had been able to look out upon the sea. (105–6)

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[1] *Laographia*, though unattested in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth OED), is an older term for folklore studies.

The characteristically wistful final touch of this story, that the tower had enabled the man to look out on the sea, argues for an aesthetic element in the poem. Tolkien went on in his lecture, later an influential essay, to demonstrate both the structural unity and the aesthetic concerns that were evident in the text and which had been overlooked in the search for other kinds of knowledge. Tolkien thus created a place in Old English studies for the kind of literary criticism Helen Vendler propounds: "The aim of an aesthetic criticism is to describe the art work in such a way that it cannot be confused with any other art work (not an easy task), and to infer from its elements the aesthetic that might generate this unique configuration" (2). Tolkien's basic claim was that criticism on the poem should treat it as a poem, describing its unique contours and aesthetic concerns, and not primarily as a repository of ideology, history, or language.

If *Beowulf* is, in fact, a poem, it should be read as a poem. For Tolkien this implies a set of assumptions about poetry that have, since the decline of New Criticism, been called into question. For instance, unity and internal coherence justify the poem's poetic status and illustrate its literary merit. For other Anglo-Saxonists, the different criteria of metrical regularity and specialized diction license the treatment of a text as a poem, though *Beowulf* has become the standard of "classical Old English verse" in part because Tolkien's defense of the poem's literary (and even lyric) quality remains so compelling. But the uneasy secret of the Old English corpus is that it presents a spectrum rather than a single standard of metrical regularity, which Old English scholars have long dealt with using terms like "rhythmic prose." Wulfstan's homilies are rhythmic and repetitive and evince an "oral style," according to Andy Orchard. Thomas Bredehoft considers Ælfric's style in many homilies a kind of late Old English verse. Many of the laws use rhetorical techniques common to verse and to the homilies just mentioned. Angus McIntosh devised a graded system of "verse-likeness" to account for various concentrations of poetic techniques. Numerous scholars treating texts from the anonymous vernacular homilies (Samantha Zacher) to Alfred's prose translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* (Nicole Guenther Discenza) note the poetic qualities of these texts and challenge traditional distinctions between such prose and canonical verse. The list of genres and sub-genres that have been characterized, often glancingly, as poetic or rhythmic or verse-like could go on and on. There is, in fact, a diversity of poetic phenomena across the Old English corpus.

It is the goal of this book to deal squarely with this very diversity, to characterize the poeticalness that pervades the corpus but that has been difficult to treat critically because our basic categories, though anachronistic, have remained unchallenged. My argument will be that our assumptions about verse and prose both as qualities of texts and as objects for specific reading practices have limited our ability to perceive important aspects of Old English signification. Old English appears not to have recognized a genre of prose at all, rendering instead all of its important documents in an artificed literary register not qualitatively distinct from what we would call poetry. In Old English texts, meaning is encoded poetically and has been neglected when texts have been excluded from poetic consideration.

Given that the Old English corpus is a mere remnant of the literary production (oral and written) of the Anglo-Saxons, the disclosure of an additional level of meaning in the extant texts presents an important opportunity to increase our knowledge.

The poetic quality of literary Old English—a level of meaning encoded in form and associative suggestion—implies the involvement of aesthetics in its signifying processes and thus requires a reading practice capable of handling aesthetic questions in a sustained, rigorous manner. *Aesthetics*, briefly, has a somewhat maligned reputation both academically and in the broader culture. In the eighteenth century, German critics deployed the term in a way that was criticized as precious when it made its way to English audiences: "There has lately grown into use in the arts a silly pedantic term under the name of Æsthetics … it is however one of the metaphysical and useless additions to nomenclature in the arts in which the German writers abound."[2] In the twentieth century, however, notably following Theodor Adorno, *aesthetics* was rehabilitated and given rigor, to the effect that it has come to denote the diverse ways that we register responses to stimuli. We have countless, interrelated emotional, intellectual, physiological, memory-based responses, and the aesthetics of a given stimulus or set of stimuli involve the dynamic of responses as a whole, a kind of gestalt. Helen Vendler seeks to describe a poet's characteristic aesthetic—the ways he or she tends to figure experience in language. W.H. Auden thought of a poet's aesthetic in terms of an idiosyncratic set of "sacred objects" to which he or she felt compelled to respond in precise language—making all poetry a language of praise. For the linguist Roman Jakobson, who posited a set of linguistic functions at work (and at play) in any given message, the dominant function in poetry depends upon the form of the message itself in a way analogous to music and to abstract art. He called this level of signification the "poetic function" of language. If a set of texts can be shown to utilize the poetic function, our account of those texts must attend to their verbal aesthetics—to their form and to what they may not denote but rather associatively suggest.

Poetry and Prose

The major impediment to adequate reckoning with the poetic qualities of the Old English corpus has been the continued reliance on the binary pair of poetry and prose. It is remarkable how seldom this construct is called into question. "What is poetry?" is a perennial conundrum driving advances in theory, art, and even linguistics. But "what is prose?" seems so obvious as not to occur to us at all. In order to approach both of these questions together, as two aspects of the same problem, it will be helpful to review both modern and historical perspectives on poetry as well as the circumstances leading to the verse/prose divide as we know it today.

Poetry, like language, is one of our deeply ingrained behaviors, a process that we consider our own creation but which in many ways exceeds both our control

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[2] Joseph Gwilt, 1842 (qtd in OED). Stephen Greenblatt quotes the excerpt in "Writing as Performance."

and our analytic understanding. We have profound responses to the memorable, paradoxically lyrical and lapidary, abstract and keenly material qualities of poetic language. When a voice takes on a certain tone or when repetitions of words or sounds arrest the ear, we seem to shift into a poetic mode of reception, in which logic may be associative rather than linear and affect is allowed a seat at the table of what counts as meaningful. One of the purest examples of such "intuitive poetry" is found in the counting- and nursery-rhymes everyone learns as a child. These delight the child because of the patterning of their language. The fact that many child rhymes are nonsense poses no problem for the child, since impatience and the demand for transparency, for useful information, are all suspended under the spell of the rhyme. In adult life, in contrast, academic categories and typographical conventions such as verse lineation or the continuous script of prose often lead us to assume generic distinctions and perhaps limit our reception accordingly. For instance, there are poems we might not consider poems were it not for the jagged right margin. Consider the free-verse beginning of James McMichael's "Itinerary," a poem that begins in free verse and the modern American West and ends in blank verse and colonial New England:

> The farmhouses north of Driggs,
> silos for miles along the road saying
> BUTLER or SIOUX. The light saying
> rain coming on, the wind not up yet,
> animals waiting as the front hits
> everything on the high flats, hailstones
> bouncing like rabbits under the sage. (156)

This excerpt is not readily perceived by the ear as poetic and relies on graphic lineation to trigger a poetic reception, which at a basic level might here imply attention to the atmospherics of the description and suspension of impatience at the message's withheld referentiality. We agree, when reading poetically, not to demand, "What's the point?" In fact, because of the poetic mode of reception we engage, the metaphor of the final line provides a "point" of its own.[3]

Ancient commentators entertained different views of the experience of poetic language. For Aristotle, poetic language was identified not by form as is the case with children's rhymes, but by the different performance contexts separating "rhetoric" from "poetry," or creative art generally. Aristotelian rhetoric applies to the sphere of public speaking, the sphere of reality, and has persuasion as its aim. In contrast, poetry involves what is supposed to be a secondary, dependent mimesis of reality, including any created "text" such as music, drama, and poetic verse.

[3] Hailstones belong in such a setting, and so do rabbits. That the two are brought together in one simile creates a totalizing (metaphoric-cum-metonymic) figure of self-similarity that stands in ironic contrast to the lack of metrical similarity structuring the passage. The extreme figure thus stakes a poetic claim for the apparently "free" language here at the outset.

Where poetic art is free to flaunt its artifices, its formal techniques, rhetorical speech must disguise its art in order not to appear disingenuous:

> The form of a prose composition should be neither metrical nor destitute of rhythm. The metrical form destroys the hearer's trust by its artificial appearance and at the same time it diverts his attention […] Prose, then, is to be rhythmical, but not metrical, or it will become not prose but verse. (Aristotle 180)

Again and again in Book III of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle borrows techniques from the *Poetics* to recommend to the prose stylist, but then cautions against using them "as the meat itself" rather than "as the seasoning" (172). The prose writer's task is to "aim at the due mean," and he or she is thus in a difficult spot, more difficult than the poet's, in having to manage this balance between artfulness and seeming artlessness. It resembles in its stylistic dissembling the later, Renaissance posture of *sprezzatura*, or practiced nonchalance.[4]

It is thus not a difference of quality but of degree that separates the self-designatingly artful language of poetry from the self-concealing artfulness of rhetoric. Rhetorical language is irregularly patterned, modestly adorned, whereas poetic language is free to be regular (as in verse) and flamboyant—though not free, according to Aristotle, at least, to detach from reality entirely and create a "second nature" such as the Renaissance imagined. For Philip Sidney, for example, the poem or other work of art is a more autonomous creation, independent of "reality." The poet can create a second nature even surpassing the real one:

> Only the Poet […] lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature: in making things either better then nature bringeth foorth, or quite a new, formes such as never were in nature […]; so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely raunging within the Zodiack of his owne wit. Nature never set foorth the earth in so rich Tapistry as diverse Poets have done […]: her world is brasen, the Poets only deliver a golden.[5]

Thus *poesis* is freed from the contingency of mimesis. It can create entirely new worlds rather than depending upon this one. Yet in other ways Sidney's view of poetry coincides with Aristotle's. For one thing, poetry is not restricted to verse but rather extends to all creative production. And both writers recognize that metrical verse can be used for texts that in no way exemplify poetry.

In the modern era, particularly in the last century and a half, "poetry" has narrowed in scope and now refers to a specific form of verbal art in which every

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[4] Castiglione (*The Book of the Courtier*, 1528) is the famous expositor of *sprezzatura*. See also Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*.

[5] I quote from the electronic text of the Ponsonby edition of 1595. In the absence of consistent pagination, the most reliable way to locate quoted material is by proximity to note numbers in the text. Hence, this quotation may be found between n. 17 and n. 18 in the e-text.

word is seen to matter and whose every formal and thematic feature contributes meaningfully (but not necessarily intentionally) to the significance of the whole, whether negatively (compounding ambiguity or doubt) or positively (building a coherent figure).[6] But prose has suffered a stranger fate. Ask someone to define *prose*, and they will do so negatively: prose is language that lacks the patterning, artfulness, or structure of poetry. Since the late seventeenth century, prose has been ceded to the discourse of science and its utopian ideals of transparency, clarity, precision, and positive referentiality.[7] Stylistically or formally oriented criticism of prose has complied in seeing the language as relatively transparent and treating instead the thematic content in a structural way. For instance, the treatments of prose by structuralists such as Tsvetan Todorov discuss the composition not of the language of the prose work, but rather of the plot or narrative; in this they mirror Levi-Strauss's structural-thematic treatment of myth. Thus the treatments of "structure" in poetry and prose have taken markedly different paths, and it has come about that the language of poetry seems to have significant structure, whereas the language of prose does not. Prose is structured by its thematic content, not by its linguistic apparatus. Critics do employ close-reading techniques of individual passages of prose, but this is usually guided by an axiomatic faith (after psychoanalysis and after Derrida and Saussure) that all human products, including language, are significant—that there is no such thing as a slip of the tongue or a happenstance locution. This faith posits the close reading of structure as a means to reveal the previously hidden and the possibly repressed; it is a negative, or deconstructive method. Definitions of prose seem always to involve concealment or repression. For Aristotle, prose was language which was crafted to conceal its craft, and for science it has become language crafted to efface its own operations entirely in order to reveal empirical facts. Such concealment and effacement have become the objects of much deconstructive and psychoanalytic work over the last century, investigating the kinds of obfuscations language cannot but employ, being the at-once self-referring and self-effacing mechanism that it is.

Ironically, it is the work of positivist linguists that augments the insights of deconstruction to help us understand the slippery dynamics that have long confounded attempts to distinguish between poetry and prose. The difference between poetry and prose is obviously a moving target, linked to history and culture. For instance, in some cultures verse is only recognized when the composition is metrically regular; in modern Anglophone culture, "free verse" counts, too. However, as Roman Jakobson pointed out in the twentieth century, and as linguists working within Jakobsonian paradigms currently surmise, poetic language is not restricted to what a given culture regards as poetry or verse,

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[6] For examples of "negative" reading practices focused on indeterminacy and deconstruction, see Perloff and de Man. For "positive" readings that focus on coherent structure, see Vendler and Jakobson. I hope to show that adequate treatment of Old English texts requires both types of reading, as Old English texts evince both types of meaning.

[7] See Sprat 111–15 and Tilley for the seventeenth century, and Tilley and Strunk for the essentially unchanged modern view of prose (Tilley describes the seventeenth century in admiring terms and thus represents both the historical and the modern view).

and while their definitions of prose may have been inexact, both Aristotle and Sidney understood more of this broader application than we do. Prose from ancient Greek to Old English to Modern English evinces techniques that linguists now suggest are part and parcel of "literary" or poetic language that is itself a subset of language generally. The stakes for this study of Old English literature are high. Old English textual criticism tends to practice formal reading (or close reading) only on texts it considers to be poetry, which is usually more or less metrically regular verse. But as I have suggested, generic distinctions between verse and prose in Old English have led us to limit our readings and miss much of what the texts have to disclose.

Jakobson was the first to develop a comprehensive model of discourse that allowed for multiple registers of language beyond the binary verse/prose pair. He envisioned language as a system made up of hierarchies of constituents, from the level of the discourse (the rendezvous; the profession of love) to the sentence ("O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?") to the phrase ("art thou Romeo") to the word ("Romeo") to the syllable (Ro) to the phoneme (/r/) to the feature (+voice, for instance)—in other words, much as linguists still conceive it.

The structural background for any linguistic event, according to Jakobson, includes an addresser, the one sending the message, and an addressee, the one to whom the message is directed. Between the sender and the receiver are: 1) the "context," or world of referentiality, the things to which signs point (the real tree or the concept of a tree to which *tree* refers); 2) the "message" itself, the linguistic matter uttered; 3) the "contact," or some physical medium allowing the message to be transmitted; and 4) the shared "code," the set of mutual assumptions about what the arbitrary signs mean, without which the message could not be received. Jakobson diagrams the set of factors thus:

	CONTEXT	
ADDRESSER	MESSAGE	ADDRESSEE
	CONTACT	
	CODE	

It is perhaps helpful to clarify the terms in the schema:

	CONTEXT	
	(referents)	
ADDRESSER	MESSAGE	ADDRESSEE
	(what is said)	
	CONTACT	
	(communication channel, e.g., air, paper)	
	CODE	
	(shared assumptions about what the arbitrary signs signify)	

I say to a friend, "I'll call you tomorrow." I am the addresser, she is the addressee. The context between us is the act of calling and the time, tomorrow. The message is the sentence I uttered: "I'll call you tomorrow." If I am talking to my friend face-to-face, our contact is air and proximity. The code we share is English,

which tells us what each word in my sentence means (though of course each word means slightly different things from speaker to speaker, creating tiny discrepancies in common, everyday communication, and larger ones at, for instance, academic conferences and negotiating tables). The code can be more specialized, as well. Teenagers share all kinds of special codes that adults find hard to penetrate, and ethnically and regionally associated dialect groups often use vocabulary, modes of delivery, and politeness norms that differ from those of Standard American English. The code governing the communication between my friend and me, however, is just Standard American English, and the chances are good that my message will be received and decoded, and my friend will be expecting a call tomorrow.[8]

Jakobson's great contribution to this fairly straightforward communication model is his analysis of its structural positions or "factors" not solely in terms of what happens between the addresser and the addressee, as outlined above, but for what the very code is doing, for the verbal dynamics of a given message. Corresponding to each communication factor is a linguistic function:

	REFERENTIAL (context)	
EMOTIVE (addresser)	POETIC (message)	CONATIVE (addressee)
	PHATIC (contact)	
	METALINGUAL (code)	

To schematize language into six functions would appear to rigidify and reduce what we know to be a fluid, dynamic phenomenon, were not these functions always seen to operate in conjunction, in differing admixtures:

> Although we distinguish six basic aspects of language, we could, however, hardly find verbal messages that would fulfill only one function. The diversity lies not in a monopoly of some one of these several functions but in a different hierarchical order of functions. The verbal structure of a message depends primarily on the predominant function. (Jakobson 66)

Any message is dominated or governed by a given function, with the other functions playing various subordinate roles.

Jakobson gives examples of messages governed by each of the different functions. The referential function requires the least explanation, because it designates the role we most commonly ascribe to language: referring to things, or carrying information. Most messages actually involve at least some component of referentiality. The pure interjections are perhaps the only exception.

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[8] As Cynthia Vakareliyska reminds me, another factor in my friend's receipt of the message and subsequent expectation of a call is our shared gender. Women tend to take "I'll call you" as a promise, where men understand the same phrase more phatically, as serving a discourse function in the moment.

The conative function, corresponding to the addressee position, "finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative" (Jakobson 67). Both commands and direct invocations ("Speak!" and "Romeo, Romeo," respectively) emphasize the addressee. Old English *eala*, in addition to its emotive function, often carries vocative force as well, and thus conative function. In *Christ I*, for instance, we see "Eala þu reccend ond þu riht cyning" (l. 18) ["Hail thou ruler and thou rightful king"].

The phatic function, which corresponds to the "contact" position, indicates those

> messages primarily serving to establish, to prolong, or to discontinue communication, to check whether the channel works ('Hello, do you hear me?'), to attract the attention of the interlocutor or to confirm his continued attention ('Are you listening' […]) […] This […] PHATIC function may be displayed by a profuse exchange of ritualized formulas, by entire dialogues with the mere purport of prolonging communication. (Jakobson 68)

The simplest example is the caricature of the two farmers on the porch: "Yep." "Mm-hmm." "Well, then." "Yuh-huh." Such communication affirms the connection between speakers. Old English *Hwæt*, commonly marking the beginning of a text, may belong here.[9]

The metalingual function, corresponding to the "code" position, describes language about language. "Whenever the addresser and/or the addressee need to check up whether they use the same code, speech is focused on the code: it performs a METALINGUAL (i.e., glossing) function […] 'Do you know what I mean?'" (Jakobson 69). Old English translations from Latin and scriptural and patristic exegesis routinely employ the metalingual function in bridging the gap between the Latin source material and their vernacular audiences.

The final function, the poetic, is the most important for the approach to Old English literature that this study suggests. The poetic function corresponds to the "message" position, and "[focuses] on the message for its own sake" (69), or on the word "felt as a word and not a mere representation of the object being named or an outburst of emotion" (378). The poetic function is engaged "when words and their composition, their meaning, their external and inner form, acquire a weight and value of their own instead of referring indifferently to reality" (378). Jakobson's insistence on the poetic function as a natural component of language not restricted to what scholars identify as verse greatly expands the scope of inquiry into poetics, into how language functions as verbal art, allowing us to see past formal generic categories in ways that will enhance our ability as readers to account for just what is going on in Old English texts:

> Any attempt to reduce the sphere of the poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to the poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification. The poetic

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[9] *Hwæt* [lit. "what"] has been translated "Listen," "Hear," and even "So," as in the recent *Beowulf* translation by Seamus Heaney (Heaney, *Beowulf* 3).

> function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent. (69)

Jakobson's formulation insists on the possibility of the poetic operating not only as the primary, determining function of an utterance (as in the case of what we recognize as poetry), but as a subsidiary constituent of an utterance dominated by other functions. Poetry might be everywhere. Indeed, as several examples illustrate, the poetic operates in language from everyday speech to campaign slogans:

> "Why do you always say *Joan and Margery*, yet never *Margery and Joan*? Do you prefer Joan to her twin sister?" "Not at all, it just sounds smoother." In a sequence of two coordinate names, so far as no problems of rank interfere, the precedence of the shorter name suits the speaker, unaccountably for him, as a well-ordered shape for the message. (70)

Jakobson's example illustrates what is sometimes called the "law of increasing members" in English prosody. Lists tend to progress from the word with fewest syllables to the most. Similarly, highlighting phonemic features rather than syllable quantity,

> A girl used to talk about "the horrible Harry." "Why horrible?" "Because I hate him." "But why not *dreadful*, *terrible*, *frightful*, *disgusting*?" "I don't know why, but *horrible* fits him better." Without realizing it, she clung to the poetic device of paronomasia [a naming-pun based on sound similarity, here alliteration]. (70)

Jakobson's treatment of the slogan "I like Ike" illustrates the poetic function of the utilitarian political phrase and demonstrates the interpretive payoff of his mode of analysis:

> The political slogan "I like Ike" /ay layk ayk/, succinctly structured, consists of three monosyllables and counts three diphthongs /ay/, each of them symmetrically followed by one consonantal phoneme, /..l..k..k /. The makeup of the three words presents a variation: no consonantal phonemes in the first word, two around the diphthong in the second, and one final consonant in the third. […] Both cola of the trisyllabic formula "I like /Ike" rhyme with each other, and the second of the two rhyming words is fully included in the first one (echo rhyme), /layk/—/ayk/, a paronomastic image of a feeling which totally envelops its object. Both cola alliterate with each other, and the first of the two alliterating words is included in the second: /ay/—/ayk/, a paronomastic image of the loving subject enveloped by the beloved object. The secondary, poetic function of this campaign slogan reinforces its impressiveness and efficacy. (70)

What all these examples have in common is equivalence, or likeness, or correspondence, which is essential to the poetic function. The poetic function creates patterns—patterns of like initial sounds, of lexical repetition, of rhythmic periodicity, of rhyme. Jakobson's insight is that any feature available to language,

on the phonetic, morphological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, or rhythmic level, can be utilized by the pattern-making, equivalence-obsessed poetic function. Jakobson is careful to emphasize that many times structures and patterns are unconsciously generated, or unintentional. This is true in the case of folk-sayings, which are often highly poetic in structure, and even in the case of poetry by self-identified poets:

> Is it then possible to limit the range of poetic devices? Not in the least; the history of arts attests to their constant mutability. Nor does the *intent* of a device burden art with any strictures. We have only to recall how often the Dadaists and Surrealists let happenstance write their poetry. We have only to realize what pleasure Xlebnikov derived from typographical errors; the typographical error, he once said, is often a first-rate artist. During the Middle Ages, *ignorance* was responsible for the dismemberment of classical statues; today the sculptor does his *own* dismembering, but the result (visual synecdoche) is the same. (369)

All the features of language can be enlisted in service to the poetic function, and the poetic function does not require conscious intent to occur.[10]

Jakobson's mode of analysis invites the reader to regard any level of detail as a potential equivalence token in the service of poetry, and his readings bring to light the poetics of all kinds of discourse. The most exciting aspect of Jakobson's work for literary scholars is that it provides a way for us technically to explain the aesthetic effects of texts—effects which have constituted the elephant in the room that must be ignored by rationalist academic discourse. A prominent scholar recently conceded to me, after strenuously opposing "linguistics" as an approach to literature, that great literature was in fact defined by what he liked. In fact, "linguistics" (as a subset of semiotics) is what can free us from this seemingly indefensible subjectivity in literary judgment. There are structural reasons why we respond to certain texts and not others, and Jakobson's linguistic framework allows us to explore and articulate them. Jakobson's own readings of what he calls "verbal art," or literature, are often overwhelmingly technical and may neglect what one feels is a vital, culturally nuanced semantic component of the text, but even intangible qualities, values, and allusive colorations can be discussed in relation to linguistic form. Though there is a thin tradition at best in Old English studies of grappling with aesthetics, the treatment of the textual features that evoke human responses is under no necessary proscription.

Recent work in linguistics and poetics has carried Jakobson's ideas further to address the problem of the difference between prose and poetry. The poetic function may operate in admixtures with various other discourse functions, not always serving as the dominant function at all (as we saw in the campaign slogan, for instance). But in "verbal art," the poetic function is supposed to be the dominant mode. How is it, then, that there seems to be such a division between the obviously poetic genre of verse, and the negatively defined, non-poetic genre of prose?

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[10] In order to follow this line of reasoning, one does have to recognize some sort of unconscious component of the mind. Without it, the way language speaks *us*, as the postmodern saying goes, becomes absurd and unaccountable, rather than unnerving but undeniable.

If both can be verbal art, as we would want to assert they can, what underlies our intuition that they are somehow distinct? Paul Kiparsky and Kristin Hanson apply the well-known concept of "markedness" to the problem of identifying the specifically literary qualities of literary language—the linguistic characteristics of the poetic function. They assert that a qualitative distinction between poetry and prose is a trick of our mental habit of categorizing in binary terms. The distinction between poetry and prose is one of quantity and regularity, not quality; both genres make use of the features of language to provide the experience of "extraordinary recurrence"—the experience of the poetic function.

For Hanson and Kiparsky, common, everyday speech is the unmarked mode of language, the seemingly transparent, effortless tool that pervades our social lives and affects our cognitive and perceptual faculties in subtle (and still contested) ways. The marked counterpart to unmarked, everyday speech is "literary" language, a mode perceived intuitively by a member of a speech community as incantatory, divine, ceremonial, festal, or some other extra-mundane category. The next level of detail in Hanson and Kiparsky's model corrects for the bias of modern, literate culture, which has assumed prose to be somehow closer to everyday speech than poetry. On the contrary, Hanson and Kiparsky point out that poetry—metrical verse, properly—is the unmarked form of this literary language, being the most clearly, obviously distinguishable from everyday speech. In an oral culture, in particular, metrical language functions as the obvious choice for the encoding of important cultural information, from histories to genealogies to laws. It has artificial structure and is thus easy to memorize and easier not to contaminate with one's familiar speech. Within marked, literary language, then, whose unmarked form is poetic verse, prose represents a marked form, marked by the effort to suppress its patterning and artifice in order to appear not verse-like or not regular. It is clear, in fact, from the seventeenth-century treatises on style (such as Thomas Sprat's diatribe against the use of ornamented speech in his *History of the Royal Society of London*), and from Aristotle's advice in the *Rhetoric* (to fly one's poetic figures under the radar when attempting to persuade—but nonetheless to fly them), that historically distant treatments of non-verse (prose) style do involve the effort of suppression or obfuscation that Hanson and Kiparsky's model suggests they should. Since unmarked literary language is regularly metrical, then anything attempting to be extra-mundane, wrought language but for some reason nonmetrical must actively eschew obvious poetic structure, defining itself against the default setting of regularity. Written literary language, not bound by the medium of speech to create maximally memorable patterns, is free to be more or less regular, but the expectation of any literary text is for patterns to be there. When a culture develops within its literary language a recognized genre of prose, as did the Anglophone world after the Renaissance, the unmarked form of that prose genre will in turn be "no regular patterning," and the marked form will be a high degree of such patterning (poetic devices, metaphors, elevated diction). Such is the case for modern novels, where highly wrought language is noted to be poetic, but where the normal expectation is for relatively transparent language to convey narrative.

For our understanding of the Old English corpus, the implications for the reorientation of prose as marked within a category whose unmarked form is patterning and artifice are substantial. Scholars have noted for two centuries now the uncomfortably poetic quality of much of what was assumed to be prose (that is, not metrically regular verse) in the corpus. What this study will suggest is that there was in Old English no recognized vernacular prose as a separate, marked counterpart to unmarked verse within literary language. The corpus displays everywhere a level of verbal patterning commensurate with a notion of literary language of varying degrees of regularity. The discursive world of the Anglo-Saxons seems still to have been divided between everyday speech on the one hand and "special" speech on the other, comprising classical verse, law codes, riddles, homilies, even entries in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. I do not suggest that there is no difference between the regularity of classical verse and the varied patterning of the other genres, nor that this difference was not recognized (as others have noted, *leoð* ["song"] may have been a term often used to denote regular verse), but rather that there was not yet a separate idea of a literary language that suppressed patterning in order to express its difference. There was no historical climate calling for clarity and plainness and deriding ornamented language to such an extent that patterning had to go underground. There was as yet no need for prosaic language to stand apart from poetic form as more prudent, pious, or methodologically sound. I suggest that there was the traditional form of classical verse, but that there were also other genres, proliferating with the onset of writing. These genres used patterning "naturally" by virtue of its still being perceived as the mark of extra-mundane language—certainly any language fit to be recorded in a book.

I will attempt to show in the chapters that follow the way formal structures in Old English texts encode meaning that contributes to the overall semantic load of the message. That is, the form contributes meaning of its own, and neglecting it in our reading of "prose" leads us to miss information that is there, in a written record already regrettably spotty and diminished. Whereas modern prose may be supposed to suppress linguistic patterns, and its structure therefore may be read for what it suppresses (the negative practices of deconstruction perform this kind of reading), Old English prose structures are highly poetic and may be read for what they are overtly suggesting. While it may be an unsurprising statement to say that Old English prose is highly poetic, it is not a common practice to employ formal close readings in the description and interpretation of Old English prose texts. It is the intention of this study to take the formal structures of Old English prose seriously, that is, not as mere adornments or rhetorical flourishes, but as examples of syntagmatic and associative relationships just as suggestive as those commonly scrutinized and celebrated when found in regular verse.

To emphasize the poetic structures within texts that have heretofore been read as prose is also to suggest that these structures imply a poetic reception of some kind, which radically alters our view of some texts' tone and significance. Seamus Heaney has spoken of poetry's "covenant with the irrational" ("Readings" 9). However informed by recent intellectual movements, Heaney's invocation of the irrational also evokes ancient attitudes toward poetry: "The oldest evidence

for this attitude appears in the Greek notion that when a lyric poet gives voice, 'it is a god that speaks'" (Heaney, *Government of the Tongue* 93). The evidence from Germanic mythology attests to the connection between poetry on the one hand and both irrationality and divinity on the other, in Oðin/Woden's association with poetry (and mead) and in the multiple associations between poetic utterance and madness, conveyed in the etymology of Old English *wod* ["mad, frenzied"]. According to Calvert Watkins, *wod* ultimately derives from Proto-Indo-European **wet-* (the asterisk denotes a reconstructed rather than an attested form) ["to blow, inspire, spiritually arouse"] which also gave rise to OE *Woden* and ON *Oðin*, from Germanic **wod-eno-*, **wod-ono-* ["raging," "mad," "inspired,"] and Latin *vates* ["prophet," "poet,"] from a Celtic source "akin to Old Irish *fáith*, 'seer,'" among other cognate forms (Watkins, *American* 101).

Heaney's emphasis on the irrational origins of poetic expression stands in opposition to consciousness and deliberateness. The irrational is the intuitive and the unconscious, driven not by linear thought but by the associative connections driving what we tend to call (often pejoratively) the imagination. Creativity in any field (not only poetic composition) involves both the rational/conscious, and the irrational/intuitive faculties. Irrationality, or the primary engagement of the unconscious (as opposed to deliberate, conscious action) is at the center of poetic phenomena. The direct line to the unconscious is what makes poetic tools so irresistible for rhetoricians like Aristotle. How do you move human hearts and minds? You persuade them through their own affect, through an act of apprehension that feels like a recognition. And finally, poetry's truth is an associative, imaginative truth fundamental to cognition and fundamentally involving play. Critics of the literature of any historical period should engage texts at the proper level of complexity, recognizing their fundamental slippage, their essential play, their radical ambiguity.

Situating Old English textuality within a non-rationalist, semiotic model of poetic signification allows us to ask questions of the extant texts that have not formally been asked. What are characteristic structures such as ring compositions and paronomastic word pairs conveying (for instance, the legal formulae *bote* […] *gebete* and *gylde* […] *forgelde* ["with compensation … let him compensate"]; the ubiquitous *word and weorc* ["words and deeds"])?[11] Do such structures function consistently throughout the corpus, or differently in different genres (for instance, homilies versus riddles or charms)? Can we describe the play of signs (as Derrida points out, not only linguistic/phonetic signifiers, but other signs and relationships as well)[12] in such a way that we gain interpretive insight into a given text beyond the identification of its sources, analogues, and degree of metrical similarity to *Beowulf*? What are the significant relationships within the text, and what do these convey or enact?

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[11] One example of a structure I consider a ring composition is the opening of Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, which begins and ends on *worold*.

[12] See 27–73, "Linguistics and Grammatology," and note especially p. 44.

Literary interpretation, at least since the early twentieth century, has borne an uneasy relationship to Old English texts. The philologist Eduard Sievers developed his ear for ancient Germanic meters to such a degree that his confident assertions about the tendencies of poetic texts were adopted into Anglophone scholarship as law: only a few Old English metrists today venture beyond Sievers's Five Types of metrical half-lines (Geoffrey Russom and Thomas Bredehoft, prominently), even though these have expanded into scores of variant sub-types, useful mostly to editors and emenders. "Poetics" in Old English has long been dominated by the impulse to explicate (often simply to catalogue) the meter. Form in this philological tradition is largely divorced from questions of content, precluding interpretation as lying outside the proper scope of inquiry.

New Criticism and the decline of philology provided new freedom to find meaning in often fragmentary, radically ambiguous poems, the most famous testament to which is Tolkien's 1936 essay (discussed above), "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics." Other treatments of Old English poems as though they were modern lyrics, however, produced mixed, often forced results. The poems' resistance to interiority and more troubling, their repetitiveness, made them difficult to reconcile with modern expectations of lyric subjectivity and both the Romantic notion of the creative genius and the Modernist imperative of innovation. Literary-minded students of Old English desired to read texts like *Beowulf* and "The Dream of the Rood" as poems, but modern critical apparatus seemed to fit only a small part of the corpus.

A promising and more historicized approach to Old English poems appeared with the introduction of oral-formulaic theory in the 1950s. While Francis Magoun, the first Anglo-Saxonist to adopt Parry and Lord's work on Homeric and Yugoslav epic, surely erred in inferring that a preponderance of formulaic language must indicate that a text originated through oral-formulaic composition (and not, as Larry Benson would retort, through happening to write in formulas), the recognition of the potentially great distance between Anglo-Saxon conceptions of "literature" and ours was a benefit to later work. In the eyes of oral-formulaic theorists, the very aspects of Old English texts that had once vexed their literary interpretation became the key indicators of a newly recognized phenomenon. This was oral as opposed to literate "literary" composition. Or, less strongly, it was some kind of composition (whether written, dictated, or something else) in a style that had origins in orality, where orality indicated a cultural state with a vastly different episteme and aesthetic sensibility. While Magoun's model proved a too-hasty adoption of a construct specific to Balkan *guslars* (not applicable to all oral composers per se), it is now almost universally recognized that the extant texts of the Old English corpus are written artifacts of an originally oral tradition.

Jeff Opland has constructed a necessarily speculative literary history of the Anglo-Saxon oral tradition. Opland divides the Anglo-Saxon period into sensible historical epochs, and brings together what evidence of oral-traditional poetry is available from contemporary classical and medieval writers, accounts in the poetry itself, modern archaeology, and comparative Indo-European philology and

mythology. Since so very little evidence exists of the ephemeral oral tradition (which was tied to the pagan tradition and therefore marginalized by Christian clerics), Opland supplements his work with comparative evidence from the living oral traditions of the Bantu people of southern Africa. Opland points to the work of A.S. Diamond, which draws correlations between a society's economic development and its laws and which notably finds Anglo-Saxon society and Bantu society to resemble one another in these respects. Opland's own work on Xhosa oral poetics finds similarities with Old English poetry (the ethics of warrior culture focused on the chieftain and the prevalence of eulogistic and praise poetry, for instance). The similarities between the poetic traditions of the Xhosa and the Anglo-Saxons combined with the similarities Diamond noted between other aspects of the two societies license Opland to use the Xhosa tradition to "fill in the blanks" where the historical record for the Anglo-Saxon tradition is lacking. The thought experiment of laying out the skeletal evidence of a tradition and then filling in the flesh with imagination, speculative inference, and borrowing from an analogous culture is undoubtedly worthwhile. At the very least it reminds us that the tradition giving rise to the in-many-ways meager textual record was a living, multidimensional phenomenon much more dynamic than we will ever fully appreciate from the textual record alone. However much Opland's commitment to the Xhosa comparison distorts his conclusions—for instance, that the Anglo-Saxon *scop* traditionally performed without a lyre (Xhosa poets strictly separate song from poetry; the Old English evidence fails to motivate that conclusion)—the contribution to our thinking about the Anglo-Saxon tradition has been a vital one, especially as a corrective to work that has tended to imagine Old English literature only in light of the Latin literate tradition.

John Miles Foley has suggested that the nature of oral traditions must lead us to read their various kinds of texts differently from the way we read written texts in our literate tradition. For Foley, "oral texts" can range from actual oral performances to written transcriptions of such performances to what he identifies as "written oral poems"—poems composed in writing but according to the rules and parameters of an oral tradition. The distinguishing characteristic of a living oral tradition is performance, according to Foley: an oral text is one that its tradition destines for utterance rather than inscription. Another defining feature of oral tradition is the proliferation of genres and social uses. Foley's work alerts us to the narrowness of elitist Western literary standards and their canons of "transcendent" (actually, reified) works in fixed written form. Oral traditions, too, produce valuable work—aesthetically interesting, moving work—but their texts are essentially ephemeral. Broadening our field of vision as to what may constitute "literature" and what may be the range of what human beings produce using language is certainly of direct relevance to the present study.

Foley invites us to consider the scale on which oral traditions dwarf literary ones in the scheme of human history and to reorient our reading practices accordingly. This "accordingly" is where the oral-theoretical insistence on alterity falters, however, and may deserve to be challenged. How exactly are oral traditions so different from literate ones in their implications for us as readers? According to

Foley, reading oral and oral-derived texts depends upon understanding traditional context. A spoken-word ("slam") poem possesses its energy only in the immanent moment of its utterance before an audience, drawing as it does on audience response, on the poet's inflection and gesture, and on the particular changes the poet might make in that given venue. A Yugoslav *guslar* thinks of his text only as the thematic components of the story; the actual text in the sense of the exact words as they are uttered will vary from performance to performance. More crucially, the evocations of formulas and formulaic systems, the idioms that are really conventional metaphors containing coded traditional values, these cannot be deciphered without recourse to the tradition, to their uses in other contexts, in the other performances listeners and poets have heard before. In linguistic terms, such locutions are "listemes," larger-than-usual chunks of meaning that have to be stored as their own entries in the mental lexicon. They do not mean what the sum of their parts would suggest.

The problem is, how is this system of "traditional" meaning different from any other semiotic system? All systems of signs, including the literary traditions of the West, are "traditional" in that they depend upon a context from which those "in the know" can glean relevant information. How could Eliot have written "The Waste Land" without a tradition, and how could we read it otherwise? The set of expectations modern readers bring to a line of poetry, whether free verse or metrical, depends upon the tradition. This is why novices to poetry find it so impenetrable and must be indoctrinated or acculturated to the conventions of poetry in order to appreciate its significance. A Martian visitor (linguists always favor the absolutely fresh eyes—or other, analogous sensory apparatus—of the Martian observer) would have no idea what to make of a postmodern novel. Its meaning is controlled by the tradition. The real issue Foley raises, it seems to me, is the issue of class and Western-centrism. The tradition of Western letters has been for the bulk of its history accessible only to an educated elite, and the oral traditions of other segments of society and of other cultures have been marginalized, denigrated, patronized, and ignored. Foley's insistence on reawakening ourselves to the multiple and dynamic traditions that lie outside the Western academy and thrive all around the world is well taken, indeed.

Foley further emphasizes alterity, directing us not to misjudge the context of any poem by fitting it into our molds—not to read slam poetry, for instance, as though it were lyric poetry, or *Beowulf* as though it were Philip Roth. But that reflects the need to historicize and contextualize, not the supposed difference of oral texts per se. Foley's attribution of oral poetics to ancient texts, which he calls "Voices from the Past," burdens ancient texts with an unnecessary layer of theoretical apparatus. Foley considers the methodology of reading for oral-traditional context to be different from the general semiotic requirement to contextualize. He insists that texts such as *Beowulf* and *The Song of Roland* (and more controversial hybrids such as the Finnish *Kalevala*) evince traces of their orality in their "recurrency and multiformity of language," in their "patterning and variation within limits" (48). But do not these traits simply mark the texts as poetry, or as Hanson and Kiparsky define it, as the unmarked form of literary language? Does not their patterning simply make them literature rather than "oral?"

