

**‘The Tale of the Tribe’:  
The Twentieth-Century  
Alliterative Revival**

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## Abstract

This thesis studies the revival of Old English- and Norse-inspired alliterative versification in twentieth-century English poetry and poetics.

It is organised as a chronological sequence of three case-studies: three authors, heirs to Romantic Nationalism, writing at twentieth-century intersections between Modernism, Postmodernism, and Medievalism.

It indicates why this form attracted revival; which medieval models were emulated, with what success, in which modern works: the technique and mystique of alliterative verse as a modern mode.

It differs from previous scholarship by advocating Kipling and Tolkien, by foregrounding the primacy of *language*, historical linguistics, especially the philological reconstruction of Germanic metre; and by, accordingly, methodological emphasis on *formal scansion*, taking account of audio recordings of Pound and Tolkien performing their poetry.

It proposes the revived form as archaising, epic, mythopoeic, constructed by its exponents as an authentic poetic speech symbolising an archetypal Englishness—‘The Tale of the Tribe’. A trope emerges of revival of the culturally-‘buried’ native and innate, an ancestral lexico-metrical heritage conjured back to life.

A substantial **Introduction** offers a primer of Old English metre and style: how it works, and what it means, according to Eduard Sievers’ (1850-1932) reconstruction.

**Chapter I** promotes **Rudyard Kipling** (1865-1936) as pioneering alliterative poet, his engagement with Old-Northernism, runes, and retelling of the myth of Weland.

**Chapter II** assesses the impact of Anglo-Saxon on and through **Ezra Pound** (1885-1972). Scansions of his ‘Seafarer’ and *Cantos* testify to the influence of Saxonising versification in the development of Pound’s Modernist language and free verse.

**Chapter III** exhibits the alliterative oeuvre of **J. R. R. Tolkien** (1892-1973), featuring close readings of verse from *Lord of the Rings*.

The **Conclusion** contends that twentieth-century English poetry should be recognised as evincing an ambitious alliterative revival, impossible before, and that this ancient metre is likely to endure into the future.

## Contents

	<i>Page</i>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	2
<b>Contents</b> .....	3
<b>Author’s Declaration</b> .....	5
<b>Introduction: The Ancient Technique and Modern Mystique of Alliterative Metre</b> .....	6
Topic and Structure.....	6
Chronology and Context.....	6
Methodology.....	10
Ancient Technique.....	18
§ I. Syllabification.....	20
§ II. Accentuation.....	20
i. ‘Swellverses’: Hypermetrics.....	22
ii. ‘Heavings and Sinkings’.....	22
§ III. Quantity.....	24
i. Resolution.....	24
§ IV. Metre.....	25
§ V. Anacrusis.....	34
§ VI. ‘Alliteration’.....	35
i. Consonantal.....	37
ii. Vocalic.....	37
iii. The Headstave.....	38
§ VII. Verse-Style.....	41
i. Caesura and Hemistich to Full-line.....	41
ii. Half-line to Paragraph.....	42
iii. Diction and Rhetoric to Episode and Narrative....	44
Modern Mystique: The Tale of the Tribe.....	46
<b>Chapter I. The Runes on the Sword:</b>	
<b>Kipling and the Work of Wayland</b> .....	58
<i>Onband beadurūne</i> .....	58
Kipling’s Victorian Old-Northern Context: Morris and Haggard.....	63
Identifying Kipling’s Old-Northern Corpus.....	66
‘The Tale of the Tribe’.....	68
Smith and <i>Scop</i> .....	73
Rudyard Runemaster.....	81
“Runes”: ‘The Magic of the Necessary Word’.....	89
Syllabification.....	90
Accentuation.....	91
Alliteration.....	91
Caesuration.....	93
Runes in “Runes”?.....	98

**Chapter II. Breaking the Pentameter:**

<b>Ezra Pound and ‘the English National Chemical’</b> .....	108
Gathering the Limbs.....	108
‘The Sound of Pound’: Note on Aural-Oral Resources.....	127
‘The First Heave’: Scanning ‘The Seafarer’.....	130
Alliteration.....	130
Caesura and Hemistich.....	131
Metre.....	140
<i>Type A Verses</i> .....	141
<i>Type B Verses</i> .....	144
<i>Type C Verses</i> .....	146
<i>Type D Verses</i> .....	150
<i>Type E Verses</i> .....	150
<i>Hypermetric Verses</i> .....	151
Ear, Ear    for the <i>y̆ða gewealc</i> : Scanning Cantos I, II, XIII, XIV, XV.....	159

**Chapter III. ‘Reviv[ing] Vanished Voices’:**

<b>Tolkien as ‘Bard to Anglo-Saxon’</b> .....	184
The Language of the Dead: Dark Staves.....	184
Living Lore: Talking Trees.....	207
‘So the Songs Tell Us...’.....	242

<b>Conclusion: ‘From the Grey Twilight’</b> .....	259
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<b>Bibliography of Works Cited</b> .....	267
Primary Sources.....	267
Secondary Sources.....	274

### **Author's Declaration**

I, the author, hereby declare that this thesis is my own work, researched and written solely by myself without the involvement of any collaborator; that no part of it has been submitted previously for examination at the University of York, or elsewhere at any other institution for another award; that, further, this thesis includes neither previously published work, nor work currently under consideration for publication.

## **Introduction: The Ancient Technique and Modern Mystique of Alliterative Metre.**

The aesthetics of alliterative poetry have received surprisingly little comment [...] <sup>1</sup>

### ***Topic and Structure***

The subject of this thesis is the revival of ‘alliterative’ metre in the twentieth century: the recreation and renewal of the accentual-alliterative form of versification, and its concomitant lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical poetic style, as inspired by Old English and to a lesser extent (the related but differing) Middle English and Old Norse poetry, in modern Anglophone poetics and poetic practice.

The thesis is structured as a chronological succession of three case-studies of three main authors, three chapters in (overlapping) biographical sequence: Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973); reference is also made particularly to such contemporaries of the three authors as T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), W. H. Auden (1907-1973).

### ***Chronology and Context***

Chronologically, in terms of the stylistically relevant corpus in question, the period compassed is roughly the first half of the century, c.1900-c.1950; though it should be noted that this climacteric engenders sequels in the work of later twentieth- and twenty-first century poets such as Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) and, into the present century, Simon Armitage (1963- ).

I shall indicate that a modern revival of alliterative metre in a full sense *could not* have occurred *before* this period: the twentieth-century alliterative revival happened in due season. It must further be recognised that the revival depends upon, develops and begins to fulfil, an earlier movement, immediately in the nineteenth century, of German Romanticism and English Medievalism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development as a Writer of Alliterative Poetry in Modern English,” in *Tolkien’s Poetry*, ed. Julian Eilmann and Allan Turner (Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 2013), 13.

<sup>2</sup> T. A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), 5-50, 296 passim; Shippey and Richard Utz, eds., *Medievalism in the Modern World: Essays in Honour of Leslie Workman* (Brepols: Turnhout, 1998); Shippey and Martin Arnold, eds., *Correspondences: Medievalism in Scholarship and the Arts* (Woodbridge: Boydell, and Brewer, 2005); Andrew Wawn, ed., *Constructing Nations, Reconstructing Myth: Essays in Honour of T. A. Shippey*

This context should include awareness of such major antecedents as William Morris (1834-1896), explicitly acknowledged by this study's three main poets, and Richard Wagner (1813-1883). Morris' advocacy, in terms of matter, of *Beowulf* and the Norse sagas, and mythopoeic narrative in poetry generally; and, stylistically, his effort to forge a linguistic style suited to these, related to the Saxonising linguistic purism, or 'English'—of which William Barnes, G. M. Hopkins, C. M. Doughty, and to an extent Tennyson and Hardy were also notable contemporary exponents—was of prime importance in England.<sup>3</sup>

Though unacknowledged, and ignored in previous scholarship on the revival, Wagner could be shown to have anticipated theoretically the principal ideas of a modern alliterative revival, and to have manifested them practice in the most conspicuous and influential medievalist cultural monument of the nineteenth century, if not of modern times, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.<sup>4</sup> His manifestoes of the 1850s articulate a comprehensive and, on its own terms, coherent and consistent, theory expounding, and justifying, a revival of a—philologically reconstructed—ancient Germanic alliterative verse and style, as a modern medium.<sup>5</sup> Wagner's construction of

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(Turnhout: Brepols, 2007); Karl Fugelso, ed., "Defining Medievalism(s)," special issue, *Studies in Medievalism XVII* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008); Ursula Schaefer, et al., eds., *Linguistics, Ideology and the Discourse of Linguistic Nationalism* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> 'Saxon' dictional purism has a far longer history in English (inkhornism, Cheke, Spenser) than Saxonising metrics, e.g.: Dennis E. Baron, *Going Native: The Regeneration of Saxon English* (*Publications of the American Dialect Society*, no. 69), Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981); E. G. Stanley, "Translation from Old English: 'the garbaging war-hawk,'" in *A Collection of Papers with Emphasis on Old English Literature* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1987), 83-114; Fr. Andrew Phillips, *The Rebirth of England and the English: The Vision of William Barnes* (Hockwold-cum-Wilton: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1996); Cary H. Plotkin, *The Tenth Muse: Victorian Philology and the Genesis of the Poetic Language of G. M. Hopkins* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989); Fred C. Robinson, "Pound and the Old English Translational Tradition," in *The Tomb of Beowulf and Other Essays* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 259-74; Dennis Taylor, *Hardy's Literary Language and Victorian Philology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993).