Foley helpfully critiques the rigidifying tendencies of the Western canon, but in so doing, he seems to create a straw man. It would seem that what separates oral poetry from literary texts is a kind of lively patterning and a responsiveness to a tradition. What does that make literary texts? Rigidly patterned and unresponsive to tradition, or absolutely idiosyncratic and a creation of the individual genius. Obviously this is not the case. Innovation, creativity, difference from predecessors, is a value of much modern literature, to be sure, but it is a traditional one. To innovate requires something to innovate against, and to admire and replicate the innovative tendencies of a predecessor is to participate in a tradition. A commonplace among poets is that every line is haunted by the lines of which it is an echo. Poets do not write a word without feeling their synchronic and diachronic roots both in the language and in the poetic tradition. Foley provides a welcome renovation of what the word *literature* may mean and a broadening of the set of categories that may constitute the semiotic context for any given work. For instance, we may take into consideration the voicing of a recitation, the lighting in the room, or in a completely different textual environment, the manuscript layout, the lettering, the ink. But the insistence that medieval texts evince orality and that this orality requires reception and reading practices qualitatively different from those supplied by modern poetics seems unnecessary.

Another consequence of oral theory has been that the literary interpretation of a key aspect of what we see as poetry—word choice and the mutual influence words have in proximity to one another (the essence of the *mot juste*)—has appeared to be a lost cause, a wrongheaded approach to a poetics built not on words but on formulas (traditional phrases used in oral composition). Mark Amodio's recent work makes nuanced interpretive use of formulas, indicating that the field has begun to grapple with the post-oral-theory poetic landscape in Old English. However, in stopping at the level of the formula (the level of the half-line) rather than considering intra-formulaic structure as well, current approaches remain rooted in a notion of synchronic composition, a notion influenced by the Romantic image of the creative genius, the solitary poet. Poets in an oral tradition use and vary *inherited* formulas to create their poems; since we are trained to see the poem as the work of the poet, what the poet inherits rather than creates "from scratch" we do not see as interpretable. We lament the anonymity of most poets in Old English, without realizing that anonymity itself takes us one more step toward understanding the world of the verse.

In an oral-traditional poetry, there are indeed individual synchronic creators (as the *guslar* accounts of themselves confirm)[13] who work at the level of the half-line. The phrase is their compositional unit. However, part of the individual poet's work is to vary phrasal formulas, to balance multiple tensions among the exigencies of rapid composition, the needs of the plot and characters, and personal color, style, and innovation. Also, in a traditional poetry there is a diachronic, collective creative force, and it is this force which is responsible for the formation

[13] See, for instance, Lord 13–29.

of the formulas themselves. Formulas do not appear out of nowhere. A collective force made stylistic choices over time, and these choices may and must be interpreted insofar as we interpret the stylistic choices of poems penned or sung by the individual artist.

Carol Braun Pasternack and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe have explored different aspects of the collective creativity of the Old English tradition. O'Keeffe has traced the role of a poetic tradition in the variant forms of the Old English version of "Cædmon's Hymn." Different scribes seem to have known the poem as a traditional, oral "text," because the slight modifications the separate scribes have made to it are consistent with the kinds of variations we see between performances of oral material. Pasternack considers the manuscript layout of the extant poetic corpus together with O'Keeffe's analysis and in light of oral theory and suggests we recognize a further, more radical alterity of Old English poetic texts. They are alien to modern conventions not only in having ties, however close or distant, to orality, but in being written products of multiple authors whose agency should not be clumped together as the "not-the-real-author," secondary obscurers of the Ur-text. Pasternack asserts these authors—the scribes and other go-betweens—to be legitimate producers of poetic textuality in their own right. If they knew the tradition and made choices—aesthetic, doctrinal, or otherwise—in their emendations of texts, then they too are traditional poets. And of course the manuscripts themselves urge such a view of plural authorship, since they never announce their authors' names (Pasternack even considers Cynewulf's runic "signatures" to be very different from a modern announcement of textual authority). Further, Pasternack takes the manuscript layout of the poems themselves, their minimal punctuation, continual script, and their lack of titles identifying separate texts as evidence of a more "episodic" and continuous view of textuality than we are accustomed to. She calls discrete structures of many kinds, from plot sequences to structurally-delineated sections marked, for instance, by a formal device such as a formula, change of voice, or rhythmic pattern, *movements*, likening them to discrete sections of a musical whole that are nonetheless embedded or imbricated within it. Thus for Pasternack it is more accurate and faithful to the textual record to consider Old English textuality than texts, singling out for study separate movements rather than supposedly coherent "works" whose boundaries we really do not know. Likewise, it is more accurate to discuss authorship in terms of the tradition rather than single personalities or subjectivities, since we know nothing of the authors of the body of inscription (as Pasternack would put it, rather than "body of texts") as it has come down to us, and since those authors are demonstrably multiple.

Thus textual scrutiny informed by oral theory has allowed us to consider a kind of textual culture that is in ways very different from our own (and in other ways, as I have suggested, not so different as it would seem). Poetic texts and poetic authors all participated in a tradition whose internal boundaries were not as stark or as important as they seem to us to be in twenty-first-century, intellectual-property-protecting society. The present study takes another step in this process of orienting ourselves to the texts (rather than orienting the texts to ourselves).

Much recent research has suggested that boundaries are fluid in Old English poetic texts and among their multiple authors. My suggestion will be that the boundaries between verse and prose are similarly fluid and that poetic signification takes place throughout the corpus, to varying degrees. It follows that our readings should be alert to such signification, and the proceeding chapters will demonstrate the critical value of doing so.

In the chapters that follow, I will consider the structures of Old English prose, many of which have long been recognized as oddly poetic but never read for any significance beyond that bare acknowledgment, since after all, they appear in (apparently non-suggestive) prose. Genres that have been recognized as poetic but not necessarily as "serious" or aesthetically significant, such as laws, charms, and riddles,[14] will receive attention, as will the rather baffling textual landscape of the vernacular homilies. In the last chapter, I will turn to classical Old English verse, the poetic texts called "Deor" and *Christ I*, because even in conventional verse form can be manipulated idiosyncratically to create significant effects. It is not a sufficient formal account to say "here is regular meter." But first, I will begin by considering the differences between a Latin prose text (prose from Boethius' prosimetric *Consolatio Philosophiae*) and King Alfred's Old English version of it, often considered prose as well. The difference between the two texts' respective modes of exposition is the difference between language dominated by the referential function (in which information is denoted by the signs) and language that is relatively poetic (in which information is conveyed by the signs themselves and in their relation to one another). The second half of the chapter considers directly the difficult evidence of vernacular literary theory in Old English, in particular any mention of a difference between verse and prose as we know it. The short story is, there appears to be no reference in the written record to vernacular prose. This is strong evidence that Hanson and Kiparsky's model of the poetic function as the unmarked form of "literary" language applies especially well to Old English and may help us better understand a culture that may indeed have a special, ancient form of verse, but not necessarily the form we think of as its binary opposite: prose. If Anglo-Saxon culture knew of one mode of language in general that coded important speech and was therefore the default choice for recording Christian doctrine, legal codes, and lore of sundry kinds in the technology of writing, then we should read not just the very obvious, ancient form of it (verse) for its formal features, but all of it, because formal features are evident, and formal features convey meaning.[15]

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[14] The riddles have received more treatment from an aesthetic and epistemological point of view than the laws and charms, to be sure. See Frye, Williamson, Tiffany, and Borysławski.

[15] If proof that formal features are meaningful is necessary, consider both music and abstract visual art; both forms contain no content other than formal features, and both are considered vastly meaningful. To some, these forms convey meaning's essence, the very potential for meaning: without relation, without difference, there is no significance. This is a basic premise of semiotics.

Chapter 1
Alfred's Prose *Boethius* and the Poetics of Anglo-Saxon Exposition

> In archaic culture the language of poets is still the most effective means of expression, with a function much wider and more vital than the satisfaction of literary aspirations.
>
> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, 134

Boethius' sixth-century *Consolatio Philosophiae* was wildly popular from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance.[1] Major figures from every era, from King Alfred to Chaucer to Queen Elizabeth I, made English versions of the Latin text, which is a prosimetrum, or alternating verse and prose, and as such provides a test for vernacular responses to those genres. Specifically, the all-prose Alfredian translation will help us evaluate the rhetorical strategies of Old English in rendering Latin prose, and later in the chapter, the prosimetric *Meters of Boethius* will provide an opportunity to contrast Old English prose and verse. The manuscript record of the two Old English versions of Boethius' text has long presented a problem for scholars, since the prefaces heading both versions seem to refer to both texts, not only the metrical one, as poetic. The solution has often been to cite scribal or compiler error to explain the texts' failure to comply with modern expectations about the distinction between verse and prose. Since such a distinction is precisely what is in question in this chapter, the texts as they appear in the manuscripts will present not a problem to explain (away) but important evidence to consider in its own right, as an indicator of a literary discourse with no prose register, no genre marked by the suppression of patterning. Old English treatments of Boethius thus strikingly highlight the poetics of Old English.

Boethius' text employs the classical form of the dialogue to dramatize the journey from self-pitying despair to rational enlightenment. The cause for despair in the *Consolation* is not the everyday sin that burdens the soul, but the historical fact of the author's, and by implication the narrator's, political imprisonment and looming execution. It thus presents a juicy, extreme scenario as an imagined context for a reader's own existential crisis. Lady Philosophy is the narrator's remonstrative tutor, and while she schools him in the proper way to understand Providence, the intermingled verses serve as outlets for emotion and as allusive, figural syntheses of key lessons. It has long been noted that King Alfred's Old English version of the *Consolation* departs from the Latin original. While Alfred's

[1] In point of fact, we only know for certain that the work was popular among the literate, who produced our written record. I pay the rest of the culture the respect of acknowledging its existence.

text seems in one place to correspond, sense for sense, to the source text, in another it veers away into exposition or skips over material entirely.

An early treatment of Alfred's *Boethius* in relation to the original Latin text is Sedgefield's simple prefatory catalog of the discrepancies between the two, which offers a helpful roadmap but no analysis (Sedgefield xxv–xxxv). Nicole Guenther Discenza's recent study offers a translation-studies analysis of Alfred's text. Discenza finds that Alfred follows, for the most part, the argumentative structure of the Latin source text, contributing to the translation's *adequacy* (Discenza 13–29). However, in order to achieve *acceptability* to a target audience of elite Christian Anglo-Saxons largely innocent of the Late Antique philosophical regimen, Alfred's version substitutes a Christian worldview for a pagan one, and biblical for Classical allusions (Discenza 31–56). And on the level of language and style, Discenza notes, Alfred's text is demonstrably concerned with acceptability in Anglo-Saxon[2] over adequacy to Boethius' Latin (57–86). Such devices as doublets or word pairs, repetition, and the tendency to figure in personal rather than abstract relations are all characteristic of Old English rather than Latin, certainly the Latin of Boethius' text. On the linguistic level, then, Alfred's text is a native artifact.[3]

One of the key traditional aspects of Alfred's text is its ties to the oral-traditional style (Discenza 67). While no one could argue that Old English texts represent the literature of primary orality (since they have been written down), they show signs of residual orality. One of Walter Ong's basic observations is that orality and literacy represent two endpoints of a continuum, along which much of English literary history falls. While Discenza notes the linguistic-stylistic differences between the relatively "oral" Old English and the relatively literate Latin, she attempts no further analysis of these differences. In fact, what Alfred's orally inflected innovations show is the prominence in Anglo-Saxon of the poetic function. The differences between the two texts contrast, as Discenza notes, a residually oral and a highly literate society, but in so doing, they also contrast discourse in which the poetic function is prominent with discourse more heavily dominated by the referential. "Residual orality" thus speaks to historical conditions, the conditions that help contextualize the distinctly poetic discourse apparent in Alfred's text. It should be clear that I understand "orality" to describe the likely state of Anglo-Saxon culture, with its low levels of literacy. I do not take the textual evidence of poetic form as an index of orality; rather, I use the fact of residual orality to contextualize the textual evidence. I have no stake in arguments over written vs. oral composition. Rather, Alfred's text provides a good opportunity to compare the verbal style of an Old English prose text with the verbal style of corresponding

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[2] I will sometimes use the older, and in some ways quainter term *Anglo-Saxon* when discussing aspects of Old English texts, because *Old English* is often used in a strict sense to refer to the language, and I wish to imply a broader sense of semiotics that involves aspects of culture as well as grammatical language.

[3] Again, see Discenza 57–86 for her discussion of Alfred's translation and native Old English style.

Latin prose. Alfred's highly idiomatic paraphrastic mode of "translation" makes it ideally suited for such a comparison, since the drastic differences suggest the Old English translator was not attempting to contort or distort his native mode.

Alfred's first major departure from his source exemplifies his poetics in favoring verbal figures over referential imagery. The Latin *Consolatio* is founded upon the allegorical figure of Lady Philosophy. Boethius' stylized description of her visual appearance bears a heavy semiotic load, and recognizing the tropes and allusions is crucial for apprehending the basic premises of the dialogue. In the opening prose section Lady Philosophy appears as the narrator has just left off his verse lament, in which he was accompanied by the Muses:

> adstitisse mihi supra verticem visa est mulier reverendi admodum vultus, oculis ardentibus et ultra communem hominum valentiam. perspicacibus colore vivido atque inexhausti vigoris, quamvis ita aevi plena foret ut nullo modo nostrae crederetur aetatis, statura discretionis ambiguae. Nam nunc quidem ad communem sese hominum mensuram cohibebat, nunc vero pulsare caelum summi verticis cacumine videbatur; quae cum altius caput extulisset, ipsum etiam caelum penetrabat respicientiumque hominum frustrabatur intuitum. Vestes erant tenuissimis filis subtili artificio, indissolubili materia perfectae quas, uti post eadem prodente cognovi, suis manibus ipsa texuerat. Quarum speciem, veluti fumosas imagines solet, caligo quaedam neglectae vetustatis obduxerat. Harum in extrema margine .Π. Graecum, in supremo vero .θ., legebatur intextum. Atque inter utrasque litteras in scalarum modum gradus quidam insigniti vidabantur quibus ab inferiore ad superius elementum esset ascensus. Eandem tamen vestem violentorum quorundam sciderant manus et particulas quas quisque potuit abstulerant. Et dextera quidem eius libellos, sceptrum vero sinistra gestabat. (Bk. I Pr. I, l. 3–25)
>
> [There appeared standing before me and above my height a woman of fully venerable appearance, eyes piercing and beyond the common power of men. They were sharp-sighted with bright color and of inexhaustible vigor, and yet she struck me as so old that she would not be considered of our age; (she was) in stature seemingly variable. At one point indeed it was but the common measure of men, at another she seemed truly to reach, at her highest, the highest heaven; then when she extended her head higher, it pierced heaven itself and bested the perception of men. Her clothing was made of most delicate thread with subtle skill and from indestructible fabric. This, as I later learned from her, she had made with her own hands. The appearance of it was like smoke-faded pictures: the murk of neglected age had obscured it. In the lowest border a Greek Π, in the highest a Θ, were embroidered. And between the two letters there appeared steps in the manner of a ladder, which were marked, by which one might climb from the lowest to the highest. But the hands of violent men had ripped this robe and carried away what pieces they could. And in her right hand she carried her books, in her left a scepter.][4]

[4] All translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

The appearance and elaborate description of the august Lady Philosophy in the Latin is figured in the Old English as follows: "þa com þær gan in to me heofencund Wisdom" (Sedgefield 8, l. 16) ["then there appeared to me heavenly Wisdom"]. The flashing eyes, the great (and variable) height, the fine garment of faded material, with its Greek letters representing what Boethius elsewhere identifies as contemplative and practical philosophy, respectively (*theoria* and *practica*)—these are all absent, as are the Muses who shuffle sadly away at Philosophy's command, indicating the supremacy of systematic Classical learning over the false comforts of mere aesthetic or expressive representation. Alfred, in fact, resists allegory in favor of barely personified abstractions. *Wisdom* has no physical characteristics that symbolize other entities. *Wisdom* is wisdom. Alfred even moves farther in the opposite direction: throughout the translation he sometimes refers to Boethius not as *Boetius* or in the first-person, but as *mod*, *þæs mod*. The character of the narrator is thus abstracted and generalized into "mind."[5] Thus the Latin text invests in the principle of referentiality, while Alfred's language is freer to allow a signifier to function as a signifier, not investing so much in the referential fiction.

Elsewhere, too, Boethius' allegory suggests a consistent, realistic fictional space, whereas Alfred mingles quasi-mimetic materiality with abstraction, constituting language rather than a mimetic virtual reality as his platform for suspended disbelief. For example, in the Latin, Philosophy is revealed to have been the narrator's nurse (Bk. I Pr. III, l. 3–6). She relates directly to the human persona whom she fed with her learning. Initially, the Old English reproduces the metaphor, as *Wisdom* is called a *foster modor*. Yet the image is quickly obscured. As *Wisdom* draws near, the narrator's *geþoht* ["thought, consciousness"] raises itself from prostration. In a confusing syntactic construction (for a nonnative Old English speaker, for whom the gender of the pronouns requires concentration), this *geþoht* dries the "eyes of its mind (*mod*)," and it is this mind which then is able to recognize its foster mother (Sedgefield 8–9). Alfred thus sets the character of Wisdom at several removes from a human body, as s/he is recognized as the foster mother of the mind of the consciousness of the narrator (of the story that is being reshaped by a translator). The meaning is of course quite close to that of the original: the narrator is comforted to recognize the one who nurtured him. The platform for this recognition, however, is quite different. Boethius' images operate under the pretense of a vision, a real waking manifestation, whereas Alfred's "images" are better termed figures, announcing themselves and operating as they do within their status as metaphors, linguistic devices. The Latin original sets up a pretext of referentiality, of correspondence between things (or concepts) and words, which requires the maintenance of an illusion for the meaning to be carried

[5] Perhaps Alfred's project in these distilling, reducing moves is to "biblicize" Boethius' complicated allegory, rendering the encounter between the historical Boethius and the allegorical Philosophy, who struggle dialectically toward truth, a simpler encounter between divine truth and the human consciousness. However, renovation toward orthodoxy does not fully account for this or other key departures in Alfred's text, which are better understood as stylistic choices that reflect the poetic nature of Anglo-Saxon discourse.

through. In contrast, Alfred can go back and forth between material representation and abstraction and even juxtapose the two. Alfred's relationship to language allows for greater play in its signification, because it recognizes the remove of its signs from reality: the whole thing is a play of signifiers.

The signifying process as a manipulation of values is visibly at play in the Old English text, illustrating one of the basic characteristics of poetic language described by Jakobson: language calls attention to itself rather than transparently referring to something else. According to Jakobson, the poetic function, "by promoting the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects" (70). When attention is drawn to the word, then, the word becomes its own referent and can do things on its own which are not bound to referentiality. Words in their poetic function are relatively unmoored. Alfred's poetic play of signifiers contrasts with Boethius' reliance on referentiality (the referential function of language). Thus the two texts rely on different modes of language to convey meaning. Both systems do use the semiotic currency of verbal signs, but while the Old English highlights the tokens of its verbal transactions, the Latin attempts to efface or obscure them through using signs to point to other things.

Another example of Alfred's poetic destabilization of Boethius' referential allegory should clarify the argument. In the passage already quoted, the Latin original has Philosophy's robes torn or cut away by "violent" men who, presumably, took away only pieces of true learning instead of apprehending the whole. The allegory depends upon the garment's earlier description and the reader's recognition that it represents the teaching of Philosophy, the perfected wisdom of the Classical world. Since Alfred's version does not recreate that initial description of the garment, he has no garment to rend. But in Alfred's version, the idea of foolish (*dysige*) men ripping away only pieces of wisdom instead of apprehending the whole is still crucial to the argument that will be developed, and so Alfred introduces another juxtaposition: "Ac hit ongeat his lare swiðe totorenne 7[6] swiðe tobrocene mid dysigra hondum" (Sedgefield 9, l. 2–3) ["But it (*mod*) perceived 'his' (Wisdom's, grammatically masculine though a 'foster mother') learning severely torn and severely mangled by the hands of the foolish"]. Wisdom's *lare*—his learning—is never affixed to a material object that could be visualized/dramatized as torn. Alfred simply says what it is perfectly possible to say in language and perfectly impossible to associate with an image: learning is all torn and broken apart. More than the pathos of the image of the Latin original, a woman of dignity ravaged by unworthy, grubbing hands, the Alfredian version gives us an aural pathos: "swiðe totorenne ond swiðe tobrocene […] 7 hine þa fran hu þæt gewurðe" (Sedgefield 9, l. 2–4) ["(…) and he asked him then how it had happened"]. The repetition of *swiðe*, with its long central vowel, creates the pathos here, along with the way the two participles begin with the "destructive" prefix *to-*, thereby rhythmically and syntactically echoing one another. The narrator's simple, awed question ("7 hine þa

[6] Here and throughout the book, "7" approximates the manuscript symbol for the conjunction "and" or "ond."

fran hu þæt gewurðe") right after highlights the effect, in seeming to respond to the pathos implied by the description. The energy and craft of Alfred's prose clearly lie elsewhere than in maintaining the visual coherence of an extended allegory. The freedom of his signifiers and the verbal and aural rather than visual construction of his narrative reveal a fundamentally poetic mode of exposition.

Ong identifies the dominance of the poetic function as a characteristic of primary-oral cultures, cultures whose modes of history and epistemology are not based on the technology of writing (Huizinga also asserts that the poetic function, with its basis in play, is basic to human language, creativity, and cognition) (Ong 32–6, Huizinga 119–35). Another characteristic of primary orality is the tendency to figure (in the sense of making metaphors as well as the sense of reasoning) in terms of the "human lifeworld" (Ong 42–3). We see both the penchant for the poetic and the tendency to figure close to the human lifeworld in Alfred's exposition of Philosophy's proof in Book III, Prose X of the Latin original.

Philosophy proposes that the unitary good which is and has its source in God, though capable of becoming multiple, returns inexorably to its divine source.[7] Alfred introduces an illustration from the natural world to demonstrate what in the Latin relies solely on linear logic:

> swa swa of þære sæ cymð þæt wæter innon ða eorðan, 7 þær aferscað; cymð þonne up æt þæm æwelme, wyrð þonne to broce, þonne to ea, þonne andlang ea, oð hit wyrð eft to sæ. (Sedgefield 86, l. 18–22)
> [just so from the sea comes the water inland, and covers it, then gathers at the spring, then becomes a brook, then a river, then a tributary, until at last it becomes the sea.]

The craft of the description is remarkable.[8] The subject (*wæter*) is introduced in its first articulation and then journeys through the sentence as the trace subject

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[7] The Latin text is too long to quote; Philosophy's proof develops over the course of the chapter. Part of what is noteworthy about Alfred's approximation is that he renders the extended reasoning in a concise figure.

[8] Alfred's technique, iconically representing the physical travel of the subject referent (here, water) through three clauses, only the first of which manifests the subject overtly, appears elsewhere in the corpus and may therefore be a traditional device of Anglo-Saxon stylistics. For instance, near the beginning of Blickling Homily IX/Vercelli X, the "cascading subject" is the *Halga Gast* or spirit of Christ making the journey from the heavens to the "precious vessel" on earth:

> Eall þæt wæs gelæsted seoþþan heofonas tohlidon
> 7 seo hea miht on þysne wang astag
> 7 se Halga Gast wunode on þam æþelan innoþe,
> 7 on þam betstan bosme, 7 on þam gecorenan hordfæte.
> (*Blickling* 105, l. 6–9)
> [It was all carried out after the heavens opened
> and the high might came down to this place
> and the Holy Ghost dwelt in that noble belly,
> and in that best bosom, and in that precious vessel.]

of each of the following phrases, mimicking the water itself as it travels into different bodies toward the sea. Language itself enacts poetically the truth of the proposition, whereas Boethius' text relies squarely on the rhetoric of logic in order to convince Boethius, the prodigal logical mind.[9] Alfred again uses poetics as a rhetorical device where his source text relies on the referential value of language, here the making of propositions and relating them to others.

Another characteristic of orality Ong describes is non-linear, non-syllogistic reasoning. The writing-based classroom fosters syllogistic thought, whereas people who have never internalized writing and never experienced the epistemology of the classroom tend to reason in a non-syllogistic way.[10] Their thinking does not close off possibilities to rely only on the stated terms of a problem, but rather searches the entire field of experience in order to find a solution. This is the kind of reasoning that riddles require, and riddles are common in all so-called "primitive" or "pre-literate" or "primary oral" cultures. The riddle is the opposite of the syllogism. The syllogism is enclosed, whereas the riddle is open. Ong illustrates the contrast between enclosed or fixed syllogistic reasoning and the open or experience-based reasoning of primary orality, citing the fieldwork of A.R. Luria with illiterate Siberian peasants in the middle of the twentieth century. Luria presented his subjects with the following sequence: "'In the Far North, where there is snow, all bears are white. Novaya Zembla [sic] is in the Far North and there is always snow there. What color are the bears?'" (Ong 52–3). According to Ong,

> Here is a typical response, "I don't know. I've seen a black bear. I've never seen any others … Each locality has its own animals" (1976, pp. 108–9). You find what color bears are by looking at them. Who ever heard of reasoning out in practical life the color of a polar bear? Besides, how am I sure that you know for sure that all bears are white in a snowy country? When the syllogism is given to him a second time, a barely literate 45-year-old chairman of a collective farm manages "To go by your words, they should all be white" (1976, p. 114). "To go by your words" appears to indicate awareness of the formal intellectual structures. A little literacy goes a long way. On the other hand, the chairman's

[9] Boethius argues, specifically, the absurdity/blasphemy of the unacceptable alternative to unitary goodness, in which there might be two sources of goodness—being two, they could not be absolutely equal; one must be "better" than the other, which would mean that goodness coming from the lesser one would no longer be absolute goodness, rather, something like "okayness." God, the source of all good, cannot simultaneously be the source of the "okay."

[10] Work such as Scribner and Cole's nearly contemporaneous study in Liberia finds no evidence for cognitive effects of orality vs. literacy per se, and finds fault with circular reasoning that would take written data as evidence of the supposed difference in consciousness that writing is supposed to effect. However, the narrower claim for a difference in the kinds of texts produced by more-oral vs. more-literate cultures remains in my view unobjectionable. The fact that Ong notes the classroom's role in the cognitive differences he cites is significant, since studies such as Scribner and Cole's suggest schooling, not writing, is what makes a difference in cognition.

> limited literacy leaves him more comfortable in the person-to-person human lifeworld than in a world of pure abstractions. (Ong 53)

Thus, for Ong the epistemology of primary orality involves reasoning in terms of one's whole experience, not entirely within the terms of an isolated verbal construct. When faced with such a limiting construct, the primary-oral individual does not produce the answer that seems obvious to the literate-minded ("the bears would be white"). However, people operating from a position of residual or partial orality, as the example of the "barely literate" collective farm chairman suggests, are able to recognize and articulate the difference: "to go by your words" was a thought path distinct from the kind the man was used to taking. He recognized the syllogism as a closed construct that required him to follow only the path offered by the exact wording of the prefatory statements toward the question asked. Such a path stands in contrast to the vast field of possible thought available to a person.

While other work has suggested that some of the inferences Ong draws from the data exaggerate and perhaps romanticize the supposedly distinct consciousness of "orality," nevertheless, King Alfred's treatment of Philosophy's discussion of syllogistic reasoning demonstrates a critical remove from that reasoning much like the awareness of the semi-literate Siberian.[11] In the Latin, Philosophy says,

> Super haec […] igitur ueluti geometrae solent demonstratis propositis aliquid inferre quae porismata ipsi uocant, ita ego quoque tibi ueluti corollarium dabo. (Bk. III Pr. X, l. 80–83)
> [In addition, just as geometricians are wont to infer from demonstrated propositions things they call *porisms*,[12] so I, too, will give you likewise a corollary.]

Lady Philosophy thus tells the narrator that she is going to add something to what has already been proven, and she justifies doing so by citing mathematicians, who do this sort of thing all the time (*solent* ["are wont"]). Her justification constitutes an appeal to authority in the form of professionals and their formal system of reasoning, according to which all her own reasoning has been conducted.

Alfred makes much of this opportunity for reflection, creating an analogy that explicates the *corollarium* by comparing it to a native mode of knowledge-production. *Wisdom* says:

> Ac ic wolde giet mid sumre bisne þe behwerfan utan þæt þu ne mihtst nænne weg findan ofer; swa swa uðwitena gewuna is þæt hi willað simle hwæthwugu niwes on seldcuþes eowian, þæt hi mægen mid þy aweccan þæt mod þara geherendra. (Sedgefield 85, l. 22–6)

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[11] Scribner and Cole might suggest "semi-schooled" as a more accurate moniker to designate the man's reasoning.

[12] *Porism* is a mathematical term and is listed in the OED.

> [But I would yet surround you with an example that you cannot find any way over; just as it is the habit of philosophers always to want to show something new and unfamiliar that they might therewith stir the mind of their listeners.]

Alfred takes the offering of the *corollarium* from the Latin source and revises the scenario fundamentally to reflect an interaction between people. The *uðwitan* ["philosophers"] do not merely work things out in a vacuum: first, they desire; second, their desire has for its object an effect in others (that something new and unfamiliar will move their minds). The Latin text contains no such gesture toward humans relating to one another. In his figure of the *corollarium* itself, Alfred employs his wonted verbal practice: he takes the already abstract "corollary" and renders it "example" (*bisen*), also abstract, but then pairs the abstraction with a concrete image. The "example" is like a wall built around the listener, over which he cannot escape. *This* process, the building of the wall, is then likened (*swa swa*) but also contrasted to the way that native philosophers present new ideas. Alfred's very image offers an analysis of the difference in the verbal construction of knowledge between the native, largely oral tradition and the literate tradition of the Classical world. Whereas a native "philosopher" speaks to move the mind of a listener, that is, to cause a reaction, to incite a dynamic process, the Latin *corollarium* resembles to Alfred a fortress of words from which the besieged party may not escape. Alfred still insists on even the new edifice bearing a social relation, since *Wisdom* builds it *around* his *listener*. But the fixed structure of the *corollarium* differs markedly from the dynamic process (of the philosophers), since their end results are so different: the *corollarium* immobilizes or entraps the listener, while the native philosophers seek rather to set the listener in motion.

Alfred's treatment of the corollary highlights the difference between the residually oral tradition, which relies on human interaction, and the literate syllogistic reasoning Boethius' text represents. The contrast in turn highlights the vastly different verbal epistemologies of the Anglo-Saxon and late antique/early medieval Latin worlds. For Boethius, the visualized encounter with Philosophy is the stylized stage upon which new material is laid out systematically in the traditional format of the dialogue. For Alfred, poetry substitutes for the visual allegory (as in "swiðe totorenne 7 swiðe tobrocene"). His method for presenting new material, for developing an argument, while sometimes following the logic of the source text (relying on the axiom, for instance, that God is the highest good), involves not hermetic logic chains so much as episodic encounters with illustrative examples in tandem with formal reasoning. The Old English text proffers a range of discursive procedures in which referential logic is traded for affective and perceptual nuance. Anglo-Saxon discourse, with its poetic self-awareness, allows for such semiotic variety.

Alfred and the Problem of Old English Prose

A residually oral, poetic discourse thus informs Alfred's ninth-century Anglo-Saxon response to the sixth-century *Consolatio Philosophiae*. What the poetic texture of a prose text like Alfred's *Boethius* should prompt, at the very least, is greater interpretive attention to form; where texts seem to fail in sense or sophistication (as Alfred's text, for many, has done), it may be that *we* are failing, by reading referentially, for "meaning," where we should be reading poetically, for patterns at every level of structure. But more fundamentally, Alfred's text also suggests that "poetics" in Old English supersedes the question of verse and prose. It is unlikely that verse/prose was the fixed binarism it has been for us, solely by convention, in the modern era. We assume prose to be the default genre or register, but in fact poetic speech is primary, as Hanson and Kiparsky have argued and as comparative evidence from oral cultures suggests.[13] The English prose genres are tied to printing and the rise of the book and combine, as we saw in the Introduction, with trends in the history of ideas on the journey away from primary orality towards literacy and visual culture. It is neither clear from the textual record nor likely given the nature of prose and the particular history of English that the Anglo-Saxons recognized a category of "prose" in the vernacular.

Roberta Frank, in an essay on poetic diction in late Old English prose, draws an essentially Jakobsonian distinction between the poetic function and the referential one associated with modern prose. In modern print culture, poetry is determined by "typographical convention. A ragged right margin tells readers to adopt a particular stance, *to look at words, not through them*. 'Print it as poetry and it is poetry'" (87, emphasis mine). In modern culture we see a poem as a poem if it is printed in lines. The reading practice we then employ is to "look at words, not through them," which is the same thing as Jakobson's poetic function, in which a "word is felt as a word" and not a transparent medium indifferently conveying information. In poetry the message is opaque, visible in its own right; in prose it is supposed to be more or less transparent. The central question for Frank is, "What oral-culture equivalent to the printed page alerted Anglo-Saxon audiences to put on a poetic hat, to prepare to hear words sing?" (88). With written texts, one can prepare a readerly approach according to the cues supplied by graphic layout, but with orally delivered material, one must perceive in real time according to immediate context and language alone. In oral–traditional settings, the extra-linguistic performance context, the occasion, the stance of the oral poet towards his or her audience must have functioned as conventional cues to alert the audience to poetry. But as oral theorists such as Jeff Opland and John Miles Foley have pointed out, such cues are lost to time. Therefore, as Frank suggests, we must look to the texts themselves, to language itself, for clues about how the extant texts may have been perceived—specifically, if they may have been perceived as in some sense poetic. What in language creates the singing effect—what are the distinguishing characteristics of poetic language?

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[13] See, for instance, Ong 33–6 and Huizinga 119–35.

The simplest answer, distilled from Jakobson and other linguists including Hanson and Kiparsky, is that poetic language deploys repetition on some level to create equivalence relations (either identity or antithesis), which are perceptible as patterning (Jakobson 71–2). Since no two utterances are ever truly identical, the perception of equivalence is an act of reification, of re-interpellation into the discourse, since to acquiesce to the illusion of identity is to submit to the mode of identification defined by the discourse. Elements perceived as equivalent are perceived as values—hence the term *token*—rather than for their particular characteristics (for instance, as specific sounds, meanings, or affective cues). As Hanson and Kiparsky understand the aesthetics of poetic language per se, the perception of equivalence creates the effect of recognition, and this effect is transferred from the abstract linguistic plane of value onto the semantic content. Thus the content is "recognized," producing the effect of "universal truth" (Hanson and Kiparsky, "Nature" 41–2).

The modern poetry that depends on graphic lineation to be identified as poetry (to cue us to listen to it poetically) in effect relies on the unit of the visual line as its constitutive equivalence token. The repetition of the line ending and our training to treat this ending as a semantic stopping-point constitute the patterning that gives poetic shape to the text. But there are many different linguistic structures that may function as equivalence tokens in a given genre and in a given tradition. An important contribution that Jakobson makes to our thinking about poetic language is the insight that poetic language need not be identified by its users as poetry or verse to be poetic. Poetic language can structure everything from campaign slogans to counting-out-rhymes ("one, two, buckle my shoe" or "eenie, meenie, minie, mo," for example).[14] Self-conscious prose and equally self-conscious verse form a binarism in a given cultural context (ours for the last few centuries, with the distinction now beginning to blur), but the categories are not essential. They are not the only way to envision a verbal milieu. The safest path seems to be to look for patterning and, where it is found, to characterize the poetic effects. This method, however, is not the traditional approach of Anglo-Saxonists.

Assuming the two traditional categories—verse and an anachronistically defined prose—Frank avers that the Anglo-Saxons "certainly distinguished between verse and prose" (88). She points to two texts as evidence. One is Ælfric's contrasting characterization of Bede's prose *Life of Cuthbert* as *anfeald gereccednys* ["straightforward account"] and the poetic *Life* as *leoðlic gyddung* ["artful song," or even "song-like singing"].[15] This certainly shows awareness of a difference between prose and verse. But Bede's *Life* is in Latin. Ælfric's description shows that he recognized two distinct modes in the Latin. He applied Latin categories to Latin texts using approximate terms from his own language, but that is not the same as applying Latin categories to texts in his own language. Similarly, the entry

[14] For a discussion of "counting-out-rhymes" see Rubin 3–8, 137, and 227–56.

[15] Cited in Frank 88, n. 4. See Ælfric, *Catholic Homilies: The Second Series* 81 (Homily X, St. Cuthbert).

for *prosa* in Ælfric's Latin grammar explicitly defines "prose" as a Latin category with no Old English counterpart. In a work that uses the vernacular to gloss Latin terms everywhere it can (for instance, glossing *poema* as *leoðcræft*), *prosa* receives the following explanation: "þæt is forðriht leden buton leoðcræfte gelencged and gelogod" ["that is straightforward Latin, expressed and appointed without poetry"].[16] Prose is straightforward Latin, with, apparently, no counterpart in Old English. Ælfric appears to recognize better than we do (we who are naturalized within prose) that prose is not a default linguistic setting but a distinct genre.

As if demonstrating just how far away from prose his own idiom is, Ælfric's gloss for "prose" evinces poetic structure. We see an alliterative pair in "leden […] leoðcræfte" and then another alliterative pair continuing the alliteration on /l/, adding alliteration on the *ge-* prefixes and topping it off with grammatical rhyme: "gelencged […] gelogod" (this is grammatical rhyme in that both words are past participles, and because both share identical verbal prefixes). *Leden* and *buton* also present a slant rhyme (*-den* and *-ton*, which involves a dental stop followed by an unstressed and thus reduced vowel followed by /n/), and assonance joins *leden* with *gelencged* and *leoðcræfte* with *gelogod*. What I am suggesting is that in its book-language Old English tends naturally toward patterns like this—similar to verse structures, irregular but epigrammatic, and formal in both senses of that word. If Old English knows no marked literary language of prose, but instead patterns all its literary (important) language in the default way (which would be "unmarked" if there were a "marked" alternative), this is just what we expect to see.

Frank's other example of Anglo-Saxon awareness of both verse and prose is the preface to the *Meters of Boethius*, which, she says, "describes the king's prose paraphrase of the metres as *spell* 'speech,' [and] his subsequent verse rendition as *leoð* 'song'" (88). *Spell* and *leoð* do not, however, map neatly onto *prose* and *verse*. One way to determine the semantic value of a term is to consider the value of an opposing term to see if the two create a dyadic pair of complements. Though Frank assumes the modes of speech and song correspond to the generic categories of prose and verse, respectively, such an assumption must be explored in this way. The word that Frank takes to imply prose, *spell*, throughout the corpus refers not to a genre opposed to verse so much as speech itself, and as a kind of speech act. Note the Modern English descendant of the word with its magical, incantatory specialization on the one hand ("to cast a spell"), and its denotation of a specific ordering of symbols, first practiced by speaking out loud, on the other ("How do you spell *tomato*?"). *Spell* will be considered more fully below, and its distribution will show that it involves artful speech and ceremonial speech in a way that does not set it in opposition to *leoð*, but rather in conjunction with that term. The two distinct prefaces to the two Old English versions of *Boethius* (the all-prose and the prosimetrum) place numerous terms for language in cooperation rather than opposition to one another, suggesting not a binary system of classification

[16] Quoted from the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, CD-ROM, ÆGram 295.15. For print edition, see *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, 295, l. 15.

(prose/verse), but rather a dynamic continuum of speech. Metrical verse appears to be a rarified form, qualitatively the same as other speech of this group, but quantitatively distinct.

The first preface heads the prose-only version of Alfred's *Boethius*, including prose versions of both the prose and meters of the original Latin prosimetrum (Discenza 8). The relevant part of the preface reads:

> Ða bisgu us sint swiþe earfoþrime þe on his dagum on þa ricu becoman þe he underfangen hæfde, 7 þeah ða þas boc hæfde geleornode 7 of lædene to engliscum spelle gewende, 7 geworhte hi eft to leoðe, swa swa heo nu gedon is. (Sedgefield 1, l. 6–10)
> [The cares are to us difficult to count which in the days of his reign came upon him, which he had to take up, and still he had learned this book and from Latin into English speech translated it, and then worked it into verse, as it has now been done.]

If we had no access to what follows in the manuscript, based on this preface we would surely expect that it was meant to be *leoð*, or verse. So the fact that the subsequent text is not in regular Old English meter creates an initial category conflict. Either the text to follow is not the version that the preface was meant to precede, or our conception of *leoð* is somehow incorrect (specifically, too narrow).

Frank's inference that *leoð* corresponds to verse and *spell* corresponds to prose is plausible in the scenario in which the preface heads the wrong version of the text (the prose-only, as opposed to the metrical version) or if the embedded clause "as it has now been done" refers not to the text that follows but rather externally, to a metrical version not present. But if the supposed prose text that follows is what the preface refers to as *leoð*, then *spell* does not oppose *leoð* in the way Frank supposes. Accordingly, another way of reading the preface is to see it describing Alfred's translation process, from learning the book ("þas boc hæfde geleornode") to rendering it into comprehensible *spoken* English ("of lædene to engliscum spelle gewende") to working it into a polished written document in the only vernacular register seen as suitable to put into a book: the poetic—if not verse—text that follows ("geworhte hi eft to leoðe, swa swa heo nu gedon is"). In such a reading *leoð* encompasses not only classical Old English meter but artful language more broadly. *Leoð* would then confirm Hanson and Kiparsky's Jakobsonian observation, that artful language is a category more fundamental than regular verse. Certainly the manuscript as we have it prevents a straightforward reading in which *leoð* and *spell* are neatly opposed as a complementary pair (together constituting "all language"), since it is unclear what *leoð* may be taken to describe, and since it may also specify or characterize *spell* rather than oppose it. We are left with two terms whose manuscript distribution suggests overlapping meanings, and whose reference in the present context is unclear.

The preface Frank does not mention, the proem to the *Meters of Boethius* in Cotton Otho A.vi (mid-tenth century) (Discenza 8), casts even more doubt on the

view that Anglo-Saxons saw Alfred's *Boethius* as prose, as it sets multiple terms at play in a confusing and suggestive account of the meters' composition:

> Þus Ælfred us ealdspell reahte,
> cyning Westsexna, cræft meldode,
> leoðwyrhta list. him wæs lust micel
> ðæt he ðiossum leodum leoð spellode,
> monnum myrgen, mislice cwidas,
> þy læs ælinge ut adrife
> selflicne secg, þonne he swelces lyt
> gymð for his gilpe. ic sceal giet sprecan,
> fon on fitte, folccuðne ræd
> hæleðum secgean; hliste se þe wille. (Sedgefield 151, l. 1–10)
> [Thus Alfred interpreted for us the ancient tale,
> king of the West Saxons, (he) displayed the craft,
> the poet-gift. He had a great desire
> that he might proclaim poems to this people,
> (poems) pleasing to men, varied "texts" (*cwidas*, the oral equivalent),
> lest a tedious (one) drive away
> the self-regarding man when he takes little note
> of such a thing on account of his pridefulness. I will speak further,
> take up in song, well-known wisdom
> to say among men; heed, he who will.]

This preface preceeds the prosimetric Old English version of the Latin prosimetrum (in other words, the "prose" translation of the Latin prose, interspersed with the metrical, alliterative version of the Latin verses). It may announce the intention of a second author (the *ic* in the eighth line) to add an element of song, equally oral ("sprecan […] secgean" ["speak … say"]), to Alfred's text.[17] Alfred's text is, however, apparently considered some kind of poetry as well. The distinction between his work and that of the "new author" is not the simple one Ælfric notes between Latin verse and prose. Alfred is said to have displayed *cræft* and *leoðwyrhta list* ["poetic skill"] in his own right. This appears to be the meaning over the alternative reading that would have *meldode* imply an expository "revelation" of Boethius' Latin craft and poetic talent, since in the lines that follow he is said to have been keen to give the people poems, to give them pleasant-sounding, varied "texts" as opposed to tedious ones. It would not make much sense for the pleasant sound to refer to the Latin original alone, since a translation into everyday prose wouldn't render its pleasantness in any palpable way for the self-regarding listener the author imagines.[18] It seems that for the Anglo-Saxon author, Alfred's text was itself *leoð*.

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[17] The referent for *ic* is in ongoing dispute. The only probable alternative to the two-author theory in light of the language of the preface is, in my judgment, that *ic* refers to the text itself. There is ample evidence in the Old English corpus and in other Germanic traditions of prosopopeia. See Earl 87–99 for this reading.

[18] The question of the proper reading of the passage is very difficult, and while I consider mine a plausible one, it is also possible that the passage describes Alfred as expositor of

Again, this may be what the author of the "all-prose" version's preface implies as well: "geworhte hi eft to leoðe, swa swa heo nu gedon is" ["he then worked it into a poem, just as it has now been done"]. But the prosimetrum author does do something different to the king's rendition of the meters. He calls it putting it into a *fitt*, or into *fitts* (the text has the singular form, but this is probably an abstract singular). There is apparently a distinction to be drawn between metrical composition, or verse by the numbers, perhaps set to music, and poetic language of another, not metrically regular kind. Importantly, though, adding the element of metrical regularity, of "taking up in song" Alfred's text, is not figured as a change of direction or transformation. The speaker says, "ic sceal giet sprecan" ["I will say further"]; the metrical element is a furtherance, a continuation or embellishment. It is not different in kind from the other text, is not a departure.

According to one possible reading, if the *ic* refers to the prosopopoeic book, then "fon on fitte" may serve to express the realization, the declamation, even (as a reader speaks aloud the words) of words wrought already in poetry.[19] Alfred would be credited with having made the meters, too, displaying the craft we saw above, and the graphic lines on the page or the page itself may be announcing their fulfillment of his text through performance, through utterance. In this scenario, multiple terms (*spell*, *cræft*, *leoð*, *cwida*, *sprecan*, *fitt*, *secgean*) all seem to conspire in the description of poetic discourse, as the sense of the passage insists. Their values are not oppositional or complementary but appositive and overlapping. This is most starkly illustrated in the phrase "leoð spellode," which combines Frank's two terms to suggest the recitation (using *spell*-) of poems (*leoð*). The use of the terms in this way, together, makes it unlikely that they were in clear opposition to one another.

Regarding *leoð* and *spell*, then, both prefaces refer to Alfred's work as *leoð*, and both imply that *spell* describes the act of speaking but not an act consistently or clearly distinct from *leoð*.[20] Let us consider *spell* more broadly. In the Old English period the word seems to have two possible meanings. It implies either

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poetic texts that would themselves be tedious for "self-regarding," prideful people. Perhaps "pleasant-sounding" for such people would entail prosaic, unadorned, straightforward speech. This seems unlikely, particularly given the (albeit late) anecdote of Aldhelm singing the masses into church, but it bears noting the possibility. See William of Malmesbury 506–7.

[19] Again, see Earl 87–99.

[20] However, throughout the "prose" Boethius the narrator marks the transition from a meter to a prose section by something like, "þa se Wisdom þa þis leoð asungen hæfde, þa ongan he eft spellian 7 þus cwæþ" (Sedgefield 34, l. 14) ["then when Wisdom had sung this *leoð*, he began after that to 'spell' and spoke thus"]. Yet even this reference to a Latin verse/prose divide isn't as simple as it seems, since strictly speaking the text says that the song is over and "spelling" begins, but not that what is spoken ceases to be *leoð*. It would be wise to remember that in oral cultures there is often a third category beside "singing" and "speaking," that of quasi-melodic chanting. Benjamin Bagby utilizes this mode when performing *Beowulf* and certain Eddic poems, and the almost monotone or very simple melodic chant is used in religious rites across the globe.

"news, tidings," or "speech, utterance." The two meanings likely descend from two integrally related semantic aspects of a single older sense of the word. In an oral culture the one who bears official messages is a public declaimer, a kind of traveling crier. We see versions of this figure in the many references in *Daniel* and one in *Genesis* to God's *spelboda* ["messenger"].[21] We see it in *Exodus*, where the rout at the Red Sea has left no messenger to take the news of the battle back home: "ac þa mægenþreatas meredeað geswealh, spelbodan <eac>" (l. 513–14a) ["for a watery death swallowed those legions, the messenger too"].[22] The outcome of a battle as told by a formal reciter bore the two senses of Old English *spell*: it was spoken out loud and it was news.

As stressed above, the official report of a battle, or of any news in the kingdom in an oral context, was patterned, not "transparent" speech. And indeed in the major long Old English text we have that strives to depict the oral culture of the past—*Beowulf*—we see very clearly uses of *spell* that variously insist on the word's implication of orality, recognize its association with "news," and allow it to describe the quintessence of artful speech in the Germanic tradition. *Spell* appears at the heart of the famous passage describing what is hard not to take as a performance by an oral-traditional poet:

> Hwilum cyninges þegn,
> guma gilphlæden, gidda gemyndig,
> se ðe ealfela ealdgesegena
> worn gemunde, word oþer fand
> soðe gebunden; secg eft ongan
> sið Beowulfes snyttrum styrian
> ond on sped wrecan spel gerade,
> wordum wrixlan. (l. 867b–74a)
> [At times the king's thane,
> a man laden with praise, mindful of music,
> he who remembered many
> of the old tales, found other words
> truly bound; the man then began
> to give life to Beowulf's voyage
> and, expert, make a well-wrought story,
> (to) change the words.]

This *spell* is clearly poetic speech. *Spell* is the product of the elaborately described word-craft; it is what the oral performer produces, having "found" the words properly joined and having substituted words to make the story about Beowulf. Another passage from *Beowulf* highlights a possible distinction between *spell* and song, the same distinction that the author of the preface to the *Meters of Boethius* seems to draw:

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[21] *Daniel* l. 229, 464, 532, and 742; *Genesis* l. 2496

[22] I here follow the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* notation for emended text: *eac* does not appear in the manuscript.

Gomela Scilding,
felafricgende, feorran <rehte>,
hwilum hildedeor hearpan wynne,
gomenwudu grette, hwilum gyd awræc
soð ond sarlic, hwilum syllic spell
rehte æfter rihte rumheort cyning. (l. 2105b–2110)
[The old Scylding,
having learned many things from long ago, recited,
at times the worthy one praised the playing-wood,
the joy of the harp, at times he made songs
true and sorrowful, at times tall tales
he recited correctly, great-heart king.]

He sang celebration songs and sad ones and he told epic tales. That the tales were told in some sort of patterned language, such as the language of *Beowulf* itself, is suggested by "rehte æfter rihte" ["recked rightly," or "recounted according to rule"]. In several key examples of verse-making and traditional (formulaic) storytelling, then, *spell* appears to describe a patterned utterance.

Further instances of *spell* as patterned speech come from varied sources in the corpus. Solomon's proverbs are for Ælfric *bigspell* ["exemplary stories"; his psalms are *leoð*] (*Catholic Homilies: The Second Series* 336, l. 48). The reader of the *Meters of Boethius* is given biographical background on Homer, to the effect that he was the best poet of the Greeks, the teacher (and friend) of Vergil, and that he composed both *leoð* and *spell* (Sedgefield 203, l. 1–8). Widsið uses *spell* to describe his performance in the hall. His many travels authorize him to "singan ond secgan spell, / mænan fore mengo in meoduhealle / hu me cynegode cystum dohten" (l. 54–6) ["sing and recite *spell*, relate before many in the mead hall, how nobles treated me lavishly"]. These examples and the evidence from *Beowulf* and from the *Boethius* texts all suggest *spell* as utterance per se, often and traditionally implying artful speech.

Two kinds of evidence thus conspire to make *leoð*/*spell* a false contrasting pair evincing a vernacular verse/prose divide. First, in situ, in the preface to the prose Old English *Boethius*, *spell* and *leoð* can be seen to work together, to build appositively rather than to oppose one another. Second, a concept of vernacular prose appears to be nowhere in Old English. The word *spell* often describes poetic speech, and in glosses for Latin prose, only Latin appears a suitable context in which to explain the term. Ælfric uses (poetically patterned) Old English to describe *prosa* as a Latin register, and the four other glosses concerning *prosa* use only Latin words as equivalents (*praefatio*, *communis*, *locutio*, and *oratorum dicta*), though Old English words serve to gloss terms for poet (*poeta*), poem (*poema*), and poetry (*poesis*) (*scop* or *leoðwyrhta*, *leoðcræft* or *leoð*, and *leoðweorc*, respectively).[23]

[23] *Praefatio*, *communis*, *locutio*, and *oratorum dicta* for *prosa* all appear in the Corpus Glossary edited by Hessels. Old English glosses for *poeta*, *poema*, and *poesis* appear in Ælfric's Grammar and in the Latin-Old English Glossaries edited by Kindschi (listed as

If Old English writers had any notion that "prose" was something any language could have, would they not have made an attempt to give a vernacular gloss?

It appears to be the case that poetic signification such as that which characterizes Alfred's translation of *Boethius*, serves a much broader purpose in Old English than we allow for poetry today. Alfred exploits the possibilities of form—of words in their linguistic relations as signs—to convey ideas, where the Latin source text uses the different strategies of referential mimesis and (also referential) linear logic. The textual evidence of Anglo-Saxon meta-discourse fails to recognize a generic dyad of vernacular verse and prose, even though at least learned Anglo-Saxons observed such a distinction in Latin. Rather, the terms used to describe vernacular texts—both extant written texts and the processes of oral performance—are used cooperatively and appositively rather than oppositionally. Their dynamic overlap suggests a discourse in which there is no term for important (ceremonious, newsworthy, book-ready) language that would oppose it to poetic language. There was a term or set of terms, all involving numbers or music, to denote metrical verse as a special kind of speech. But there is no positive opposite—there is no prose.

Alfred's exposition of Boethius' Latin text makes use of poetic patterning to configure metaphors, illustrate theological propositions, and gloss logic structures in his native idiom. Where his source text uses language referentially, he uses it poetically. The two prefaces to the Old English versions of *Boethius* suggest, in their descriptions of artful speech that seem to apply both to the prose and to the meters, that a model of Old English discourse involving patterning in many genres of important language is onto something. Patterning is the hallmark of "important speech" (what Hanson and Kiparsky call "literary language"), and in a culture that has not developed a recognized, marked genre of prose—marked by its suppression of patterning—we would expect to find not only metrical verse but many different "brands" of patterned speech, all recognizable because of their patterning. To return to Frank's question regarding the poetic function in Old English—what alerted Anglo-Saxon audiences to "prepare to hear words sing?"—I would suggest that all kinds of poetic structure had this function (formulaic verse being a special kind), and that the majority of the texts we have bear evidence of it. We have little or no evidence of actual everyday speech, the language mothers used to scold their children and farmers used to chat about the weather. We have little "prosaic" language in the quotidian sense of *prose*. If it is possible and even probable that genres in Old English literature not traditionally viewed as poetic use poetic strategies to convey meaning, then we should extend poetic scrutiny across the Old English corpus rather than restricting it to the contents of the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. Perhaps more texts can sing to us than we thought—if we are prepared to hear them.

AntGl 6 in the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*). The gloss for *poesis* reads "leoðweroc," which is almost certainly a transposition of *leoðweorc*. The simplex "weroc" appears four other times in the corpus, and each time must be a mistaken spelling of *weorc* (three times it translates Latin *opera* and the remaining instance is in the common doublet pairing it with *word*).

Chapter 2
Godspel: Old English Poetics and the Vernacular Homily

The homilies have been a major site of contention in the on-again, off-again debate over the definition of verse and prose in Anglo-Saxon England, a debate that this book seeks to cast in a new light. We have seen that *spell* has been taken to mean prosaic speech, when in fact its contexts suggest a connotation of artful speech, sometimes even verse. The range of meanings seems to include "speech" as in utterance at the most general level, with connotations of poetic patterning but with no connotations of non-patterning. The word's traditional, overlapping senses are "news" and "crafted message." Modern English *gospel* derives from Old English *godspel*, where *spell* is combined with *god* [originally /gōd/ "good"—translating Latin (from Greek) *evangelium*, "good tidings"—but quickly reanalyzed as /god/ "god," according to the OED] to denote the message of the New Testament (God's-good news). Preaching the gospel takes the verbal form *godspellian*, and it refers to vernacular preaching as well as the speech of the apostles. This news, this new message of Christianity that vernacular *godspel* represents provides another specimen of Anglo-Saxon nativization of foreign material.

While the homilies vary greatly in origin and composition, they share stylistic tendencies, among them the "echoic" word pairing, ring composition, and alliteration that we find almost everywhere we look in the Old English corpus. Further, the performance context for the vernacular homily bears some relation to the performance context for classical Old English verse. Even though its precise nature is still debated, the consensus version of traditional verse performance remains the iconic harper in the hall, based on images from Bede's story of Cædmon (not a hall, but around a fire) to scenes in *Beowulf* and reflected in modern imaginings of Anglo-Saxon performance such as John Gardner's blind *scop* in his novel *Grendel*.[1] The context of the Catholic mass brings with it a resignified analog

[1] Jeff Opland considers the mentions of performers making songs around the hall-fire to be anachronistic creations of late writers perhaps imagining for themselves a bygone world using more contemporary "entertainment" models of performance. According to Opland, traditional verse had more "serious" social functions than entertainment and thus must have been performed elsewhere than in the beer hall. But it does not necessarily render a performance less "serious" to have beer involved. The Norse association of poetry with mead and of poetry with madness (all through the person of the god Oðin) affords gravitas, not cheapness or frivolity, to that symbolic nexus. One might compare the Greek oracular traditions, which involved various types of intoxication and poetry (including inscrutable

to the feast in the hall. The bread and wine—meat and mead—are controlled and meted out by the priest, whose authority consolidates what, in the pre-Christian era, were separate roles: the chieftain (wielder of power and supplier of food and drink), the priest (performer of ritual), and the singer (performer of important speech). In the context of the church, then, the homiletic performance setting, the priest assumes several traditional social roles that include the *spelboda*, the reciter of important speech. The important speech of the homily is the "news" of the gospel, and while its subject matter is based on a new doctrine, its form is *spell*. We should expect it to evince the poetics of important speech across the corpus. Like other *spell* that has borne the unfortunate label of prose, homiletic speech is varied, not regular, and that very fact has been the snag upon which stylistic study of the homilies has been caught for over a century.

Form, varied and irregular, meaningfully structures the vernacular gospel, and if we do not read it meaningfully we are likely to see in the homilies mere thematic simulacra of the adopted Latin tradition. On the contrary, I consider the homilies to represent avant-garde Anglo-Saxon literary composition, having emerged in response to new cultural conditions (the coming of Christianity with its attendant social change). The homilies are fundamentally, radically products of the contact between Latin Christian and Germanic pagan culture, between literate learning and oral lore, between moral instruction and the transmission of custom. The connotations of *spell* suggest news, a new order, as well as artful telling. As we will see, Old English homiletic speech amply reflects the sense of proclamation and of artful delivery. This chapter will consider "vernacular gospel" as a genre with hybrid origins linking poetic, vernacular discourse with imported Christian doctrine, developing within a renovated performance context unique to the Christian church.

The likeness of Ælfric's style to classical Old English poetry has been noted since the nineteenth century, prompting some early editors to classify it as verse (*Homilies* 106). In the twentieth century, however, particular literary standards at odds with devotional and hortatory public registers and a more detailed understanding of the poetic vocabulary of classical Old English verse (which Ælfric's work conspicuously avoids) left Ælfric's work in a literary no-man's land between poetry and prose. It seemed to employ fairly regular verse devices, but it did not lend itself to a lyric or epic classification, and worse, failed to evince the modernist *sine qua non* of ambiguity and irony. The label "rhythmic prose" has sufficed to characterize the loosely metrical, usually alliterating "lines" which bear a structural likeness to classical verse. Take, for instance, the following passage from Ælfric's *Life of Cuthbert* (*Catholic Homilies, Second Series*), quoted from Pope's discussion of "rhythmical prose" in the preface to the *Homilies of Ælfric* (114). Constraints on alliteration appear to be relaxed in that any syllable, regardless of prominence, may participate in alliteration. Likewise,

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but revered nonsense—absolutely poetic speech), and which appear to have been taken seriously both within fictional frameworks of drama and outside them.

just one alliterating correspondence can join the two "verses." Nonetheless, there is a likeness to classical verse which enables the division into lines of verses:

Eft ða siððan oðre twegen
swearte hremmas siðlice comon.
and his hus tæron. mid heardum bile.
and to neste bæron. heora briddum to hleowðe;
Þas eac se eadiga. mid ealle afligde.
of ðam eðele. mid anum worde;
Ac an ðæra fugela. eft fleogende com.
ymbe ðry dagas. þearle dreorig.
fleah to his foton. friðes biddende.
þæt he on ðam lande. lybban moste.
symle unscæððig. and his gefera samod;
Hwæt ða se halga him. þæs geuðe.
and hi lustbære. þæt land gesohton.
and brohton ðam lareowe. lac to medes.
swines rysl his scon to gedreoge.
and hi ðær siððan. unscæððige wunedon;
[Then afterwards two other
black ravens came along
and tore his house with hard bill
and bore it to the nest their birds/brides to harbor.
These too the blessed one cast out with the rest
from that land with one word.
But one of those birds came flying after
about three days very dreary
flew to his feet beseeching protection
that he might live in the land
forever unharmed together with his companions.
Lo then the holy one granted him this
and they eagerly sought that land
and brought to the master as a gift of goodwill
pig's gristle for softening his shoes,
and they dwelt there unharmed after.]

Angus McIntosh in 1949 suggested that the boldly rhythmic, highly repetitive phrasing of Wulfstan was also regular in a way, organized in—instead of the "long" (two-verse) line of the pan-Germanic tradition—single-verse phrases of two stresses each:

Ac sóþ is þæt ic sécge
of éorþan gewúrdan
ærest gewórhte
þá ðe we sýlfe
éalle of cóman
and to éorþan we scýlan
éalle gewéorþan

and sýþþan hábban
swa éce wíte
áa butan énde
swa éce blísse
swa hwæþer we on lífe
æror geéarnodon
Gód ure hélpe
Amen. (McIntosh 115)
[And truly I say
from the earth there were
first created
those whom we ourselves
all came from
and to the earth we shall
all return
and thereafter have
such eternal torment
forever without end
such eternal bliss
such as we in life
had earned
God our help
Amen.]

Indeed, the pointing of many of the manuscripts bears out McIntosh's assertion, but Ida Hollowell attacked his analysis (on spurious grounds), leaving widespread uncertainty.[2] For several decades it seemed satisfactory to note both Ælfric's and Wulfstan's apparently idiosyncratic styles as "rhythmic prose."

Work for much of the twentieth century focused on Ælfric to the exclusion of Wulfstan, as Andy Orchard points out ("Re-editing Wulfstan" 63–5). The exclusion is even more extreme than Orchard notes, however, because while Wulfstan suffered relative neglect, the anonymous vernacular homilies in the

[2] See Orchard, "Re-editing Wulfstan," for a full discussion of the pointing of the Wulfstan canon. As for Hollowell's treatment of McIntosh, her attempt to undercut his claims amounts to a misapplication of principles from linguistic theory and a simultaneous failure to understand that the rules governing poetic grammar often differ from those governing the grammar of the common spoken language. For instance, Hollowell assumes without justification that the Nuclear Stress Principle, adduced from Modern English, applies to Old English and to Old English poetry more specifically. According to the Nuclear Stress Principle, the strongest phrasal stress normally falls on the last stressed syllable of a phrase. We see immediately in classical Old English poetry that the NSP probably does not apply, since the last stressed syllable in a line is the one syllable that is normally barred from alliterating. Russom's model of Old English meter, as well as the more recent models of Getty and Hanson and Kiparsky, assert the opposite of the NSP for Old English verse, assigning prominence to left-most nodes in the phrase structure. See Getty 134–6 for his discussion of the NSP in relation to Old English verse.

Vercelli and Blickling collections—for anything other than source studies—have been virtually ignored.[3] In fact, the anonymous homilies share many stylistic traits with the work of both Ælfric and Wulfstan, suggesting a more coherent vernacular homiletic tradition than has been recognized.

Recently, in light of broader reconsiderations of what constitutes art and artfulness, and in light of the development of oral theory beyond the early, heady days of Francis Magoun toward a plausible picture of an age of hybrid literary–oral composition in traditional *style*, scholars have returned to the older views of Ælfric and Wulfstan as engaged in poetics. Orchard has argued that Wulfstan's texts evince a characteristically oral tendency toward repetition and variation:

> Wulfstan's repetition can […] be said to operate at five levels of discourse, namely repetition of sounds and individual words, repetition of formulaic phrases, repetition of sentences and sentence structures, repetition of themes and paragraphs, and repetition of entire compositions […] Exactly these five features are considered by Peabody in his five tests for what he calls oral style. ("Crying Wolf" 258)

Orchard concludes, based on the evident "oral-traditional style" of Wulfstan's work, that we should "set Wulfstan's name alongside that of Aldhelm and the *Beowulf*-poet, all three providing examples of […] literate Anglo-Saxons who chose to compose in the traditional oral style of vernacular verse" (259). Orchard thus frees himself from the constraint of regular meter as the sole defining characteristic of the native oral tradition. Some texts, such as *Beowulf*, either represent or simulate the classical meter. Other texts, like many of Wulfstan's, evince the orality of the tradition but not the regular metricality of verse, which was most likely only one poetic genre among several in the culture. Since "oral style" appears to be characterized by repetition and hence patterning, "oral style" would be better termed "poetic language." It seems that once again a binary distinction between verse and prose has made the association with orality more available as a descriptor for the non-regular verbal patterning Orchard sees in Wulfstan, since assuming "prose" to be non-patterned, one must find some way to understand a prose that is evidently patterned. Rather than revising basic stylistic and generic assumptions, scholars such as Orchard borrow the socio-anthropological paradigms of orality and literacy. The problem with this is that it adds, unnecessarily, a controversial claim to what could be more purely descriptive and remain a stylistic claim, about text alone, rather than becoming an anthropological one about a cultural relationship to writing and communication. Homiletic language is apparently poetic, whether or not this is a symptom of an anthropological or cultural state of orality.

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[3] Zacher's new book on the Vercelli collection is a welcome sign that the anonymous homilies are coming back into critical view.

The Question of Metricality

This section will be technical yet frustratingly cursory. I am not a metricist. Yet it seems important to consider briefly the possibility, recently suggested from at least two separate theoretical perspectives, that some vernacular homiletic language may scan metrically. I invite the reader not interested in such a discussion to skip ahead to the next section heading, where I reassert Hanson and Kiparsky's broader claim that poetic language need not be regular to be poetic.

Thomas Bredehoft has gone beyond Orchard's assertion of oral (or poetic) *style* in resuming the poetic analysis of Ælfric. Bredehoft offers a model of the history of Old English meter that invites us to consider Ælfric's style as a form of specifically *late* Old English verse. According to Bredehoft, several late texts, including many by Ælfric, are consistent with a model in which a handful of key classical constraints have ceased to operate. Specifically, resolution, secondary stress subordination, and restriction of anacrusis to certain positions in the line are lost, leading to many more acceptable verses in the late tradition. Another characteristic of late Old English verse according to Bredehoft is the use of several types of secondary equivalence tokens rather than the extremely regular employment of dominant-stress-based alliteration we see in *Beowulf*. While alliteration still appears linking the two half-lines of a verse, it can also link only the two feet of a given verse (a or b), or even two consecutive lines. Many kinds of rhyme, assonance, morphological and lexical echoing—virtually any likeness—may constitute equivalence and keep up the meter. The sole constraint in Bredehoft's model, it would appear, is that a verse consists of two feet and a line of two verses, but whereas Geoffrey Russom's model (of classical verse) defines a foot in terms of acceptable word-stress contours, in Bredehoft's model there is no a set of rules giving rise to acceptable foot structures (a foot must involve such-and-such a grouping of syllables). Rather, he suggests that "late" poets reanalyzed old verses as comprised of many more foot types because of the loss of rules (resolution, stress subordination, and anacrusis constraints). Texts that evince Bredehoft's expanded set of verse types and no others he calls verse.[4]

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[4] The table below gives the expanded set of acceptable stressed feet. Following convention used by both Bredehoft and Russom, x denotes lack of metrical stress, S denotes strongest metrical stress, and s denotes subordinated metrical stress (dominated by an S somewhere in the line). Unstressed feet may consist of anywhere from one to four unstressed syllables. Bredehoft's rule for verse formation is that

> any verse must take one of these two forms:
> x-foot + S-foot
> or
> S-foot + S-foot
> and unstressed extrametrical elements are allowed before either foot. (76)

An S-foot may be any of the following expanded types (combinations that are newly allowable in late meter are italicized):

But what determines a metrical foot in late verse? Another way of putting this question is, what patterns of syllables would not be allowed, and why? According to Bredehoft, the only patterns of syllables allowed would be those a poet recognized from (reanalyzed) classical verse (personal correspondence). Composition would be a conscious, less intuitive process, since there is no linguistic structure upon which to base the foot. But as Hanson and Kiparsky, among other linguists working on verse, have shown, the subtle regularities poets observe are not consciously controlled but largely intuitive. Thus Bredehoft's model lacks some plausibility from a generative point of view.

Another possible metrical account of the patterning of "rhythmic prose" derives from Hanson and Kiparsky's "Parametric Theory of Poetic Meter." Hanson and Kiparsky suggest that the world's languages produce metrical verse that optimizes each language's lexicon (a proposed cross-linguistic principle they call FIT). Each verse type has several parameters to set according to this principle of optimization. These parameters are analogous to the parameters that vary between languages generally, as opposed to the universal principles common to all natural human languages. "Principles and Parameters" form a complementary dyad in generative theory. The universal principle that metrical verse observes is a basic alternation between prominent and unprominent elements. The parameters specify the maximum size of a metrical position (syllable, phonological foot, or prosodic word), the kind of prominence the verse observes (strength, weight, stress, or pitch accent), whether prominent or unprominent positions are restricted, and finally, in what way. The features that are apparent to verse practitioners and "formally independent of phonological structure" are the traditional metrical parameters we learn, such as how many metrical feet go in a line, and what characterizes the feet (iambic or trochaic contour, for instance) (289).[5] Hanson and Kiparsky identify

Classical foot form	**Late foot form**
s	S, Sx
sx	Sx, Sxx
S	S, Sx
Sx	Sx, Sxx
Sxx	Sxx, *Sxxx*
Ss	SS, SxS, SSx, *SxSx*
Sxs	SxS, SxxS, *SxSx*, *SxxSx*
SxxS	SxxS, *SxxxS*, *SxxSx*, *SxxxSx*
Ssx	SSx, *SxSx*, *SSxx*, *SxSxx* (76)

[5] Metrical feet and prosodic feet are distinct: a prosodic, or phonological, foot is a unit of structure between the syllable level and the prosodic word level ("prosodic word" captures the fact that unstressed particles such as prepositions are adjoined to other words phonologically, causing the prosodic and lexical definition of "word" to differ). For Old English and Modern English, a prosodic foot is, minimally, one heavy syllable (a long, bimoraic vowel, or a short vowel plus a consonant in the syllable "rhyme"), two light syllables, or a "resolved" syllable of a light syllable plus a heavy syllable.

three optimized metrical systems for Modern English based on the possible combinations of parameters subjected to the principle of FIT.

Shakespeare's iambic pentameter sets the phonological, or prosodic, foot as the maximum position size (thus units smaller than the foot—single light syllables—may fill metrical positions too), with resolution. It regulates weak positions, stipulating that strong syllables/prosodic feet may not appear in weak positions. Strong syllables and feet may appear in strong positions, and weak syllables and feet may appear freely, in any position. Line-initial inversion (in which the first metrical foot of the line is inverted) is allowed according to the general principle of CLOSURE, which allows relaxation of metrical or prosodic constraints at the beginning of a verse or prosodic unit (such as a line). An Elizabethan poet knew that the verse line has five pairs of syllables with a rising contour (unstressed-stressed), but what he or she did not know was that the underlying regularity of the verse observed not two-syllable metrical feet with all sorts of inversions, but rather a much more regular alternation of weak and strong positions whose maximum linguistic realization was the prosodic foot, and whose weak positions could not be filled by strong syllables or feet (but whose strong positions could be filled by weak elements).

Gerard Manley Hopkins uses, according to Hanson and Kiparsky, another of the three optimal verse settings, basing his Sprung Rhythm on the prosodic foot as well, but using stress, not strength, as the prominence type, and regulating prominent, not unprominent positions, so that an unprominent (unstressed) syllable may not appear in a prominent position. Unprominent positions may be empty, filled by unstressed syllables, or filled by stressed syllables. This is what gives Sprung Rhythm the feeling of clashing stresses it has, one right after another, as in the line "Who fired France for Mary without spot" (from *Duns Scotus's Oxford*, quoted in Getty 191, from Hanson and Kiparsky, "Parametric" 300). The remaining optimal meter in English is based on the syllable as maximum position size, using strength as prominence type, and regulating weak positions as in Shakespeare's foot-based meter: prominent syllables may not appear in unprominent positions. This is the meter, according to Hanson and Kiparsky, of Milton.

Michael Getty developed a model of classical Old English meter (specifically, the meter of *Beowulf*), that draws on Hanson and Kiparsky's parametric theory. According to Getty's analysis, Old English meter uses the same settings as Hopkins's Sprung Rhythm: maximum position size is a minimal prosodic foot, stress is the prominence type, and unstressed syllables are barred from filling prominent positions (making prominent positions the site regulated by the meter). Suggestively, based on FIT, Getty claims that Hanson and Kiparsky's three optimal verse types are optimal for the Old English lexicon as well, and that

> the predictions of Hanson and Kiparsky's theory would thus be (a) that these schemas represent the full range of variation in Old English metre, and (b) that all three metres should surface in recorded Old English poetry. Only an exhaustive survey of the poetic corpus can test these two predictions. (188)

It is unclear why all meters known to a language, particularly the language of a culture that is still doing much of its verbal business orally, not in writing, should be attested in written form. Nevertheless, it is tempting to apply the two remaining possible metrical settings—foot-based meter regulating weak positions (excluding prominent syllables from them) and basing prominence on strength, and syllable-based meter regulating weak positions in the same way—to "rhythmic prose" and the question of its possible regularity. The three passages below, from Ælfric, Wulfstan, and the Vercelli collection, all scan according to the syllable-based meter, and perhaps according to the foot-based meter as well. I am not expert enough in working with phonological tree diagrams (which show structure from the prosodic word down to the foot, then to the syllable, then to the mora) to evaluate the scansions with confidence, and the question before us here is not whether the homilies are ever regular according to any one scheme (over any other). I think it prudent, though, to refer Anglo-Saxonists to current work in phonology and metrical theory (on the linguistics side of things) that has great promise for Old English metrical studies. I would also suggest to phonologists that they look beyond recognized verse as they search for examples of other possible metrical systems in Old English. The homilies may provide what they are looking for. For rigorous explication of phonological foot structure I refer the reader to Hanson and Kiparsky ("Parametric Theory") and for a comprehensive discussion of classical Old English meter within a parametric model, I refer the reader to Getty.

Briefly, in order to show possible metrical structure, below is an example of Ælfricean verse as scanned by Bredehoft, from the *Life of Cuthbert*, "generally acknowledged as Ælfric's first extended composition in the rhythmical style" (Bredehoft 82). In addition to Bredehoft's scansion, I attempt below each line a tentative, prosodic-foot-based scansion according to Hanson and Kiparsky's parameters (in which weak positions may not contain strong syllables). In my very limited analysis, I have posited, based on what the "verses" seem to suggest, that extrametrical syllables are allowed at the beginning of any verse, and that the scansion properly begins with the first strong syllable (since all the syllables prior to it are weak, none violate the constraints against strong syllables appearing in weak positions), making the pattern trochaic, like the pattern of classical meter. The reason a syllable may signal the beginning of the scansion when the meter itself is based on the position size of a prosodic foot is that the position size sets the maximum position size, not the minimum. Therefore, a position may sometimes be filled by a syllable, and a syllable may sensibly begin the scansion. The first line of my scansion marks in capital S and W ("strong" and "weak," respectively) metrical positions beginning with the first strong syllable in each verse; this is the abstract template of the meter. The line below the positions gives in lowercase s and w the actual materialized foot values (strong or weak). Strength, in the phrase-structure paradigm I follow here (that of Hanson and Kiparsky and Getty), is defined by status as the head (left-most member) of any binary branching constituent or a descendant of such a head (Hanson and Kiparsky, "Parametric" 291). Strength is different from stress, though they often correspond. In the passages

below I have noted in parentheses additional poetic devices where these appear. The arrows signify an equivalence relation with the line above or below, according to the direction of the arrow. Regarding my tentative scansions, I reiterate that the proposed constraint prohibits strong syllables from filling weak positions; weak syllables may fill strong positions. So in the first line, the weak *man* appears in a strong position and this is allowed according to the proposed meter.

Bredehoft's scansion

Sum eawfast man. eac swilce hæfde. x/SxS xxx/Sx (voc.-allit.)
S W S S W
w s w w w w w
micele cyðde. to ðan halgan cuðberhte. Sxx/Sx (xx)Sx/SSx (c-allit.)
S W S W S W
w w s w s w
and gelomlice his lare breac. xx/Sxx x/SxS (l-allit.)
S W S W
w s w w w w
þa getimode his wife. wyrs ðonne he beðorfte. xx/SxxxSx Sxx/(xx)Sx (w-allit.)
S W S W S W S
w s w w w w w w
þæt heo ðurh wodnysse. micclum wæs gedreht; xxx/SSx Sxx/(x)S (w↑)
S W S W S W
w w w s w s w w w
þa com se eawfæsta. to ðan eadigan cuðberhte. (x)S/(x)SSx (xx)Sxx/SSx (voc.-allit.)
S W S W S W
w w w s w w w s w s w
and he wæs on ðam timan. to prafoste geset. xxx/(xx)Sx x/SxxxS
S W S W S
w w w w w s w w s w w
on ðam munuclife. þe is lindisfarnea gehaten. xx/SxSx (xx)SxSx/(x)Sx (m↓)
S W S W S W S W
w w s w w w s w w w s w
þa ne mihte he for sceame. him openlice secgan. (xx)Sx/(xx)Sx (x)Sxxx/Sx (s-allit.)
S W S W S W S W
w w w w w w s w s w
þæt his eawfæste wif. on ðære wodnysse læg. xx/SxxS xxx/SxxS (w-allit.)
S W S S W S
w w s w w w w s w w
ac bæd þæt he asende sumne broþer. (x)Sx/(xx)Sx Sx/Sx (b-allit.)
S W S W
w w w w s w w s w
þe hire gerihta. gedon mihte. xxx/(x)Sx x/SSx (rhyme)
S S W
w w w w
ær ðan ðe heo of life. gelæd wurde; xxx/(xx)Sx x/SSx (l-allit.)
S W S S W (Bredehoft 82–3)
w w w w w w w

[One devout man also had such
great knowledge as the holy Cuthbert
and often enjoyed his learning.
Then it happened to his wife worse than he deserved
that she through madness was greatly afflicted.
Then came that devout one to the blessed Cuthbert
and he was at that time serving as prior
in the monastery that is called Lindisfarne.
Then he could not for shame tell him openly
that his devoted wife lay in madness,
but asked that he send forth a brother
who might perform her rights
before she be led from life.]

Note that every line but one (the line exactly in the middle of the passage, as it happens) has a secondary equivalence token, usually alliteration, operating within the line or between it and a line it precedes or follows.

Bredehoft does not treat Wulfstan's oeuvre beyond two texts in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*Textual* 106–10), but some of Wulfstan's work scans much as Ælfric's does, according to his system. The opening lines of Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, for instance, can be put into the same schema, with similar results:

Leofan men, gecnawað þæt soð is: Sx/S (x)Sxx/Sx
S W S S W S W S
s w w s w w w w
ðeos worold is on ofste, 7 hit nealæcð þam ende, (x)Sxxx/Sx (xx)Sxxx/(x)Sx
S W S W S S W S W (voc. allit., gramm. rhyme)
w s w w w w w s w w
7 þy hit is on worolde aa swa leng swa wyrse xxx/(x)SxxS x/SxSx
S W S S (w-allit.)
w w w w w s w w w w w w
7 swa hit sceal nyde for folces synnan (x)Sxx/Sx x/SxSx
S S W S W (s-allit.)
w w w w w w s w s w
ær Antecristes tocyme yfelian swyþe x/SxSx (x)Sx/SxxxSx
S W S W S W S W (voc.-allit., c-allit.)
w s w s w s w s w
7 huru hit wyrð þænne egeslic 7 grimlic wide on worolde. (xxxx)Sxx /SxxxSx Sxx/Sxx
S W S W S W S W S W (w-allit., intern. rhyme)
w w w w w s w w s w w w s w (47)

[Beloved men, know it is true:
this world is in haste, and it nears the end,
and it is ever in the world the longer the worse
and so it shall straiten on account of people's sins
before the Antichrist's coming to severest evil
and truly it will then grow frightening and grim wide over the world.]