<sup>4</sup> First performed 1876. For Wagner's *Ring*, see further: Stewart Spencer, Barry Millington et al., *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung: A Companion* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993), complete edition with *en-face* translation of the text with commentary; see further Deryck Cooke, *I Saw the World End: A Study of Wagner's Ring* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979); Elizabeth Magee, *Richard Wagner and the Nibelungs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Árni Björnsson, *Wagner and the Volsungs: Icelandic sources of Der Ring des Nibelungen* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003), 107.

<sup>5</sup> Albert Goldman and Evert Sprinchorn, eds., *Wagner on Music and Drama: A Compendium of Richard Wagner's Prose Works* (New York: Da Capo, 1988); Stewart Spencer, "Wagner

the ideology, aesthetics, and character of alliterative verse as a modern mythopoeic art-form significantly prefigures, theoretically, thematically, and technically, the Anglophone poets treated upon in this thesis. Wagner's writing on alliterative metre—his writing *in* it enthused the young Nietzsche to extol *Stabreim* as 'Language raised to its strongest degree of expression'<sup>6</sup>—should also be seen in their context of the history of nineteenth-century German Romantic-Nationalist philology.<sup>7</sup>

Philologically, Eduard Sievers (1850-1932), and Henry Sweet (1845-1912) will emerge as decisively important figures; the influence of 'Old-Northern' tradition on modern literature tends to emanate from medievalist philological origins, and the most significant modern revivals of alliterative metre tend duly and with fitness to be medievalist in form and content.

Implicated in the topic's timeframe is the lag in the publication of G. M. Hopkins' (1844-1889) poetry;<sup>8</sup> involved more substantially in the present study is the displacedly posthumous publication of Tolkien's and Lewis' alliterative narrative poems. The latter's *Nameless Isle*, c.1930, was not published till 1969;<sup>9</sup> an enormous amount of material composed by Tolkien c.1918 to the c.1960s remained unpublished until the 1980s, with three major books emerging during the proposal and writing of the present thesis. To this extent this research explores something of a hitherto largely submerged, anachronistic, history in twentieth-century English poetry. The two World Wars dominating the c.1900-1950 period appear to assume significance with regard to the revival, c.1918-c.1945 emerging as a spell of intense alliterative activity. Another way of conceptualising the present focus chronologically, is to discern a

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as Librettist," in *The Wagner Compendium*, ed. Barry Millington (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 264-68.

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski, eds., *The Wagner Handbook*, trans. John Deathridge (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 43.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Shippey, "The Problem of the Rings: Tolkien and Wagner," in *Roots and Branches: Selected Papers on Tolkien* (Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 2007), 97-114. See further George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Pimlico, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems*, ed. Robert Bridges (London: Humphrey Milford), 1918.

<sup>9</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Narrative Poems*, ed. Walter Hooper (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1969), xii, 107-27.



hundred-year historico-cultural phase beginning with Wagner and ending with Tolkien, c.1850-c.1950: though—as the rings in play here may betoken—an important doubt attaches to whether such a cycle *has* ended.

The twentieth-century alliterative revival has attracted some previous scholarly attention, most notably Chris Jones' articles and his book *Strange Likeness: The Uses of Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry*.<sup>10</sup> Jones' study omits treatment of Lewis and Tolkien, pursuing a particular thesis which conduces to focus on authors negotiating the margins of 'Englishness': which does hence accommodate in differing ways Pound and Auden along with—notwithstanding that the title derives from Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns*—essentially lyric poets of what used to be termed the Celtic Fringe.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it is the 'Saxonism' and medievalism of Pound and Auden which has amassed most critical commentary hitherto: considerable criticism which includes, on Pound, in addition to Jones, work by Fred C. Robinson and Michael Alexander (see my Chapter II), and with regard to Auden, again in addition to Jones, including from Bloomfield, Howe, Emig, Szarmach, and Toswell.<sup>12</sup> Lewis and Tolkien do feature in Phelpstead's "Auden and the Inklings," but are decidedly

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<sup>10</sup> Chris Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); "Anglo-Saxonism in Nineteenth-Century Poetry," *Literature Compass* 7, issue 5 (May 2010): 358-69, doi: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2010.00704.x; "New Old English: The Place of Old English in Twentieth- and Twenty-first-Century Poetry," *Literature Compass* 7, Issue 11 (November 2010): 1009-19, doi: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2010.00760.x.

<sup>11</sup> See esp. Jones' "Introduction: Whose Poetry is Old English Anyway" and "Conclusion: Old English—A Shadow Poetry?" in *Strange Likeness*, 1-16, 238-43.

<sup>12</sup> Morton Bloomfield, "'Doom is Dark and Deeper than any Sea-dingle'": W. H. Auden and *Sawles Ward*," *Modern Language Notes* 58 (1948): 548-52; Nirmal Das, "Ice, Fire, and Beasts: W. H. Auden's Medievalism," *The Year's Work in Mediaevalism V* (1996): 172-178; Nicholas Howe, "Praise and Lament: The Afterlife of Old English Poetry in Auden, Hill, and Gunn," in *Words and Works: Studies in Medieval English Language and Literature in Honor of Fred C. Robinson*, ed. Peter S. Baker and Nicholas Howe (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1998), 293-310; Paul E. Szarmach, "Anthem: Auden's *Cædmon's Hymn*," in Shippey and Utz, eds., *Medievalism in the Modern World*, 329-40; M. J. Toswell, "Auden and Anglo-Saxon," *Medieval Studies Newsletter* 37 (1997): 21-28; "Two New Letters by Auden on Anglo-Saxon Metre and *The Age of Anxiety*," *The Year's Work in Medievalism for 2000*, 15 (2001): 57-72; Rainer Emig, *W. H. Auden: Towards a Postmodern Poetics* (London: Macmillan 2000); Chris Jones, "W. H. Auden and 'The "Barbaric" Poetry of the North': Unchaining One's Daimon," *The Review of English Studies* n.s. 53 (2002): 167-85; "'One can emend a mutilated text': Auden's *The Orators* and the Old English *Exeter Book*," *TEXT* 15 (2002): 261-75.

demoted in this article, in accordance with Phelpstead's particular arguments, in favour of the first-named author.<sup>13</sup>

The present study however represents, partly in answer, an alternative 'take' on this topic, espousing a distinct methodological and critical approach, and, proceeding from quite different premises and principles, pursuing an alternative thesis: one which stresses philology, and *the metre itself*, and which claims, accordingly, the Inklings as the climax of the revival—a recognition of alliterative verse as an *intrinsically* epic-mythopoeic, rather than lyric, form and style, and as a form, as constructed by these authors, proposed as being archetypically and quintessentially *English*.<sup>14</sup> Such a construction is, of course, no less fundamental to Jones' study—hence Old English's very interest, that of a 'strange likeness', to those on the 'edge'; whilst, again, Kipling, Tolkien, and Lewis, born respectively in India, South Africa, and Northern Ireland, might equally have qualified by Jones' own specific, polemical, criteria.<sup>15</sup>

The only substantial commentary hitherto—also foregrounding philology and formal scansion—on Tolkien's alliterative verse, is to be found in several articles by Tom Shippey: the third chapter of the present thesis is intended in part as a response to Shippey's invitation to further work on Tolkien's epic poetry.<sup>16</sup>

### **Methodology**

Each chapter identifies in overview the respective poet's relevant oeuvre, and proceeds to selective close readings, with a particular emphasis on practical scansion.

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<sup>13</sup> Carl Phelpstead, "Auden and the Inklings: An Alliterative Revival," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 103 (2004): 433-57.

<sup>14</sup> Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1978). Carpenter is also the author of standard biographies of Auden, Pound, and Tolkien.

<sup>15</sup> Consideration of this might induce the commentator to suggest that alliterative verse in the twentieth century may indeed be, *because* of its symbolic Englishness, a (*post-/*)colonial genre. Cf. the intense engagement with OE and ON literature in the work, contemporary with the authors in this thesis, of an academic Argentinian Anglophile of partly English descent, Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986).

<sup>16</sup> Tom Shippey, "Alliterative Verse by Tolkien," in *The J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D. C. Drout (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 10-11; review of *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, *Tolkien Studies* 7 (2010): 234-91; "Writing into the Gap: Tolkien's Reconstruction of the Legends of Sigurd and Gudrún," in *Revisiting the Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Heroic Legend*, ed. Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington (New York: Routledge, 2013), 238-57; "Tolkien's Development."

The purpose of this methodology of detailed metrical analysis is to explicate the form and style which is the topic of the thesis, and to *demonstrate* whether, and measure precisely how—to what extent and with what success—my authors *have* revived the medieval metre in Modern English in the twentieth century. This enterprise necessarily requires, then, both such close textual analysis, concerning the enmeshed versification, diction, syntax, of the modern works, and extensive reference to the original, model, literatures.

From its beginnings over beer in hall, on battlefield, at barrow, to the symposia of the Inklings and the broadcasts of Pound, accentual-alliterative verse is a most oral and aural of poeties; and though the gleemanry of scop and skald is silent, an advantage of studying twentieth-century literature is that recordings were made of these poets themselves reciting their alliterative verse—contributing another form of authoritative primary documentation, hitherto scarcely noticed. Hence to the usual textual sources of the main primary texts I add the testimony of the audio recordings of two of my main authors performing their poetry.