Bredehoft does not treat Wulfstan's corpus because Haruko Momma declares Wulfstan not to have used "the long line," meaning he did not link two half-lines into a full line structure (personal correspondence). Yet Momma's assertion is based on McIntosh's five-tier hierarchy of "verse-likeness," which was itself conceived ad hoc as the backdrop for his particular analysis of Wulfstan's writing.[6] McIntosh was interested in highlighting Wulfstan's distinctness from other writers. He perceived in reading Wulfstan aloud a tendency toward two-stress units, and proposed putting Wulfstan's texts into "Hudibrasian" lines reflecting these units (114–15). McIntosh's assertion that the units did not weld together to form longer structures is wrong, as the passages scanned above show. The chain of assumptions from McIntosh's lecture to Bredehoft's exclusion of Wulfstan from consideration is therefore dubious and in need of reconsideration. Scholars have indeed begun to address Wulfstan anew.[7]

Both Wulfstan's and Ælfric's texts scan as late Old English verse according to Bredehoft's formulation, and as an alternate optimal Old English meter according to Hanson and Kiparsky's; the same is true for at least some (randomly chosen) of the Blickling and Vercelli homilies. For example, here is a passage, lineated and scanned both ways, from Vercelli II:

7 on þam dæge	bið dryhtnes rod	(x)x/Sx x/SxS
S	S W S	(d-allit.)
w w w w	w s w w	
blode flowende	betweox wolcnum,	Sx/Sxx (x)S/Sx
S W	S W	(b-allit., assonance)
w s w	w s w	
7 in þam dæge	bið dryhtnes onsyn	(xx)x/Sx x/SxSx
S	S W S W	(d-allit.)
w w w w	w s w s w	
swiðe egeslicu	7 ondryslicu,	Sx/SxSx x/SxSx
S W S	S W S	(voc.-allit., gramm. rhyme)
w s w w	w s w w	
7 on þam hiwe	þe he ne wæs	(x)x/Sx (x)x/Sx
S	S	(h-allit.)
w w w w	w w w	
þa hine Iudeas swungon	7 ahengon	(x)Sx/SxxSx (x)x/ Sx
S W S W	S W	(voc.-allit., gramm. rhyme)
w w s w	s w w s w	

[6] The five-tiered classification system ranks classical poetry first, "debased" poetry (consisting of only a handful of late examples) second, the features of which anticipate some of the feature's of Bredehoft's late OE meter, Ælfric third, Wulfstan fourth, and "everyday" prose last in order of verse-likeness (McIntosh 110–12). "Verse-like" seems to denote language that a native speaker would recognize as poetic or *leoð*-like, so that classical compositions would immediately signal a set of discursive expectations, where prose texts would carry no such markers.

[7] See, for instance, *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York*, and Orchard's essay, "Re-editing Wulfstan: Where's the Point?" in particular.

7 hiora spatlum him on spiwon. (x)Sx/Sx Sx/Sx
S W S W (h-allit., sp-allit.)
w w s w w w s w (Scragg 54)
[and on that day will the cross of the lord
be flowing with blood between the clouds,
and on that day will the look of the lord
be terrible and dreadful,
and in the form he was not in when the Jews swung and hanged him,
and with their spittle sprayed him.]

All three passages scan according to Bredehoft's model of late Old English verse, and all three passages scan, tentatively, according to Hanson and Kiparsky's two strength-based, weak-position-regulating metrical systems (one based on the foot, and other other on the syllable). In my tentative scansions, the foot-based meter appears to have more possibility, but there may be ways I have incorrectly construed the structure of certain words. The noteworthy thing, initially, according to this cursory, preliminary attempt, is that the constraint is not violated: nowhere does a weak position get filled by a strong foot or syllable. I am not qualified to go beyond this possibly erroneous analysis, and I therefore leave it as a suggested avenue for future evaluation by a proper metrical phonologist.

Poetic Language More Broadly

While Bredehoft's model of late Old English verse and Hanson and Kiparsky's and Getty's phonologically based analyses are provocative and reorienting and suggest directions for future research in metrics, I will here leave the question of regular meter. This study is not concerned with regular metricality per se, but instead, with poetic structure—a more various phenomenon than has been considered possible. We might class the vernacular homilies as a genre partaking in some respects of "the traditional oral style of vernacular verse" (Orchard, "Crying Wolf" 259), while forgoing the "oral" in favor of "patterned." Vernacular homilists of the tenth century compose in a style that combines quasi-regular verse with emphatic word pairs, highly structured lists, and short passages of more prosaic exposition. But the mode of language throughout is highly poetic in Jakobsonian terms: language is a visible, active conveyor of meaning.

At least one other scholar, Anne Savage, has already suggested the homilies as a poetic genre, as a major transmission conduit for traditional poetry across the divide that seems so utterly to separate the Old English and Middle English verse traditions:

> We must take into account, then, that the distinctions we draw between prose and poetry are, perhaps all the way from the Anglo-Saxon period to *The Owl and the Nightingale*, a little artificial […] Old English poetry did not whither into a few nostalgic antiquarian attempts at reconstruction, but *changed cultural use*. It remained in an oral medium, preaching and devotional use, from whence it did indeed find its way into writing—where we have largely ignored it. (507)

Savage sees a continuity from Old English to Middle English verse, and envisions a scenario similar to the one I propose here, in which the native verse tradition is absorbed into the emerging discourse (changing cultural use, as Savage puts it) of the homilies and other devotional literature. Savage further recognizes the appropriateness of inherited prestige language linking itself to the newly sacred, resulting in the very early phenomenon of Cædmon's miraculous production of Christian truth in a pagan vessel:

> The overt association of the Old English oral-poetic mode with the spiritual understanding of biblical texts is an essential element of Anglo-Saxon culture from Cædmon to the Old English *Exodus*, reworked in the homiletic mode by Wulfstan, and, I hazard, transmitted through the twelfth century. (510)

While Savage notes only Wulfstan specifically (her article uses only his work as an example of its period, for the purpose of comparison with later texts), her characterization of the "homiletic mode" as retooling the "oral-poetic mode" for new uses applies to the texts of the anonymous Blickling and Vercelli collections and Ælfric's work as much as it does to Wulfstan's. In my view, the oral-poetic mode characterizes not only the metrical verse tradition, but the Anglo-Saxon conception of literary language or important speech more generally, the mode that important language engaged in order to mark its own importance. This represents a softening, perhaps, of Savage's claim regarding the homilies, or rather a view from a different angle. The homilies do make use of the verse tradition, but they also make use of many different textual traditions and discourse modes in order to structure a vibrant vernacular gospel.

The best potential for critical insight may lie in recognizing hybridity not as an index of confusion but as a coherent textual characteristic with unifying aims: oral delivery (during the mass and in other ritual venues), vernacular poetics and epistemology, Christian theology. The homilies vary from the relatively prosaic (Vercelli V, for instance, though this, too, evinces the poetic function, as in its predilection for paronomastic couplets and alliteration) to the more obviously poetic (Vercelli II, Blickling IX, *Sermo Lupi*, much of Ælfric's oeuvre). Some of the sermons are translations nearly verbatim from Latin sources (Blickling XIV, for example), and thus show less of the vernacular prosody. Those for which no direct source can be found, however, often evince a poetic sensibility on many levels of structure. This tradition makes use of all kinds of poetic correspondences (equivalence tokens) in forming its patterns, and while it may sometimes launch into recognizable meter, elsewhere it forms couplets, long phrases, chiasmus, and ring structures.

I will take the opportunity here, before I begin an extensive close reading, to establish and explain my use of seemingly technical terms such as *chiasmus* and *ring structure*. Such terminology has a technical sound, but is technical only in the sense that it describes structure with precision; it does not imply a special theoretical depth. So, for instance, *chiasmus*, which literally describes a diagonal "x-shape," has come to refer to grammatical and literary structures in which parallel terms seem to "trade places" or "travel in the opposite direction."

For instance, Marjorie Garber once explained, in a lecture on *Macbeth*, that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth undergo a chiastic exchange of positions in the play, in that Lady Macbeth moves from guilt to innocence, and Macbeth from innocence to guilt. "Fair is foul, and foul is fair," from the witches' chorus in the opening scene of the play (1.1.10), is an example of a verbal chiasmus. In the realm of modern consumer culture, the jingle "I am stuck on Band-Aid brand 'cause Band-Aid's stuck on me!" is another example of a chiasmus. The aesthetic effect of a chiasmus is to effect in language a parallel transformation as a felt thing. For example, since *foul* and *fair* alliterate and thus resemble one another to begin with, their trading places syntactically effects a devastating proof that neither term has integrity: they are one and the same.

A ring structure, or ring composition, is a figure in which the element marking the beginning of a passage appears again to mark the end, forming bookends and carving out the particular passage as a distinct structure. Pasternack's "movements" in Old English are often marked out in this way. I find that in Old English, a ring composition will often not only have bookends, but also an iteration of the same term in the middle of the structure, which I call a "hub" or a "fulcrum." The opening lines of Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi* is an example of such a structure, containing an opening, a closing, and an internal iteration of *worold*. The effect of a ring composition or structure is completeness-with-motion, making Pasternack's term "movement" quite apt for it. With a ring structure, one appreciably begins and goes somewhere, since word follows word in a temporo-spatial sequence, but coming back to the same word, phrase, or term that began the sequence creates at once a sense of closure and a sensation of cyclic continuity. Thus Wulfstan's repetition of *worold* in an excursus on the end of days has a self-evidently totalizing but eternal effect.

I use technical rhetorical/poetic terms here and throughout this book in order to describe structure accurately. It is important to remember that structure may be conscious as well as unconscious, and that "poetic" and "rhetorical" are actually the same thing. I identify structure because it is so prevalent in Old English, and different structures have different suggestive potential, but I do not conceive of rhetorical figures as a fixed list of terms inherited from the Classical tradition. It is important to note this because many traditional medieval scholars, and literary scholars in general, for that matter (particularly those not trained in linguistics), do see rhetorical figures this way, as stylistic devices akin to the *plié*, which arise only once, in a single tradition, and must be learned by conscious instruction. Linguists, on the other hand, see poetic structure as arising from the structfure of language, which is a universal human trait. Thus many languages of the world make use of puns and parallelism and rhyme and alliteration, even though they have no contact with the Latin literary tradition. When I identify a structure, therefore, I am not making a claim about an Anglo-Saxon's access to Classical learning. I am instead recognizing a pattern in language and giving it an accurate, descriptive name. I will discuss the various kinds of couplets used by Anglo-Saxon writers and in the Indo-European tradition more generally later in this chapter.

Blickling IX/Vercelli X: A Case Study

Rather than presenting sets of examples of the major poetic and comparatively prosaic techniques at work in the homilies, as most recent studies have done in order to prove the existence of these techniques,[8] I will present a close reading of an entire homily, providing comparanda as I go. In this way the text's hybridity or strategic variety will best reveal itself. Also, the interpretive potential of this method of reading will become clear as we go beyond source studies with hybridity in mind, on the lookout for whatever textual, linguistic patterning presents itself. The terrain becomes interesting in a way we may now have the tools to describe.

I have chosen Blickling IX/Vercelli X, a Rogation sermon at least partially attested in nine copies. Donald G. Scragg, the most recent editor of the Vercelli Book, judges the sermon to be highly poetic and well wrought in the course of his prefatory description, mostly concerned with manuscripts and sources. This study is complementary to Scragg's bibliographic work, which has made it possible.[9] My purpose is to illuminate how the sermon creates what Scragg calls its homiletic effectiveness (192). The base text I have used is that of the Blickling manuscript, and where this breaks off I have switched to the copy in CCCC 302 (Ker 56). The choice is rather arbitrary, since, as Scragg points out, "all [the versions] appear to have been written with a great deal of freedom" (193), but I choose Blickling because it preserves archaic language, and CCCC 302 because it is "in many respects the most reliable textually," and the two represent distinct groups in Scragg's proposed stemma (194). In this way some semblance of the earliest flavor of the original language may come through, as well as a maximally readable text requiring the least amount of emendation. I will cite the different manuscripts following Scragg, using B for the Blickling manuscript and K for CCCC 302. The quotations themselves are from the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* on CD-ROM. "&" has been changed to "7" throughout.

Blickling IX/Vercelli X falls into three main sections, all focused thematically upon the word and its roles at different stages of judgment and salvation. In other words, the theme of the homily is the word, which the homily both describes (as in Christ, the Word, the Good News) and embodies, in being an instance of gospel words and in calling attention to itself in multiple ways. Not only is the language poetically structured, but the individual scenarios of the three parts of the homily all overtly construe and comment upon their own existence as speech acts. First, the story of the Incarnation, which made forgiveness by grace a possibility for humankind, outlines the theological terrain and suggests the proper path to

[8] See Zacher, *Preaching the Converted*, for a book-length study of the style of the Vercelli homilies, from a more traditional, rhetorical point of view.

[9] Zacher has recently published analysis of this very homily. Zacher's approach is based in rhetorical rather than linguistic analysis, and our two studies are thus complementary rather than redundant or competing.

salvation. That path involves hearing a message (the one that Christ preached) and correctly perceiving it through divine grace. The homilist's audience is therefore enjoined to take heed of the present message. Thus the homilist links the salvation message from the prophets through Christ to his own present words, rendering his speech act immediately urgent. The second major section dramatizes the fate of a sinful soul in the terms of a dispute hearing, again framing theological precept as discursive event. Satan plays the accuser before the divine judge. The final section of the homily features Christ as direct accuser of the soul, expanding on various New Testament scenes. Christ remonstrates the living soul, delivering the message that is intended for every human being to hear, in a metonymic address to one representative human. In so doing the homily presents in the final section the gospel Word straight from the savior's mouth. To summarize, then, the homily presents the story of the coming of the Word as the articulation of a message; it then illustrates the consequences of not hearing that message (one will be accused and pronounced guilty); finally, Christ himself (the incarnate Word) places direct pressure on humanity, articulating its sinful state. In all three sections, the poetic word acts as self-reflexive animus for the Logos itself.

The homily's opening highlights the discursive emphasis of what is to come. The first few lines[10] resemble an expanded version of the opening of *Beowulf* or of "Deor" or indeed of many other poems, in their invocation of speech and of a tradition that binds the present listeners in a community. (Unless otherwise noted, all emphases in Old English quotations, such as bold, italics, extraordinary capitalization, and underline, are my own.)

> we gehyrdon oft secggan be þam æþelan tocyme ures Drihtnes
> hu he him on þas world þingian ongan,
> þæt heahfæderas sægdon 7 cyðdon,
> þæt witigan witigodan 7 heredon,
> þæt sealmsceopas sungon 7 sægdon (B.1)
> [we have heard it said often about the noble coming of our Lord
> how he began to intervene in this world,
> *that* the patriarchs said and knew,
> *that* the prophets prophesied and praised,
> *that* the psalmists sang and said]

"Saying" binds the opening passage in a ring composition with its hub in the middle line: "secggan […] sægdon […] sægdon."[11] The ring asserts the centrality

[10] I have chosen to print the homily in approximate lines of verse, as it does scan according to Bredehoft's late verse system, with equivalence tokens marking each line. My main goal is to portray in typography recognizable to modern readers the high degree of patterning in the text. My analysis does not depend upon the homily's metricality, but noting this aspect of structure—the approximate lines—typographically helps us to perceive other elements of structure that run through the text in tension with it.

[11] Similarly, Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi* repeats *worold* three times in its long opening sentence, in a ring composition much like that which opens Blickling IX above:

of the spoken word to the salvation story of the gospel and as the binding force connecting the Old Testament to the New Testament and both to the textual "present." The diction of the passage invokes poetically (by way of referring to them, not by way of constituting orality) the oral traditions of the past and present: *þingian* ["intercede," "litigate"] is a densely packed word in Anglo-Saxon, evoking scenarios of oral contest and debate, such as we see in the name of the Old Norse and Modern Icelandic legislative assembly, the *Alþingi*; the psalmists are figured as *sceopas*, a traditional word for the oral poet. The passage follows a reverse chronological and geographic sequence, from the present *we* whose ears the word has reached, to the church fathers who carried the word from Biblical times to the present, to the prophets who predicted Christ's coming, to the psalmists who, in this schema, were the originators of the story. Their word was the word of God, in an assertion of poetic primacy much like that we see in Cædmon's story.[12] The sequence goes back to the psalmists, not to the divine mouth, not to the burning bush or the booming voice atop Mount Sinai. The buck stops with the poets.

Leofan men, gecnawað þæt soð is
ðeos *worold* is on ofste, 7 hit nealæcð þam ende,
7 þy hit is on *worolde* aa swa leng swa wyrse,
7 swa hit sceal nyde for folces synnan
ær Antecristes tocyme yfelian swyþe
7 huru hit wyrð þænne egeslic 7 grimlic, wide on *worolde*. (47)
[Beloved men, we know it is true
this world is in haste, and it nears the end,
and thus it is ever worse in the world the longer it goes,
and so it will press, because of the sins of the people,
before Antichrist's coming, to badly worsen,
and truly it will then be frightening and grim, all around the world.]

Wulfstan's sentence moves from *worold* in the sense of our temporal, mortal reality—the present "age" of humankind, to *worold* paired with *aa* in the sense of "ever" or "always," to *worold* as a geographical, physical expanse. The trajectory is fitting, since his sermon treats the "present" state of affairs and its connection to the eternal point of view of the divine Judge. It seems fair to say this ring technique serves as an opening gesture to synopsize in poetic form the content of the sermon to come. It varies the constant term *worold* in ways that evoke its different meanings, from "time" to "eternity" to the earth itself. This particular opening technique is hardly ubiquitous among the vernacular sermons, but similar ring structures and repetition patterns abound, as Scragg notes in his preface to Vercelli X (191).

[12] The miracle of Cædmon's gift is often emphasized in the story, but it is also remarkable that the holy language of the church could be translated, and that it would be translated in the form of traditional poetry. Poetic language was so culturally important in Anglo-Saxon that a new religion had to be shown to be expressible in its terms. Bede's elegant account of the miracle asserts the Christian God and the church as institutional and inspirational authorities, to be sure, but this is a narrative act, and the story's very existence affirms the primacy of the vernacular idiom.

Four "lines" later we see another, similarly schematic, language-driven image, in the homilist's account of the incarnation. The heavens open at the beginning of the sentence, and the *hea miht*, the Holy Spirit or the holy spirit of Christ, drops down and down until it reaches this land (*þysne wang*), then the womb of the Virgin, which is the *æþelan innoþe* ["noble insides"], the *betstan bosme* ["best bosom"], and finally the *gecorenan hordfæte* ["chosen/precious vessel/treasure-cup"]. The effect of this syntactic figure, with the opening heavens at the "top" and the precious vessel at the "bottom," mimics the physical dropping down from the sky into the earthly vessel:

> Eall þæt wæs gelæsted seoþþan heofonas tohlidon
> 7 seo hea miht on þysne wang astag
> 7 se Halga Gast wunode on þam æþelan innoþe,
> 7 on þam betstan bosme, 7 on þam gecorenan hordfæte. (B.6)
> [It was all carried out after the heavens opened
> and the high might came down to this place
> and the Holy Ghost dwelt in that noble belly,
> and in that best bosom, and in that precious vessel.]

This is similar to the grammatical figure we saw employed by King Alfred in Chapter 1, in his account of *wæter* ["water"] traveling as syntactic subject through multiple clauses, mimicking the actual water being described:

> swa swa of þære sæ cymð þæt wæter innon ða eorðan, 7 þær aferscað; cymð þonne up æt þæm æwelme, wyrð þonne to broce, þonne to ea, þonne andlang ea, oð hit wyrð eft to sæ. (Sedgefield 86)
> [just so from the sea comes the water inland, and covers it, then gathers at the spring, then becomes a brook, then a river, then a tributary, until at last it becomes the sea.]

This might be a common poetic device we should recognize for Old English. The version in K attests *wæstme* ["fruit"] instead of *bosme* ["bosom"] above, forgoing the alliteration with *betstan* but creating an additional level of structural detail. Instead of simply supplying an appositive alternative for "æþelan innoþe," version K creates a list that moves from the animal to the vegetable to the mineral in its epithets: "innoþe […] wæstme […] hordfæte" ["belly (…) fruit (…) chalice"]. The list in fact moves from literal to figurative over this rehearsal of taxonomy, enacting the transformation from earthly flesh to holy vessel. Theological precept is here made explicit in Mary's verbal "immaculation." She moves from fleshly woman to precious object. Further still, Mary's immaculating trajectory from flesh to perfect metaphor forms a chiasmus with Christ's impending transformation from Word to flesh.

An addendum tells us more plainly what happened then, bringing together *halga* ["holy"] signifying the Spirit and *breost* ["breast"] the flesh, which had remained separate in the account of the descent above, enacting the incarnation of the Word made flesh:

> 7 on þam halgan breostum he eardode nigon monaþ. (B.10)
> [And within that holy breast he dwelled nine months.]

/h/ repeats throughout the extended passage above, appearing on a stressed syllable in every line (*heofenas*, *hea*, *Halga*, *hordfæte*, *halgan*), again, I think, tracking poetically the descent of the Holy Spirit (not necessarily the same as the trinitarian Person) whose name begins with that sound from its origins in the heavens to its hallowed earthly dwelling.

The next moment in the narrative is the birth:

> Þa ealra fæmnena cwen cende þone soþan scyppend 7 ealles folces frefrend (B.10)
> [Then the queen of all women gave birth to the true "shaper" and the comforter of all people.]

Again we see Mary balanced with Christ, here in a parallel syntactic construction. "Ealra fæmnena cwen" ["queen of all women"] parallels "ealles folces frefrend" ["comforter of all people"], and the two epithets bookend the sentence. But the sentence also contains a three-part division, creating the 2:3 tension Orchard describes in Wulfstan's homilies ("Re-editing Wulfstan" 77–91). The three units are marked by the alliterative word pairs which break up normal syntactic constituents such as the noun phrase "ealra fæmnena cwen" in favor of a suprasyntactic, purely phonetic overlay: "cwen cende […] soþan scyppend […] folces frefrend." The cognitive effect is akin to the musical effect of duple meter superimposed on triplets. Again, too, Mary's role is emphasized by syntactic structure, in that *cwen cende*, which describes the active role of giving birth, parallels the act of creation suggested by *soþan scyppend*, while *folces frefrend*, too, includes in its semantic field the nurturing comfort of the maternal as opposed to other lexical choices—choices made very often by Anglo-Saxon writers—that would have emphasized Christ's role as triumphant redeemer and harrower of hell.[13] Mary is the queen who conceives the creator and comforter.

Mary has been the subject and agent of the action. The agency now shifts to Christ himself:

> þa se goldbloma þa on þas world becom
> 7 menniscne lichoman onfeng æt Sancta Marian þære unwemman fæmnan.[14] (B.10)
> [then the gold-bloom[15] came to this world
> and took a human body through Sancta Maria the unblemished woman.]

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[13] Vercelli X attests *wuldor* ["wonder," "splendor"] instead of *cwen*, obscuring the triplet of alliterative pairs. Elsewhere, too, as will become apparent, this text emends the other versions' poetic structures, often opting for more prosaic alternatives.

[14] Vercelli X substitutes *ælmihtega dryhten* for *goldbloma* and omits "þære unwemman fæmnan."

[15] I have not come across any discussion of *goldbloma* that goes beyond noting its poetic quality and uniqueness. Since epithets of Christ often figure him as the sun, and at least one other name for a flower, *daisy*, originated in a metaphor for the sun (*dæges-ege* ["day's eye"]), it seems plausible that *goldbloma* here partakes of that network of metaphors

Christ is now the subject, and Mary is subordinate to the action. She is figured as a conduit for the incarnation of Christ. But the action does not yet move on to the next step in the narrative, for the homily instead regroups in another synopsis, recapitulating the path from Mary's action of bearing the child, to the cooperation or joining of flesh and spirit, Mary and Jesus, to the action of Jesus in coming to the world:

> þurh þa burþran we wæron gehælde, 7 þurh þæt gebeorþor we wurdon alysde.
> 7 þurh þa gesamnunga we wæron gefreoþode feonda gafoles,
> 7 þurh þone tocyme we wæron geweorþode, 7 gewelgade, 7 gearode. (B.15)
> [through the bearing we were healed, and through that birth we were redeemed.
> And through that joining we were freed of the demons' fief,
> and through that coming we were rewarded, and enriched, and endowed.]

At the same time, we see the introduction of humankind, the object of salvation, as the passive subject in these sentences. The relation of Jesus to human beings will be the focus of the next part of the story. Thus the homily begins with Christ's descent into the fleshly vessel, dwells on the interaction between Mary and Jesus by figuring a kind of hand-off of agency in the Advent story, and recapitulates that hand-off while at the same time introducing the next step in the salvation story—people—as the passive subject of the syntax.

The homily now sets up a structure depicting the response of humanity to the Good News that figures both its resistance to and eventual acceptance of salvation as passive, under the sole agency of God. The least active of all verbs, "to be," describes the hard-heartedness of the people:

> Hie wæron stænenre heortan 7 blindre þæt hie þæt ongeotan ne cuðan
> þæt hie þær gehyrdon,
> ne þæt oncnawan ne mihton þæt hie þær gesawon. (B.21)
> [They were of such a blind and stony heart that they could not perceive
> what there they heard,
> nor were able to recognize what there they saw.]

The active verbs *ongeotan* ["perceive"], *gehyrdon* ["heard"], *oncnawan* ["know, recognize"], and *gesawon* ["saw"], are doubly embedded, first by the state-of-being verb *wæron* ["were"] and then by what we might crudely call "state-of-ability" verbs *cuðan* ["could"] and *mihton* ["could"]. The homily never does allow humanity to perform an action. The *ælmihtig God* removes the veil of error [*unriht wrigel*] from people's hearts, and "brightens" or illuminates them with the light of perception ["onbyrhton mid leohtum andgite"].[16] The lexical and syntactic form of the revelation controls this change in the people in an etymological figure

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associating the Son with the sun. See Chapter 4 for more discussion of solar metaphor and Christ.

[16] As Scragg notes (197), the Blickling manuscript shows an erased plural *onbyrton* ["(they) brightened"] and a correction to the singular *onbyrhte* ["(he) brightened (them)"].

(*figura etymologica*), as they brighten with the light of *perception* [*angite*] and then *perceive* [*ongytan*]. The verb the people are finally allowed to *enact* is subordinate to God's act of unveiling, since they only perceive once they have brightened with perception by God's unveiling hand. The echo of the word *ongeotan* from the description of humanity's hardheartedness figures the moment of brightening as pivotal: they could not perceive, they brighten with the light of perception, and now they perceive:

> *ongeotan* ne cuðan […]
> 7 hie onbyrhte mid leohtum *angite* þæt hie þæt *ongytan* 7
> oncnawan mihton (B.21–3)
> [they could not perceive …
> and he brightened them with the light of perception so that they were able
> to perceive that and know]

The structure of this passage also provides another example of the kind of three-part lexical repetition with variation that Wulfstan employs at the beginning of *Sermo ad Anglos* (repeating *worold*, see note 11) and that this homilist uses in the opening with *secgan*. This three-part repetition of the same root word is not identical but is similar to the parallel construction we have seen in this homily and in Alfred's *Boethius*, in which a single instance of a word is made to suffice over three stints as subject. Following the divine unveiling, the homily returns the focus to Christ and his actions and places these alongside the partnered acts of God in revealing them. Note Christ's almost frenetic activity compared to the torpid passivity of human beings we have just seen:

> hwa him to hæle 7 to helpe 7 to feorhnere on þas world astag
> seoþþan he him mildheortnesse earon ontynde, 7 to geleafon onbryrde,
> 7 his miltse onwreah, 7 his mægsibbe gecyðde. (B.23–7)
> [how to their healing and help and salvation he came to this world,
> after he opened their ears in lovingkindness, and kindled them to believe,
> and revealed his mercy, and proclaimed his compassion.]

The focus does return to humanity, but in another double-passive construction:

> Ær þon we wæron steopcild gewordene, forþon þe we wæron astypte þæs
> heofonlican rices (B.29)
> [Before that we had become orphans, because we were orphaned of the
> heavenly kingdom]

Beyond again fixing humans as passive subjects rather than agents (a syntactic effect reinforced by the image of orphaned children), this last passage also employs a *figura etymologica*, using *steopcild* and *astypte*, synonyms for "orphans" that share an etymological root.

As commentators have noted, word pairs (also called doublets, echoic pairs, and paronomasia) are ubiquitous in the homilies (and common in the laws as well).[17] The prevalence of these pairs suggests that they constitute an important technique, that they serve some aesthetic and cultural function. The word pairs imply it is better to say something two ways than only once, especially if the two ways you say it bear an uncanny morphological or phonetic resemblance to one another. For instance, to break the concept "human activity" into two terms, *word and weorc* ["words and works"], as Old English writers often do, is to name emphatically the whole, to particularize it and specify it, to lend it an aura of completeness and integrity through self-similarity. Human beings produce words and works, figuring a whole as a sum of distinguished parts. This is an essentially metonymic operation. Watkins identifies the poetic word pair as common Indo-European, and breaks the phenomenon into two groups of two subgroups each.[18] The first group is "simple" in that the pairs themselves designate what they signify. They may be qualifiers, intensifying a concept, or quantifiers, breaking a totality into two. I give some of Watkins's examples below:

Simple Pairs (also called designators)

Qualifiers – intensify	**Quantifiers – totalize**
litotic (arg. + negated counter-arg.):	**arg + negated arg**:
"true and not false"	"diseases seen and unseen"
(Old Persian *hašiyam naiy duruxtam*)	(Latin *morbos uisos inuisosque*)
non-litotic, or redundant:	**arg + counter-arg**:
"safe and sound"	"be you god or goddess"
	(Latin *si deus si dea es*)

The simple pairs, again, are simple in that they designate a concept simply or directly, without referencing a third concept. Complex pairs, also called connectors, are complex by contrast because they do index a third notion. Watkins separates complex pairs into two groups, the metaphoric kennings and the metonymic merisms. Kennings are familiar to Anglo-Saxonists. They generate, through a genitival or through a compositional relation, a third concept. For example, *folces hyrde* ["shepherd of the people"] genitivally indexes "king" and *hronrad* ["whale-road"] forms a compound term for "sea." Merisms are no less common in Old English. They are metonymic, involving two nouns that share most of their semantic features in a copulative relation together designating a globally higher

[17] This observation has been made most often in reference to Wulfstan's work, since the technique is one of his most characteristic devices: "Wulfstan uses every permutation of echoic pairs" (Chapman, "Germanic Tradition" 2); "A further characteristic of Wulfstan's style is his repeated fondness for alliterative doublets, many of which have the added adornment of rhyme […]. There are on average roughly ten such doublets in every single sermon" (Orchard, "Crying Wolf" 248).

[18] The following discussion draws heavily on Watkins and most examples are his. See 43–6.

concept (Watkins 46). "Barley and spelt" for all grains is an example of a merism, or "bread and wine" for all comestibles.

Complex Pairs (also called connectors) – index third concept

Kennings – metaphoric – non-copulative	**Merisms – metonymic – copulative**
OE *folces hyrde* ["shepherd of the people"] For "king"	"barley and spelt" for all grains (Hittite *halkiš* ZÍZ-*tar*)
OE *hronrad* ["whale road"] for "sea"	OE *word and weorc* ["words and works"] for all actions[19]

Naming one thing twice is a very old poetic practice that ensures listener reception and whether incidentally or no, adds emphasis. Paronomastic word pairs and etymological figures further strengthen the hermetic, hypnotic effect of signification. They create the illusion of a natural relation between the words being used and the thing itself, since the words resemble each other and are both used in relation to the thing. All word pairs lend the stamp of authority to what is said, articulating a worldview in which the Word manifestly corresponds to the natural order of creation, though this does not imply transcendence, the existence of a "pure-form" signified. *Signifier* and *signified*, incidentally, the dual components of the Saussurean sign, present an etymological figure that has just the authoritative, naturalizing effect I am describing. It suggests that the *sign* can be broken into two hidden components that manifest its very name and therefore affirm their relation to each other and to the sign, not to mention their very existence. Simple word pairs, especially, actively fortify language against indeterminacy by enacting unity and uniformity through poetic effect. Where one Western tradition, that of Latin Christendom, chose reference, whatever signs point to, as the ground on which to stake metaphysical unity, what Old English texts suggest is that at least some

[19] Epithets do not fit comfortably into this schema, it seems to me, for they may bear both metonymic and metaphoric relations. Take, for example, *svannes hals* ["swan's throat"], the epithet applied to King Harold's mistress Edith. The two parts of the epithet are in a genitival relationship, and the term is meant to compare Edith to a swan, a definite metaphor. However, the phrase is not a kenning, for it is not a miniature riddle. Who is the shepherd of the people? A king. What is the road of a whale? The sea. But what is a swan's neck? A swan's neck. It is pointing in its own verbal relationship only to only one thing, not bringing two things together. Only as an epithet attached to a name does the phrase become metaphorical. Edith is like a swan. And yet, metonymy is involved as well, since the epithet does not liken Edith to a swan, but likens part to part, allowing the metaphoric relationship between the metonymic parts to stand for the whole woman. Edith's neck is like a swan's neck and it is by her swan-like neck that we call her. A metonymically based epithet (the very definition of an epithet being a name for something else, therefore a substitute term, therefore a metaphor) highlights a fundamental fact that has long been covered over uncomfortably: a metonym is always also a metaphor, and a metaphor, as soon as it is made, becomes a metonym (the vehicle becomes associated with the tenor, and the metaphor itself with both vehicle and tenor). This confirms Derrida's assertion that all signifying processes are metaphoric and of exactly the same order.

component of the Old English tradition tended not toward the signified but toward the signifier. This fixing strategy does not totalize signification, since, as we will see in Chapter 3, in relation to the riddles, laws, and charms, fixing concepts in word pairs finds its opposite in the Anglo-Saxon penchant, still focused on the signifier, for indeterminacy and obliqueness, which we see dominant in the riddle genre but also prominent in classical verse. In Old English, knowledge does not think it can escape signification. Some language behaves in an orderly, ordering way, in genres that require it. Other language plays upon its own rules. The fixing, ordering strategies of the homilies in fact bring the authority of native poetic signification—notably the ordering power of the law—to the service of Christianity. If we think about rhetorical effect, we might contrast the highly literate, logical (entirely referential) arguments that were credible for C.S. Lewis with the poetic figures we see enacting theological arguments in Blickling IX/Vercelli X.

We left our homily just as humanity was granted the possibility of redemption. Humankind had been lost (*astypte*), but now, the homily asserts, we are found:

> Syndan we nu eft þider amearcode, þurh þone soðan scyppend
> and þurh þone lifigendan god and þurh þone acennedan sunu,
> urne drihten, to þam gefean neorxnawanges. (K.37)
> [Since then we have been marked, by the true creator
> and by the living god and by the begotten son,
> our lord, for the joys of paradise.]

Here, in another poetic figure, the list of actors in human salvation is recapitulated—with humans, as usual, in passive position—beginning with the most remote valence of divinity, the "true creator," moving ever nearer to the earth, with the *living* god and then the *begotten* son, finally close enough to us for a familiar relation: our lord.[20]

Thus the first part of the homily, culminating in a happy ending, asserts the ideal plan of God in idealized, poetic language. A ring composition invokes the spoken word which includes the present speech of the preacher and the Word fulfilled in the gospel. A syntactic figure drops the holy spirit (possibly distinct from the Holy Spirit) down from heaven to the earthly vessel, Mary, and Mary is made immaculate on a path from flesh (*innoþe*) to spirit (*hordfæte*) that crosses that of Christ from spirit to flesh. Mary's act of creation parallels God's creation of the world, as the alliterative pair "cwen cende" ["queen/woman bore"] parallels the pair "soðan scyppend" ["true creator"]. Not only is Mary's act valorized by

[20] It is noteworthy how seldom Jesus is called by his name. If we assume that in this culture the powerful words are uttered rather than suppressed (as they are in Hebrew), then the Old English homilist's preference for generic titles designating Christ's role and status over his foreign names is another manifestation of the power of the vernacular. In this context, in which Christ takes supreme overlordship, the most potent position in Germanic culture, the evocations of vernacular words trump the magical power of foreign tongues, which we see elsewhere in, for instance, charms that employ Latin as an incantatory vehicle.

this parallel structure, but a third term affirms her role further, combining maternal nurturing with Christ's more traditionally heroic leadership qualities in "folces frefrend" ["comforter of the people"]. In its account of Christ's ministry and the onset of grace for humanity, the homily ingeniously relegates references to humanity to passive syntactic positions or assigns them state-of-being verbs. All agency is God's, as syntax manifests theological principle with precision. This preamble to the less blithe, more exhortatory message that follows is, as Scragg notes, a tour de force, and probably contributed to the homily's popularity in the late tenth century (Scragg 195).

The function of epic poetry in many traditional cultures is to reflect and maintain both the structure and values of the culture in a form the people will enjoy. The function or work of the homilies is, similarly, to communicate the gospel message in a form the people will receive (which implies enjoyment). One poetic-homiletic effect we have begun to see is the exposition of theology through linguistic figures of grammar and sound, rendering abstractions palpable to an Anglo-Saxon audience. The passivization of human would-be agents in the opening synopsis of the gospel story in Blickling IX/Vercelli X scrupulously conveys the theological precept of grace. It was not by any act of ours that we might be saved, but by our acceptance of Christ's divine act of sacrifice. The bulk of the rest of the homily foregrounds the soul's constant jeopardy in cultural terms an Anglo-Saxon audience would understand. It stages scenes of direct speech—the patterned speeches of the open court of justice—while at the same time drawing on numerous authoritative textual sources for theological, dramatic, and rhetorical material.

Humanity has the option of salvation thanks to the interventions of the lord, the son of God, but the second section of the homily reminds us of the constant danger of screwing up this chance and opting, Huck Finn-like, for hell. This next, largest part of the homily echoes with a dire, deeply poetic refrain from the mouth of Satan:

> dem, la dema, dem rihtne dom and emne dom (K.73)
> [Judge, O judge, judge right judgment and fair judgment
> (or, more awkwardly but with more of the effect:
> Deem, O lord, deem right doom and fair doom)]

The human soul is condemned by Satan before the divine judge in a scene and with ritualized language ("dem, la dema") evocative, perhaps, of the *moot* law courts of Germanic tradition, in which pronouncements were just that: pronounced (the theatrics of modern courts of law and legislative assemblies retain the verbal-performative aesthetics of their mixed Germanic and Classical inheritance—which is of course ultimately Indo-European in origin). The soul's works are weighed, and

> gif þonne beoð maran þa misdæda and þæs godes to lyt,
> þonne wynsumað se wiðerwearda feond and se awrygeda gast
> on gesihðe þæs hean deman and þæs reðan cyninges. (K.70)

[if then the misdeads be greater and there be too little of the good,
then the hostile fiend and the outcast spirit rejoice
in the sight of the high judge and the rightful king.]

In the freedom of his reaction in God's presence and in his bold speech before the judge, Satan is a formidable accuser, drawing perhaps on both the Satan of *Job* and a traditional hearing scenario such as that of the annual assembly of the *Alþingi* in Iceland or the *Hundred* in England. The image evokes the expectation of important speech, of judgment hinging on the success of the speech. Satan's withering, commanding performance is terrifying to the human soul, not only convincing to the divine judge but, it seems, compelling. There is no sense that God has any leeway. He cannot reduce the sentence. Satan argues his case and essentially commands the lord to do what he must. This both upholds speech as a powerful act and distances God from the cruelty of the damned soul's absolute punishment. The homilist interjects an aside to his audience:

Hwæt, we nu gehyrdon, hu bealdlice se deofol sprecð to þam hælende! (K.117)
[Listen, how boldly we have heard the devil speak to the savior!]