I seek to show also why the form attracted, technically and stylistically, these efforts of revival: what characteristics and effects offered by alliterative verse aroused poetic attention, which includes the intrinsic properties of the form and style, and also cultural constructions formed on interpretations of its origin and nature—the associative implications of alliterative verse as a modern poetic mode. That is, *how* the form *works*, as revived from medieval models, in Modern English; and *what* the form *means* in modern poetry: the technique, the aesthetics, and the mystique of the technique; or the ‘ideological’ construction, the modern mythology, of alliterative verse. Why did these poets attempt to revive alliterative verse, how and how well did they, and what did they make of it?

Inasmuch as the medieval tradition of alliterative *poiesis* was a collective one; and not unrelated to a perception of how the language is anterior to its individual exponents, a reversal of the usual modern hierarchy might be entertained: viewing the revived metre *itself* as a cultural, linguistic-prosodic ‘energy’—Tolkien speaks of a mythopoeic ‘daimonic force’ ‘multipli[ed] through many minds’, Pound of dynamic metrico-

cultural ‘energies’—and subordinating the individual *poets* as expressions of *it*.<sup>17</sup>

Self-evidently crucial to the methodology of this study must be a system of that metre.

No accounts of their traditional vernacular versification are extant from the ancient English themselves. If any such existed, it is among the lost lore. The only testament is the surviving corpus of poems.

The historico-culturally and linguistically closest sources are accounts from Iceland, dating from the later Middle Ages. Though, as both vernacular, and concerned with indigenous originally pagan poetic (indeed mythopoetic) traditions, strongly ‘Northern’, this Icelandic ‘renaissance’ actually represents a belated, even in a sense ‘antiquarian’, Latinate Christian engagement of literate scholars with their persisting anciently native tradition; and this latter is specifically that of the cognate, closely akin yet distinctively locally developed, Old Norse, *skaldic*, poetics.

Ascribed to the masterly Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241), the most famous and significant of these texts, building on an earlier metrical work *Háttalykill* and influencing in its turn the *Third* (mid-thirteenth) and *Fourth* (mid-fourteenth-century) *Grammatical Treatises*, is the ‘Younger/Prose’ *Edda* (c.1221-5), particularly its fourth part, *Háttatal* (early 1220s).

Invaluable though Snorri is as a medieval authority on Germanic versecraft and *skáldskapr*, and whilst enormously compelling in his mythography, exposition of diction, rhetoric, tropes, and indigenous prosodic nomenclature, his book, obviously, refers to poetics as understood and represented by him in High-Medieval Iceland: hence cannot unreservedly be transferred to Old English. For all its interest and value it does not, furthermore, supply a comprehensive system of metric in the modern sense.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *Sauron Defeated*, vol. 9 of *The History of Middle Earth*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 228, cf. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2010), 17; Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson (London: Faber, 1973), 345; *Guide to Kulchur* (London: Peter Owen, 1952), 152.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 29-68, 157-205, *passim*; Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Snorri Sturluson: Edda, Gylfaginning, Skáldskaparmál, Háttatal* (University College London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998-1999); all citations of Snorri’s *Edda* refer to this edition, hereafter

Therefore, the technical principles of ‘Old-Germanic’ versification as we can know them are theoretical, ‘asterisk-’ reconstructions of modern academic philology. The modern poetry attempting revival of that versification has depended, a *philological poiesis*, upon this scholarship in historical linguistics and textual criticism: the poets have been recreative medievalists, relying upon medievalist philologues.

Consequently Germanic metre has been an evolving, controversial field of study, progressing with the process of the modern reception and interpretation of the rediscovered medieval Germanic languages and literatures since the late seventeenth-century, and continues to develop today.

A complete systematic theory, taxonomy and typology of the metre appeared only with the work of the German philologist Eduard Sievers, initially in his 1885 “Zur Rhythmik des germanischen Alliterationsverses”<sup>19</sup> and, definitively, in his *Altgermanische Metrik* of 1893.<sup>20</sup>

*Until* the publication of *Sievers’* system—in German, at the end of the nineteenth century—no single robust, adequate and intelligible, authoritative and *workable*, account of the versification *was available* from philology to the modern revivalist.

Modern medievalism, of course, antedates this epochal Sieversian climacteric by a couple of Romantic centuries (though *Beowulf* only began its Búri-like re-emergence from the ice of history and forgotten language in the early 1800s) and includes numerous important works; but the point is that during that period there was no *system* of ancient Germanic prosody.<sup>21</sup> From George Hickes’ *Linguarum veterum septentrionalium thesaurus grammatico-criticus et archaeologicus* (1703-1705) and Sharon Turner’s *History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1799-1805), to George Ellis’ *Specimens of the Early English Poets* (1801), Edwin Guest’s *History of English Rhythms* (1838), to Henry Morley’s *English Writers, The Writers Before Chaucer* (1864-94) and

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cited parenthetically in-text by title and Faulkes’ page-number. Tolkien, *Sigurd*, 7, 20-26, 33-37, 45-50; Bliss, *An Introduction to Old English Metre* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 10 (1885): 209-314; 12 (1887): 451-545.

<sup>20</sup> (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1893).

<sup>21</sup> Carl T. Berkhout and Milton McC. Gatch, eds., *Anglo-Saxon Scholarship: The First Three Centuries* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982).

George Saintsbury's *Historical Manual of English Prosody* of—hence exactly contemporary with Kipling and Pound—1910,<sup>22</sup> confusion and ignorance as to Anglo-Saxon verse form and style reigned, in spite of the efforts of J. M. Kemble, Benjamin Thorpe, J. J. Conybeare, and others, in English letters. In consequence, Thomas Gray in the 1760s *could not know* how the versification of his Eddic and saga sources worked;<sup>23</sup> an established working and convincing theory of the metric was *not available* to Coleridge or Longfellow; was effectively unknown to dedicated enthusiasts Tennyson, Morris, and Hopkins. However powerfully impressionistically imitative, and apparently stylistically reminiscent, of Old or Middle English or Norse, poetry even Victorian medievalist poems are—withstanding 'sprung-rhythmic' and 'Saxonising' dictional innovations—they remain either essentially accentual-syllabic, or only incipiently accentual, in their prosody.<sup>24</sup>

It is in this sense and spirit that it was contended above (page 1) that a 'revival of alliterative metre *in a full sense could not have occurred before* this period': as argued supra on page 8, '*until* the publication of Sievers' system—in German, at the end of the nineteenth century—*no* single robust, adequate and intelligible, authoritative and *workable*, account of the versification *was available* from philology to the modern revivalist'. It is the gravamen of this thesis that Sievers—his system combining full-line, caesura, and *metrical* verse-types involving accentuation and syllabification—is the watershed. In this regard particularly—that is, with reference to the stirrings of sundry experiments, scholarly and poetic, to construe and revive Old English-inspired accentual-alliterative versifications in the *nineteenth* century—that to the previous scholarship thus far noticed should be added Joseph Phelan, *The Music of Verse: Metrical Experiment in Nineteenth-Century Poetry*.<sup>25</sup> Phelan's account complements, corroborates and in numerous thematic and technical ways overlaps with my study,

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<sup>22</sup> (London: Macmillan, 1910).

<sup>23</sup> Alison Finlay, "Thomas Gray's Translations of Old Norse Poetry," in *Old Norse Made New: Essays on the Post-Medieval Reception of Old Norse Literature and Culture*, ed. by David Clark and Carl Phelpstead (University College London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2007), 1-20; Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750-1820* (Trieste: Edizioni Parnaso, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Michael Alexander, "Tennyson's 'Battle of Brunanburgh,'" *Tennyson Research Bulletin* 4, no. 4 (1985): 151-61; Chris Jones, "Where Now the Harp? Listening for the Sounds of Old English Verse, from *Beowulf* to the Twentieth Century," *Oral Tradition* 24, no.2 (2009): 490.

<sup>25</sup> (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

affording further background on the scene immediately preparative to the phase treated upon in the present thesis, wanting only inclusion of Tennyson's engagement with Old English. Phelan should also be consulted regarding Coleridge's accentual experimentation in "Christabel" (1816); this *cannot* be identified, merely because it is accentual, meaningfully as *Old English metre*.<sup>26</sup> His most pertinent chapter is the third, "Native Traditions: Anglo-Saxon and Alliterative Verse", of which especially relevant are the sections on the metrical controversies between Sharon Turner, Conybeare, and Rasmus Rask; and on the attempted early revivals of William Morris and G. M. Hopkins, upon both of whose stylistic Saxonism more work needs to be undertaken.<sup>27</sup> The present study however is *not* a disquisition on *accentual* experimentation in *nineteenth-century* verse; although it may be conceded, that Kipling belongs, formally, rather *between* the Victorian Morris and Hopkins and the later, twentieth-century 'Sieversians'. The first, shorter, chapter on Kipling is intended as a presentation, introducing that intermediate phase, of a chronologically earlier, preliminary case-study.

By the early twentieth century Sievers' system was academically established as standard: nonpareil, including by the successive alternative isochronic systems advanced by Andreas Heusler and (but as late as 1942) J. C. Pope.<sup>28</sup> If Sievers was accepted by the philologists, *a fortiori* was he the authority for the twentieth-century English poets: probably in most cases—Lewis and Tolkien being likely partial exceptions—transmitted indirectly via a vital and fateful intermediary.

Sievers' scansion was—crucially—restated in Henry Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, which attained its definitive form with its Seventh Edition of 1894 and became the standard Anglo-Saxon textbook in the Anglophone academy.<sup>29</sup> For generations of

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<sup>26</sup> Phelan, *Music of Verse*, esp. 96.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-133.

<sup>28</sup> Andreas Heusler, *Deutsche Versgeschichte* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1925); J. C. Pope, *The Rhythm of Beowulf* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942). Bliss, *An Introduction*, 2. Pope includes a preliminary recapitulation of Heusler's theory, 20-37.

<sup>29</sup> *An Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), all citations hereafter to this edition. Mark Atherton, "Priming the Poets: The Making of Henry Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader", in *Anglo-Saxon Culture and the Modern Imagination*, ed. David Clark and Nicholas Perkins (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 31-49.

students, including Pound and Auden, Sweet's *Reader* instituted both the canon of Old English texts, and their system of metric:<sup>30</sup> 'Pound, Auden, Hill, and Heaney used this textbook, and all to varying degrees absorbed its late nineteenth-century ethos.'<sup>31</sup>

Sweet's 'clear abstract of Sievers' views', derived from *Altgermanische Metrik* and Sievers' epitome in Hermann Paul's *Grundriss der germanischen Philologie*,<sup>32</sup> on pages lxxxv-xcvi of the Seventh Edition, with its prefatory acknowledgement and endorsement of Sievers on pages x-xi ('not a theory, but a statement of facts'), positioned Sweet as apostle of Sievers to the English. It has not hitherto been sufficiently emphasised that *the* most important figures in the history of the revival of modern accentual-alliterative verse, the matrix and the mediatrix, are these two nineteenth-century philologists.

Through Sweet, Sievers reached aspiring Anglophone *scopas* by the early 1900s: Pound c. 1904, Tolkien perhaps as early as 1907.<sup>33</sup> While Tolkien owned a copy of Sievers' *Old English Grammar* his library included at least three editions of Sweet's *Reader*.<sup>34</sup> Thus from Pound and Tolkien to Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns* of 1971 and beyond, English poets attempting to imitate Old English verse have been working from an understanding of the metre: as deciphered and explicated by Sievers; as transmitted by Sweet. This revival is an instance of 'dryasdust' academic nineteenth-century Romantic Nationalist philology quickening to some of the most prodigiously influential and popular literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Twentieth-century English poetry metrically imitative of Old English is in fact, and as has not hitherto been sufficiently appreciated, *Sieversian verse*: this poetry is founded

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<sup>30</sup> The first edition of Sweet's *Reader* was that of 1876; the account of metre was omitted after the tenth: Bliss, preface to *An Introduction*.

<sup>31</sup> Atherton, "Priming Poets," 3.

<sup>32</sup> Eduard Sievers, "Old Germanic Metres and Old English Metrics," trans. Gawaina D. Luster, in *Essential Articles for the Study of Old English Poetry*, ed. Jess B. Bessinger and Stanley J. Kahrl (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1968), 267-88.

<sup>33</sup> Pound was taught Anglo-Saxon by Joseph. D. Ibbotson from Sweet's *Reader* at Hamilton College 1904-1905: Fred C. Robinson, "'The Might of the North': Pound's Anglo-Saxon Studies and *The Seafarer*", *Yale Review* 71 (1982): 199-224; Tolkien 'already pursuing interests in Old English' while at King Edward's: Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, *The J. R. R. Tolkien Companion & Guide: Chronology* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 13.

<sup>34</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Tolkien MSS E16/33, E16/39, 40, 41.



on (German Romantic) ‘pedantry’.

Sievers, the overwhelmingly prevailing scansion in the period 1900-50 (the Sievers Era?), was Anglo-Saxon metric as known to and studied (in Sweet), accepted and practised, by all the authors in question (save the earlier, autodidactic, Kipling): taught to Pound and Auden, taught—and taught *by*—Tolkien and Lewis (including *to* Auden).

A revised and amplified form of Sievers’ system was developed in a series of important publications by Tolkien’s colleague, formerly student, Alan J. Bliss. From 1962 Bliss’ research, a ‘triumphant vindication of Sievers’, was administered to Oxford undergraduates in his *Introduction to Old English Metre*. Sievers thus modified by Bliss (and fortified by the findings of Thomas Cable and R. D. Fulk) is generally taken as the basis for current metrical research in Old English. Still commanding general consensus, confirmed and refined by succeeding research, its wide acceptance as the basic understanding of Germanic metre means that new theories of scansion, even if critical or contrary to it, such as those of Bessinger, Bredehoft, Creed, Hoover, Hutcheson, Pope, and Russom, are routinely expounded in relation and with reference to Sievers.<sup>35</sup>

It should be interjected that, notably, poets have *not* followed the alternative Heuslerian school of Old English scansion, which is musical, theorising necessary incorporation of instrumental accompaniment. (It is, also, noting the role of Sweet at the dawn of the century, slightly *later* than Sievers’, and Pope’s development still later.) Interestingly, Sievers (until his recantation) and Sweet explicitly repudiate this, arguing from the linguistic evidence that the poetry cannot have been truly *sung*. Sievers devotes much space to showing that Heusler’s theory, imposing ‘[...] a smooth, even series of bars, is ‘simply not tenable’. Sweet affirms that the metre’s ‘rigorous [...] observ[ation]’ of ‘sentence- [and] word- stress’ ‘proves that OE poetry must have been recited, not sung.’<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For a complete history see R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); for a contemporary introduction, Jun Terasawa, *Old English Metre* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Sievers, “Old Germanic,” 268-70; Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxvi.

Sievers' '*Altgermanische* metric' is therefore vital, *sine qua non*, to the present study. I attempt hereunder a brief and simplified encapsulation of the rudiments. The following account is consciously designed to evince special consistency, of period and provenance, with the present thesis.

It may also, then, be as well explicitly to emphasise now, that what is at issue here is less (a notional) Old English poetics *as such*, than the *early twentieth-century construction* of Old English poetics *as re-created* by the modern philologists and poets in question. Further to the eliminations processed in this Introduction, therefore, is the discrimination by corollary that it is logically unnecessary, would be beside the point and misplaced, for this thesis to debate, or seek either to prove or disprove, the accuracy, adequacy or otherwise, *of Sievers' system*. Here, rather, that system need only be expounded, at once to advance the present arguments and for the reader's convenience; and above all, for it to be demonstrated that *the main poets in this thesis* espoused and practised that system, and to exhibit how they received it and applied it in their own *Modern English* poetry.

### ***Ancient Technique.***

One demands the right, now and again, to write for a few people of special interests and whose curiosity reaches into greater detail.<sup>37</sup>

The Old English verse-line comprises: — a 'full- (or 'long-) line';  
     — consisting of two 'half- (or 'short-) lines'  
 (hemistichs), termed 'on-verse' and 'off-verse', (I and II, *a* and *b*);  
     — (counter)poised on either side of a medial  
 caesura;  
     — linked by alliteration.

Modern editions print the full-line as one, distinguishing the two halves by a gap of white space between them indicating the caesura, the most immediately conspicuous aspect of the form:

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<sup>37</sup> Ezra Pound, Canto XCVI, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1996), 679; all citations of *The Cantos* hereafter, unless otherwise specified, refer to this edition.

Wæs sē grimma gæst Grendel hāten

>Wæs sē grimma gæst Grendel hāten<sup>38</sup>

The handling and typographic representation of lineation and caesura varies from author to author, and sometimes from work to work, in the twentieth-century revival, but where—the clearest case—the Old English full-line is imitated the *tendency* is for the medial caesura *not* to be tokened. Anglo-Saxon scribes lineated verse and prose indiscriminately, but in some manuscripts (especially the ‘Cædmonian’ MS Junius 11) the caesurae are indicated by interpuncta, which may fortify the appreciation that they, as Snorri appears to do (*Háttatal*, 4) thought in terms of half-lines and pairs of half-lines.<sup>39</sup>

The structural integrity of the Old English full-line was not generally understood by the Victorians, whose usual custom was to print the hemistichs separately as successive lines—as still often the case in Old Norse alliterative verse—with

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<sup>38</sup> *Beowulf*, l. 102: Frederick Klaeber ed., *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1950); all citations of *Beowulf* hereafter refer to this edition.