And indeed, the lord finds in favor of the prosecution:

nelle ic eow habban on minre geferrædenne, ac ge fram me gewitað,
wuldre bedælede, freondum afyrede, feondum betæhte
in þam hatan wylme hellefyres,
þær ge awyrgedan scylon wite adreogan
in þam hatestan hellebrogan,
and þær on witum a wunian butan ende. (K.119)
[I do not wish to have you in my fellowship, but depart from me,
bereft of glory, parted from friends, transfigured by fiends
in the hot wave of hell-fire,
there you shall suffer the punishment of the damned
in the hottest hell-terrors,
and there languish in agony forever without end.]

After this dramatic judgment scene, itself based loosely on a Latin source, Paulinus of Aquileia's *Liber exhortationis ad Henricum comitem*, the homily, in its third and final section, brings together a series of sources (a pseudo-Augustinian sermon, the gospel of Luke, the epistle of James, and Book II of Isidore's *Synonyma*) to emphasize the contrast between, on the one hand, the good life of charity and contempt for worldly riches, and on the other, the wicked futility of wealth and power (Scragg 191–2). As Scragg notes, however, "again the Latin material has been reordered and redirected, making it fuller, more pointed and considerably more effective homiletically […] the sources often supplying little more than basic ideas which are expanded and redeveloped" (192).

For instance, where in its initial treatment of the necessity of giving to the poor rather than mistaking the lord's goods for one's own and hoarding them, the Latin

source delivers its message and cites from scripture to authorize it, the Old English sermon stages another direct confrontation with the lord. The homily invokes the epistle of James, in which the apostle harangues his audience for holding the rich and powerful in reverence while disregarding the poor: "Swa Sanctus Jacobus Cristes discipul sæde" (K.141) ["As Saint James Christ's disciple said"]. Yet the homily invents a scenario of direct address to a rich man, perhaps synthesizing the passage in James with the parable of the rich man in Luke, in which God berates a rich man directly for storing up wealth on earth while neglecting his eternal future in heaven. Christ's speech to the rich man in the homily resembles Satan's accusation of the soul at judgment in its harshness and bravado. Christ berates the soul on earth, lest Satan have the chance to do so thereafter. The effect is heightened by the fact that speech here occurs outside the hyperbolic context of a parable and is figured instead as a direct address. Christ is not speaking in instructive stories, but rather chastising a "real" human being, with whom a listener might identify, who will die along with his whole household at the end of the speech. Indeed, Christ's speech is largely a litany of sarcastic commands and rhetorical questions designed to belittle human agency and reinforce the ultimate origin of all wealth and all prosperity in God.

> Þu man, to hwan eart þu me swa ungeþancfull minra gifena?
> Hwæt, ic ðe gesceop and geliffæste, and æghwæt, þæs ðe þu hafast, ic þe sealde.
> Min is eall, þæt þu hæfst, and þin nis nan wiht.
> Ic hit eall afyrre fram þe.
> Þu leofa butan me, gif þu mæge.
> Þe ic hit sealde, to þan þæt þu hit sceoldest þearfum dælan.
> Ic swerige þurh me sylfne, þæt ic eom se ilca god,
> þe þone weligan and þone heanan geworhte mid minum handum […]
> Ic nu afyrre minne fultum fram þe;
> hafa þu æt þinum gewinne, þæt þu mæge, and æt þinum geswince.
> Ic ðe ætbrede mine hrenas, þæt heo þinre eorðan ne hrinað;
> ic afyrre fram þe mine mildheortnesse, and þonne bið sona gecyþed þin yrmðe and ætywed.
> Gif þu wene, þæt hit þin bocland sy, and on agene æht geseald,
> hit þonne wæron mine wæter, þa þe on heofenum wæron, þonne ic mine gife eorðwarum dælde.
> Gif þu mihte hæbbe, dæl renas ofer þine eorðan.
> Gif þu strang sy, syle wæstmas þinre eorðan […]
> eala, þu dysiga and þu gedweleda, to whan getreowdest þu on þine speda and on þine æhta?
> Þin sawl bið afyrred fram þe in þisse ilcan nihte and be minre hæse of þinum lichaman gelæded (K.176–229)
> [You man, why are you so ungrateful to me for my gifts?
> Lo, I made you and brought you to life, and whatever you have, I gave you.
> All that you have is mine, and nothing is yours.
> I will take it all from you.
> You live without me if you can.
> I gave it to you so that you would share it among the needy.

> I swear by my self that I am the same god who made the rich and the poor with my hands.
> I will now remove my favor from you;
> Have for your own what strife you may, and what suffering.
> I will withhold my rains from you, that they will not rain upon your soil;
> I will remove from you my mercy, and then soon will your sorrow be known and apparent.
> If you think that it be deeded to you and given to your sole ownership, it were still my waters, that were in the heavens, that I share as my gift with humans.
> If you have might, provide rains over your soil.
> If you be strong, produce fruit from your soil.
> Alas, foolish and astray, why did you trust in your success and in your possessions?
> Your soul will be removed from you this very night, and by my command led from your body.]

The homily reveals for us part of its strategy in placing this speech in the mouth of Christ. Words spoken by the savior are sure to be fulfilled, and the more directly they are heard, rather than reported through others, the more potent they will be:

> Sceoldan þa word beon ealle cuðlice gelæste and gefyllede, þe se hælend sylf cwæð. (K.234)
> [Those words shall certainly be performed and fulflilled, which the savior himself spoke.]

The homilist designs Christ's speech to recreate this immediacy of the word for his audience. We are not directed to the word as spoken by the apostles in scripture, but instead we are privy, in the imaginative space of this homily, to the very words of Christ. And we are also privy to the effect those words had:

> Hine þa þone weligan man þære ilcan nihte deað on becom and on his bearn ealle; fengan þa to his gestreonum fremde and laðe. (K.236)
> [Then upon the rich man that very night came death, and upon all his children; he took then as his treasures the cursed and loathed.]

The last phrase is a traditional elegiac formula, TAKE/HAVE + *to* + dative + (substantive *and* substantive), as in "Deor": "hæfde him to gesiþþe sorge 7 longaþ" (l. 3) ["he had for companion sorrow and longing"]. The audience sees the man's final bereavement and perceives in the formulaic phrase that comments upon it the barrenness and loss associated with traditional elegy. The drama of direct address coupled with traditional poetic effect serve to convey to an Anglo-Saxon audience the imminence of judgment and the total devastation that lurks over its horizon.

The homilist here makes a transition to a new section, based on Isidore, through the use of (to me) a very funny litotes (statement-by-way-of-understatement), which is of course a key Germanic literary effect:

> Hwæt, we nu magon, men þa leofestan, be þysum ongitan and oncnawan,
> þæt se ælmihtiga god nele, þæt him man his gifena þanc nyte. (K.239)
> [Lo, from this, beloved men, we may now perceive and understand,
> that the almighty god does not wish man to neglect thanking him for his gifts.]

Indeed. What this recapitulation also represents, though, is a reminder of the first part of the homily, the salvation story, in which humanity heard the gospel but could not "ongitan and oncnawan" until God removed the darkness from their hearts. This echo of the central act required of people for their salvation confirms what has just been said, the story of Christ's condemnation of the rich man, as gospel, as part of the salvation message, the word of God. The audience must perceive and understand what has been said ("Lo, from this … we may perceive and understand") just as humanity must perceive and understand God's message; what has been said by the homilist is part of that message.

About the consequence of not heeding the message—devastation— this homilist is emphatic. Isidore briefly explains that all glory in this world is tempered, and that all temporal power is fragile, providing the homilist with examples of high things (trees, towers, mountains) that are most prone to fall and ruin. The Old English homily builds a poetic edifice from these suggestions, going beyond the assertions that all will fall to dramatize every stage of the fall of every human pretension. Noteworthy is the preference for physical treasure over the abstract notions of power or glory or happiness in the Latin. Beyond providing another example of the familiar "physicality" or "earthiness" of Anglo-Saxon diction, the preponderance of physical treasure in the Old English perhaps serves two further purposes. First, it enacts the dichotomy between the material and the spiritual in a clear, stark way. Where the heavenly shines with bliss, the earthly shines with the impermanent splendor of gold and silver. Then again, the elaborate descriptions of wrought metal and fine clothing below also echo such descriptions in the heroic verse tradition (a similar echo, as well as another *ubi sunt* list, appears in "The Wanderer"). The audience might thus respond to the aesthetics of such descriptions and then recoil from or repudiate them according to the designs of the homilist, much as, according to Stanley Fish, the Christian audience recoils from Satan's seductive eloquence in *Paradise Lost*. In the three steps of ruin described by the Old English passage, our precious lives have an end, the ways we prepare for the end are futile, and finally, all returns to dust, in progressively bleaker images of obliteration:

> Đeah we þissa worulde wlenca tilian swiðe and in wuldre scinan swiðe;
> þeah we us gescirpen mid þy readestan godwebbe and gefrætwian mid þy
> beorhtestan golde
> and mid þam deorwurðum gimmum ymbehon,
> hwæðere sceal on eorðan ende gebidan. (K.265)
> [Though we acquire great riches in this world and shine greatly in glory;
> though we clothe ourselves in the reddest finery and adorn ourselves
> with the brightest gold
> and hang about us costly gems
> nevertheless on earth an end must await.]

Đeah þe ða mihtegestan and þa ricestan hatan him reste gewyrcan
of marmanstane and mid goldfrætwum and mid gimcynnum eal astæned
and mid seolfrenum ruwum and beddum eall oferwrigen
and deorwyrðum wyrtgemengnessum
eal gestyred and mid goldleafum gestrewed ymbutan,
hwæðere se bitera deað þæt todæleð eal. (K.270)
[Though the mightiest and the richest commission tombs of marble
and studded with gold ornaments and with divers gems
and with silver plate and intricate engraving
and with expensive sachets
tossed about and with gold leaves strewn around,
nevertheless bitter death will dismantle it all.]

Þonne bið se glencg agoten and se þrym tobroden
and þa gimmas toglidene and þæt gold tosceacen
and þa lichaman tohrorene and to duste gewordene. (K.276)
[Then will the design be destroyed and audacity ripped to shreds
and the gems dissolved and that gold ground up
and the bodies pulverized and made into dust.]

The riches we amass are thus finite, the finitude of death involves decomposition or the loss of structural integrity, and finally, the very components of the material world that we used to build form and significance are pulverized, erasing every distinction. The homilist cashes in on the impact of his harrowing eschatological performance with a densely repetitive recapitulation of its lesson. Bold italics mark a ring composition, underline marks alliteration, boldface marks full or slant rhyme:

Forðam nis naht þyses middaneardes ***wlite***, ac he is tweogendlic þysse
worulde **wela**,
he is **hwilendlic** and **feallendlic** and **gebrosnadlic** and **tobrocenlic**,
he is **wyrslic** and **yfellic** and **forwordenlic**, swa þa rican syndan her on ***worulde***.
(K.279)
[Thus there is no one splendid on earth, but he is dubiously prosperous
in this world,
he is temporary and fallen and battered and broken,
he is vile and evil and perishing, as the rich are here in the world.]

We see alliteration across a whole line, grammatical rhyme, internal rhyme, word-pair alliteration, assonance, and ring structure [*middangeardes wlit* (…) *woruld* (…) *worulde*]. Just as the homily's opening synopsis employs multiple techniques to mark out that section's importance, so we see here an important moment of recapitulation marked by poetic density. The section is bounded by alliterating references to earthly splendor and the world, within which an overwhelming chain of dreary adjectives assures the audience that in this world there is no escape from the dust to which we all crumble; vanity will not avail.

Thus bereft of pretenses of ownership or agency of any kind, the audience has nearly completed the course set out for it by this homily.[21] We have been told the story of the savior's coming and of his work on earth. We have heard how humanity at first rejected the gospel message, and only through God's grace finally grasped its truth and accepted salvation. We have overheard the awful judgment of a sinful soul, and have been warned of the dire consequences of attachment to the mortal coil. Chastened, and chastened again, the audience may now receive a glimpse of the heavenly kingdom. I place in italics and label below each line the main instances of poetic structure.

Đær is *gesene þegnes* ioguðe, and þær is *ar and fægernes werum and wifum*
(assonance, syntactic parallelism and alliterative pair)
and *ge*þoftscipe *engla* and *heahengla* and *ge*ferræden *apostola* and
heahfædera and *witigena*,
(grammatical rhyme and syntactic parallelism: ge- + genitive plurals …
ge- + genitive plurals)
and þære *eadigan ceastre* weras gefeoð and wynsumiað
(assonance)
on lisse and *on blisse* and *on rice* and *on ecum gefean*. (K.324)
(rhyme, paronomasia, syntactic parallelism, grammatical rhyme)

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[21] The homilist here embarks on an *ubi sunt* passage (based on Isidore's, but expanded) that echoes in rhetorical effect and repetitive structure Christ's speech to the rich man. "Do you think you own what you have?" gives way to "Where is it now?" For the sake of completeness I include the section here. Its poetics is the same in the Old English as it is in the Latin original: the relentless repetition of the framing question, "Where is … ?" The passage in Isidore reads,

Dic ubi sunt reges? [Say where are the kings?]
ubi principes? [Where princes?]
ubi imperatores? [Where emperors?]
ubi locupletes rerum? [Where those invested with authority?]
ubi potentes saeculi? [Where the powerful of the age?]
ubi diuites mundi? [Where the riches of the world?] (Scragg 210–11 n.)

The Old English *ubi sunt* passage echoes many of the questions in the Latin, but inserts novel ones as well:

Hwær syndon nu þa rican caseras and þa cyningas, þe io wæron, oððe
ealdormen, be beboda setton? [Where now are the mighty caesars
and the kings who lived long ago, or the aldormen who made the laws?]
Hwær is demera domstow? [Where is the place of the judges?]
Hwær is heora ofermedla, butan mid moldan beðeaht and in witum gewrecen?
[…] [Where is their overweaning, except given over to the earth and consigned
to torment?]
Hwær com middaneardes gestreon? [What came of the treasure of the earth?]
Hwær com worulde wela? [What came of the rich in the world?]
Hwær com foldan fægernes? [What came of the land's loveliness?]
Hwær coman þa, þe geornlicost æhta tiledan and oðrum eft yrfe læfdon?
(K.283–92) [What came of them, who most eagerly acquired possessions and
then refused others' due?]

[There is seen the youth of a thane, and there is law and fairness among
men and women and companionship of angels and archangels and
fellowship of apostles and patriarchs and prophets,
and in that blessed city men will rejoice and be glad
in blessing and bliss and in power and in everlasting joy.]

All is brought together here at the end of the homily and in the figured end of the heavenly kingdom. The patriarchs and prophets, the feminine presence we saw in Mary's prominence in the first part of the homily, even the songs of the psalmists make another appearance: "Þær is sang and wynsang" (K.329) ["there is song and song of joy"]. As the homily has taken pains to impart, the story of our salvation is a wonder tale, and it is not through our deserving that we receive it. Through the gospel message of the Word made flesh and the gospel message that has just been preached,

We wæron þider *gehatene* and *gelaðede* to ðam *halgan ham*
(grammatical rhyme, alliteration, assonance)
and to ðam *cynelican* friðstole, þær drihten *Crist wunað* and *rixað*
(alliteration, grammatical rhyme)
mid *eallum halgum sawlum aa butan ende in ealra worulda woruld, amen*. (K.332)
(voc- and w-alliteration, grammatical rhyme, assonance)
[We have been called thither and led to the holy home
and to the kingly refuge, where the lord Christ dwells and reigns
with all the holy souls forever without end forever and ever, amen.]

The aesthetic that informs the variants of Blickling IX/Vercelli X is deeply concerned with both theology and what translation theorists call acceptability—the aptness of a text to its target-audience's expectations and literary tradition (Discenza 6). The forms we see in the text reflect theological ideas using native verbal strategies and strategies borrowed from Latin (for instance, the *ubi sunt* motif—see n. 21). Since, as we see in Blickling IX/Vercelli X, at least some of the homilies conform to late Old English metrical rules as they are conceived by Bredehoft and by implication, to alternative Old English metrical rules suggested by Getty, but more importantly, as they employ poetic devices at every turn, the literary quality of homiletic language in its own right should be recognized. Doing so would at least encourage modern readers to read the texts with new attention to verbal detail and aesthetic effect. It might be objected that many of the homilies, even most, are far less densely poetic than Blickling IX/Vercelli X, some even translating Latin texts nearly verbatim. But by now it should be clear that we must not assume regularity and uniformity to be the *sine qua non* of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Besides, there already exist models of Anglo-Saxon literary history that recognize different levels or even genres of verse, notably Sievers's seemingly forgotten *Sagvers* alongside the strict classical meter, and McIntosh's hierarchy of verse-likeness. Most recently, Pasternack's analysis of Old English poetry as comprising movements rather than monolithic poems, and involving multiple kinds of authorial participation, corroborates this approach.

The homilies bear aesthetic scrutiny, and such scrutiny yields insight into the ways the specific genre carried cultural information. The literary imagination of the homilies is vibrant, and vernacular poetics serve in the homilies at once aesthetic and theological ends. As we have also seen in Alfredian exposition, form conveys doctrine. For instance, the basic requirement of salvation—faith—as encouraged through the dramatization of spiritual encounters as direct verbal confrontations. Christ speaks directly to the (synecdochically) representative human. Satan condemns the soul before the divine judge. The divine judge *pronounces* the judgment as he has paronomastically been set up to do ("dem, la dema, dem rihtne dom and emne dom"). While the meter of the homily, if meter there is, is not regular throughout, the way form configures content and the overt staging of each section around a speech act centered on a message (the message of the gospel) amply confirm the homily's pervasive poeticalness: on a local phrasal level, the text is highly patterned; on a global structural level, each section depicts a speech event; in the broadest sense of all, pervading and motivating the text, is the Christian Word itself, conveyed through the gospel.

Chapter 3
Bind and Loose: Poetics and the Word in Old English Law, Charm, and Riddle

We saw in the last chapter that the poetic word in homiletic language operates in such a way that the language of the homily becomes a figure for the salvific Word of the Christian message. This chapter considers the deployment of the poetic word in three other genres, Old English law, charm, and riddle. These genres in particular highlight the unique poetic character of Old English and make clear its epistemological implications. The discourse of vernacular Old English represents an epistemology and an ontology vastly different from the theology of presence developed by St. Augustine and promulgated by the Latin Church.

The first of the three genres, the law, intersects with the homilies in the figure of Wulfstan II, Archbishop of York (d. 1023). Wulfstan penned not only many of the homilies but also the laws of Cnut and Æthelred, and as Patrick Wormald suggests, developed an ever-growing interest in legislation over the course of his career (225–46). Wulfstan's homiletic and his legal writing share stylistic similarities such as word pairs and characteristic tag phrases, and compounding these similarities, the ethos of the laws is further tied to that of the homilies by the Anglo-Saxon preference for Old Testament legalism, which we saw dramatized in the middle section of Blickling IX/Vercelli X. But whereas the homilies have a didactic, evangelizing function in dramatizing the Christian Word, the laws function, as we will see, to encode exchangeable values, the foundation of a system of compensation, in a way language is uniquely equipped to do.

Both Wormald and Lisi Oliver offer similar overviews of the literary history of the Old English laws. This history, like that of formulaic poetry, extends both backwards into the primary-oral past of the Anglo-Saxon tribes and forward, through contact with Latin, toward the literate concept of the *domboc* ["judgment book"], as the ninth century would know Alfred's compilation of statutes. The first English king to set down laws in writing was also the first to receive Christian baptism: Æthelberht of Kent (r. approx. 587–617).[1] According to Bede, Æthelberht's laws were "iuxta exempla Romanorum" ["after the example of the Romans"] (*Historia* Bk. II Ch. v), almost certainly referring to the writing of the law and not its particular content. While this new application of the technology of writing was a step toward Rome and Latin Christendom, the text itself is starkly Germanic in the system of values it asserts and in its famously laconic style.

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[1] See Oliver 8–10 for the dating of Æthelberht's reign.

The most fundamental characteristic of the earliest English law is the principle of the balanced equation: action and compensation. Compensation differs from penalty or punishment; these latter are absent from Æthelberht's code. Their absence may reflect a relatively small, homogeneous community where every man is considered a cognizant, responsible member accountable within a system of exchange, as evidenced in the *scilling* amount due for every sanction in the code. In later codes, punishments begin to appear, such as death sentences and limb amputations and, after contact with the Danes, outlawry. Later codes also introduce the element of intricate procedural prescription, often in statutes involving the church (as Wormald explains, the church-related codes were usually the latest additions, and thus most likely to have been "born" in writing rather than in the oral milieu). Once the extant record moves to Wessex, discriminatory codes dealing with the Welsh appear, as well. But in Æthelberht's code, the simple principle of compensation (with wealth or with women) obtains. In the examples that follow I have highlighted in italics the equated values.[2]

> *Godes feoh 7 ciricean XII gylde*. (1)
> [*God's property and the church's* is to be compensated with *12-fold compensation*.]
> Gif *friman edor gegangeð, IIII scillingum* gebete. (29)
> [If a *freeman enters an enclosure* (…) let him pay with *4 shillings*.]
> Gif *eage* of weorð, *L scillingum* gebete. (42)
> [If an *eye* becomes gouged out, let him pay with *50 shillings*.]
> Gif man *gekyndelice lim* awyrdeþ, *þrym leudgeldum* hine man forgelde. (64)
> [If a person damages the *genital organ*, let him pay with *three person-prices*.][3]

To illustrate the contrast between this economical system (in both the sense of "thrifty" and that of "having to do with exchange") and later, more procedurally oriented ones, I include an example from Hloþhere and Eadric (673x686, Oliver 120)[4]:

> Gif man oþerne sace tihte, 7 he þane mannan mote an medle oþþe an þinge, symble se man þam oðrum byrigean geselle 7 þam riht awyrce þe to hiom cantwara deman gescrifen. (6)
> [If a person brings a charge against another in a matter, and he should meet that person in the assembly or in the public meeting, the person charged is always to give surety to the other and carry out that right (= judgment) which the judges of the Kentish people may appoint for them.]

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[2] Quotations of the laws of Æthelberht, Hloþhere and Eadric, and Wihtred are from Oliver, and unless otherwise specified, translations are hers as well, because the language is highly ambiguous and Oliver's translation is based on comparative analysis with cognate material. Statutes are cited according to Oliver's enumeration, not by page number.

[3] The huge penalty of three person-prices for damage to the genitals may be designed to compensate a loss of potential offspring.

[4] Following the convention of Anglo-Saxon legal scholarship, law codes are identified by their issuer's name without italics.

Æthelberht's code is, by contrast with the prolix and procedurally oriented codes of Hloþhere and Eadric almost a century later, a terse, economical codification of values.[5]

The compensation-based system of Æthelberht sets up statutes as statements of equivalent values—"Gif *eage* of weorð, *L scillingum* gebete" ["If an *eye* becomes gouged out, let him pay with *50 shillings*"] (42)—the structure of which a reader can rely on throughout the text once he or she perceives it. The code clearly conforms to an abstract verbal structure. The first seven statues (which, as Oliver asserts, constitute the latest addition [61]) make up a table of values for ecclesiastical property and list each item using the simple equation we saw above in Æthelberht 1:

> Godes feoh 7 ciricean XII gylde.
> [God's property and the church's is to be compensated with 12-fold compensation.]
> Biscopes feoh XI gylde.
> [A bishop's property is to be compensated with 11-fold compensation.]
> Preostes feoh IX gylde.
> [A priest's property is to be compensated with 9-fold compensation.]
> Diacones feoh VI gylde.
> [A deacon's property is to be compensated with 6-fold compensation.]
> Cleroces feoh III gylde.
> [A cleric's property is to be compensated with 3-fold compensation.]
> Ciricfriþ II gylde.
> [Violation of church peace is to be compensated with 2-fold compensation.]
> Mæthlfriþ II gylde.
> [Violation of assembly peace is to be compensated with 2-fold compensation.] (1–7)

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[5] Oliver notes, citing A.W.B. Simpson, that it is possible Æthelberht's code reflects a motive, under the influence of Augustine's mission, to substitute monetary compensation for the vendetta. Oliver also cites Wormald's rebuttal of this view, however, which (rather economically) calls attention to Tacitus's account of monetary compensation among the Germans (Oliver 16). If we acknowledge that the system of compensation is native to the Kentish people we can also acknowledge the striking absence of any mention of the vendetta in Æthelberht's code, and the difference between this strategy of silence and the prominence of vengeance in later codes in Wessex, along with attempts to bring vengeance under the control and auspices of the king, (whose authority is increasingly invoked as lordship). Æthelberht's code also differs in this respect from the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Icelandic law code, *Grágás* ["Graygoose"], which deals extensively with the feud, asserting norms and rules for reprisals and compensations, though it is unclear whether this aspect of the law appeared after the Icelanders' conversion around 1000 or had been part of the pagan oral laws as well (Miller 192–3). Æthelberht's code makes no mention of vengeance and relies solely on compensation. Judging from the account of Tacitus, along with Wormald, it is probable that monetary compensation for offences was traditional for the Anglo-Saxons; yet it is also possible that a conscious, strategic preference favored this tradition for the new written version of Kentish law, to the exclusion of other traditions such as vengeance, and, presumably, practices such as human sacrifice (propitiation of the gods) that never became integrated into a Christian Anglo-Saxon system.

The abstract structure of the first seven statutes may be given as follows:

> VALUED THING (*feoh* or *-friþ*) + MULTIPLE (a number) + *gylde*

The verbal structure of the older statutes is a bit more complex:

> *Gif* + CONDITION* + COMPENSATION†
> *(usu. with a verb in 3p. subj. or indic.)
> †(usu. in *scillingas*, but sometimes in gold or other moveable wealth, including women)

The repeated statute structure can in some respects be compared to the unit of the line in oral poetry, and the two elements within the statute (the equated, balanced values) to the two separate verses that constitute the line, each with its own set of constraints. Just as the lines of Old English poems are demarcated not by graphic representation (lineation) but by their metrical structure, so are the early law statutes distinguished one from another by their structure. Editors give them numbers, but in the manuscripts they are written continuously, as Oliver's diplomatic transcription conveniently shows (181–94).

Returning to Jakobson's discussion of the poetic function of language, we see that the equivalence-based system of Æthelberht's code, even before we examine its preponderance of more localized poetic devices, is another example of poetic structure:

> What is the empirical linguistic criterion of the poetic function? […] To answer this question we must recall the two basic modes of arrangement used in verbal behavior, *selection* and *combination*. If "child" is the topic of the message, the speaker selects one among the extant, more or less similar nouns like child, kid, youngster, tot, all of them equivalent in a certain respect, and then, to comment on this topic, he may select one of the semantically cognate verbs—sleeps, dozes, nods, naps. Both chosen words combine in the speech chain. The selection is produced on the basis of equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymy and antonymy, while the combination, the build-up of the sequence, is based on contiguity. ***The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination***. **Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence**. In poetry one syllable is equalized with any other syllable of the same sequence; word stress is assumed to equal word stress, as unstress equals unstress; prosodic long is matched with long, and short with short; word boundary equals word boundary, no boundary equals no boundary; syntactic pause equals syntactic pause, no pause equals no pause. Syllables are converted into units of measure. (71, italics original, bold-face mine)

In Æthelberht's statutes, the constituents highlighted above, which are repeated from statute to statute, become equated values by which the poetic text is parsed or measured. In Hanson and Kiparsky's terminology, their regular recurrence of linguistic material lends each one the authority of a structure that is given, a "fact of the world" and not an act of caprice. This authority extends to the referential

equations made by the individual statutes as well. One is led to read them as though the semiotic equation were merely an affirmation of *a priori* equivalence, because they fit into the set pattern of the law's utterance. The poetic structure of the law code, therefore, exerts binding force, generating authority for the statutes it asserts. Taking the first seven statutes as an example, verbal form with its tight structure conveys an effect that is airtight in a way its Modern English paraphrase is not. The paraphrase, in introducing the jussive phrase, "is to be compensated with," leaves room for refutation, for backtalk, since it offers a finite verb (*is*) and a finite verb is vulnerable to negation. The structure of the original, in contrast, offers a kind of poetic shorthand—no explicit predicate and therefore no opening for negation. Instead of syntactic predication this group of statutes sets up an apparent equation: ecclesiastical property in one scale and the compensating monetary amount in the other. Since verbal structure itself enacts that equation, it is not a contestable assertion but a fact figured before one's eyes (or ears). The older statutes function similarly, offering a pattern of equivalence that forecloses questioning or negation, since the language appears balanced and thus suggests that what it refers to is balanced as well: fifty shillings for an eye, four shillings for trespassing, and so on.

Within the poetic structure of Æthelberht's code with its parallel clauses, less regular but nonetheless poetic structure further underwrites the authority of the system, because it is another way the code uses likeness of language, a "fact of the world," to assert a likeness meant to appear equally factual, to be a likeness found, not made. Alliteration is the device most familiar from classical Old English poetics, and it appears throughout Æthelberht, including in the sections Oliver considers, based on linguistic evidence (notably the use of the archaic dative of quantity, *scillingum*), to be the oldest.[6]

> Gif **b**anes **b**lice weorðeþ, III scillingum ge**b**ete. (34)
> [If exposure of a bone occurs, let him pay with 3 shillings.]
> Gif **b**anes **b**ite weorð, IIII scillingum ge**b**ete. (35)
> [If cutting of a bone occurs, let him pay with 4 shillings.]

The alliteration is often quite complex, involving word pairs locally, as well as patterns that span the entire sequence. The alliteration binds the penalty to the offense, making it seem, through poetic similarity (the like initial sounds), self-evidently apt. The words resemble one another and therefore the things they signify resemble one another, too. In the second example below, I have grouped alliterating (and assonance-linked) words with parentheses to show the local alliterative structure; I have italicized the parallel finite verbs, which are linked both through alliteration and assonance in a complex way:

> Gif **m**an **m**annan **o**fslea, **a**gene scætte 7 **u**n**f**acne **f**eo **g**ehwilce **g**elde. (30)
> [If a person should kill someone, let him pay with his own money or unblemished property, whichever.]

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[6] See Oliver 32–4 for a discussion of the archaic "dative of quantity."

> Gif (**fri**m**a**n wið **f**ries **m**annes) (**wi**f *ge**lige**þ*, his **w**er)[7] (*gi**lde** a**bi**cg**e***),
> 7 (**o**ðer wif his **a**genum) (scæ**tte** ***bege**te***) 7 (**ð**æm **o**ðrum **æ**t **þ**am) *g**ebre**ng**e*. (31)
> [If a freeman lies with a free man's wife, let him buy (him/her) off with his/her *wergild* and obtain another wife (for the husband) with his own money and bring her to the other man at home.]

The verbs in 31 form an echoic series of their own, forming a syntactic figure as well as a phonetic one using both assonance and alliteration. The figure emphasizes action and compensatory action. The assonance in the passage extends beyond the verbs to other words as well, such as *wergilde*. The dense patterning here creates an unbreakable chain of assertion, since its patterns (syntactic and phonetic) are interwoven. It also makes several other poetic statements that supplement the referential meaning of the statute. The poetic (as opposed to syntactic) phrase "friman wið fries mannes," marked by lexical repetition and by alliteration, highlights the nature of the offense as between equals and specifically as a violation of the universal principle of the golden rule. A free man has wronged a free man (like himself). The next phrase, "wif geligeþ his wer," invokes the common pair *wer* […] *wif* ["man … woman"] and perhaps highlights the violation involved, since the pairing referred to here in a traditional phrase is illicit. "Gilde abicge" and "scætte begete" echo one another to reinforce the monetary penalty (the offender will buy with his wergild, and use his own money). "Oðer wif his agenum" emphasizes, again, the nature of the wrong: he has slept with the wife of another, not his own, has acted as though the other were his own.

Another common device in Æthelberht is the *figura etymologica*, the word pair that makes use of an actual- or false-cognate similarity in the root of each member to create a figure that suggests the *a priori* link between meaning and phonetic/morphological likeness as correlative facts of the world.

> Gif cyning mannes ham drincæþ 7 ðær man lyswæs hwæt gedo, twi*bote* ge*bete*. (9)
> [If the king drinks at a person's home, and a person should do anything seriously dishonest there, let him pay two-fold restitution.]
> Gif frigman cyninge stele, IX *gylde* for*gylde*. (10)
> [If a freeman should steal from the king, let him compensate with 9-fold compensation.]
> Gif cyninges ambiht smið oþþe laadrincmannan ofslehð, meduman leod*gelde* for*gelde*. (13)
> [If a person kills the king's official smith or herald/guide, let him pay an ordinary person-price.]
> Gif *frig*man *fre*um stelþ, III gebete, 7 cyning *age* þæt wite 7 ealle þa *æh*tan. (15)

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[7] I have placed the parenthesis at the compound boundary for clarity's sake; both the common scribal practice of alienating compounds and the phonology of compound structures (being more easily alienable than, say, the morphosyntactic structures of a finite verb) provide some insurance against illegibility.

> [If a freeman steals from a freeman, let him pay 3-fold, and the king obtains (lit. "possesses") that fine or all the possessions.][8]

Alliteration, etymological figures, and the use of local or discrete word pairs along with more global patterns are characteristic of the homilies as well, and are perhaps features of a shared tradition that we would call literary, meaning artful, special, sacred—marked as distinct from "everyday language." This broader literary language is not classical poetry, but it is highly poetic.

The tenth- and early eleventh-century laws, influenced and often written by Wulfstan, display the basic poetics of the laws we have already seen in the earlier ones—word pairs, alliteration patterns, balanced equations—developed to Wulfstan's characteristic degree of stylistic effect. In addition, Wulfstan adds to the inventory the technique of lexical negation, juxtaposing a word with its "un-" antonym, for instance *riht* and *unriht* ["right" and "unright"]. I quote from II Cnut, because Wulfstan is associated most squarely with this body of law (Wormald 244–5).[9]

> Dæt is þonne ærest, þæt ic wylle, þæt man *rihte laga* upp arære 7 æghwylc *unlaga* georne afylle, 7 þæt man aweodige 7 awyrtwalige æghwylc *unriht*, swa man geornost mæge, of þysum earde, 7 arære up Godes *riht*. (1)
> [That is then foremost what I desire, that a person should uphold right law and eagerly oppose any "un-law," and that a person weed out and uproot any "un-right," as earnestly as one may, from this earth, and hold up God's "right" (=law).]

Wulfstan's opening statute is picturesque in many ways (the two horticultural images for "uprooting" *unriht*, several alliteration patterns). The double antithesis, however, constitutes a ring composition that asserts *riht* as the central concept of earthly law and God's. Humanity is to

> hold up right law,
> cast down un-law,
> weed out and uproot un-right from the earth.

The directional particles (*up*, *down*, *up*, and *out* in Modern English) take us in every direction, which is even clearer in the Old English, as we are to hold up ("upp aræran") the right law, cast down (*afyllan*) un-law, and then one imagines, since two roughly synonymous uprooting verbs are used ("aweodige 7 awyrtwalige"), cast

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[8] Oliver suggests that in early Old English, *and* (represented by 7, the equivalent of the modern ampersand [&]) could function either as a conjunctive "and" or as an adversative "or" (55). Bosworth-Toller does not attest this meaning, and it seems simpler to suggest that the symbol 7, itself, could stand for either conjunction. I am not wedded to the outcome either way. In any case, it does seem clear that in the cases where Oliver translates 7 as "or," the adversative is the proper interpretation.

[9] Quotations from II Cnut are from the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* on CD-ROM (LawIICn). Translations are my own, and citation is by statute number.

away un-right first to one side and then to the other. This schematic even mimics the tracing of the cross, and is reminiscent of the strong four-quadrant spatial component of many of the charms. The final phrase, "7 arære up Godes riht" ["and hold up God's right"], in repeating the initial verb (*upp aræran*) suggests that performing all of the above as regards earthly law will culminate in upholding the law of God as well. The *riht* of God and the *riht* of man mirror one another, at the opening and at the close of the ring structure, in *rihte laga* ["right law"] and *Godes riht* ["God's right/law"]. Or, put another way, the passage asserts that if you eradicate the antitheses of *riht* and *laga*, as it instructs, you end up with *Godes riht*. This construction poetically aligns itself with a Christian Augustinian worldview in which evil is but the absence (the *un*-factor) of good, and in which the world of mortal life is characterized by the *un*-state, flesh having fallen away from the good.

> Gif hwa Godes flyman hæbbe on *unriht*, agyfe hine to *rihte*. (66)
> [If anyone should harbor against the law God's fugitive, let him give him up to the law.]
> And gif hwa wylle georne fram *unrihte* gecirran eft to *rihte* […] (67)
> [And if anyone desires eagerly to turn back from "unright" to "right"]
> Forðam a man sceal þam *unstrangan* men for Godes lufe 7 ege liþelicor deman 7 scrifon þonne þam *strangan*; forþamðe ne mæg se *unmaga* þam *magan*, we witon full georne, gelice byrðene ahebban, ne se *unhala* þam *halan* gelice. (68.1)
> [Thus a person shall for God's love and awe judge and dictate to the "unstrong" man more lightly than for the strong; for the unmighty cannot, we know full well, lift the same burden as the mighty, nor the unhealthy the same as the healthy.]
> 7 þy we sceolon medmian 7 gesceadlice todælan ylde 7 geogoþe, welan 7 wædle, freot 7 þeowet, *hæle* 7 *unhæle*. (68.1b)
> [And thus we must consider and reasonably alot to old and young, rich and poor, free and enslaved, healthy and unhealthy.]
> 7 gyf hwa hwæt *ungewealdes* gedeð, ne byð þæt eallunga na gelic, þe hit *gewealdes* gewurþe. (68.3)
> [And if someone does something not of his own volition, it is not altogether the same as that which is done (lit. "happens") on purpose.]

This last assertion in particular illustrates the spirit of Wulstan's intervention in Anglo-Saxon law. Miller notes the Old Norse edict (perhaps more ancient than the caveats that follow it in the text) that states there is no such thing as an accident (Miller 62). The Germanic worldview is based on positive value. There are no accidents, only actions and effects. Accordingly, the balanced equation system observes only positive values. When a valuable thing is lost or damaged, money must compensate. The ARGUMENT/NEGATED-ARGUMENT pairs add to the balanced equation paradigm the ethos of antithesis, of evil or exclusion, the opposite of a positive value. Now, specifically with the term *riht* ["right" but also "law" and "domain" and "sovereignty"] and its *un*-antonym, there exists a state of being not merely lordless or outside the bond of the community, but rather allied with the anti-lord, with the anti-law, what one can only relate to a state of sin. Once again, we see formal properties of Old English texts participating in the cultural history of

the Anglo-Saxons. Wulfstan's use of antitheses to label people, states, and behaviors as the very negative of good highlights a difference between the Late Antique, Augustinian, neo-platonic order of values and the Germanic system of positive worth (in which there is no un-worth—just solitude and exclusion). With the infiltration of Christianity the exile is no longer defined by his position outside, but according to a binary system that labels his very being in terms of what it is not.

The Old English laws also manifest other "literary" or aesthetic or ludic qualities, here and there, that are most often ignored by editors and commentators but which become readable in light of a model accounting for aesthetic effect. For instance, at the end of the seventh century, the Kentish laws of Wihtred and the slightly earlier West Saxon laws of Ine exhibit, alongside devices we see across the Anglo-Saxon period, statutes that seem out of place according to our expectations of the law, that shade into both proverb and riddle. The first instance is a statute common to both Ine and Wihtred.[10]

> Gif feorcund mon oððe fremde butan wege geond wudu gonge 7 ne hrieme ne horn blawe, for ðeof he bið to profianne: oððe to sleanne oððe to aliesanne. (Ine 20)[11]
> [If a foreign man or a strange (one) should go without a path across the wood and neither call out nor blow a horn, he is to be taken for/tried as a thief: either to be killed or to be redeemed.[12]]
> Gif feorran cumen man oþþe fræmde buton wege gange, 7 he þonne nawðer ne hryme ne he horn ne blawe, for ðeof he bið to profianne, oþþe to sleanne oþþe to alysenne. (Wihtred 23)
> [If a man come from afar or a strange (one) should go without a path, and he then neither calls out nor blows a horn, he is to be taken for/tried as a thief, either to be killed or to be redeemed.]