<sup>39</sup> Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxv; Bliss, *An Introduction*, 10; John C. Pope, *Eight Old English Poems*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. prepared by R. D. Fulk (New York: Norton, 2001), 130-31; Peter S. Baker, *Introduction to Old English*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 120-21. It may be objected, Snorri speaks in terms of ‘lines’, or ‘verses’ rather than, explicitly, the modern ‘half-lines’; the ON noun at issue is *vísuorð*. However, what he *does* say in *Háttatal* 4 is, ‘there are *two lines*,’ and speaks of ‘the *second line*’; which, moreover, bears the ‘headstave’, whilst noting that ‘the *first line*’ features the ‘props/studdles’, whose *alliterative scheme*, NB, is ‘determined by the headstave’. It may, I would contend, be legitimate to infer from this that Snorri conceptualises ‘two lines (or verses)’ *joined by an alliterative rhyme-scheme*, and that this scheme is determined by the ‘headstave’, which occurs ‘first’ in ‘the *second line*’. It may be conceded, then, that since, and to the extent that, ‘the *two lines*’ together *form a unit linked by the alliteration*, they are indeed halves of a whole: whilst of course the structural reiteration here of the Old English ‘full-line’—two hemistichs divided by a medial caesura but unified by common alliteration across the caesura and governed by the first accentuated syllable in the second half-line—is patent. It should be noted, though, that this does not wring the withers of the fact that the modern poets accepted Sievers’ system, which Snorri moreover does not contradict, and that Snorri is speaking *not* about Old English verse but about the later ON, skaldic form of the *dróttkvætt* stanza. See further Ross, *History*, 167. I would adduce also that, as explained, the caesural-hemistichal structure is further or rather fundamentally ingrained in the fabric of the versification due to the correspondence of the hemistichs *to the formulaic phrases* from which the poetry was built: the bard improvised *by* combining formulaic half-lines and linking them by alliteration. Again, this is intrinsic to the verse.

consequences for Tennyson's versification in his "Battle of Brunanburh" translation,<sup>40</sup> and Kipling's in his "Runes on Weland's Sword" (see my Chapter I).

These hemistichs are to be understood as natural—if traditional, hence archaic<sup>41</sup>—breath-phrase speech-groups selected, condensed and formalised for verse (§ IV.)

### § I. *Syllabification.*

It arises linguistically that a verse-hemistich must consist of a *minimum* of four syllables, a concision commonly found in the original poetry.<sup>42</sup> According to the metre two or depending on verse-type three of these must be accented, whilst the economy of this condensed verse logically demands, as will become apparent, that the number of un- or lighter- stressed syllables does not proliferate. Hence although the syllable-count as such is not prescriptively stipulated as in accentual-syllabics, and may and does exceed this tetrasyllabic minimum, it is practically limited by the metrical-linguistic nature of the versification.<sup>43</sup> The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables being mandated, and the *number* of the former, the position and number of the latter is concomitantly restricted.<sup>44</sup> (§ IV.)

### § II. *Accentuation.*

Of these syllables, two are (word- and sentence-) stress-accented more comparatively heavily, delivered with greater emphasis and prominence, than the others.

Accentuation is thus as it still is in Modern English—that of normal spoken prosodic, logical or rhetorical (which may thus also involve syntactical disposition in the clause), lexical and phrasal intonation, for sense: semantic elements, expressing or contributing significantly to *meaning*, hence usually *content*-words, are stressed.

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<sup>40</sup> Alfred Tennyson, *Ballads and Other Poems* (London: C. Kegan Paul, 1880), 169-78.

<sup>41</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Sievers, "Old Germanic," 267, Pope, *Eight Poems*, 144.

<sup>43</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 14-15; J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Translating *Beowulf*," in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 64.

<sup>44</sup> Pope, *Eight Poems*, 141.

Prosodic, therefore metrical, accentuation is thus obviously also correlated to grammatical classes and morphology, the root syllables of lexical, content-words *normally* being hierarchised above grammatical, function-words—Kuhn’s *Satzpartikelgesetz*, really a linguistic codification of what will be recognised and rendered by the Germanic speaker instinctively.<sup>45</sup> A tangible example, also frequently attested in the revived poetry, is the unstressed prefix. It is important to remember that all accentuation is relative within a given environment, and that parts of speech which are not normally accented may acquire contrastive rhetorical emphasis.

Rhythmically this makes for a general preponderance of *front-stressed falling* rhythms, a prosodic bias pervasively recapitulated in the metre.<sup>46</sup>

The category of accentuation however comprises not only the *two* grades of stress included in the binarism *stressed* and *unstressed*, but extends to a tertiary subordinate, or *half-stress*.

This is *no less true* of *Modern English*, and a phenomenon which emerges clearly and recurrently in revived alliterative-accentual poetry, as in its ancient model, when scanning *compounds*. A common simple illustration is the difference between ‘a black bird’ and ‘a blackbird’. The second three-word instantiation exemplifies the three essential grades of accentuation.<sup>47</sup>

Some metrists distinguish in the half-stress a discrimination into two finer-grade levels, ‘secondary stress’ and ‘tertiary’: the simpler term ‘half-stress’ may be taken as connoting gradations of subordinate or reduced accentuation.<sup>48</sup>

The metre mandates, per minimally tetrasyllabic hemistich, two full-stresses: however, certain of the basic verse-types are formed by adding a third syllable bearing this half-stress. (§ IV).

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<sup>45</sup> Hans Kuhn, “Zur Wortstellung und –betonung im Altgermanischen,” *Pauls und Braunes Beiträge* 57 (1933): 1-109.

<sup>46</sup> Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxvi; Bliss, *An Introduction*, 6-8; Pope, *Eight Poems*, 135-38.

<sup>47</sup> Sievers, “Old Germanic,” 271-72; Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxvi-lxxxix; Bliss, *An Introduction*, 8-9, 16-17, Pope, *Eight Poems*, 139.

<sup>48</sup> Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxvi; Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 62; Pope, *Eight Poems*, 139-40, 140n21.

**i. ‘Swellverses’: Hypermetrics.**

A special variety of verse-type is the extended hypermetric mode, characterised by three rather than two full-stresses per hemistich: approximately, a normal verse (overwhelmingly **Type A, § IV**) prefixed with an extra ‘foot’, entailing alliteration on that foot.<sup>49</sup> In Old English poetry hypermetrics are introduced normally in runs of such lines evidently for an effect of extraordinary weight, slowness, and intralinear continuity: both Lewis and Bliss liken them to the Alexandrine in decasyllabics.<sup>50</sup>

Except possibly by Pound, the hypermetric does not appear to have been revived.

**ii. ‘Heavings and Sinkings’.**

The more accentuated elements in the half-line are conventionally termed ‘lifts’ (full- or half- lifts).

The un-, or least-, stressed syllables, the slurred slack of the line, constitute the ‘dips’.

This has become the standard usage for Anglo-Saxon ‘arsis/ictus’ and ‘thesis’ in Modern English, appearing in Sweet, Tolkien and Lewis, although ‘rise and fall’ or ‘drop’, are also sometimes used,<sup>51</sup> an antonymic binomial conventionally fossilising translation of Sievers’ *Hebungen* and *Senkungen* (subordinate stress, *Nebenhebung*): which appear to *originate* from the antecedent metrist, upon whose scansion Wagner relied in composing the libretto of *Der Ring*, Ludwig Etmüller (1802–1877).<sup>52</sup>

A customary and convenient nomenclature, which may commend itself in not entirely inapposite idiomatic analogy with the ‘rise and fall’ of vocal intonation, it may yet mislead, imparting the misprision that the ‘lifts’ are light, aloft, and the ‘dips’

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<sup>49</sup> Sievers, “Old Germanic,” 280-81; Sweet, *Reader*, xciv; Bliss, *An Introduction*, 25-27, “The Origin and Structure of the Old English Hypermetric Line,” *Notes and Queries* n.s. 19 (1972): 242-48; Pope, *Eight Poems*, 151-52.

<sup>50</sup> C. S. Lewis, “The Alliterative Metre”, *Lysistrata* 2 (May 1935), first reprinted in *Rehabilitations and Other Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 119-32, cited hereafter from *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 17; A. J. Bliss, “The Appreciation of Old English Metre,” in *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J. R. R. Tolkien on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Norman Davis and C. L. Wrenn (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), 39.

<sup>51</sup> Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxvi, lxxxviii passim; Tolkien “Translating *Beowulf*,” 62, 64ff.; Lewis, “Alliterative Metre”, 17-21; Pope, *Eight Poems*, 137, 140.

<sup>52</sup> *Lieder der Edda von den Nibelungen* (Zurich: Füßli und Compagnie, 1837).

heavily sunken, whereas it is the exact opposite conception which must be fostered.

It is necessary to conceptualise the accented syllables as elements of lexico-metrical *weight*, the gravamen of ponderous substance and content: *Hebungen*, ‘heaves’ of heaviness—and the un- or *lightly*-accented speech-material as *weightless*. It is crucial to comprehend that this metre is an architectonic counterpoise of stacked, loadbearing lexico-metrical stress—‘weight’ and force—pivoted in tensile balance. According to the Inklings, ‘Tough builder’s work of true stone’,<sup>53</sup> it is like ‘carving in granite’,<sup>54</sup> a ‘solid [...] structure [...] more like masonry than music.’<sup>55</sup> The underlying logic of this single, frame-structuring principle of *management of weight* so pervades and unifies the inextricably interrelated elements of this versification, that once grasped its details are rendered evident.

Pound’s reiteration of ‘heave’ in rhythmic contexts, meanwhile, seems to echo Sievers *Hebung*. He also speaks of ‘rhythm-waves’ (see Chapter II, page 110), perhaps recalling Sweet who likens the rhythm of Old English half-lines to ‘rising’, ‘falling’ or ‘unequal’ ‘waves’ (*Reader*, page lxxxix; hypermetrics are ‘three-wave verses’, xciv), ‘reinforcing’, Jones remarks, in the context of Pound’s ‘Seafarer’ and Cantos I and II, ‘the idea that this prosody is intimately suited to versifying the sea and sea-voyaging’.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 71.

<sup>54</sup> Lewis, “Alliterative Metre,” 23.