The scenario and the logic expressed have a picturesque, folk-like quality for a modern reader, and the orientation is proverbial. The stylized scene has color and texture, but not the elaborate detail we see in decrees that seem to respond ad hoc to specific, immediate circumstances. Such decrees outline exactly what the circumstances of the offense were, and then what is to be paid as compensation. The stranger statute is, in contrast, general and negative: someone travels *buton wege* ["without a path"] and fails in two ways to call attention to himself (neither calling out nor blowing a horn). The three failures to conduct himself like a responsible citizen, with the latter two dependent upon the first (since to walk silently down a road would incur no penalty) lead to three verbs of positive reciprocity, the latter two depending on the first: the stranger is to be either tried

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[10] Oliver suggests this statute, Ine 20/Wihtred 23, may derive from a common source (especially plausible given the proverbial nature of the text in question), but it may also, as Liebermann suggests, have been borrowed from Ine by Wihtred (Oliver 179–80).

[11] Quotations from Ine are from the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, LawIne.

[12] The translations of these two statutes are my own.

or simply taken for a thief and then either slain or redeemed.[13] While much is debatable and obscure about the language of the passage, its logic is conveyed through its formal structure. It is another instance of legal poetics, bearing both a more obvious (to us) aesthetic load in its folksy scenario and a more subtle, structural one in its syntax and morphology. As for the generalness of the scene, in contrast to the specific cases elsewhere described, this resembles the language of proverbs. Rather than waxing abstract and referential at the same time ("unknown persons who wander and fail to identify themselves are to be treated as thieves"), as a modern statute would do, the statutes here opt for proverbial language that conveys a general idea through concrete illustration difficult to assign exclusively either to metaphor or metonymy: blowing a horn and calling out do stand as members for all the possible ways of identifying oneself, but they are hypothetical and therefore more like metaphors. In any case, the legal principle is general but

[13] These two texts bear the sole testimony of the verb *profian* in the Old English corpus. Modern English *prove* derives from Old French *prover* according to the OED. Since we have no other instances of the verb *profian* in Old English other than those we are trying to gloss, we should not, as seems to have been done before, gloss the verb ad hoc to fit the situation, but rather base its meaning on Latin *probare*, a very common verb meaning "to test, to try (the quality of)" and also "to demonstrate, show." The Latin meanings lead to the conclusion that "to profianne" in Ine and Wihtred means not "to be taken (for)," but either "to be tested" or "to be demonstrated." The passages may suggest the ordeal. If the text read "for ðeof bið profianne," a reading "for a thief he is (that is, has been) shown" would be possible. I do not see, however, how such a reading is possible given the *to* in front of *profianne*, which clearly parallels the other inflected infinitives in the sentence (*to sleanne* ["to slay"] and *to aliesanne* ["to redeem"]). The logical progression of the sentence and the meaning of the verb *profian* together suggest that the stranger will be put to the test, the outcome of which will determine his fate, either to die or to be redeemed by the payment of *wergild* or, presumably, innocence. However, the consequence of whatever *to profianne* means does fit exactly the penalty Ine sets for a thief caught in the act:

> Gif ðeof sie gefongen, swelte he deaðe, oððe his lif be his were man aliese. (12)
> [If a thief be caught, let him perish to death, or someone redeem his life with his *wergild*.]

Thus a stranger who does not properly call out his position or announce himself is to be treated, it seems, exactly like a thief who has been caught red-handed. The glosses for *profian* as "take, consider," thus interpret the word according to the logic of the sentence in its legal context. The problem with the grammar and with the meaning of the verb remains, however, since a cursory examination of the hundreds of instances of Latin *probare* with Old English glosses reveal that it was understood to imply testing and assessment, not "proof." The verb is often glossed with *fandian* ["to test; to experience"] and *acunnan* ["to try, test, prove"], indicating that the Anglo-Saxon glossators knew the semantics of the word (*probare*) that at least one of them borrowed into English at least once. The most conservative conclusion to draw is a hedge: either Wihtred 23 and Ine 20 imply that a creeping (hence "creepy") stranger is to be treated as a proven thief, or they imply he is to be proven a thief, that is, suspected as one and put on trial. The grammar suggests the latter, while the penalty expressed by the next clause suggests the former.

the scene is specific and the language specifically poetic, both in reference and in form (the three verbal causes and three reciprocal consequences).

An exceedingly interesting statute in Ine's code shows that in Old English, a sensibility more commonly identified with riddles can also serve legal language. Riddling language is obsessed with the slippage between names and things. In constructing its traps and contraptions, however, it plays upon a more basic fascination with naming as the linguistic function in its broadest sense: assigning names to our ideas of things in the world. The assignment of novel names is part of many kinds of initiation practices, and naming participates in ordering and controlling the environment. In Ine 43, the penalty for burning down trees, 60 shillings, is given an explanatory, name-giving gloss missing in comparable tree-burning statutes (such as Alfred 12 and 13), a gloss that justifies the penalty by linking it to a more basic crime, theft, which incurs the same price:

> Đonne mon beam on wuda forbærne, 7 weorðe yppe on þone ðe hit dyde, gielde he fulwite: geselle LX scillinga, forþamþe fyr bið þeof. (Ine 43)
> [When anyone should burn down a tree in the woods, and it becomes known who did it, let him pay full penalty: let him give sixty shillings, because fire is a thief.]

Ine 10 states the basic compensation for theft:

> Gif hwa binnan þam gemærum ures rices reaflac 7 niednæme do, agife he ðone reaflac 7 geselle LX scillinga to wite.
> [If anyone within the borders of our kingdom should commit robbery ("rob-and-run") or banditry ("taking-by-force"), let him give up the goods and pay sixty shillings as a fine.]

Thus when Ine 43 sets the fine for burning down a tree, a riddling explanation links that penalty to a more basic one that "explains" it. This is counterintuitive. The law requires no explanation; that is part of the definition of the law, especially the Old Testament-type law for which Anglo-Saxon churchmen had such affinity. Here, though, a different sensibility asserts itself. Fire is a thief because it takes something away entirely, and the man who sets the fire is metonymically assessed the penalty for that crime. This is a metonymic operation because the man who sets the fire isn't exactly a thief. He doesn't get to take anything valuable away, as is the case with robbery in Ine 10. "Fire is a thief," and this metaphoric idea is what the text implies as justifying the attachment of such a fine to the setter of the fire—the one metonymically associated with the fire. None of this is logical in any way except through the logic of play and poetry. "Fire is a thief" is a riddlic identification, one that was apparently acceptable to Anglo-Saxon lawmakers and transcribers working with the serious purpose of making legislation. The subclause of Ine 43 continues and complicates the riddle:

> Gif mon afelle on wuda wel monega treowa, 7 wyrð eft undierne, forgielde III treowu ælc mid XXX scillingum; ne ðearf he hiora ma geldan, wære hiora swa fela swa hiora wære: forþon sio æsc bið melda, nalles ðeof. (43.1)

> [If anyone should fell a great many trees in the woods, and it is afterward disclosed, let him compensate for three trees each with thirty shillings; he does not have to give more of (for?) them, however many of them there be; because the axe is a discloser/informer, not at all a thief.]

Sweet "solves" the riddle of Ine 43 by offering that the key is sound: fire is a thief because it is silent, while the axe is an informer because it makes noise (245). This is a possible understanding of the opposition between the two concepts, but it is not entirely satisfying. First, fire does make noise. Second, the sound of the axe is most likely not what would give its wielder away, since his identity is said to become known after his act ("wyrð eft undierne" ["it is afterward disclosed"]). The axe might still inform on its owner if it is *seen*. It bears noting these caveats even if Sweet's suggestion remains, on the stylized plane of riddle logic, plausible. There is yet another way, however, that the logic of this particular riddle might work. It might be operating on word-play. *Fyr-* is one of the variant stems of the verb *feorran* ["to remove, withdraw, alienate"]. *Æsc-* is a variant stem of the verb *ascian* ["to ask," but also "to announce"]. It is possible that *fyr* ["fire"] is a thief because it "removes" things (here, trees), with a pun on *fyrran*, and *æsc* ["axe"] is a "maker-known" because it "announces" things (here, the felling of trees), with a pun on *æscian*. In any event, the penalty given, that 30 shillings compensate the felling of three trees only, and for only half the penalty assessed for burning (30 shillings as opposed to 60), supports a reading of "taking away" rather than of silence, since burning renders a tree useless (taking it entirely away). Chopping a tree down is less severe, since the wood may be reclaimed.

Whatever solution(s) were on the mind of the person responsible for this riddle becoming part of a law, the most remarkable point about it is that it does produce, through linguistic artifice, the effect of satisfying logic of a sort. This particular logic draws on the poetics of riddles, though not entirely. Whereas a riddle would go from calling an axe an "informer/discloser" to calling it several other things suggesting wholly divergent attributes with the intention of misleading and confusing, Ine 43 gives one name for fire, and one for the axe. The punning occurs within that framework of the one-to-one correspondence. Thus Ine's riddle still participates in a discourse that seeks to bind and fix, to assert authority and create an ordered world. It plays with the arbitrariness of fines and names and categories, but in a circumscribed way that reasserts closure. Miller cites the same tendency in Norse law to identify and categorize, often in a seemingly picturesque way that we would associate more with literary language than the language of the law (44). Riddles, of course, are by contrast obsessed with (mis)identity and (mis)categorization.

Another strange edict in the Anglo-Saxon record gives a similar riddlic example of naming something a *melda*, though its logic is even more obscure. A code of uncertain issuance (possibly Edmund, Eadred, Eadwig, or Edgar, according to Whitelock [429]) called *Hundredgemot* ["The Meeting of the Hundred"] (939x61) contains a poetic clause concerning three objects that make a sound:

> Hryðeres belle, hundes hoppe, blæshorn: ðissa ðreora ælc bið anes scillinga weorð;
> 7 ælc is melda geteald. (8)[14]
> [Heifer's bell, hound's hoop (collar), blow-horn (some kind of trumpet):
> of these three each is one shilling's worth; and each is held a *melda*.]

There must have been some some common lore surrounding *melda* and objects that make noise. Note the neat, chiastic alliteration pattern in the first clause (h-b, h-h, b-h), the grammatical parallelism in the second (gen. gen. nom. *bið* gen. gen. nom.), and the slant rhyme in the third (*melda*-*geteald*). The similar sound of *æsc* and *ælc* should also be pointed out as a possible (if perilously speculative) formulaic signpost: Ine 43 attests "æsc bið melda" and here we have "ælc is melda." Perhaps one is a key for the other (perhaps not). It is a difficult problem, and probably one without a solution given the extant record, but given what little we have, all likenesses bear examining, as this kind of speculation is indeed the kind of thinking riddles thrive on.

The main point to be gleaned is what has been said before, that Germanic legal language is a highly poetic genre. Its eruptions into lyricism and wit are not anomalies but apparently perfectly acceptable verbal strategies. Moreover, these strategies are not ornamental flourishes but rather further the discursive projects of their texts and genre. The projects of the Old English laws, as we have seen, differ from text to text, but both a small group of subcategories with distinct characteristics, and a few main, overarching principles can be discerned. Wulfstan's tracts introduce the binary word pair, related to Augustinian conceptions of good and its opposite (evil as not-good). This innovation is nonetheless related to the etymological figure and other kinds of word pair, a tradition that goes back to Indo-European (Watkins 28–49). The oldest structural principle we can discern, as we see in Æthelberht, is the balanced equation (*Gif* + CONDITION + COMPENSATION). Alliteration underwrites the authoritative, binding poetics throughout the legal corpus.

The Binding Word and Old English Charms

The genre we most expect to speak of in terms of binding forces is of course that of charms. Their pragmatic function, as many have noted, is to "bind" elements of the real world in order to bring about some desired effect, such as a healthy birth or relief from a toothache. To be spellbound, as Frye notes, is to be under the influence of a charm (130). But in *Beowulf* and many other examples of Old English poetry, the act of poetic creation is also described with the lexicon of binding, as in the famous passage quoted in Chapter 1:

> Hwilum cyninges þegn,
> guma gilphlæden, gidda gemyndig,

[14] The quotation is from the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* on CD-ROM, LawHu.

> se ðe ealfela ealdgesegena
> worn gemunde, word oþer fand
> *soðe gebunden*. (l. 867b–71a)
> [At times the king's thane,
> a man laden with praise, mindful of music,
> he who remembered many
> of the old tales, found other words
> *truly bound*.]

Charms are primeval expressions of the poetic function.

> The rhetoric of charm is dissociative and incantatory: it sets up a pattern of sound so complex and repetitive that the ordinary processes of response are short-circuited. Refrain, rhyme, alliteration, assonance, pun, antithesis: every repetitive device known to rhetoric is called into play. (Frye 126)

What Frye's description suggests is that charms create a texture so overwhelming that the illusion of a given world eclipses one's sense of reality. The verbal world stands in for the world itself and thus enacts the desired magic through its own self-similarity. Another thing Frye notes is that charms, as absolutely poetic, use repetition per se to create the poetic experience of their language—words as words, not as pointers to other things. This is why nonsense is perfectly acceptable as charm-language: the point is the form, not the meaning. Much more than any other genre the charms attest mixed codes—for instance, English, Latin, Celtic, and what appears to be sheer nonsense. The sheer nonsense usually appears in charms that are more Christian in content, since Latin or Greek words barely understood operate as effective talismans and require less of an attempt to make sense of their forms than a language truly close to one's everyday tongue, as in the case of charms in Old English. Hence, the "Holy Salve" charm prescribes "Acre arcre arnem nona ærnem beoðor ærnem nidren acrun cunað ele harassan fidine" (Storms 236). I provide no translation because there is no meaning to translate; the language is perfectly opaque.

Consider also, "Against a Toothache":

> Sing ðis wið toðece syððan sunne beo on setle, swiðe oft:
> Caio laio quaque uoaque ofer sæloficia sleah manna wyrm.
> Nemne her þone man and his fæder, cweð þonne:
> Lilumenne æceð þæt ofer eall þonne alið, coliað þonne hit on eorðan hatost byrneð. Fintamen. (Storms 297)
> [Sing this against a toothache after the sun has set, very often:
> *Caio laio quaque uoaque* over *sæloficia* the man slew the worm.
> Here name the man and his father, then say:
> *Lilumenne* it aches most of all when it is light, cools when it
> burns hottest on earth. *Fintamen* (=*Finit*. *Amen*. [Storms]).]

Perhaps the charm is to make the tooth stop hurting so one can go to sleep (pain is always worst at night). Therefore the last statement asserts a counterfactual

reality in order to make this happen: the tooth aches in the daytime, and "cools" (feels better) at night, when the sun burns the earth because it is underneath it. The slaying of the primeval Indo-European "worm" or dragon appears in numerous Old English charms (as it does in countless other daughter languages), and the slaying of the dragon thus appears related to the defeat of disease in the poetic history, for instance, in the "Nine Herbs Charm." This toothache charm mixes the sensical with the nonsensical and highlights the unique and complicated synchronic and diachronic status of charm language. Because of the importance of the verbal pattern as pattern, magical language is more conservative than other kinds of language. The normal spoken language goes on changing normally, but magical locutions will retain archaic forms because they are not perceived as normal components of the language but as special, holy speech. This is the case with the thee/thou pronouns and archaic verb paradigms of biblical language that people still invoke in modern America, for instance, when quoting commandments ("thou shalt not kill"). Thus frozen forms appear in magical formulas as islands amid a much changed language. Synchronically, frozen forms that can still make sense historically, such as the reference to the dragon-slayer in the toothache charm, coexist beside nonsense words and half-sense words and words in other languages, all operating as magical, poetic speech with a life of its own that is very much the antithesis of reference. It may respond to a "real-world" situation, but the message itself refers not to that situation, but to its own pattern. That message is then put to its pragmatic, performative application.

For many if not most charms, it is not the great power or poetry of the verse that carries the effect, but sheer repetition. For instance, the "Nine Herbs Charm" (Storms 186–90) prescribes recitation of the metrical portion three times over each of the nine herbs and once into the mouth, once into each ear, and once over the wound, of the ailing person. The prescription is thus 31 recitations of a metrical charm sixty-three lines long. This makes for a performance of 1,953 lines—almost two-thirds the length of *Beowulf*. According to Benjamin Bagby, a performance of *Beowulf* in its entirety would last around five hours, so the prescribed recitation of the "Nine Herbs Charm" would take at least three. The text would no doubt etch itself into the memory of the reciter after the first handful of repetitions, and repetition after repetition would give the words the kind of unthinking, lulling, otherworldly quality that modern mainly memorized texts have for us today (the Lord's Prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance).

Another characteristic of Old English charms, linked to their historical circumstances, is the onion structure, in which the text is bookended, or opened and closed, with later, usually more Christian material, and grades into older, more pagan material towards the center. The well-known fertility charm called *Æcerbot* ["Remedy for a Field"] (Storms 172–6) moves in a sequence from glossed Latin, to lovely Old English with characteristic syncretic features, to quite pagan-seeming Old English incantation, back "out" again to a thrice-repeated Pater Noster tacked onto the end. A passage from the "pagan core" of the charm contains the famous "erce erce erce" nonsense invocation:

Nim þonne þæt sæd, sete on þæs sules bodig. Cweð þonne: (l. 53)
[Take then that seed, set it on the body of the plough. Say then:]
Erce, Erce, Erce, eorþan modor,
geunne þe se alwalda, ecce drihten
æcera sexendra and wridendra,
eacniendra and elniendra,
sceafta scira herse-wæstma,
and þæra bradan bere-wæstma,
and þæra whitan hwæte-wæstma,
and ealra eorþan wæstma.
Geunne him ece drihten
and his halige þe on heofenum synt
þæt hys yrþ si gefriþod wið ealra feonda gehwæne,
and heo si geborgen wið ealra bealwa gehwylc
þara lyblaca geond land sawen.
Nu ic bidde ðone waldend se ðe ðas woruld gesceop
þæt ne sy nan to þæs cwidol wif, ne to þæs cræftig man
þæt awendan ne mæge word þus gecwedene. (l. 54–69)
[Erce, Erce, Erce, mother of the earth,
may he grant you, the all-powerful, eternal lord,
fields growing and sprouting,
bearing and thriving,
shining shafts of millet-crops,
and the broad barley-crops,
and the white wheat-crops
and the crops of all the earth.
May he grant him, the eternal lord,
and his holy ones who are in heaven,
that his crop be protected against each and every foe,
and be fortified against each and every malice
of the sorceries sewn across the land.
Now I pray the *waldend* (lit. "wielder," "agent of agents"), he who made
the world, that there be no woman so versed, nor man so ingenious
that they may avert the words thus spoken.]

Compare this to the closing passage of the charm:

Cweð þonne III Crescite. In nomine patris sitis benedicti, Amen.
And pater noster þriwa. (l. 86–7)
[Say three times: *Crescite. In nomine patris sitis benedicti, Amen*.
And *pater noster* three times.]

Different cultural, linguistic, and doctrinal strata are evident in the contrast, but the most noteworthy thing about such a piece of masonwork is the absolute faith in the sign it attests, in light of which its structure makes sense (rather than making nonsense). Even if the doctrine enshrined in a strophe is no longer espoused, even if the language is either no longer understood or has been borrowed from a foreign

tongue, precisely ordered words (verbal signs) and symbolic actions (nonverbal signs) are invested with magical power. The signifiers, not the signifieds, are what matters.

The linguistic function of charms is the most straightforward of any genre. The goal is to bind the world through language in its primeval, perfect function: naming=binding. To utter perfect speech is to create order in the cosmos. If the language of the laws is to order the relations between human beings, the language of charm is to order the cosmos in relation to human beings by substituting the human order of language for the order (or chaos) of nature external to or greater than human beings.

Ordering the social world (the world of human beings) and the cosmos (the plane of existence on which we interact with forces vaster than ourselves): these are both heavy semiotic tasks. As Derrida makes clear, signification is not an unproblematic process. It involves an effort of repression and forgetfulness to bind in language, because language is a system of signs, and the world is external to it, indifferent and amorphous. The logocentric solution of the western tradition is to posit the perfect language of God, the Word that was with God and that was God (Logos),[15] as the dualistic counterpart to the fallen language of humanity. All apparent gaps and lapses in signification can be chalked up to the imperfection of this mortal language, and effaced or ignored through faith in the transcendent ideal forms these imperfections supposedly obscure. In the postmodern era, Derrida's alternative solution, his reaction against logocentric effacement, is to invert the logocentric relation and assert language (in a broadened sense of "writing") over "reality," denying any transcendent realm beyond signs, at least in terms of any possibility of human ability to ascertain it. Thus we have the dualistic model of the classical tradition as passed from Late Antiquity through Latin Christendom and into the modern era on the one side, and the postmodern proclamation that the emperor has no clothes—there is nothing "there" in the direction in which signs point, or they are actually pointing at a mirror or pointing straight but in curved space—on the other. One implication of this study of Old English poetics is that Old English complicates this chronologically based opposition. Our final genre, the vernacular riddles, grapples, in "serious play," with indeterminacy and evinces an awareness of the sign that resembles postmodern epistemology more than it does pre-modern logocentric theology.

Riddles and the Word Unbound

All modern commentators on riddles (Old English and in general) who are not purely concerned with source studies describe in one way or another riddles' interstitial quality, which fundamentally involves play. As Huizinga says,

[15] See John 1:1.

> The eternal gulf between being and idea can only be bridged by the rainbow of imagination. The word-bound concept is always inadequate to the torrent of life. Hence it is only the image-making or figurative word that can invest things with expression and at the same time bathe them in the luminosity of ideas: idea and thing are united in the image. (133)

Huizinga is speaking about poetry more generally, which, as we have seen in the language of charm, unites ideas with things in a magical fusion. What riddle does, however, is play with the process by which this fusion occurs. A metaphor or metonym creates an association that brings to mind an image, the solution to its mini-riddle (is this not what metaphor is, a juxtaposition of two things that asks what is articulated by the overlap between them?), but then the next metaphor or description contradicts it. For instance in Riddle 59 (Williamson 57),[16] the riddle object is announced in perhaps the most potent heroic terms possible, only for the scene to "turn Christian" in an abrupt reversal of expectations: "Ic seah in healle hring gyldenne" (l.1) ["I saw in the hall a golden ring"], followed by:

> men sceawian modum gleawe
> ferþþum frode. Friþospede bæd
> god nergende gæste sinum
> se þe wende wriþan. (l. 2–5a)
> [men behold with wise minds,
> prudent spirits. For prosperity beseeched
> the redeemer God, for his soul,
> he who hefted the hoop.]

The false *apo koinou* is a trap. *Hring gyldenne* can only be parsed within its line as the direct object of "ic seah" ["I saw"]: "I saw in the hall a *golden ring*. But with the objective infinitive *sceawian* in the next line, the syntax requires a revised reading, in which "men sceawian" is the object of "ic seah" and *hring gyldenne* becomes the object of *sceawian*: "I saw in the hall a golden ring men look upon," or, intelligibly, "I saw in the hall men look upon a golden ring." Thus the expectation encouraged by the opening line, that the narrator will describe a beautiful, precious, and traditionally resonant object (the ring was a kind of warrior's arm-band given as present or reward by one's chief or lord; a common epithet for a leader is "ring-giver"), is thwarted and revised by the second line. The narrator adopts for a moment a critical gaze on the traditional scene, watching other people admiring the object, but then this, too, begins to morph into a wholly different, Christian scenario. The riddle's solution is most likely the communion cup (Williamson 313–14).

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[16] Quotations of riddles are from the Exeter Book, which numbers the riddles differently from Williamson, their most recent editor (there are a few ambiguous riddle boundaries, leading to numbering discrepancies according to one's interpretation). Williamson's enumeration is given in parentheses throughout.

Anita Riedinger charts the ways Old English riddles play similarly with specifically poetic categories and expectations. They exploit the conventions of the oral-formulaic tradition in order to throw the riddle-guesser off the track by leading him or her into wrong associative networks. Using the following example, Riddle 5 ("shield" and/or "chopping block"), Riedinger shows how traditional formulas mislead the guesser to construe the object as a warrior, and then how the very few non-formulaic verses offer truly helpful clues that steer the guesser toward "chopping-block," the farthest removed solution from the battlefield imagery urged by the formulas. RF stands for "riddle formula" (a formula found only in riddles), and TF for "traditional formula," following Riedinger's notation. The translation is also Riedinger's, for the sake of convenience, because the meaning of individual words is not under discussion here:

RF	Ic eom anhaga iserne wund,	TF
RF	bille gebennad, beado-weorca sæd,	TF
TF	ecgum werig. Oft ic wig seo,	
TF	frecne feohtan. Frofre ne wene,	TF
	þæt me geoc cyme guð-gewinnes,	TF
TF	ær ic mid ældum eal forwurðe,	TF
	ac mec hnossiað homera lafe,	TF
	heard-ecg heoro-scearp, hond-weorc smiþa,	RF
	bitað in burgum; ic abidan sceal	TF
TF	laþran gemotes. Næfre læce-cynn	
TF	on folc-stede findan meahte,	TF
	þara þe mid wyrtum wunde gehælde,	TF
	ac me ecga dolg eacen weorðað	
TF	þurh deað-slege dagum ond nihtum.	TF

[I am a solitary one wounded by iron, wounded by the bill, sated by battle-deeds, weary from edges. Often I see war, dangerous fighting. I do not expect comfort, that help may come to me in battle-conflict before I, among men, am completely destroyed; but the leavings of hammers strike me, hard-edges very sharp, hand-work of the smiths, bite in the fortresses; I must await a more hateful meeting. Never in the people-place can I find a race of physicians, of those who have healed wounds with herbs, but the gashes of edges become increased through death-blows by days and by nights.] (Riedinger 33)

As Riedinger explains, the bit about not being able to find a healer among people leads the guesser to a non-human object that receives blows. The emphasis on edges and blades as opposed to all kinds of weapons (arrows and spears would likely be mentioned if the solution were simply "shield") narrows the possibilities and suggests a chopping-block. But of course we have no answer key, so all solutions are on the table (or, as it were, the chopping-block).

The solution to the riddle is only part of what the riddle "is" or "does." We return now to the "interstitial" quality mentioned above. According to Daniel Tiffany in an essay on "lyric substance" in riddles, the speaking objects in Old English riddles are both or between persons and things. The riddle's effect is to render the "corporeal aspect of obscurity," which is to say, to figure in language

the fundamental indeterminacy of "real" things (since these are only definable or expressible in language) (74, 82). If objects can talk, then the strict boundary between human and non-human becomes problematic, and if objects cannot be designated easily by linguistic signs, then the very idea of signification becomes problematic. What is human, and what is real—or how do we *know* what we think and say is real, really is?

Rafał Borysławski notes Huizinga's description of the seriousness of "play," particularly for pre-industrial cultures. The link joining play, creativity, and insight (problem solving and knowledge or wisdom) helps Borysławski make sense of the etymology of *riddle* (cognate with *ræd-* ["counsel"]) and the pervasiveness of riddling and mystery in Old English discussions of the nature of wisdom. Part of Borysławski's thesis is that the Exeter Book riddles are all concerned with the mystery behind signification and its relation to the mystery behind creation itself.[17] In this respect they are fundamentally in the tradition of Aldhelm's Latin riddles, which Borysławski takes to express the *pneuma* or Logos pervading all creation. Thus for Borysławski both Aldhelm's Anglo-Latin and the Exeter Book's Old English riddles function in a dualistic paradigm (for all the traces of northern pagan sensibilities he finds in the latter) through which the obscurantism and play of riddle language serve to incite wonder at the pristine inscrutability of the created universe. Just as creation is difficult for us to "read" for its proper ideal order, so a riddle is difficult to read one's way through to the proper solution. Hiding and cleverness in riddles mimic the mysterious ways of God.

Yet there is one very obvious difference between the Anglo-Latin and Old English riddles in their relationship to "solution" and the idea of transcendent meaning. Borysławski sees the difference as trivial, but I do not:[18] the Latin riddles have their solutions as their titles; the Old English riddles have neither title nor solution. They are word-puzzles with no key. The riddles appear as a Derridean ideal (oxymoronic as that may seem): they admit to no solution; they are language at play. Indeed, according to Craig Williamson, the riddles' most recent editor,

> what they mean is the riddle-solver's meaning. What they mean is that reality exists and is at the same time a mosaic of man's perception. What they mean is that man's measure of the world is in words, that perceptual categories are built on verbal foundations, and that by withholding the key to the categorical house (the entitling solution) the riddlers may force the riddle-solver to restructure his own perceptual blocks in order to gain entry to a metaphorical truth. In short the solver must imagine himself a door and open in. (Williamson 25)

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[17] Borysławski's thesis is in fact more complex. While he detects the structural-thematic parallel I highlight here, his larger aim is to document a pervasive riddlic sensibility in Old English literature, thus implying the riddle was in fact native in some form to the Anglo-Saxons.

[18] Williamson, as well, sees the absence of solutions to the Exeter riddles as integral to their significance. See pp. 23–8.

The play of the Old English riddles reveals that there *is* a space between things (even if these are concepts) and words, between real and ideal. "The riddle is essentially a charm in reverse: it represents the revolt of the intelligence against the hypnotic power of commanding words," according to Frye, contrasting the main attributes of charms and riddles (137). Charm, from Latin *carmen* ["song"], and riddle, from Old English *rædels*(*e*) ["riddle," "opinion," "conjecture"], govern two distinct associative groups: sound (charm) and sense (riddle), or rhyme (charm) and reason (riddle) (123–4). In our terminology, Frye's opposition captures the way charms employ pure poetry, perfect language, to enact and thus embody desired results in the world, and the way riddles have something to do with knowledge. Although initially Frye also attempts to associate charm with sound and riddle with vision (hence, sense=vision), his further discussion reveals what is really behind the distinction: not sound and vision, but rather form and a paradox or crisis of meaning:

> The trouble with [William Carlos] Williams's anti-conceptual statement ["no ideas but in things"] […] is that in poetry there is, so to speak, no such thing as a thing. Word and thing are frozen in two separate worlds, and the reality of each can be expressed only by the other in its world. This paradoxical deadlock is precisely the essence of the riddle. (Frye 145)

Charms are obsessed with form as form (operating almost exclusively on the poetic function), whereas riddles are obsessed with the relationship between form and meaning, and thus involve a tension among the poetic function (form; message referring to message), the referential function (meaning; message referring to the world outside the message), and the metalingual function (the code, the set of symbols through which communication can occur). To quote from the Introduction, the metalingual function corresponds to the "code" position and describes language about language:

> Whenever the addresser and/or the addressee need to check up whether they use the same code, speech is focused on the code: it performs a METALINGUAL (that is, glossing) function […] "Do you know what I mean?" (Jakobson 69)

The common riddle refrain, "say what I am," signals the metalingual function. It challenges the reader or listener to have understood the clues in the riddler's intended way (a cruel exigency) and to produce proof of it in the form of the answer. This metalingual check-in, in other contexts so routine, is in riddles a hair-pulling affair (one reader, it seems, inscribed his or her frustration in drypoint runes on folio 125a in response to Riddle 64 [Williamson 62]: *Beo unrepe* ["be merciful!"] [Williamson 59]). The difficulty is, of course, the point—the ordeal that initiates the reader into a metaphysical secret: essentially Derridean *differance*.

Frye, too, riddles out for himself that the answer is in fact beside the point, again, as is strongly implied by the absence of answers to any of the riddles in the Exeter collection. But he adds to the assertion of indeterminacy, which is the general

ontological orientation of the riddles, the positive element of interpretation, not for a monolithic meaning but for the associative tendrils sent out in all directions by the peculiar texture of a riddle. Frye ends his discussion of riddles with a consideration of Riddle 33 (Williamson 31), a riddle that does appear to have a clear solution:

> Wiht cwom æfter wege wrætlicu liþan,
> cymlic from ceole cleopode to londe,
> hlinsade hlude; hleahtor wæs gryrelic,
> egesful on earde, ecge wæron scearpe.
> Wæs hio hetegrim, hilde to sæne,
> biter beadoweorca; bordweallas grof,
> heardhiþende. Heterune bond,
> sægde searocræftig ymb hyre sylfre gesceaft:
> "Is min modor mægðа cynnes
> þæs deorestan, þæt is dohtor min
> eacen up liden, swa þæt is ældum cuþ,
> firum on folce, þæt seo on foldan sceal
> on ealra londa gehwam lissum stondan."
> [A creature came after the crest, curiously sailing,
> comely from the keel/chill (it) called to land,
> rang out loud; (its) laughter was gruesome,
> awful on earth, edges were sharp.
> She was merciless, too careless in combat
> of bitter battle-work; (she) scored the roundboards,
> hard-hitting, engraved with a curse,
> spoke cunning(ly) about her own creation:
> "My mother is the rarest
> kind of maiden, that is my daughter
> grown big, thus it is known to the wise
> among the people, that she shall on the soil
> of each and every land stand peaceful."]

Frye says,

> The answer is supposed to be "iceberg" […]. But the answer hardly does justice to the poem: like all interpretations that profess to say "this *is* what the poem means," the answer is wrong because it is an answer. The real answer to the question implied in a riddle is not a "thing" outside it, but that which is both word and thing, and is both inside and outside the poem. This is the universal of which the poem is the manifestation, the order of words that tells us of battles and shipwrecks, of the intimate connection of beauty and terror, of cycles of life and death, of mutability and apocalypse, of the echoes of Leviathon and Virgil's Juno and Demeter and Kali and Circe and Tiamat and Midgard and the mermaids and the Valkyries, all of which is focused on and stirred up by this "iceberg." (147)

Thus Frye insists both on the riddle's Derridean refusal of transcendent, unitary significance, and on a positive play of significance in its associative dynamics (however much he then succumbs to a universalizing crescendo at the end).

Derrida, without really altering the validity of Frye's point here, would no doubt emend "both […] and" to "neither […] nor" above. It is not significance, it is *differance*. This difference moves us past the allusions to formal or structural relationships, the effects produced by bodies juxtaposed and estranged, the play of their differences. Frye's iceberg riddle serves this kind of reading just as well.

Riddle 33 contains, by my tally, eight verses in which the ambiguity is due either to a word with two plausible but disparate meanings or the ambiguous meaning of the entire phrase. The indeterminate, in-between riddle-meaning, which I have attempted to document from the point of view of several riddle commentators, takes place in the mental operations one performs locally in each of these verses, and in the way one must try to build a picture of the solution (meaning a concept, not a literal picture) while maintaining a stance of openness. One must remain open because one is aware of being constantly misled—miscued—to close off possibilities in favor of the field of images a given clue produces. I reproduce the riddle below with the ambiguous verses in italics:

> Wiht cwom æfter wege wrætlicu liþan,
> *cymlic from ceole* cleopode to londe,
> hlinsade hlude; hleahtor wæs gryrelic,
> egesful on earde, *ecge wæron scearpe*.
> *Wæs hio hetegrim*, *hilde to sæne*,
> biter beadoweorca; *bordweallas grof*,
> *heardhiþende*. *Heterune bond*,
> *sægde searocræftig* ymb hyre sylfre gesceaft:
> "Is min modor mægða cynnes
> þæs deorestan, þæt is dohtor min
> eacen up liden, swa þæt is ældum cuþ,
> firum on folce, þæt seo on foldan sceal
> on ealra londa gehwam lissum stondan."

We see immediately that the riddle breaks into two parts, and we know from studies such as Williamson's that the motif of the mother who is also the pregnant daughter (as the iceberg is the mother of the water that is the mother of the iceberg, and so on) goes back at least to antiquity (Williamson 238–9). The second part is thus the basic motif on which the riddle elaborates, and the first part constitutes that elaboration, the original material of this riddle. The first double entendre with which the reader must grapple is "cymlic from ceole" ["comely from chill/keel"]. While many commentators insist that *ceol* cannot possibly mean "keel" (because it never refers to a keel in the extant record), it does often mean "ship," and it can also mean something like "chill" or "cold." The previous description of the creature coming over the sea weights the meaning in favor of "ship," which is of course the wrong choice. Since the guesser knows it is probably a trap, he or she holds both possibilities in mind, and even juxtaposes them: a cold ship; a ship of ice, a beautiful vessel of ice, or from the frozen north. All the sound-making in the following lines is consistent with other descriptions of ships in the riddles, for instance the ship that makes a sound when it grinds against the sand (Riddle 32

[Williamson 30]). The next ambiguous verse introduces martial imagery, logically bringing to mind the blades of soldiers being carried on a warship: "ecge wæron scearpe" ["edges (usually metonymic for swords) were sharp"]. The unproblematic addition of soldiers to one's mental ship (though one is still keeping in mind the cold vessel; what is cold over the sea with sharp edges like swords?) leads into the complicated statement of the next line, "wæs hio hetegrim, hilde to sæne." This might mean, "she was hatefully deadly, slow to battle," but might also mean, "she was hatefully deadly, in battle too careless." In fact both make cryptic sense in light of "iceberg" and both are no doubt intended. Icebergs are slow-moving as well as careless—literally and in their destructiveness.

The final cluster of ambiguous verses is, in my mind, the tour de force of the riddle and constitutes its final knot of confusion before resolving into the derivative final riddle-within-the-riddle, which is actually the riddle's key. The creature, after a four-verse martial description, is now said to have "engraved" or "carved" *bordweallas* [normally "shields," but here reinvesting its constituents with lexical meaning, as "board-walls," or the sides of a ship]. Carving or engraving shields is a lovely poetic image for battle, but it is a misleading image in terms of the riddle's solution. We are meant to build and hold onto it, but the seeking mind must also grab hold of the literal meaning of the object *bordweallas*, a complex and thoroughly pleasing mental operation—a chance to play with language and not only its synchronic but its historical processes as well, in the form of metaphor-reconstitution. *Heardhiþende*, too, is radically ambiguous: "hard-hitting" in terms of what might be expected of swords, but what also describes the seafaring iceberg and its effect on another seagoing body. Further, the similar-sounding past participle *liden* in line 11 recursively suggests a third reading, "hard-growing," which accurately describes the frozen water that becomes an iceberg. Finally, "heterune bond" ["bound with a hate-rune"] takes up the engraving image of *grof* from the line before, suggesting the writing of a curse—writing specifically, because of *grof* ["engraved"]; it is the only previous clue the new verse can attach itself to. This image, though, is immediately subverted by the phrase "sægde searocræftig" ["spoke cunning(ly)"], since it shifts the guesser's sense of the medium away from writing towards speaking. By this point in the riddle, it is all too much to keep in one's head, and the guesser has shifted into a mode of local enjoyment: the words themselves tease and play, reveal and conceal, and this is the riddle's literary effect. There are indeed many other levels on which the riddle operates: the recognition and misrecognition of traditional formulas, the surprise and new perspective one gains on the solution-object if one happens to guess it and can go back and contemplate all its metaphoric aspects (what one might call the riddle's contemplative value). But the language itself, on the level of linguistic operation, in the absence of a titular solution, is performing multiple-signification, which plays with referentiality, poetic effect, and the very possibility of a shared code. The nature of the language of riddle is play, the refusal of one-to-one correspondence and "correct" solution.

Poetic language, as Jakobson says, uses likeness to construct a sequence of recurrences. Riddles construct a sequence based on both likeness and difference, not the difference that is a binary opposition, but the difference that suggests one kind of likeness but also another. And another and another. Riddles operate on a fundamentally indeterminate verbal epistemology, which refuses ontology altogether, I think. This is why their spirit may be characterized as Derridean. The Old English riddles give the lie to a monolithic Western tradition from Late Antiquity until the abruption of postmodernity. There were "other traditions," to borrow a phrase from Marjorie Perloff, in counterpoint to that of the elite and hegemonic intellectual culture of Latin Christendom. Anglo-Saxon verbal culture was not permeated by a concept of a transcendent Logos that unified everything into a coherent system. Perception and poetic praxis were specific, driven by detail, and by an ephemeral ontology; this is what Bede understood as he crafted the flight of the sparrow through the hall, out of the night, into the night. Such was his culture's view both of being and of signification.[19]

Julia Kristeva makes the case that poetic language is inherently subversive because it discloses the inner workings of the sign rather than imposing the sign as hegemon. It may be that the highly poetic discursive economy of Old English, in which the artifice of signs is everywhere apparent rather than suppressed, promotes the indeterminate epistemology that the riddles are concerned with overtly. Riddles are an attempt to work through and within indeterminacy. It is the state that presents itself as "real" in a discourse in which signifying processes are apparent. In the modern discourse of scientism, of course, the real seems like it is elsewhere, in "the world" that we might touch if only we fix our language with exquisite control. Riddles, by contrast, may, as the etymology of the word *riddle* suggests, represent the scientific discourse of Old English. Because the literary language of Old English is poetic, it presents a world marked by signifying structures. The genre and epistemological tradition attempting to deal with such a world is the riddle. The poetics of Old English thus exerts a founding influence on the genre.

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[19] Bede relates the parable of the sparrow in Book II Chapter 13 of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. In considering whether or not to convert to Christianity, one of the counselors of King Edwin of Northumbria offers the parable as a characterization of the native ontology:

> The present life of man, O king, seems to me, in comparison of that time which is unknown to us, like to the swift flight of a sparrow through the room wherein you sit at supper in winter, with your commanders and ministers, and a good fire in the midst, whilst the storms of rain and snow prevail abroad; the sparrow, I say, flying in at one door, and immediately out at another, whilst he is within, is safe from the wintry storm; but after a short space of fair weather, he immediately vanishes out of your sight, into the dark winter from which he had emerged. So this life of man appears for a short space, but of what went before, or what is to follow, we are utterly ignorant. If, therefore, this new doctrine contains something more certain, it seems justly to deserve to be followed. (95)

The three genres with which this chapter is concerned—law, charm, and riddle—stake their different epistemological claims according to the poetic discourse of Old English. The laws use equated language to assert equated values in order to bind individuals under one system of compensation. The laws order human beings in relation to one another through the ordered language they all share. The charms substitute the plane of language for the referential plane, allowing the order of poetic form to suffice, to stand in for an ordered cosmos. The riddles grapple with the very ontological premises on which the other two genres operate. The riddles consider again and again, turning over and over, the imaginary fusion of the sign, foregrounding the dynamics of slippage as the ultimate episteme.

Chapter 4
Extraordinary Poetics in Traditional Verse

Poetic features by definition operate in the language of classical verse, but less obviously, formal features beyond those required by the meter can appear in verse and contribute to meaning. I am not the first to suggest ways in which Old English verse uses form for a specific local effect. Carol Braun Pasternack, for instance, points out the way *Elene* of the Exeter Book puts coherent, clearly subordinating syntax in the mouths of righteous characters and gives confused and ambiguous syntax to the spiritually fallen and confused. Her work follows Robert Bjork's analysis of style and syntax in hagiographic verse. According to both scholars, correspondences between linguistic and spiritual coherence or confusion help dramatize the didactic message of Christian texts. This chapter will consider other ways that verse texts use form beyond the standard alliterative meter. Not only are the prose texts enriched for us by a recognition of Old English poetics, but verse texts, too, become richer and more meaningful and surprising.

Praise Structure in Old English

The first example of extraordinary structure in metrical verse comes from a collocation of texts—from ostensibly very different genres—that share not one unusual technique, but several, and further, share thematic contexts as well. The coincidence of both form and theme suggests a genetic relationship, a common origin. The texts must derive from a common generic tradition. This tradition specified a poetic structure for praise—specifically, praise of the natural world.

The three main texts I will discuss, from *Christ I* and two verse charms in different manuscripts,[1] all involve apostrophic invocation of a figure of nature: the relevant section of *Christ I* addresses *earendel*, a semantically freighted equivalent for Latin *oriens* ["east," "rising one," and thus the dawn or the sun] in the Church's "O" Antiphons for Advent[2]; in a section from the *Æcerbot* ["field-remedy"] charm, the earth is addressed and figured as the "mother of men" ["fira modor"]; and a discrete passage from the beginning of the "Nine Herbs Charm" addresses in turn three different plants with magical powers: *mucgwyrt* ["mugwort"], *wegbrade* ["plantain"], and *stune* ["lamb's cress"]. Structurally, the three texts mark their boundaries within their larger verse environments in a similar way. All make use of alliterative repetition across line breaks using a similar, non-canonical kind of

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[1] The charms are printed in Storms as well as in *ASPR* (*Minor Poems*).

[2] *Earendel* is traditionally taken to signify either Christ or John the Baptist, figuring him as the sun or the dawn.

"slant" alliteration (observing features rather than whole sounds); all vary this alliteration pattern precisely at the center of the passage; all contain at least one prominent chiasmus. The thematic and stylistic connections among the texts point to an inherited verbal ritual of nature-praise.

I will begin with the text from the oldest manuscript, *Christ I* of the Exeter Book. *Christ I* comprises vernacular elaborations of the Latin "O" Antiphons of the Advent season, and the section in question is a unique five-line structure marked by an unusual density of sound correspondences. It appears in an invocation to the "rising one," Old English *earendel*, which has been taken variously to refer to the morning star, the dawn, John the Baptist, and/or Jesus Christ. Borrowing from Calvert Watkins, we might call this a "strophic" structure, since it marks itself linguistically as distinct from its verse environment, or, following Pasternack, a verse "movement," since that term highlights the unique textuality of Old English verse as a continuous texture marked by discrete movements. The five-line, "strophic movement" of *Christ I* follows:

> Eala earendel engla beorhtast,
> ofer middangeard monnum sended,
> ond soðfæsta sunnan leoma,
> torht ofer tunglas, þu tida gehwane
> of sylfum þe symle inlihtes. (l. 104–8)
> [*Eala* earendel, brightest of angels,
> sent over the earth to mankind,
> and truest light of the sun,
> bright above the stars, all spans of time you,
> of yourself, enlighten always.]

This passage is printed in the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* as verse, and it conforms to the principles of classical Old English meter. However, the structure of the passage is richly complex and goes far beyond the meter. First, there is a small group of recurring sounds within the first three words of the first line, "eala earendel engla." This group contains a preponderance of /e/ and /a/ (and no other vowels), three /l/s and one /r/ (both are "liquid" sounds) and a nasal. All these sounds—the liquids /l/ and /r/, vowels, and the nasal /n/, are "sonorant" sounds, a class observed by phonological rules that govern syllable structure.

To explain some terminology, the sound classes I use belong to the feature-based understanding of modern linguistics. The brain appears to categorize sounds according to "place of articulation," which is where in the mouth the tongue shapes the resonance chamber of the vocal tract, and "manner of articulation," which is the particular way the air is affected. The most important manner of articulation feature is voicing. The throat vibrates when a sound is voiced, and does not when it is not. This makes the difference between /p/ and /b/ and between /f/ and /v/, for instance. The one difference of voicing can make the difference between separate words: *fat* and *vat*, or *pat* and *bat*. Another manner of articulation feature is frication, involving continual airflow but an obstructive contact between the

tongue and some spot in the vocal tract, as in /f/, /v/, /th/, /s/, /z/, /sh/, and /h/.[3] "Stop" sounds, by contrast, stop the airflow completely and then release it with the articulation of a following vowel. Stop sounds are /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, and the glottal attack in the onset of each syllable in *uh-oh*. The brain makes all the necessary calculations under the radar of our awareness. But the feature categories used by our phonological processors are available for manipulation for poetic and commercial effect, as is illustrated by a sign I recently saw in the town where I live. It read, "Why salad when you can zalad?" This was a billboard for Zaxby's, a chain restaurant priding itself on its salad selections. The slogan plays on the affinity between /s/ and /z/: they share all features except one: voicing. They are both alveolar in place of articulation (tongue up behind the tooth ridge), and both are fricatives, with obstructed air moving continually rather than stopping; /s/ is unvoiced and /z/ is voiced. The slogan is pretty lame, but it would be even less effective than it is without the close correspondence between /s/ and /z/. Imagine, for instance, that the restaurant's name was Max's. "Why salad when you can malad?" This version would be totally nonsensical. The brain makes use of feature-based correspondences even in the most banal instances of poetic speech.

To return to the *earendel* passage in *Christ I*, the final line of the strophe, "of sylfum þe symle inlihtes," closes the passage with a phonetic density similar to that of the first line, forming a kind of ring structure. There is here a preponderance of high and mid vowels (/i/, /y/, /u/, and /e/), and of /s/s, /l/s, and nasals (in a nasal sound, the air flows through the nose instead of the mouth; /n/, /m/, and /ng/, are Modern English and Old English nasals).[4] The unordered collocation s-l-N (where N stands for any nasal) occurs three times in the line. This final line also echoes the exact alliteration pattern of the central line of the strophe, which is the highlighted epithet for *earendel*: "soðfæsta sunnan leoma," ["truest light of the sun"]. That central line is thus underscored by the final line's closing repetition of its pattern, which also relates to it thematically, in explaining the effect of the "truest light of the sun": bringing light every day and thereby marking time itself ("tide gehwane"). Within this framing and highlighting structure, with densely patterned opening and closing lines and a highlighted central line, the rest of the strophe also operates beyond the regular meter in that consecutive lines correlate by feature correspondences. The /b/ in the first line "beorhtast," which does not participate in that line's alliteration, is a bilabial (made with the lips) voiced stop, and the alliterating sound of the following line is /m/, a bilabial voiced nasal (hence, the two sounds differ in only one feature). The non-alliterating initial sound in that line, /s/, is carried over completely in the following line, the central, focus line: "soðfæsta sunnan leoma." The /l/ of *leoma* in that line is an alveolar (tongue behind the tooth ridge) liquid, and the /t/ of the following line is an

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[3] I use Modern English orthography instead of the International Phonetic Alphabet to represent the interdental fricative (/ð/ [voiced] or /ɵ/ [unvoiced]) and the palatal fricative (/ʃ/).

[4] I use English ng instead of IPA ŋ.

alveolar stop (they share place of articulation). The final line overrides this pattern of carryover in favor of echoing the alliteration pattern of the middle line exactly, as already discussed.

There are other patterns here, too, such as a chiasmus of structure and meaning, between "engla beorhtast" in line 1 (meaning literally, "of angels brightest") and line 4, "torht ofer tunglas" ["bright 'over' the stars"]. In the first half of the structure the partitive genitive *englas* offers the contrasting term for earendel's brightness (of angels he is brightest), and in the second half the brightness contrasts with stars which are the object of a prepositional phrase (he is bright above the stars). The s-l-N repetition pattern in the last line forms a chiasmus, too. *Sylfum* yields s-l-N. *Symle* reverses the /l/ and the N. *Inlihtes* is the mirror image of the first: N-l-s. Thus s-l-N → s-N-l → N-l-s. Recall that N-l is what we start with in "eala earendel engla," and that /s/ is what gets added in the central line. So the central focus is /s/, and the final sonic chiasmus begins and ends on /s/, /s/ for *soð*, and /s/ for *sunna*. We will see another chiasmus below in the text from the *Æcerbot* charm.

Appreciating the thematic resonance of the passage begins with the rare epithet *earendel*. "Eala earendel" translates "O Oriens" from the Latin antiphon on which the Old English lyric is based.[5] The Latin reads: "O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae et sol justitiae: veni et illumina sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis" (Campbell 55) ["O East/Rising One, splendor of eternal light and sun of justice: come and illuminate one sitting in darkness and the shadow of death"]. "Eala earendel" is the only invocation in *Christ I* that corresponds word for word (matching in semantics and morphosyntax) to its Latin exemplar.[6] *Oriens* is a present participle functioning as a noun, alliterating with the vocative *O* and meaning, literally, "rising one" or "east." *Earendel*, too, alliterates with its vocative *eala* and has

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[5] Unless otherwise noted, quotations from *Christ I* are based on the ASPR edition, though I have in some cases altered the punctuation.

[6] Here are the invocations of the Latin antiphons along with their Old English counterparts. Each matches *O* with *Eala*, and addresses a biblical figure with its own name or an epithet:

O clavis David ["O key of David"]: Eala þu reccend ond þu riht cyning, se þe locan healdeð (l. 18–19a) ["*Eala* reigning and rightful king, who holds the locks"]

O Hierusalem: Eala sibbe gesihð (l. 50a) ["*Eala* vision of peace"]

O virgo virginum ["O virgin of virgins"]: Eala wifa wynn (l. 71a) ("*Eala* joy of women")

O Oriens ["O East/Rising One"]: Eala earendel (l. 104a)

O Emmanuel: Eala gæsta god (l. 130a) ["*Eala* god of spirits"]

O Rex pacifice ["O peaceful King"]: Eala þu soða ond þu sibsuma ealra cyninga cyning (l. 214–15a) ["*Eala* true and peaceful king of all kings"]

O mundi Domina ["O Mistress of the world"]: Eala þu mæra middangeardes seo clæneste cwen ofer eorþan (l. 275–6) ["*Eala* excellent of the earth, the purest queen over the earth"]

O admirabile commercium ["O marvelous transaction"]: Eala hwæt, þæt is wræclic wrixl (l. 416a) ["*Eala hwæt*, what a rare exchange"] (Campbell 49–77)

(as I will detail below) meanings covering "east" and "rising one" (the morning star, specifically). Further, though not etymologically correct, *earendel* would have been prone to reanalysis as a present participle. Though the semantic etymology of the word in its inherited form was recoverable (the referents for the word, as morning star, personified character, dawn, sun, east, and light, were known, as we shall see, by at least some speakers), the morphology would have become opaque. There is no way a native speaker would have intuited Proto-Germanic (henceforth PGmc) **auri-wandilaz* and made the connection between the second element (**-wandilaz*) and any OE word, because according to the OED, the root "does not appear in West Germanic." English borrowed what became *wand* from ON *vöndr*. Thus, the closest sensible analogy to fix on for a grammatically sensitive Anglo-Saxon would be the present-participial -end, which was productive in forming agent nouns in its own right, affixed to -el, also productive for agent nouns.[7] "The one doing something (overdetermined)" is what the morphology would say to the native speaker, and since the word *meant* to him or her all the shining, star-like things we will see below, the speaker would most likely assume "the one who is rising" or "the one who shines" as the folk-etymological sense of the word.[8]

Earendel is an exceptionally good match for *Oriens*. However, *earendel* is extremely rare compared to the many attestations of the Latin word it "translates." *Earendel* and its various spellings (*eorendel*, *earendil*, and [most likely due to a French scribe's nativizing error[9]] *oerendil*) appears a total of seven times in the extant

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[7] I am grateful to James Earl for reminding me that -el was also the common ending for the well-known names of the angels (Michael, Gabriel). *Christ I*'s "engla beorhtast" (l. 104b) ["brightest of angels"] becomes more suggestive in light of this morphological overlap.

[8] Similarly, when we think about the modern English adjective *fetching*, formed on the still-productive present-participle-to-adjective model (*shocking*, *pleasing*, *loving*), we paraphrase the syntax as "one who is likely to fetch." Yet that doesn't feel right to a native speaker, since we understand *fetch* as a synonym for *retrieve*, with specialized semantics in American dialects that restricts it to the realm of dogs and "old-timey" (archaizing) diction ("I'm a-gonna fetch me some water"). We then cast about for a more probable etymology, and alight on the rare folk-sense of *fetch* as "spirit." Since this sense classes the word as a noun, we have to fudge it and suppose it could also be a verb. Such "queering" (cross-categorization) of syntax is inherently poetic, resonant with verbal delight and play like Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Thus when something is described as "fetching," it acquires the fey sense of the supernatural from the marginal meaning of *fetch*, along with the *jouissance* that a category-crossing synchronic analysis provokes. The mind performs this kind of folk etymology routinely as it processes language, and the seemingly speculative or idiosyncratic nature of my discussion of *fetching* is precisely the point. Language involves association and speculation inherently; it is not a fixed code, as is apparent in the fact of historical change at all levels (syntactic, phonological, semantic).

[9] According to Pheifer, the manuscript, the Erfurt Glossary in the Codex Amplonianus, was copied in the late eighth or early ninth century at the Cathedral School of Cologne (xxvi).

Old English corpus, according to the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* database.[10] *Oriens*, on the other hand, appears twenty-two times with an Old English gloss, and nowhere is that gloss *earendel*. Six times the Old English gloss for *oriens* is *eastdæl* [lit. "east-part," meaning "the east"], and 13 times it takes the form UP + present participle MOTION, which is to say some directional preposition signifying "up," such as *up-* or *ufan-*, attached to some verb of motion in present-participial form, such as *gangende* ["going"], *cumende* ["coming"], or *springende* ["leaping, bursting forth, growing"]. Both of these alternatives (*eastdæl* and *up-*/*ufan-* + present participle) would have satisfied the alliterative requirements of the verse (*eala* + vowel-initial word for "east/rising one"). That the *Advent Lyrics* instead attest the rare word *earendel* compels our attention.

When the poet considered "O Oriens" in the Latin antiphon, his first act would have been to follow his practice in the other lyrics and render the Latin *O* as *Eala*. In *Oriens* he was faced with a present participle literally meaning "rising one," metonymically meaning the sun, often also "east." *Earendel* was his overdetermined choice in its semantic and syntactic equivalency (denoting the sun and also east, and being present-participial by reanalysis/folk etymology), and in duplicating the alliterative effect of the Latin "O Oriens" exactly.

Further, though, the fact that *earendel* is part of a larger verbal network offering praise to the dawn and its associate celestial bodies (no matter how metaphorical) is suggested by the words which follow the appearance of *earendel* in both Blickling Homily XIV (one of the seven surviving instances of *earendel* in the Old English corpus) and *Christ I*: *soð-* ["truth"], *sunna* ["sun"], and *leoma* ["gleaming light"]. In *Christ I*, we have: "*eala earendel*, engla beorhtast, / ofer middangeard monnum sended, / ond *soðfæsta sunnan leoma*" (l. 104–6) ["Eala earendel, brightest of angels, sent over the earth to mankind, and truest light of the sun"]. The similar passage in Blickling XIV reads: "ond nu seo Cristes gebyrd æt his æriste, se niwa *eorendel* Sanctus Iohannes; 7 nu nu se *leoma* þære *soþan sunnan* God selfa cuman wille" (163) ["and now Christ's birth at his rising, the new *eorendel*, Saint John; and even now the light of the true sun, God himself, shall come"]. The homily emphasizes *earendel* as the morning star, the light whose rising signifies Christ's birth, whose appearance comes before the "light of the true sun."

Blickling XIV, however, translates (through a Pseudo-Augustinian source) most of a homily by the fifth-century Archbishop of Ravenna Peter Chrysologus. The *earendel* passage renders the Latin quite literally: "Sed si processurus est, jam nascatur Joannes, quia instat nativitas Christi; surgat novus *Lucifer*, quia *jubar* jam *veri Solis* erumpit" (PL 52 col. 457 B) ["But since he is about to appear, now let John spring forth, because the birth of Christ follows closely; let the new *Lucifer* arise, because now the *light* of the *true Sun* is breaking forth"]. *Lucifer* neither in the fifth century nor until Wycliffe in England (according to the OED) served as a simple epithet for Satan. As the language of the most ancient liturgies

[10] Unless otherwise noted, all glossary references are from the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* on CD-ROM.

suggests (for instance, the liturgical Psalm 109:3, "Tecum principium in die virtutis tue in splendoribus sanctorum ex utero ante luciferum genui te" ["Your people (will be) with you on the day of your power, in holy regalia; from the hollows of the earth before the morning star I created you"], which preserves the early Latin translation of the Septuagint rather than reflecting the revised version of the Vulgate; only the Septuagint version appears in Anglo-Saxon sources), *Lucifer* had several, usually positive meanings. In liturgical language it is the light-bearer, the morning star, the sign (like the star "in the east" seen by the wise men in Matthew 2:2) auguring the birth of Christ (again and again in the Middle Ages, both the "true son" and the "true sun"). In Peter's homily *Lucifer* recalls both the "morning star" of Isaiah 14:12 ("How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!" [prophetically addressing the defeated Prince of Tyre]) and the mythological son of Aurora (that is, the morning star) in a perfect example of what Peter Dronke has recently discussed as the thoroughgoing syncretism of Late Antique representation.

In Old English sources, *Lucifer* is always glossed "light-bearer" ["leoht-berend"], never Satan or the Devil, and in homilies and the didactic *Christ and Satan* the connection (introduced by Origen; see *On First Principles* [*De Principiis*] 1.5 and *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 18) between Lucifer and Satan is carefully explained. *Christ and Satan* asserts that *Lucifer* was the name of an entire race of angels, from which the Devil fell: "Wæs þæt encgelcyn ær genemned, / Lucifer haten, leohtberende, / on geardagum in godes rice" (l. 365–7) ["That race of angels had been named, called Lucifer, light-bearer, in days gone by in God's kingdom"]. Ælfric explains *Lucifer* as the name of the angel *before* he fell, when he was still full of light: "se hatte Lucifer, þæt ys Leohtberend, for ðære miclan beorhtnisse his mæren hiwes" (*On the Old and New Testament* 19) ["who is/was called Lucifer, which is Light-bearer, on account of the great brightness of his splendid form"]. Thus the word *Lucifer* carried the positive connotations for the Anglo-Saxons that it seems to have borne originally. Peter Chrysologus calls John the "new" or second[11] Lucifer, a second morning star (with a rich mythological history), and for this the Blickling homilist chose *eorendel*. The Old English homilist perceived *earendel* as an appropriate object of liturgical praise, an epithet for the morning star, and, if other Anglo-Saxon sources may guide us, the name of the prelapsarian angel of light. The Anglo-Saxons appear to have known *earendel* as a quasi-mythological figure who personified a natural phenomenon (sunrise) and an astrological/astronomical object (the morning star).

A key point in addition to these meanings is to recognize the associative networks that maintain connections among words, insinuating associated terms even when not every element appears overtly, an effect particularly acute when

[11] According to *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*, *novus* followed by a proper name could mean "a second," as in "novus Camillus" (Livy) and "novus Hannibal" (Cicero). The Lewis and Short dictionary does not specify this meaning.

a word has become marginalized and thus undergone specialization. A modern example is the extremely restricted distribution of the word *merry* in American English. Only a small set of words come to mind to combine with it, forming a subset of well-worn phrases: "Merry Christmas;" "make merry;" "Merry England;" "Merrily we roll along." *Any* use of *merry* invokes for an American English speaker the Old World, the happy-holiday-in-a-snowglobe warmth that these collocations triangulate for us.

When *earendel* appears in Old English (all seven times) it may have a similar specificity and restriction. This means it is not enough for glossators of Old English texts to note the meanings of *earendel*—"dayspring," "dawn," "morning star," "John the Baptist." Poetic interpretation has to employ the comparative method to reconstruct semantic fields for rare words such as *earendel*. What does *earendel* evoke when it is used? It may be associated with old litanies of praise to the dawn. Where *earendel* appears, it may trigger the vocative wonder of "O!" or "hail!" (*eala*), associated with the light (*leoma*) of the sun (*sunna*) itself and the validating mark of truth (*soð*-).[12] This is not only an issue of meaning, but crucially of form, since not only the same synonyms for similar concepts, but the same *words* appear again and again trailing after *earendel*.

The way the words in the collocation appear together in Blickling Homily XIV and *Christ I* resembles a formulaic system. However, the elements here appear more distant from one another than elements of a strictly defined formulaic system—that is, they do not appear within one verse, or even one line, if you count *earendel* as a member of the system or a trigger for it. The concept of the formulaic system arose from the recognition that metrically discrete verses could be so similar as to constitute variations of the same formula, as in, for instance, the case of "wan/weox/___ under wolcnum." Also, with the *soð … sunna … leoma* collocation, I was not able to find any variant substitutions for one of the elements in any of the eight examples in the corpus of at least two of these words together. If the collocation belonged not only to a poetic but a sacred or liturgical register, then it would be more resistant to the variation that characterizes a formulaic system. Another explanation for the lack of variation might be literacy: the whole cluster might have begun as a literate phenomenon, perhaps even translating closely a Latin original.

Whether the *soð- … sunna … leoma* collocation is a product of literary (written) or oral transmission (a distinction which loses some of its sharpness when medieval *aural* "reading" practices and the role of memory in composition are considered), the poet of *Christ I* exploits multiple poetic techniques to draw attention to this very phrase, as we have seen, and to insist on its appositive relation to *earendel*. The structure of the passage exists in a mutually reinforcing relationship with its meaning, as each verse invokes a different attribute of the

[12] It is unclear if the poet of *Christ I* had access to a version of the Latin sermon or perhaps a copy of the Old English homily. Perhaps the phrase was rather "in the air," that is, circulating orally. If so, it might have circulated as a homiletic catchphrase.

"true light of the sun." *Earendel*, in being the "brightest of angels," is both heavenly/divine and radiant (physically and metaphorically). He is also propitious to humankind: both the sun and the son of God have been sent "over the earth" (again, both physically and metaphorically) for the benefit of humanity. Finally, in "þu tide gehwane / of sylfum þe symle inlihtes" (l. 107b–8) ["all spans of time you / of yourself enlighten always"], *earendel* exists both eternally, outside time, and as the very force that makes time and its perception possible. The son of God, being coeval with God, is eternal. However, the sun also enlightens, with its own energy, every discrete day, and this divisible notion of time we mark by the sun's stages. Thus the peripheral lines poetically elaborate different attributes of the addressee (*earendel*), and these are contained within or implied by the central line, the collocation we see elsewhere, the "true light of the sun" ("ond soðfæsta sunnan leoma").

Regarding the passage's exceptional poetic structure, part of which I have labeled "concatenating": as Jakobson showed, and as is axiomatic for specialists in modern poetics, all kinds of poetic speech operate on the level of features (for instance, the political slogan "I like Ike" from the introduction and the Zaxby's slogan, above). The poetic function, which is the literary function, creates patterns—patterns of like initial sounds, patterns of lexical repetition, of rhythmic periodicity, of rhyme. Jakobson's insight is that any feature available to language on the phonetic, morphological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, or rhythmic level can be utilized by the pattern-making, equivalence-obsessed poetic function. To return to a point emphasized in the Introduction, Jakobson is careful to emphasize that many times, as in the case of folk-sayings, which are often highly poetic in structure, and even in the case of poetry by self-identified poets, poetic structures and patterns are *unconsciously generated*, or *unintentional*. All the features of language can be enlisted in service to the poetic function, and the poetic function does not require conscious intent to occur.

Jakobson's student Calvert Watkins applied linguistically informed poetic analysis to ancient texts, and his findings provide further corroboration of the pattern we have considered in *Christ I*. Watkins describes the dense structure of the oldest section of a prayer for purification or "lustration" of the fields recorded by Cato (234–149 B.C.) in *De agri cultura*:

> Every line […] is marked by recurrent sound features, indeed every word is linked to another by such a figure. These equivalence tokens are remarkably varied, ranging over alliteration, homoioteleuton [words having similar endings], internal rhyme, and phonic echo. In the following, boldface roman capitals are used for phonetic figures, and boldface italic capitals for figures that are both phonetic and grammatical. The conjunction *-que* is italicized to draw attention to its position in each strophe:
>
> [uti tu]
> morbos ***VISOS*** in***VISOS****que*
> **V**iduertatem **V**astitudinem*que*

c**A**l**A**mit**A**tes	interperi**A**s*que*
prohibess***IS***defend***AS***	auerrunc***ES****que*,
[utique tu]	
FRVges **FRV**menta	**VI**neta **VI**rgulta*que*
grand**IRE**	d**VENE***que* **EVEN-IRE** s**IR*IS***
Pastores **P**ecua*que*	**S**alua **S**ervass***IS***
DV*IS**que* **DV**onam sal**VT**em	ualet**VD**inem*que* (206)
[that you	
forbid, ward off,	and brush aside
diseases seen	and unseen,
depopulation	and devastation,
storms	and tempests;
and that you	
let grow tall	and turn out well
grains (and) corn	and vineyards (and) shrubwork
and keep safe	shepherds (and) cattle
and give good health	and soundness] (200)[13]

Lines 104–8 in *Christ I*, in Watkins's notation, evince a similarly dense structure of phonetic equivalence tokens:

> **EALA EA**r**EN**d**EL** **EN**g**LA B**eor**HT**ast (b = bilabial voiced stop)
> ofer **M**iddangeard **M**onnum **S**ended, (m = bilabial voiced nasal)
> ond **S**oðfæsta **S**unnan **L**eoma, (l = alveolar voiced liquid)
> **T**or**HT** ofer **T**unglas, þu **T**ida gehwane (t = alveolar unvoiced stop)
> of **SYL**fu**M** þ**E** **SYMLE INLIHTES**.

The first and last lines frame this section in their hyperdensity of phonetic repetition. The concatenating alliteration pattern points both from the "top" and the "bottom" towards the middle line, as the middle line is the first (and only) line to pick up the non-alliterative second stress from the line above in all its features, and as this line's pattern is exactly repeated in the last line of the poem.

Such poetic density is remarkable, and its effects are beyond the normal rules of the meter. Some or all of the *earendel* passage may be the product of collective composition, as an inherited strophe of praise perhaps, and its formation and transmission from memory to memory, performance to performance, in a process of imaginative conjuring and reconjuring, is difficult for a literate modern reader to conceive (though the process is alive in Modern English in the form of folk sayings and nursery rhymes). Its structure is definitely not the creation of a single, skillful innovator, since other texts, to which we now turn, share it (unless, of course, this collocation might be taken for the technique of a single author—something that seems quite unlikely given the disparate texts under discussion). Whatever the case may be, the extraordinary patterning in these lines is there to be read and accounted for along with the more global patterns of *Christ I*.

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[13] The translation is from Watkins.

A passage from the well-known charm for the remedy of a field (*Ærcerbot*) is the second text I will discuss, and it displays several of the key structural and thematic properties of the *earendel* section of *Christ I*. The text is from the tenth-century *Heliand* manuscript (Cotton Caligula A.vii), where it appears to fill in the two-and-a-half folio sheets left at the end of that text (Ker 172). The charm text itself is, according to Ker, in an eleventh-century hand (172).

> Hal wes þu, folde, fira modor,
> beo þu growende on Godes fæþme,
> fodre gefylled firum to nytte. (Storms 176 l. 72–4)
> [Be (you) well, earth, mother of men,
> be (you) growing in God's embrace,
> full of food in favor to men.]

There are several thematic similarities between *Christ I*'s invocation to the rising one and this invocation to the earth, "fira modor." A natural figure is addressed and its beneficial properties are outlined in praise or supplication. The structural similarities, too, are striking. First, note the preponderance of the sequence of sounds f … f … m in the strophe. It serves multiple structural functions. In a chiastic structure framing the strophe, it is the second element of the first line and the first element in the last line: "Hal wes þu *folde fira modor* […] *fodre gefylled firum* to nytte." The chiasmus begins and ends with phrases outside the pattern ("hal wes þu"[14] and "to nytte"), forming another pattern of contrast and suggesting its own secondary order: "hal wes þu […] to nytte" ("be you well … as a favor [to us]"). The passage contains the slant alliteration we saw in *Christ I* as well. In the transition from the first line to the second, the /m/ of the nonalliterating word *modor*, a bilabial voiced nasal, carries over to the /b/ in "*beo*," a bilabial voiced stop. At the end of that second line we see f … m in *fæþme*, which is our pattern appearing in every line in this strophe, but in-between there is an eruption of difference much like the stark pattern in the middle line of the *earendel* strophe: "growende on Godes fæþme" in line 2 is the illustration of the desired action which will lead to benefit for human beings: the earth made to grow in the copulatory embrace of god, who is figured by implication as the sun. The sounds of this central phrase offer the greatest possible phonetic contrast to the dominant sounds of the rest of the strophe. /f/s, /b/s, and /m/s are the dominant initial sounds of the strophe, and are all labial, made with either both lips (as in /m/ and /b/) or with the teeth and lip (as in /f/). The /g/ of the central phrase, "growende on Godes fæþme," has a velar place of articulation, all the way across the vocal tract from the lips. It thus stands in maximum contrast to the other sounds of the strophe, highlighting its difference and its importance.

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[14] *Hal wes þu* / *wes þu hal* / *wes hal* is the etymon for the relic form *wassail* in Modern English.

This passage begins its dominant alliterative pattern (f … f … m) with the word *folde*, which could be said to control or initiate the subsequent word choices (such as *fir-* twice for "men," *fæþme* ["embrace"], and *fodre* ["food"]). The unmarked word for "earth" is *eorðe*. *Folde* is poetic in Old English, appearing only 257 times in the corpus, nearly always in verse, homilies, or glosses. The cognate *fold* in Old Norse is the name for "earth" attributed to the *Æsir* gods (*iorð* is attributed to men) in the Eddic *Alvíssmál*:

> iǫrð heitir með mǫnnum enn með ásom fold
> kalla vega vanir
> ígrœn iǫtnar álfar gróandi
> kalla aur uppregin (quoted from Watkins, 39)
> [earth it is called among men and among the Æsir fold
> the Vanir call it way
> green the giants elves growing
> the high gods call it clay]

Like *earendel*, *fold* appears to have some "shine" on it, and the collocation *fir-* + *fold-*, which appears in our *Æcerbot* passage, occurs ten times in Old English verse, including in "Cædmon's Hymn":

> He ærest sceop eorðan bearnum
> heofon to hrofe, halig scyppend;
> þa middangeard moncynnes weard,
> ece drihten, æfter teode
> firum foldan, frea ælmihtig. (*Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* 106, l. 5–9)
> [He first shaped for the sons of earth
> heaven for a roof, holy shaper;
> then middle-earth mankind's protector,
> eternal lord, after fashioned
> for men of earth, almighty lord.]

The archaic resonance of "folde, fira modor" in *Æcerbot* presents a similar example of marked diction, and like the *Christ I* strophe, this three-line section recalls its first line in its last line, as "fodre gefylled firum" echoes "folde fira modor" not only alliteratively and through lexical repetition but through assonance: o-e y-e : o-e i-a.[15]

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[15] In "Cædmon's Hymn," incidentally, the vowel sequence in the last line forms a sonic chiasmus that moves from high vowels to mid vowels to low vowel and back to mid vowels and high vowels:

firum foldan	frea ælmihtig
i u o a	ea æ i i
2 high mid low	2 mid 2 high

And the line also displays an f-m pattern similar to both the charm passage and the *earendel* passage from *Christ I*: f … r … m … f … l … n fr … lm. The context in the "Hymn" is not a

In both main texts I have discussed so far, then, a natural object is apostrophized and its attributes described, and the structure in which this happens goes beyond the rules of classical verse in similar ways: a line in the middle of the passage is marked out as different and special, special patterning opens and closes the passage, and feature-based alliterative continuity connects consecutive lines to one another. Specialized, archaic diction characterizes both passages as well.

The final text of this group is longer, comprising three smaller strophes, but it, too, evinces feature-based sound correspondence and a central line (here, two lines) that differs from the rest; it, too, apostrophizes elements from the natural world. This passage is found in the so-called "Nine Herbs Charm," from the tenth- and eleventh-century MS Harley 585 (Ker 305), from a text that Storms, following Cockayne, calls *Lacnunga* ["healing" or "treatment," that is, a medical text in a very loose sense]. Watkins discusses the possibly great antiquity of some of the elements of the charm, but not the three strophes I will discuss. The strophes form a movement distinct from the rest of the charm by virtue of their shared refrain and their use of an alliteration pattern across lines with variation in the center—the structural feature they also share with the two previous texts discussed. I have noted to the right the rough alliteration pattern for each line (depending on the model of verse you choose, some terms may or may not be "visible" to the alliteration scheme). Capital V stands for "vowel," since all vowels may co-alliterate, and here they alliterate with /w/.

	Gemyne ðu, mucgwyrt, hwæt þu ameldodest,	(m … m … m)
	hwæt þu renadest æt Regenmelde.	(r … r)
	Una þu hattest yldost wyrta,	(V … V … w)
	ðu miht wiþ III ond wið XXX,	(ð … ð)
	þu miht wiþ attre ond wið onflyge,	(V … V)
6	þu miht wiþ þa laþan ðe geond lond færð.	(l … l … f)
	Ond þu, wegbrade, wurta modor,	(w … w … m)
	eastan openo, innan mihtigu.	(V … V … V … m)
9	*Ofer ðe* (ms *ðy*) *cræte curran, ofer ðe/y cwene reodan,*	(*c … c … c … r*)
10	*ofer ðe/y bryde bryodedon, ofer ðe/y fearras fnærdon.*	(*b … b … f … f*)
	Eallum þu þon wiðstode ond wiðstunedest.	(V … w … w)
	Swa ðu wiðstonde attre ond onflyge,	(w … V … V)
13	ond þæm laþan þe geond lond fereð.	(l … l … f)
	Stune hætte þeos wyrt, heo on stane geweox,	(st … w … st … w)
	stond heo wið attre, stunað heo wærce.	(st … V … st … w)
	Stiðe heo hatte, wiðstunað heo attre,	(st … w … st … V)
	wreceð heo wraðan, weorpeð ut attor.	(w … w … w … V)
	Þis is seo wyrt, seo wiþ wyrm gefeaht,	(w … w … f)
	þeos mæg wið attre, heo mæg wið onflyge,	(V … V)

direct address to a natural figure, but the earth and sky are certainly front and center. Whether "Cædmon's Hymn" is related to this group of texts is a question for future consideration.

20 heo mæg wið þa laþan ðe geond lond fereþ. (l … l … f)
(Storms 186)
[Remember you, mugwort, what you revealed,
what you contrived at the revelation.
Una you are called, oldest of herbs,
you prevail against III and against XXX,
you prevail against poison and against pestilence,
you prevail against the scourge that goes over the land.

And you, way-broad (waybread, that is, plantain), mother of herbs,
open to the east, mighty within.
Over you the carts rolled, over you the women rode,
over you the brides cried out, over you the oxen snorted.
All you then withstood and struck against,
so may you withstand poison and pestilence,
and the scourge that goes over the land.

Stune is this plant's name, which grows on stone,
it stands against poison, it strikes against pain.
It is called steadfast, it strikes against poison,
it drives away harm, casts out the venom.
This is the herb that fought with the worm.
This prevails against poison, it prevails against pestilence,
it prevails against the scourge that goes over the land.]

One striking thing is the extent to which this 20-line section avoids stop sounds in its alliteration. Every single line except for two (lines 9 and 10, approximately the central lines of the passage) avoids stops. We have nasals, liquids, fricatives and vowels, but only in lines 9 and 10 do we have stops. Line 9 alliterates on the voiceless velar stop written as /k/ in IPA (the International Phonetic Alphabet). Line 10 alliterates on /b/ in its first pair, and then links to the labio-dental /f/ in its second approximate "verse." Thus the central lines of this passage are underscored in a way similar to the strategies employed by the passages of *Christ I* and *Ærcerbot*.

This three-section passage, like the other two texts, invokes the attributes of forces of nature—different plants—for human benefit. *Mucgwyrt* bears some kind of revelatory power (particularly against three and thirty, occult numbers) which may thwart poison and infection "and the scourge that goes over the land." *Wegbrade* is mother of herbs and open to the east, and thus associable for us at least with both "fira modor" of the *Ærcerbot* charm and *earendel* of *Christ I* above, since the root of *earendel* is cognate with *east* and whose rising happens in the east. *Wegbrade* has the power to withstand the poison, pestilence, and movement of the unspecified scourge, because, apparently, it has withstood some mysterious traveling and then acted out associatively, based on a pun: it has withstood the rolling of carts and the crying out of "brides" and the snorting of oxen in a formulaic litany that may refer to the spoils of war (more on this below).

Wegbrade having withstood these things likely has to do with its name, which is metonymic: modern descriptions of plantain state that it often grows along footpaths, and the OED gives early etymologies of *waybread* as originating in the compound "way-broad" or broad-way. The plant gets its name from the paths where it grows, and it is figured to have endured the passage (over such paths, or "ways") of people and livestock that the ritualized language describes. This plant may thus withstand being "traveled over" by a great evil. The associative "acting out based on a pun" is in the verb *wiðstunedest* ["you struck against"], which only makes sense as a pun on *wiðstode* ["withstood"]. This "sriking" action seems attributable to waybread (plantain) only because the verb it has performed (withstanding) authorizes similar-sounding actions to be attributed to it, too (*wiðstode* : *wiðstunedest*).