<sup>55</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics,” in *The Monsters*, 28, 30.

<sup>56</sup> Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxix, xciv; Chris Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 33. In Robert Graves’ mythic genealogy, presented in an Oxford lecture, Old English metre originates in ‘the slow pull and push of the oar [...] against the rough waves of the North Sea’: “Harp, Anvil, Oar,” in *Collected Writings on Poetry*, ed. Paul O’Prey (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1995), 189. Cf. Dennis Cronan, “Alliterative Rank in Old English Poetry,” *Studia Neophilologica* 58, Issue 2 (1986): 145-58, from which may be hypothesised, from the numerousness of words for ‘sea’ in OE poetic diction in proportion to the *frequency* of the occurrence of these in the surviving corpus, that the sea was yet more important a theme in OE poetry at the preliterate time of its diction’s formation, than it came to be at its later period of attestation. I am grateful to Dr Matthew Townend for bringing this inference to my attention. See also Phelan, *Music of Verse*, 115.

### § III. Quantity.

In Old English metrico-prosodic terms, a ‘lift’ is a *heavy* syllable, which is defined as: normally a syllable which is *both accentually* stressed, and *quantitatively* contains a long vowel (or long diphthong) nucleus, or is closed with a consonant (or consonant cluster).

A lift may also be constituted of a short stressed syllable, consisting of a short vowel with a consonant- (or consonant cluster-) coda—thus reckoned long.<sup>57</sup>

#### i. *Resolution.*

A lift may *also* be formed by a metrically *resolved* stress, as in Classical epic metre. The (verbally) consecutive combination of two short syllables, or a short stressed syllable followed by one of any weight (usually short stressed followed by a weak—according to Bliss historically two shorts of which the first was stressed), may be reckoned, by *resolution* or *auflösung*, as ‘sharing’ the accent, and be counted as adding up to the equivalent of a single heavy syllable, and hence qualifying as a ‘lift’.

A stressed short may alone count as a lift if immediately *preceded* by a stressed or unstressed long.<sup>58</sup>

Hard to understand (and explain) in abstract exposition, like much here it makes intuitive sense, and crystallises in concrete instantiations of scansion, because it describes actual metrico-prosodic linguistic behaviour elicited by *the realities of performance*, relating the syllables’ qualities of duration and accentuation in enunciation. Resolution is a grammatical fact of performance.

However, when transferred to *Modern* English linguistic reality the question arises as to whether and if so to what real extent Old English issues of quantity (vowel-length) apply, particularly with regard to the protocols pertaining to vowels followed by consonants, an aspect at least complicated by the vagaries of Modern English orthography.<sup>59</sup> It seems the quantitative ‘rules’ become more approximate in Modern

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<sup>57</sup> Sievers, “Old Germanic,” 271-72; Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 62; Lewis, “Alliterative Metre,” 16-17; Bliss, *An Introduction*, 6-9.

<sup>58</sup> Sievers, “Old Germanic,” 271; Bliss, *An Introduction*, 9-10, 13, 21-22; Pope, *Eight Poems*, 141-42.

<sup>59</sup> Lewis, “Alliterative Metre,” 16-17; Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 17.



English, but with the underlying principle of the scansion, predicated upon the stress-timed nature of the language, persisting and remaining operant, as, as in Old English, the definitive arbiter is what happens in performance.

Quantity and hence resolution are, in the Modern English revival, at once crucial and problematic questions. Bliss claims, citing the findings of Kurylowicz, that, due to certain sound-changes occurring in Middle English, resolution is impossible in Modern English—‘the main respect in which the rhythm of MnE differs from that of OE’.<sup>60</sup> However quantity and resolution are certainly assumed in Modern English by Lewis, and an important if qualified feature in Shippey’s scansions of Tolkien (who terms resolution ‘breaking’).<sup>61</sup>

Thus now *Beowulf* l. 102: caesura denoted by double vertical bar; the full-lifts capitalised:

wæs sē GRIMMa GÆST || GRENDel HĀTen

This simple example of a full-line clearly exhibits the normative structure of the twin hemistichs hinged on the fulcrum of the caesura: it may be observed how the half-lines may be likened to an equation of an essentially 4:2 || 4:2 ratio (two accentuations to four syllables). It should further be perceived that the stressed and unstressed elements in the, in this example, accentually equal—two full-lifts each—hemistichs, are manifested in *differing* arrangements.

#### § IV. Metre.

Metricality in this versification is constituted of prescribed configurations of the heavier and lighter elements within the hemistich. It might, and importantly, therefore be more exact to speak of metres. These patterns of intonation are prosodically resident in the phrasing of natural, stress-timed speech. The metre isolates and formalises them to beget a scale of rhythms—modes, riffs, *tālas*—conventionally recognised as

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<sup>60</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 10; “Appreciation,” 31; J. Kurylowicz, “Latin and Germanic Metre,” *English and Germanic Studies* 2 (1948-9): 34-38.

<sup>61</sup> Lewis, “Alliterative Metre,” 16-17, 23; Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 16, 22; Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 64.

hemistichal verse-types.

Sievers identified and typologised these as a set of six *basic* rhythmic modes, lettered **Types A - E**, with two **D**-subtypes, ordered and denoted by frequency of occurrence in the extant corpus—ascribing **A** to the most commonly occurring, followed in varying frequency by **B**, **C**, **D**, and **E** to the least.<sup>62</sup>

Known as Sievers' *Fünftypensystem*, I find it helpful here to reckon the main sub-type of the fourth type as a fifth.

In their simplest tetrasyllabic paradigms they may be tabulated, with scansion notated using:

Breve ˘ = unstressed (or comparatively very lightly stressed) syllable.

Acute ´ = fully stressed syllable.

Grave ` = intermediately stressed syllable, reduced or subordinate accent.

The table below is derived from Tolkien,<sup>63</sup> most importantly his mnemonic, prosodically-illustrative exemplifications of Sievers types in *Modern* English phrases, 'a novel but defensible procedure; for it brings out the ancestral kinship of the two languages [...] and illustrates the old unfamiliar forms by words of whose tones and accents the student has living knowledge': an ideologically and poetically pregnant statement, whose significance includes and implies, in and of itself, a revival.<sup>64</sup>

Tolkien's 'novel [...] procedure' has since been re-used, by Bliss (whose illustration of **Type A** is the Middle-earthly 'misty mountain'); by Alexander in his translations dedicated to Pound, and edition of *Beowulf*; in Chickering's *Beowulf*; the same schema is imitated by Jones, substituting phrases from Alexander's translation of *Beowulf*.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Sievers, "Old Germanic," 283; Sweet, *Reader*, xciv.

<sup>63</sup> Tolkien, "Translating *Beowulf*," 62: cf. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fall of Arthur*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2013), 228, examples from translation of *Brunanburh*. Such exemplifications were also presented by Lewis.

<sup>64</sup> Tolkien, "Translating *Beowulf*," 61.

<sup>65</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 12-13; Michael Alexander, *The Earliest English Poems*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 150; Alexander, ed., *Beowulf* (London: Penguin, 1995), xxv-i; Howell D. Chickering, Jr., ed., *Beowulf* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 30; Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 245-46.

For maximal clarification I follow Lewis here in capitalising stressed syllables, but Lewis' simple metrical representation miscarries due to oversimplification. Vicissitude betwixt uniform-sized capitals and lowercase affords him only *two* levels of stress, an insufficiency, and in the case of one line metrically misleading, since as explained this scansion requires discrimination of a minimum of *three* grades of accentuation: full-stressed, half-stressed, unstressed. I denote that subordinate stress by the additional expedience of smaller capitals.<sup>66</sup>

Note moreover, as tabulated, that the hemistichal patterns may be further characterised as being:

- of, as to the half-line contour of the whole phrase, cadentially 'rising' ('masculine'), 'falling' ('feminine'), or (medially) 'clashing' rhythm;
- of, as to the accentuation and its disposition within the hemistich, 'equal' or 'unequal' accentual weight.

That is, with regard to the weighting within the hemistich, distinguishing a phrasing to a certain extent assimilable to 'feet', but better conceptualised as breath-groups.<sup>67</sup> Thus **Types A-C** are 'equal', composed of *two* breath-groups, *each* constituted of one full-lift and one dip, in variegated arrangement, and evenly proportioned (thus **Types A and B** *can* be thought of as two trochaic and two iambic feet respectively).

**D - E**, however, are types representing in varying prescribed permutations the possibilities of including the third intermediary-grade stress. Naturally this results in these types being *heavier*, containing only one dip, and consistent with the bias of English linguistic prosody the weight is shunted to the front of the phrase, making the hemistich *unequal*—these types present an unequally accentually heavier onset—and the breath-group 'foot'-boundaries, demarcated hereunder by interpolation of single

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<sup>66</sup> Lewis, "Alliterative Metre," 17-20. 'We were talking of dragons, Tolkien and I' l. 2b *appears* unmetrical: a **Type E** requiring representation of half-stress.

<sup>67</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 6, 10, 17 *passim*; Baker, *Introduction*, 125; Pope, *Eight Poems*, 141.

vertical bar, are considered to be uneven, asymmetrical.<sup>68</sup> The concept of ‘feet’ in the Classical sense thus becomes misleading, but the division can be understood by considering the *breath expended* in phrasal delivery of the lifts.<sup>69</sup> (This proves important in interrelation with alliteration, § VI.)