The final plant, *stune*, carries on the verbal punning of the section above, bringing the second element of *wiðstunedest* and *wiðstonde* into prominence and activating this element's likeness to *stane* ["stone"]. Storms's glossary explains that the prose passage following the charm clearly identifies this *stune* as lamb's cress, confirming the motivation of *stune* to be a poetic one—namely, its association with the prominent words in the section above. There is no other reason to call it *stune*, which is a nonsense word. The charm says it grows on a stone and the rest of the passage obsessively develops the possibilities of various words that alliterate on /st/ and on /w/, the initial sounds of *stune*, the unusual paronomastic name, and *wyrt*, the generic word for "plant." The whole third passage, then, has poetic likeness as its primary motivation and enacts what the last chapter identified as the primary poeticalness of charm language: language that refers primarily to its own form, the self-sufficient signifier.

The three sections that form this opening movement of the "Nine Herbs Charm" are marked out as a separate movement by their shared two-line refrain and by their use of the feature-based alliterative structure that highlights the central lines as different. The formulaic syntax of those two central lines confirms their distinctness. They stand out acoustically and syntactically, and though their importance may be so fossilized in the charm language as to bear little aesthetic or logical significance here, I will attempt a reading. It may be that these two lines encapsulate the ultimate cultural trauma: women and livestock being led away by the prevailing enemy; first the traveling movement and then the utterances of both groups are given. The two lines may form a chiasmus, since we have the carts rolling, then the women riding, then the women crying out, then the oxen—attached to the carts—snorting: hence carts-women-women-carts. The thematic content of the central moment of difference here, in this movement, is thus not something propitious or wished-for (as in the true light of the sun or the earth swelling with fruit) but something to be warded against. As Freud pointed out, a negative or a positive charge can attend essentially the same drive, and here we may have the same core element of "human-affecting phenomenon" charged negatively instead of positively. Thus in a charm text concerned with warding off harm, an ultimate harm revolves at the center of its opening, three-stanza

movement just as, conversely, the other two texts we have considered, concerned with nature's beneficence rather than harm, centrally feature an ultimate good, a desired outcome.

A similar *set* of techniques is thus shared by the three texts we have considered: chiasmus, feature-based alliterative structure in consecutive lines, and the highlighting of central lines as different and important. These texts also share the thematic elements of apostrophe to a natural object and appeal to that natural object for human benefit. The comparative method suggests that a collocation of elements shared among the comparanda indicates common inheritance, and thus that this set of techniques characterizes a native genre of ritual nature veneration.

The stylistic features of this genre add meaningful structure to the general requirements of alliterative meter. Stock vocabulary and metrical obedience ensure the poeticalness of traditional Old English poetry, but other kinds of poetic effects can still occur within its parameters. They may be the work of individual masters, or they may represent inheritances from a previous, no longer productive, stage of the language. Especially in the case of sacred language, in the most resonant phrases that carry on that old, possibly universal (not strictly Indo–European) tradition of the word as efficacious in its own right, *the form holds much of the meaning*. Language in these phrases points to itself. If the wording were changed, unlike other kinds of speech, the message would no longer "mean" the same thing; it would no longer be perceived as magical, holy, the speech of the gods, beautiful—whatever the perception of poetry may be in a given culture. For example, saying "to be or not to be" is different, not only in its greater elegance, from saying "it is hard to know whether to live or die sometimes," and saying "the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," is enormously different from saying "God protects me and takes care of my needs." A reading practice that incorporates both comparative methodology and linguistically informed close reading can reveal the specific verbal dynamics of individual texts and the shared tradition that binds them, since Old English texts in particular are fundamentally collaborative artifacts of both individual and collective creativity.

The three texts I have so far discussed may be examples of a once-productive mode of praise perhaps typically directed toward natural objects. Pasternack points out a movement in *Christ II* that evinces a similar extrametrical alliteration pattern with variation in the center. As Pasternack describes it, lines 744–55 constitute "a movement differentiated by its alliterative pattern, which relies heavily on *h*, six out of twelve verse pairs alliterating on that sound—every other pair except the centre two, which both use *h*" (67). Here is the passage:

> Þus her on grundum godes ece bearn
> ofer heahhleoþu hlypum stylde,
> modig æfter muntum. Swa we men sculon
> heortan gehygdum hlypum styllan
> of mægne in mægen, mærþum tilgan
> þær we to þam hyhstan hrofe gestigan
> halgum weorcum, þær is hyht ond blis,

geþungen þegnweorud. Is us þearf micel
þæt we mid heortan hælo secen,
þæt we mid gæste georne gelyfað
þæt þæt hælobearn heonan up stige
mid usse lichoman, lifgende god. (Pasternack 67)
[Thus here on earth God's eternal son
over high hills sprang in leaps,
bold along the mountains. So shall we men
with minds of a hart[16] spring in leaps
from might to main, strive mightily
that we to that highest roof ascend
with holy works, where is hope and bliss,
excellent throng. There is for us a great need
that we with our hearts seek salvation,
where we with spirit eagerly believe
that that savior child high up may ascend
with our bodies, the living god.][17]

In Pasternack's reading,

> the verse instructs the audience to imitate Christ and further suggests the possibility poetically through alliterative associations. In parallel statements, God's eternal son and men spring in leaps: *ofer heahhleoþu hlypum stylde*, 'over high hills sprang in leaps' (745), becomes *heortan gehygdum styllan*, 'with the thoughts of our hearts spring in leaps' (747), the thoughts of men's hearts becoming the tropological equivalent of the high hills which Christ leaps over. The means, the path and the goal of man's ascent all are marked with *h*'s (means: *hlypum*, 'leaps'; *heortan gehygdum*, 'the heart's thoughts'; *halgum weorcum*, 'holy deeds'; *mid heortan gehygdum*, 'with hearts'; path: *her*, 'here'; *ofer heahhleoþu*, 'over high hills'; *to þam hyhstan hrofe*, 'to that highest roof'; *heonan*, 'from here'; goal: *hyht*, 'joy'; *hælo*, 'salvation'). In addition, the verse stresses the necessary movement by alliterating end words with each other: *stylde*, 'sprang'; *styllan*, 'spring'; *gestigan*, 'ascend'; *stige*, 'ascend'; complemented by the closely related *sculan*, 'must,' and *secen*, 'seek.' These verses form one movement in a series on the subject of Christ's leaps […] these show us in metaphorical language how people should imitate those leaps […]. The alliterative pattern suggests the differentiation of the middle movement, as well as bearing its own internal semantic system and producing a beautiful chiming effect in its repeated return to the same sounds. (67–8)

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[16] My translation takes *heortan* as a variant spelling for *heorten*, an adjective meaning "of a hart," as more probable in context than Pasternack's reading, which takes the word *heortan* to mean "of our hearts," yielding "with the thoughts of our hearts" instead of "with minds of a hart," though given the close resemblance of *heorte* and *heorot*, both meanings are no doubt relevant and active in the line.

[17] The translation is my own, though I have consulted Pasternack's and sometimes opt for the same locution.

Certain aspects of the movement structure of the praise passages I have discussed may be shared by other texts as well. The *Christ II* movement's line-crossing alliteration and its difference right in the middle of the passage suggest this may be so. Further, there may even be a thematic tie to the nature-praise passages I discussed. Christ's movement centers on "leaping," and though Pasternack opts for the less figurative *heart* to translate *heortan* in the fourth line of the quoted passage, the word may well represent an adjectival form of *heorot* ["hart"], *heortan* ["of a hart"], calling us as humans to adopt the mindset of the hart, to leap like Christ over the mountains, up to the heavenly kingdom. The reading of "hart" certainly does suit the figurative setting of the movement, and this setting does relate to the natural landscapes of the other passages' themes, forming a set of nature figures quite recognizable in the context of the iconography of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: the sun, the earth, the potent herb, the leaping hart.

Strophic Structure and the Sinews of "Deor"

Another kind of movement structure appears in another Exeter Book poem, known as "Deor." Early in the twentieth century the text was identified as a *consolatio* in the voice of a speaker who has lost his position as court poet to a rival (Kiernan 333). The poem's graphically separated sections (a marked feature in Old English poetic manuscripts) were addressed mainly thematically and said to depict examples of "misfortune overcome."

The stylistic patterning in "Deor" is exceptional, however. The poem is unusual in that its strophic sections are marked by capitals. Capitals are usually used by the Exeter scribe(s) to mark the beginning of a new text, such as a riddle or a poem. Each section of "Deor" instead contains a brief allusion to or summary of a Germanic legend, followed by an iteration of the refrain, "þæs ofereode þisses swa mæg" ["that has (been) passed over, so may this"].[18] Thus the strophic sections in "Deor" are demarcated in ways unusual for Anglo-Saxon poems. The final strophe is one long section that contrasts a general lament on the arbitrariness of life with the specific lament of the speaker, whose fortunes have reversed; the final strophe, too, and thus the poem, ends with the poem's refrain. I have placed the initial capitals, as well as the refrain, in italics.

[18] The syntax of the refrain is obscure. The translation I have given is one possible reading. Another is suggested by a similar construction in line 26, "þæt þæs cynerices ofercumen wære" ["that the kingdom were overcome"]. The verb *ofercoman* seems to take a genitive object. If we read the refrain in a similar way, as involving *ofergan* with a genitive object, then a reading with implied (*pro*-dropped) subjects is possible: "(he/she) passed on from it, so may (I?) from this." The refrain read thus withholds revelation of just what the speaker wishes to "pass on" or recover from, which is revealed in the last lines of the poem. The final iteration of the refrain then reads differently, finally implying a referent for *þisses*.

*W*elund him be wurman wræces cunnade,
anhydig eorl earfoþa dreag,
hæfde him to gesiþþe sorge ond longaþ,
wintercealde wræce; wean oft onfond,
siþþan hine Niðhad on nede legde,
swoncre seonobende on syllan monn.
Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg! (l. 1–7)
[Weland on account of the "worm(s)" knew suffering,
the single-minded man suffered torments,
had as companions sorrow and longing,
winter-cold wrack, often found woe,
after Niðhad laid him in fetters,
supple sinewbonds on the better man.
That has passed over, so may this.]

*B*eadohilde ne wæs hyre broþra deaþ
on sefan swa sar swa hyre sylfre þing,
þæt heo gearolice ongieten hæfde
þæt heo eacen wæs; æfre ne meahte
þriste geþencan, hu ymb þæt sceolde.
Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg! (l. 8–13)
[Beadohild was not for her brothers' death
so sore at heart as for her own "thing,"
that she had readily perceived
that she was carrying (pregnant), afterward could not
proudly think of that as she should.
That has passed over, so may this.]

*W*e þæt Mæðhilde monge gefrugnon
wurdon grundlease Geates frige,
þæt hi seo sorglufu slæp ealle binom.
Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg! (l. 14–17)
[We have heard of Mæðhild that
Geat's many loves grew fathomless,
that love-sorrow deprived her of all sleep.
That has passed over, so may this.]

*Ð*eodric ahte þritig wintra
Mæringa burg; þæt wæs monegum cuþ.
Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg! (l. 18–20)
[Đeodric held thirty winters
the Mærings' burg; that was known by many.
That has passed over, so may this.]

*W*e geascodan Eormanrices
wylfenne geþoht; ahte wide folc
Gotena rices. Þæt wæs grim cyning.
Sæt secg monig sorgum gebunden,

wean on wenan, wyscte geneahhe
þæt þæs cynerices ofercumen wære.
Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg! (l. 21–7)
[We learned of Eormanric's
wolfish thought; he held a great many
of the realm of the Goths. That was a grim king.
There sat many a man bound with sorrows,
thinking on woe, wished earnestly
that the kingdom were overcome.
That has passed over, so may this.]

*S*iteð sorgcearig, sælum bidæled,
on sefan sweorceð, sylfum þinceð
þæt sy endeleas earfoða dæl.
Mæg þonne geþencan, þæt geond þas woruld
witig dryhten wendeþ geneahhe,
eorle monegum are gesceawað,
wislicne blæd, sumum weana dæl.
þæt ic bi me sylfum secgan wille,
þæt ic hwile wæs Heodeninga scop,
dryhtne dyre. Me wæs deor[19] noma.
Ahte ic fela wintra folgað tilne,
holdne hlaford, oþþæt Heorrenda nu,
leoðcræftig monn londryht geþah,
þæt me eorla hleo ær gesealde.
Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg! (l. 28–42)
[Sits one sorrowful, deprived of joys,
in his heart darkens, to himself reckons
that it be endless his lot of suffering.
May he then think, that across the world
the wrathful lord wends throughout,
to many men he shows mercy,
secure prosperity, to some a portion of woe.
I will say it concerning myself
that I once was *scop* of the Heodenings,
dear to a lord. The name was dear to me.
I held many winters a good following,
a loyal lord, until Heorrenda (or "the hearing/listening one," that is,
apprentice?) now,
song-skillful man, took the land-right
that to me the friend of earls had granted.
That has passed over, so may this.]

[19] I uncapitalize Krapp and Dobbie's capitalization of the word *deor*, since it is by no means obviously meant as a proper name. Where a manuscript reading is possible, I favor not emending.

In the last, longest section (15 metrical lines including the refrain), the narrative scheme shifts markedly, the pace slows and the focus at once narrows and becomes more general. Suffering itself is personified in a nameless *sorg cearig* ["sorrow-careful," in the literal sense, "full of care"].[20] Then, in the a-verse of the eighth line of this section, the speaker finally directs attention to himself ("that I will say of myself" ["þæt ic bi me sylfum"]) to elaborate his own, climactic suffering, after which the "this" of the refrain is finally given a referent in the speaker's own situation. Thus, to summarize the poetic "plot," the poem telegraphs various kinds of conflict and suffering, melodramatically portrays suffering personified, and then focuses all of the accumulated dramatic energy on the solution to the riddle of the poem's refrain, which is the revelation that the speaker's own plight rivals both legend and gnomic abstraction. In the poem's use of a refrain as well as graphic separation (initial capitals and end pointing) to punctuate its themes, "Deor" is already unusual for an Old English poem.

But the strophic structure of the poem serves more than this general thematic purpose. Before I spell out the details, simply note the similarities within the following sets of phrases:

> Welund him be wurman (1) : þæt ic bi me sylfum (35) : þæt me eorla hleo (41)
> Beadohilde ne wæs (8) : þæt ic hwile wæs (36)
> Ðeodric ahte þritig wintra (18) : ahte ic fela wintra (38)
> siteð sorgcearig (28) : leoðcræftig monn (40)

What I am going to suggest is that the strophes of "Deor" provide the framework for an intricate pattern of interlace based on half-line correspondences between disparate sections and the final, key strophe of the poem. The first sections of the poem are woven into the last section to form an interlace pattern that concentrates, on the level of form, attention on the poet[21] himself, reinforcing what the poem's thematics also suggest. First-line a-verses correspond to the second half of the final section, and second-line a-verses to the first, crossing threads in a chiasmus across the "center" of the poem. Below is a table showing all the correspondences, grouped into systems (numbers and boldface for the first-line-to-last-lines correspondences; letters and underline for the second-line correspondences; * and italics, and * and bold italics, respectively, marking two parallel internal echoes):

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[20] The nominalization of the adjectival phrase ("sorg cearig" here means "the sorrow-careful one" so that the normally subordinated adjective takes on subject status) carries out the semantic operation of personification at the grammatical level. This correspondence between syntax and sense is a signal that we should be on the lookout for subtlety and complexity in the poem.

[21] The first-person narrator of the poem, the "speaker" according to modern critical convention, will occasionally be referred to as "the poet," as in this case the speaker´s persona is in fact that of a poet.

1 **Welund him be wurman** wræces
cunnade,
A anhydig eorl earfoþa dreag,
hæfde him to gesiþþe sorge ond longaþ,
wintercealde wræce; wean oft onfond,
siþþan hine Niðhad on nede legde,
swoncre seonobende on syllan monn.
Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg!

2 **Beadohilde ne wæs** hyre broþra deaþ
B on sefan swa sar swa hyre sylfre þing,
þæt heo gearolice ongieten hæfde
þæt heo eacen wæs; æfre ne meahte
þriste geþencan, hu ymb þæt sceolde.
Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg!

* *We þæt Mæðhilde* monge gefrugnon
C wurdon grundlease Geates frige,
þæt hi seo sorglufu slæp ealle binom.
Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg!

3 **Ðeodric ahte þritig wintra**
D Mæringa burg; þæt wæs monegum cuþ.
Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg!

* *We geascodan* Eormanrices
E wylfenne geþoht; ahte wide folc
Gotena rices. Þæt wæs grim cyning.
Sæt secg monig sorgum gebunden,
wean on wenan, wyscte geneahhe
þæt þæs cynerices ofercumen wære.
Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg!

4,A **Siteð sorgcearig**, sælum bidæled,
B on sefan sweorceð, sylfum þinceð
C þæt sy endeleas earfoða dæl.
D Mæg þonne geþencan, þæt geond þas
woruld
E witig dryhten wendeþ geneahhe,
eorle monegum are gesceawað,
wislicne blæd, sumum weana dæl.
1,5 ***þæt ic bi me sylfum*** secgan wille,
2 **þæt ic hwile wæs** Heodeninga scop,
* ***dryhtne dyre***. Me wæs deor noma.
3 **Ahte ic fela wintra** folgað tilne,
* ***holdne hlaford***, oþþæt Heorrenda nu,
4 **leoðcræftig monn** londryht geþah,
5 ***þæt me eorla hleo*** ær gesealde.
Þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg!

The first half-line of the first section of the poem reads "Welund him be wurman," a syntactically parallel construction to "þæt ic bi me sylfum," involving a nominative substantive (*Welund*/*ic*) plus the preposition *be*/*bi* plus a dative pronoun (*him*/*me*) plus a dative substantive (*wurman*/*sylfum*). The next line in the final section begins, "þæt ic hwile wæs" ["that I for a time was"], corresponding rhythmically and syntactically to the first half-line of the second section of the poem, "Beadohilde[22] ne wæs." The correspondence here consists of a substantive (*ic*/*Beadohilde*) plus an adverb (*hwile*/*ne*) plus the finite verb *wæs*.

[22] Since the simplest explanation for the small but apparent space between "Beado" and "hilde" is the tedium of transcription, I opt for writing "Beadohilde" as a single compound proper name.

þaet ic bi me sylfum secgan wille
[str. 1: Welund him be wurman …]
þaet ic hwile waes heodeninga scop
[str. 2: Beadohilde ne waes …]

With these first two half-lines we see the beginning of the pattern in which the a-verse of each line in the last section after the "I" is introduced echoes the first half-line of each section in the poem, in order (with the exception of two that are symmetrically placed and semantically parallel and thus reflect each other, line 3 and line 5; see below):

þaet ic bi me sylfum secgan wille
[str. 1: Welund him be wurman …]
þaet ic hwile waes heodeninga scop
[str. 2: Beadohilde ne waes …]
dryhtne dyre me waes deor nama
[str. 3: *We þæt Mæðhilde* …]
ahte ic fela wintra folgaþ tilne
[str. 4: Þeodric ahte þritig wintra]
holdne hlaford oþþat Heorrenda nu
[str. 5: *We geascodan* …]
leoð craeftig monn londryht geþah
[str. 6: Siteð sorg cearig saelum bidaeled]
þaet me eorla hleo aer gesealde.
[str. 7: þaet ic bi me sylfum …]

Dryhtne dyre, in the third line above, refocuses the irony of the poet's situation, as here the former lord is brought into the equation. Lines 37 ("dryhtne dyre me wæs deor nama" ["dear to (my) lord; to me was a dear name/Deor was my name"]) and 39 ("holdne hlaford oþþæt heorrenda nu" ["a loyal lord until Heorrenda"]) do not echo back to corresponding sections, but instead strongly echo each other: both feature loyalty to or from one's lord followed by a naming of the *scop*, first Deor in line 3 (whether that is an epithet or a proper name), then Heorrenda in line 5. These parallel lines symmetrically placed in the section perhaps serve to highlight the sense of arbitrariness and irony in the poem: Deor was dear to his lord and now Heorrenda fills exactly the same position. Further, and in keeping with the pattern of correspondence outlined above, the a-verses of both lines, "dryhtne dyre" ["dear to (my) lord"] and "holdne hlaford" ["a loyal lord"], are rhythmically parallel and together serve the semantic function of figuring the reciprocal relationship between a lord and his court poet. In this poem the relationship has broken down, and the lord has ceased to fulfill his obligations. The form, particularly the tight half-line correspondence between lines 37 and 39, is essential in creating the contrast between ironized past intimacy and the present estrangement. The first lines in strophes 3 and 5, which would correspond to these internally echoic lines in the final strophe, also echo each other, reinforcing the pattern and creating the sense of the rings within rings we see in Insular interlace.

The correspondence between line 40 and the first line of the last section of the poem (line 28) involves both whole lines in semantic, syntactic, and rhythmic similarity. "Leoð cræftig monn" parallels "sorg cearig" syntactically, both constituting a noun phrase. However, "leoð cræftig" and "sorg cearig" are rhythmically parallel. "Londryht geþah" constitutes an active phrase ("seized the land-right") whereas "sælum bidæled" is passive ("deprived of joys/comforts/prosperity"). The two phrases juxtaposed in their syntactic and semantic opposition contrast Heorrenda, the usurping poet, with the nameless destitute sufferer whom we are invited to associate with Deor. "Leoð cræftig" Heorrenda stands against the "sorg cearig" speaker (Deor); "londryht geþah," what Heorrenda has done, contrasts with "sælum bidæled," what has been done to Deor. The structural correspondences between line 6 and the first line of section 6 thus intricately serve the semantics of the poem on the syntactic level. Heorrenda gets the dignity of a noun (*monn*) whereas the nameless sufferer becomes his very suffering, as the adjectival phrase "sorg cearig" functions as a noun.[23] Likewise Heorrenda is the subject of an active, transitive verb with proactive meaning ("seized") *and* an object, whereas the sufferer governs only a past participle with passive semantics ("deprived") and a complementary dative of separation. The second-line-to-last-section interlace pattern (ABCDE in the table above) formalizes the conceptual move from specific to general, except for the first correspondence, which juxtaposes *anhydig* with *sorgcearig* and by extension, with *leoðcræftig* (because *sorgcearig* and *leoðcræftig* correspond independently), in a figure of the precariousness of one's position in the world: whether one is *anhydig* ["independent, daring"] like the famous smith Weland or *cræftig* ["skillful, ingenious"] in anything, as are both Heorrenda and Weland, the center around which both positive states revolve is *sorgcearig*, the state of sorrow and bereavement. Instead of Fortune's wheel which rotates one from heights to depths, this ring construction figures the "low point" rather as the fulcrum or lynchpin, the central force around which everything orbits, toward which all inexorably gravitates.

The rest of the second-line correspondences, again, render the specific legendary allusions in general, gnomic terms. "On sefan swa sar" (l. 9), describing Beadohild in her unwanted pregnancy, is reflected in the darkening heart of the unhappy man in line 29: "on sefan sweorceð." Geat's loves (for other women, or for Mæðhild herself?) are bottomless or fathomless—countless, which is generalized as "endless" suffering in the corresponding line, line 30, in the last section. D may present a phonetic echo alone, though the context of both verses seems to be an oppressed kingdom, so that the Mærings' oppression stands in contrast to the freedom implied by *mæg* in line 31. In correspondence E, the connection is strong, since the "wolvishness" of a specific king (Eormanric) finds the general *witig*

[23] The pejorative, often dehumanizing function of adjective nominalization can be seen in modern terms for group identification. For example, note the change in connotation between the following sentences: He is a smart black man; He is a smart black. Substitute "Jewish man/Jew" and "gay man/gay."

dryhten ["wrathful/punitive lord"] as counterpart. Thus all the opening strophes are woven, through two systems of correspondence, into both the general meditation (l. 28–34) and the specified lament (l. 35–41) that make up the final section.

The one line of the last section that has yet to be discussed is line 38. The first half-line, "ahte ic fela wintra" ["I held/owned (for) many winters"] echoes, which is to say it formulaically corresponds to, the entire first line of section four of the poem, "þeodric ahte þritig wintra" ["Theodric held sway/ruled (for) thirty winters"]. There are so many shared words as to make the correspondence unmistakable, and the syntax is nearly identical. A nominative subject "held" or ruled for X number of winters in each case.

In the most complex of the last section's "echoes," correspondence 5, the last line of the final section corresponds to line 35, the first line of the section about the poet, and involves precisely those elements of the first line that do not participate in the correspondence (1) with line 1 of the first section of the poem. The first line of the last section thus corresponds to two separate half-lines, and the correspondences are in complementary distribution.[24] For instance, *ic* serves double duty in line 35. It corresponds to *Welund* in the first line of the poem, in that both are substantives and both are in the nominative case (correspondence 1). *Ic* also corresponds to *me* in line 41, however, in those features that do not participate in the correspondence to *Welund* (correspondence 5). In this second correspondence, *ic* corresponds to *me* as a first-person singular pronoun. Thus the two sets of correspondences for *ic* are in complementary distribution. In the schema below, the material in brackets between each pair of lines describes the correspondences between line 1 and line 35, and between line 35 and line 41.

1 *Welund him be wurman* (1a)
[nominative substantive + dative pronoun + "be"/"bi" + dative substantive]
1,5 *þæt ic bi me sylfum* (35a)
["þæt" + 1p. sg. pronoun + substantive SPEAKER/substantive LORD]
5 *þæt me eorla hleo* (41a)

All three verses are metrically similar (though not identical, since they do not share alliteration). Correspondence 5, between line 41 and line 35, involves *þæt* plus the first person pronoun plus LORD in the one case and a reference to the speaker in the other. Whereas the line just before (line 40) contrasts Heorrenda the *scop* and Deor, the last line of the section aligns Deor with *eorla hleo*, the friend of earls, highlighting the ironic relationship between the lord and the *scop* (the "friend of earls" is of course no true friend to at least one earl—the poet) that we have seen manifested elsewhere in the structure of the section (for instance, in the correspondence between lines 37 and 39).

[24] It would seem, then, that "þæt ic bi me sylfum" is a member of two separate, perhaps poem-specific formulaic systems within the poem.

Correspondences 1 and 5, described above, involving the first line, last line, and line 35, combine to form a ring composition. The a-verse of the last line of the last section, "þæt me eorla hleo" ["that to me the earls' friend"], echoes the first line of the speaker's focus on himself, which itself echoes the first line of the poem (see diagram above). Not only is the last section brought together in a ring composition, but the whole poem is as well, by transitive substitution: if the last line of the last section echoes the first line of the last section, and the first line of the last section echoes the first line of the poem, then the last line of the last section echoes the first line of the poem. The last section forms a closed ring, a structurally contained unit, and so does the entire poem, though to do so it depends upon one of the markers of the last section, the line which opens that section and forms the point of contact between the last line and the first line of the poem: "þæt ic bi me sylfum." The ring encompassing the whole poem thus "recognizes" the distinctness of the final section as a self-contained unit at the same time that it draws the section within its own boundaries. There is tension, then, between the greater ring structure of the poem and the smaller one of the final section, with its distinct shift in tone, subject matter, and length. The two sets of "internal" echoes (* in the table) form two smaller rings, and the system discussed above, involving correspondences 4 and A, with *sorgcearig* as fulcrum, forms another. Thus the poem attests two systems of interlace (12345, ABCDE) weaving the shorter strophes together in the final section of the poem, and a system of rings involving two parallel small rings (*) within two overlapping larger ones that encompass the entire poem (1, 5 and A, 4).

The poem's bound, woven structure provides a key to the old puzzle of the poem's refrain, and from there to the broader question of the poem's interpretation. The refrain serves two functions. The first is the overt elegy, recognized by almost all interpreters of the poem. In its last iteration especially, the refrain seems to constitute a weary sigh of "this too shall pass" in relation to the poet's troubles. However, throughout the poem the refrain functions as a kind of teaser as well. At the end of every section the ambiguous demonstrative pronouns ("þæs […] þisses") prompt us to ask, *what* has passed or been passed over? *What* yet may? Mildred Budny describes interlace as "a construction in which each element (or strand) of the fabric passes alternately *over* and *under* elements crossing its path" (183). Might not the refrain also refer to the strands of interlace in this poem? It thus provides an apt gloss for the structural principles of interlace and boundness (and the concomitant themes of self-reflexivity and identification by analogy) that are heavily overdetermined in the poem. The half-lines echoed in the last section are the most visible interlaced strands; they originate in each demarcated section and reemerge in the last section, reinforcing the thematic development of the poem (from the drama of the mythic-heroic allusions to the melodrama of the nameless sufferer to the situation of the speaker). Another type of thread is formed by the legends or previous poems that have broken through the surface into utterance here in this poem and will go back "under" into the narrative background when it ends. Finally, the refrain itself forms a unique strand: its persistent "going under"

and reemergence throughout the poem ties all the sections together while at the same time creating difference by taking on new connotations in each context. The poetic self-consciousness implied by this reading is attested elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon (and Celtic) versecraft.[25] A reading of the refrain as reflective of the constitutive structural principle of interlace highlights the deliberateness and craft in the poem's construction that have often been overlooked. *Þæs* and *þisses* are meant to be ambiguous because they have multiple referents in the poem's semantic ("this too shall pass") and structural (interlace) domains. The refrain is a clever pun—it was meant to be vexing. At the same time that the speaker applies a recurring commentary ("this too shall pass") to all the accounts of suffering he has bound up with himself in the poem, he also provides, in the same device, a riddlic clue to the structural principle he has employed to do the binding, that is, to interlace. That a poem "about" the breaking of bonds and the downfall of a master poet celebrates at the same time the intricacy of poetic structure, of verbal bonds, is not at all surprising when we consider that all poetry is in some way "clever" and its function is to surprise, encode, and delight.

The structure-reflecting function of the refrain in "Deor" comes into sharper relief when the poem is viewed in the context of the manuscript. "Deor's" refrain seems to invoke the woven, blended structure of the interlace linking the different sections of the poem. The refrain of "Wulf and Eadwacer" (immediately following "Deor" in the Exeter Book), however, invokes the principle opposite from that of interlace: inexorable separation. "Wulf and Eadwacer" involves a plaintive monologue on the part of an unnamed speaker directed toward two addressees, Wulf and Eadwacer (as with Deor, not necessarily proper names). The speaker's apparent sometime-lover, sometime-ravisher is in imminent danger from the speaker's community. He will be taken the next time he appears within their stronghold. The speaker's child, literal or figurative, probably got by "Wulf" (she refers to it as a "whelp" [*hwelp*]), will be stolen by him into the woods. Thus, both the speaker's lover and child will be taken from her. The poem employs the airiest kind of elegy, offering no familiar allusions to ground the reader/listener, but instead a series of gloomy images that give the impression of a background drama while refusing access to its details. We see only a snapshot of a bleak situation, fraught with tension and impending catastrophe: "wulf is on iege, ic on oþerre / fæst is þæt eglond, fenne biworpen" (l. 4–5) ["Wulf is on an isle, I on another / fast is that island, surrounded by fen"]. The refrain in this poem, iterated only twice and not emphasized by visually separated sections, reads, "ungelic is us" ["it is unlike for us"], a bleak and ambiguous assertion of un-joinedness and incompatibility. The last two metrical half-lines of the poem reinforce the assertion: "þætte næfre gesomnad wæs, uncer giedd geador" ["that never was joined, our song together"]. As the strands of Deor's poem are thoroughly linked together, so the speaker's song in "Wulf and Eadwacer" consists of separate, incompatible loose ends. "Deor" is a heavily

[25] For instance, the riddles are often self-referential. For the Celtic tradition, see Stevick and Budny.

ironic affirmation of craft, order, and the proper social status of the *scop*, whereas the contrapuntal alternative we see in "Wulf and Eadwacer" is a spare articulation of impending, antisocial chaos, a rending of the social fabric as it is woven and held together by language. While the refrain in "Deor" serves to bind, in "Wulf and Eadwacer" it keeps apart. The two poems viewed together thus help us make sense of their use of an uncommon poetic device (the refrain), and both support and enrich the present reading of "Deor."

The formal composition of "Deor" reveals a poetic artifact that exhibits the Anglo-Saxon (and Celtic) formal principles of interlace, ambiguity, and ring composition. More broadly, the poem attests to medieval aesthetic values of multiply-layered meaning and renovation as opposed to absolute innovation, in which reference to a known thing (here, the brief legendary allusions in "Deor") forms the foundation for something "new" (the self-reflexive elegy on the part of a disgraced court poet). While traditional verse provides the basic constitutive principle for "Deor," the poetic structure of the text goes well beyond rules governing verse and line. We are reminded that poetry is never content to rest within the confines of a given metrical system, and that the essence of what we consider great poetry is an ability to bend, add to, and play with the rules.

If such unique, unexpected effects can be found in several examples of classical verse, the minimal conclusion that must be drawn is that such effects can occur (since here they do). The deployment of unique formal effect in regular verse is consistent with the thoroughgoing poeticalness of the Old English corpus, which the bulk of this study has sought to describe; these texts perform poetic operations on already poetic language. The poetic function compounds its own effects. This is the very nature of poetry: the controlled ignition of the tensions between expectation (tradition) and surprise (innovation, play). Classical metrical texts can involve much more formal complexity and interest than their mere adherence to the rules of verse. Our reading practices must aspire to comparable sophistication.

Conclusion

I have suggested a renovated reading practice for Old English, one that brackets *a priori* literary categories in favor of attention to the structures and effects of texts, working "from the ground up" as opposed to "from the top down." I do not mean to imply that one may come to a text with no ideology, but rather, that one's ideology should prioritize language and structure (the formal components of a text) over assumptions about culture, religious doctrine, or influence, because in this way we are least likely to neglect elements that do not fit our expectations. A text is primarily a construct of language. That is not all it is, but my conviction is that language is where the best reading starts, moving outward to other questions, cultural and historical, intellectual and material. The poetry critic Helen Vendler was an important teacher of mine, and as she puts it,

> It is natural that people under new cultural imperatives should be impelled to fasten new interpretations (from the reasonable to the fantastic) onto aesthetic objects from the past. But criticism cannot stop there. The critic may well begin, "Look at it this way for a change," but the sentence must continue, "and now don't you see it as more intelligibly beautiful and moving?" That is, if the interpretation does not reveal some hitherto occluded aspect of the aesthetic power of the art work, it is useless as art criticism (though it may be useful as cultural history or sociology or psychology or religion). (*Music* 2)

One claim of this book has been that reading Old English texts with an eye for form illuminates the texts in this way, allowing previously unrecognized levels of suggestion, coherence, and play to reveal themselves. For me, such a payoff suggests I am on the right track. And yet, Vendler's directive is complicated in the context of Old English, since just what constitutes a "work of art" is far from clear, and the very label is in some sense anachronistic. One of the arguments of the book has been that the corpus has an important aesthetic aspect in its poetic patterning and that if a work of art can be defined as a cultural product in which aesthetic effect is an important bearer of cultural meaning, then much of the corpus is "art"—is "literary."

Hanson and Kiparsky's theory of literary language, combined with the evidence of centuries of writing about poetry and prose, from Aristotle to the present, has given me a framework in which to make sense of the evident patterning of Old English texts. Anglo-Saxon culture developed without an extensive written literature up until contact with Christianity, and "important speech" of all kinds (from laws to genealogies to epic poetry) was patterned for mnemonic convenience but also for aesthetic effect, to mark it out as important, as distinct from the quotidian, and to convey specific meanings in specific ways. Modern English, in contrast, has

undergone historical developments that follow Aristotle in observing separate spheres for the poetic, which allows for aesthetic effect, and the prosaic, which bans it.

In the "serious" discourse of the modern era, the aesthetic has been repressed. This must be so, for nothing can be nonaesthetic or anaesthetic, just as nothing can be apolitical or nonideological. We cannot help but register emotional, affective, intellectual, and countless other kinds of effects when we encounter any stimulus. That is what *aesthetic* means. It means we feel it. The recent controversy surrounding the latest appointee to the United States Supreme Court, Sonia Sotomayor, illustrates how often this point is misunderstood. The conservative resistance to Sotomayor centers on a statement she once made that her ethnicity and gender cannot help but inform her judicial opinions. Commentators take this to mean that Sotomayor endorses the influence of ethnicity and race on legal judgment. While in Sotomayor's perspective, personal history and identity are unavoidable influences that in fact constitute what it is to exercise a judgment, to think and discern at all, in the perspective of her critics, such factors are something we are free either to exclude or to endorse. We may banish them from cognitive processes and human interactions or willfully employ them. Thus, in the conservative view the optional involvement of personal factors renders them "biases" rather than integral to the process. This difference also characterizes the controversy between "objectivity" in science and the recognition that our perspectives cannot help but influence the outcomes of our experiments.

What this study has allowed me to confront is the similar unavoidability of aesthetics; we are never neutral or inert in our response to a text, and no text was ever created neutrally. It is absurd to imagine such neutrality. All language, all "texts" in the broadest sense (written and oral, even verbal and nonverbal or semiotic) have aesthetic effects. According to Hanson and Kiparsky, the unmarked or default expectation of "normal" or nonliterary language is the absence of patterning. However, our very perceptual faculties create patterning for us as they filter what from the world gets through to our senses. The unmarked form of language thus specifies not only and perhaps not primarily the linguistic output but instead a mode of reception: with "nonliterary language" we do not prepare to receive patterning qua patterning; we tune out the texture in favor of referential meaning. In literary language, by contrast, the patterning of the stimulus is licensed for reception. It can become apparent rather than transparent, and the unmarked form of this register is thus regular verse, where patterning is unmistakable and thus perfectly satisfies "literary" expectations.

If Hanson and Kiparsky are correct in asserting that patterning—a formal effect—is a basic characteristic of literary language, and that prose, the marked form of literary language, suppresses patterning (and the "prosaic" discourse of so-called nonliterary prose represses it), this has implications for all of literary studies, not only for Old English. It suggests a new way of reading the modern novel, for instance. Prose is not a transparent medium for rendering plot developments. Rather, if prose suppresses patterning, then there is negative evidence to read. What kinds of patterns are being avoided? What are showing through? Prose must

operate on a kind of tension between overt patterning and the suppression of such patterning—the appearance of transparency, which means the disappearance of the signifier. Thus, we come again to deconstruction. Deconstruction has suggested that textual coherence is an illusion masking heterogeneous and contentious dynamics. Hanson and Kiparsky, from another methodology entirely, reveal the illusory transparency of prose, suggesting a renewed attention to the sign that affirms the core tenets of deconstruction. And in light of Hanson and Kiparsky's work, to note the poetic patterning of a textual corpus from a residually oral culture is simply to affirm that the culture had not gone through the stages of repression of the sign that Modern English later did.

This study has sought neither to supersede nor to obviate any previous approach to the Old English corpus. Rather, it has been my aim to provide a complementary point of view from a field of literary and linguistic inquiry that has not been well represented in Old English studies. Source studies, codicology, paleography, philology, metrical studies, oral-formulaic studies, anthropology—all have shed invaluable light upon what evidence we have of the culture and history of the Anglo-Saxons, and on their language and its development. I have brought to my reading interrelated developments in linguistics (Jakobsonian discourse analysis, Chomskyan grammar), theory (Derrida's expansion of semiotics beyond language, Ong's description of orality and literacy, Huizinga's insight into the serious work of "play"), and literature (the aesthetic criticism of Helen Vendler, the extension of aesthetics and poetics beyond notions of High Art) that have, I hope, revealed how much less monotonously chaotic and how much more surprising and sophisticated Old English texts appear when considered at the level of language.

Anglo-Saxon verbal culture defies Derrida's monolithic characterization of the Western tradition as being defined by a transcendent view of language. Old English texts, rather than privileging the referent, seem, in fact, "aware" that meaning does not preexist or exceed signs, but is constituted by them. One segment of elite culture in the Latin Middle Ages cultivated a theology and ontology of the transcendent Logos, but other paradigms clearly governed much literary and visual production. Often when a text appears opaque to translatable "meaning," and one is tempted to shrug one's shoulders before a baffling alterity, a moment's pause is in order. I have attempted to pause in this way, to consider what structures in Old English do as opposed to what they fail to do. The alterity of Old English seems to me not a baffling or chaotic jumble but a textuality based on different, largely poetic premises. Interpretation is never definitive and never exhaustive or exhausted. It is itself a form of cultural production. The medieval period posed as prehistory for important cultural producers in the twentieth century (Foucault, Derrida, most participants in the recent vogue of Early Modern Studies), but the period has and is a textual and material history, the elements of which, as medievalists have long known, both invite and reward consideration.

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