*EQUAL }*

1. **Type A:** || ´ ˘ | ´ ˘ || *falling-falling* ‘KNIGHTS in| ARMour’

2. **Type B:** || ˘ ´ | ˘ ´ || *rising-rising* ‘the ROAR|ing SEA’

3. **Type C:** || ˘ ´ | ´ ˘ || *clashing* ‘on HIGH | MOUNTains’

*UNEQUAL }*

4. **Type D1:** || ´ | ´ ˘ ˘ || *falling by stages* ‘BRIGHT|ARCHANGels’

5. **Type D2:** || ´ | ´ ˘ ˘ || *broken fall* ‘BOLD| BRAZEnFACED’

6. **Type E:** || ´ ˘ ˘ | ´ || *fall and rise* ‘HIGHCRESTed |HELMs’<sup>70</sup>

The very diction and imagery chosen by Tolkien for these embodiments of the metre, revivals in miniature, might also be remarked as noteworthy for its tone and temper. His ‘knights in armour’, ‘highcrested helms’, and ‘bright archangels’ appear themselves to stem from Tolkien’s heroic, Pre-Raphaelite mentality (one could

<sup>68</sup> Sievers, “Old Germanic,” 273; Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxix-xc; Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 62; Bliss, *An Introduction*, 15 passim.

<sup>69</sup> Perhaps first understood, and best explained, by Wagner: Goldman and Sprinchorn, *Music and Drama*, 198-99. His national myth finally appearing just prior to the initial emergence of Sievers’ research, Wagner can be demonstrated to have substantially anticipated, in principle, Sievers’ representation of Germanic metre.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Sievers, “Old Germanic,” 272-73; Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxix-xc; Lewis, “Alliterative Metre,” 17-20; Bliss, *An Introduction*, 12-13.

imagine these from the pages of the Kelmscott Chaucer), whilst ‘the roaring sea’ and ‘on high mountains’ bespeak, similarly, of the Burkean natural sublime. ‘“High”, purged of the gross, and fit for the [...] adult mind of a land long [...] steeped in poetry’, they too outbreathe the air of epic ‘“heigh stile”’: the high mimetic mode Tolkien and Lewis correctly maintained as proper to alliterative versification.<sup>71</sup>

It now becomes important and possible to clarify the length of the dip. The standard notional form of the dip is monosyllabic. As raised above on syllable-count, the dips consist of no *definite* number of weak syllables in succession, but this number is *practically* restricted, by the nature of the language (the weakly-stressed parts of speech cannot, linguistically, be multiplied indefinitely between stressed, hence a row of more than three consecutive weak syllables seldom occurs) and still further metrically specified in certain positions in certain types.<sup>72</sup> The fact of polysyllabic dips is of course one limitation of the present usefulness of Classical terms such as iamb and trochee. Essentially, it is evident that the dips must not be so substantial that they weaken or mask the terse, tense rhythmic shape of the hemistich. This means that, simply put, longer dips are tolerated in the lighter and more equal types in the first dip, but decisively less so in the second. Extra unstressed syllables can *never* be accommodated *after* the half-line in Types **B** and **E**, and *must* be *monosyllabic* in **Types A, C, and D**. The—*exceptional*—maximal recorded limit to the dip in those positions in which it can be polysyllabic is seven; the first (*not* the second) dip in **B** and **C** is usually disyllabic, that in **A** usually monosyllabic, but up to six is attested. Beyond this the issue impinges upon the constitution of subtypes.<sup>73</sup>

It may be perceived that the verse-types express certain prescribed logical permutations in the organisation of relatively accented and unaccented elements. **Type A** is transposed to produce the **Type B**; **Type C** realises the juxtaposition of the two

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<sup>71</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 144-5, 238; Phelpstead also notes the Inklings’ insistence on high style (with disparagement, preferring, on unargued assumptions, Auden being ‘very unmedieval’, ‘up-to-date’, and indeed scabrous and picaresque, in ‘an essentially medieval metre’), “Auden,” 453-57.

<sup>72</sup> Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 64; Bliss, *An Introduction*, 14-15; Pope, *Eight Poems*, 141.

<sup>73</sup> Sievers, “Old Germanic,” 282, 284-85; Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxvi-lxxxviii.

‘lifts’ sundered by ‘dips’ in **A** and **B**. As noted in the forthcoming Chapter II on Pound (page 116) this Old English spondaic or ‘clashing’ rhythm (also featured in **Types D, E**) attracts much admiration in the twentieth century, remarked upon by James Joyce and Auden.<sup>74</sup> As Jones notes, such consecutive accentuation is ‘not commonly the case in traditional English accentual-syllabics’,<sup>75</sup> and this, as C. S. Lewis observes a ‘speech-rhythm’ ‘which has been allowed no metrical recognition for centuries’, is arguably a significant metrical Saxonism in Pound’s verse.<sup>76</sup>

**Types D-E** represent variations including a third subordinate ‘lift’, with the two main subtypes of **D** formed by substitutions in the cadence. **D**’s onset is indeed identical in both subtypes, but the modulation of **D2**’s terminal foot to a (moderately) rising rhythm is significant, and enumerating *it* as a basic *fifth* type also affords the advantage of presenting *six* paradigms as two groups of three.

It should also be observed that of the six basic verse-types, three, **A, C, D1**, describe fully *falling* rhythms, and of the remaining three, two, **B** and **E** are fully *rising*, leaving one, **D2**, to end on the half-lift (‘broken fall’). But (as expressed by its typological designation) the falling trochaic rhythm **A** is the most common, the norm: however, again by very definition, ‘masculine’ iambic **B** is the next most frequent.<sup>77</sup> Bliss observes that amidst the metrical variation of the verse the Anglo-Saxon poet seems to have effected frequent returns to full-line combinations comprising one **A-Type** hemistich, as if to maintain the norm within earshot.<sup>78</sup>

If **Type A** represents the norm, it will be appreciated that **Types D-E** signify an extreme from that norm: viewed thus it may be perceived how this system approximates a gamut compassing a scale ranging from a typical norm of evenness and (relative) lightness, to progressively unusual, unequal, and *heavier* (especially onset-heavy) rhythmic patterns. It begins to emerge then, for example, that **E** is

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<sup>74</sup> Alan Ansen, *The Table Talk of W. H. Auden*, ed. Nicholas Jenkins (London: Faber, 1990), 62; Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 34-35.

<sup>75</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 246.

<sup>76</sup> Lewis, “Alliterative Metre,” 19.

<sup>77</sup> Bliss, “Appreciation,” 29-31.

<sup>78</sup> Bliss, “Appreciation,” 29n5.

remotest from **A**'s norm, or how **D1** exhibits an attack of particular accentual intensity:

As to fourfold accentual 'terracing', Tolkien suggests the number 4 be assigned to a full-lift and 1 to a dip: thus to the half-lift stress may be ascribed intermediary values 2-3, though it must also be noted that in instances of consecutive accents the second is normally relatively demoted, hence in **Type C** the second lift (which may indeed be a short syllable) may be graded 3 rather than 4. Thus **A** may be expressed 4 : 1 | 4 : 1; **D1** 4 | 3 : 2 : 1; and because the hemistich echoes the language's prosodic front-stressing there is a general diminuendo of force and significance towards the end of the half-line, hence in **E** the cadential full-lift may a 3 rather than the 4 of its first-foot onset: 4 : 2 : 1 | 4/3. (So reckoned, the normal sum value of each type is 10).<sup>79</sup>

All the exponents of this versification in this thesis—all Sieversians, from Sweet to Bliss, and not excluding the recreative revivalists between—have emphasised its naturalness, its ancient cultural and linguistic nativeness and innateness. It is the only native English metre, organically intrinsic to the language. Sweet states 'The most essential element of OE metre is the natural stress of the spoken language, the rules of sentence as well as word-stress being rigorously observed'.<sup>80</sup> 'The lifts and dips utilised in this metre', explains Tolkien, 'are those occurring in any given sequence of words in natural (if formal) speech', instructing that the verse-lines should be read 'slowly, but naturally', not according to any preconceived, artificial and imposed verse-rhythm, but 'with the stresses and tones required solely by the sense [...] as judged [by] emotional and logical *significance*': echoing Lewis' enjoinder to the reader of his *Nameless Isle* to 'read all with its natural accent and carefully avoid the artificial accents of syllabic verse'.<sup>81</sup>

This is due to the cardinal recognition that the 'verse-types', corresponding to rhythmic-syntactic units of breath-group phrasal idioms, the speech-material 'from

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<sup>79</sup> Tolkien, "Translating *Beowulf*," 62, 67, 70-71; cf. Thomas M. Cable, "Clashing Stress in the Meter of *Beowulf*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 72 (1971): 42-50.

<sup>80</sup> Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxvi.

<sup>81</sup> Tolkien, "Translating *Beowulf*," 62-63, Tolkien's italics; Lewis, *Narrative Poems*, 177.

which the verse is built', are 'a selection of natural speech-patterns'.<sup>82</sup> In his contribution to the 1962 Tolkien *Festschrift*, Bliss quotes Wrenn's formulation 'the prosodic patterns of Old English poetry were primarily a rhetorically emphatic and dignified selection of patterns of actual speech', and Daunt's pointedly overstated discrimination "The "five types" are *language patterns* [...] patterns of natural language shapes [...] not metrical patterns'.<sup>83</sup>

The metres, the metricality, of this versification is thus formed, as Tolkien noted, 'not in re-arranging words to fit a special rhythm', an arbitrary metre imposed upon the speech-material as an extrinsic (and imported) convention, and within one poem a single one, 'repeated [...] in successive lines', 'but in choosing the simpler and more compact' 'word-' and 'phrase-' patterns', exposing and exhibiting, as it were, the native prosodic bone or grain of the language: 'speech-groups which have a certain race and resonance in isolation. These are the elements of our native metre'.<sup>84</sup>

Of course the full-line is composed of two half-lines, and this *intrinsic* variety and flexibility is yet furthered by regularly combining in juxtaposition *two, different*, half-line verse-types, 'independent metrical organisms', to form the full-line on either side of the caesura, the rhythmic 'patterns stand[ing] opposed to one another': 'no single pattern progress[es] from the beginning of a line to the end [...] repeated with variation in other lines'.<sup>85</sup> Bliss explicates that in this system of metre 'divergences from the norm are to be found not in the more or less exact accommodation of the speech material to the metrical pattern, but in the variation of the metrical pattern itself': 'a real difference of principle'; 'the degree of divergence from any conceivable metrical norm is far greater than would be permissible in any other form of verse'.<sup>86</sup>

Although as typology implies, and though the general principle is to combine

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<sup>82</sup> Bliss, "Appreciation," 30, *An Introduction*, 3.

<sup>83</sup> C. L. Wrenn, "On the Continuity of English Poetry," *Anglia* 76 (1958): 51-52; Marjorie Daunt, "Old English Verse and English Speech Rhythm," *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1946): 59.

<sup>84</sup> Tolkien, "Translating *Beowulf*," 62, *Arthur*, 227; Lewis, "Alliterative Metre," 22-23.

<sup>85</sup> Lewis, "Alliterative Metre," 17; Tolkien, "Translating *Beowulf*," 62; "Monsters," 30.

<sup>86</sup> Bliss, "Appreciation", 30, 30n1: prompting Bliss's telling comparisons with blank, and free, verse.



different types, full-lines constituted of two **A-Type** hemistichs are frequent and **A** is the most frequent type in both halves of the full-line, in the original poetry certain types are preferred in the on-, or off-, verses respectively, with falling **A** and **D** types more frequent in the on-, and rising **B** and rising-falling **C** types preferred in the off-: the rare **E** is more common in the off-verse. This disposition has a bearing upon the shaping of the full-line (implicating the headstave § VI.iii ) and the verse-*paragraph* (§ VII.ii.)<sup>87</sup>

The line was thus essentially a balance of two equivalent blocks [...] of different pattern and rhythm [...] an opposition [of] two halves of [...] equivalent [...] but not necessarily *equal* [...] phonetic weight and significant content more often rhythmically contrasted than similar [...] The ear [...] should attend to the shape and balance of the halves.<sup>88</sup>

*By definition*, types **A-C** are the most frequent half-lines in the metre: part of the art of this verse is to reserve the yonder three *heavier*, unequal, line-types for the expression of content of greater *significance*. This is perhaps less practicable in Modern English in which want of rhythmic interchange is less palatable; yet freely, without justification of content, to mingle all line types continually for mere sake of formal modulation, dissociatedly from what is being narrated or expressed, would compromise the capability of the metre for *meaningful* rhythmic vicissitude. That is, the formal effect of rhythmic variation should express a cause in content, deploying metrical resource conspicuously at those occasions when they may be contrived to function *tellingly*. This is a virtue, judiciously to be exercised, of the potential for rhythmic differentiation intrinsic to the metre: shuffling half-line types merely for the sake of it would weaken if not vitiate this power: *metre be meetly // to matter wedded*.

The normal transaction of the verse will hence exhibit a judicious variegation of **A-C**, a regular rhythmic counterpointing of interchanging metrical types, *for this is not a lyric form*, but one capitalising upon ‘a narrative line that [...] mean[s] business’, ‘[...] willable forward/Again and again and again’.<sup>89</sup> *Narrative* verse is rightly to be

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<sup>87</sup> Sievers, “Old Germanic,” 270, 283; Sweet, *Reader*, xciv; Bliss, *An Introduction*, 12; “Appreciation,” 29.

<sup>88</sup> Tolkien, “Monsters,” 29-30, 47, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 63.

<sup>89</sup> Seamus Heaney, trans., *Beowulf* (London: Faber, 1999), xxxiii; epigraph, ix, from “The Settle-Bed,” ll. 16-17, *Seeing Things* (London: Faber, 1991).

distinguished (just as Heaney professes) as pertaining to canons such as forward momentum and explicit efficiency of statement, from the ultimate and absolute, transcendent intensity proper to the concentration of the *lyric* genre. Alliterative verse moreover is a form of narrative poetry of a particular kind: one that, as Tolkien often stressed, aims for certain distinctive felicities to a considerable extent its own.<sup>90</sup>

The components of the versification are to be modulated to regulate the *tempo* of the verse. Inclusion of a greater proportion of unstressed syllables conduce to lighter- and swifter-flowing verse, which could be speeded by minimising the caesurae and of course preferring **As** and **Bs**, facilitating a register of smooth, even regularity; the opposite effect is hence achievable by emphatically disruptive caesurae, dividing hemistichs of the slower, denser, heavier **D-E** Types.<sup>91</sup>

It must also be emphasised that each of these main basic types entails a number of *subtypes*, those of **D** being the most numerous. These variants are of course generated by certain specified substitutions in the arrangement of strength and position of the lifts and dips, and their licensed suppression or resolution.<sup>92</sup>

The underlying logic, the overarching goal, effectively, is that the recognisable rhythmic *shape* or contour of the verse-type must be maintained, as compactly and hence discernibly as possible.

## § V. Anacrusis.

The last main syllabic-accentual issue is that of *anacrusis* or *Auftakt*, Sweet's 'prelude', by which an extra unstressed syllable (or, rarely, a 'vamp' of two) is permitted to be accommodated before the measure starts, and reckoned not to count. Logically, anacrusis is applicable theoretically only in those types beginning on a lift,

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<sup>90</sup> Tolkien, *Arthur*, 226; J. R. R. Tolkien, trans., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl and Sir Orfeo*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 1995), 2.

<sup>91</sup> Donald G. Scragg, "The Nature of Old English Verse," in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcom Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 61-63; Barbara C. Raw, *The Art and Background of Old English Poetry* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), 97-122.

<sup>92</sup> Sievers, "Old Germanic," 274-75, 283-85, Tolkien, "Translating *Beowulf*," 64-65; Bliss, *An Introduction*, 13-24, Pope, *Eight Poems*, 144-48.

**A, D, E**; actually it appears attested only in **A** and **D**, frequently in the former (particularly in an **A** subtype), less commonly in the latter. Also by structural logic anacrusis is a phenomenon largely restricted to the beginning of the full-line before the commencement of the on-verse; and, because of the headstave (§ **VI.iii**), it is avoided in the off-<sup>93</sup>

## § VI. ‘Alliteration’.

The foregoing delineates how this versification is caesural, syllabic, accentual, and involves a quantitative component. Yet it is customarily labelled ‘alliterative verse’.<sup>94</sup> A form of verse could be composed in the metre thus far described but a structural deficiency would become evident.<sup>95</sup> The two hemistichal units, two independent blocks of metrico-lexical weight, in usually *differing* configurations of lifts and dips, orbit gravitationally, or hover magnetised, at the medial caesura; but each is also exerting force *away* from the caesura, because of that weight and discrete rhythmic character, pulling apart in opposite directions: the incipient full-line is liable to fall asunder into its halves. It is not *yet a line*, but rather still two verses.

Instead of the *end*-rhyme of the latterly-familiar couplet, this form utilises *head*-rhyme, internally to the two hemistichs, the *initial* sound of the *accented* syllables. This ‘alliteration’ (depending not on *letters*, graphemes, but phonemes) is the last, *clinching*, device in the architectonics of the line.

*As a rule*, the fourth position, the second lift in the off-verse, does *not* participate in the alliteration: except in the special cases of two fancy chiasmic schemes. The alliteration may be patterned in four ways (another quaternity of variables); employing here *a* and *b* as in traditional notation of end-rhyme, and *x* for a non-alliterating syllable:

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<sup>93</sup> Sievers, “Old Germanic,” 273; Sweet, *Reader*, xci; Lewis, “Alliterative Metre,” 18; Bliss, *An Introduction*, 16; Pope, *Eight Poems*, 142-43.

<sup>94</sup> On the concept of ‘alliteration’ *per se* and as a rhetorical and poetic phenomenon see further Jonathan Roper, ed., *Alliteration in Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 5-17 *passim*.

<sup>95</sup> Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 66; Lewis, “Alliterative Metre,” 15.

1. a x || a x : 'simple'
2. a a || a x : 'full'        } normal
3. a b || a b : 'crossed'
4. a b || b a : 'double'    } special

This alliteration is not ornamental, but *functional*.<sup>96</sup> Its function is threefold, and to all three its 'inseparable connexion' with the accentuation (it only counts as the initial sounds of the lifts) and hence sense-content, is essential.<sup>97</sup> It serves to pick out, point up, the first three main sense+stress words of the full-line; to associate these by sound and thus to suggest relationships in sense; and by that sonic association (rhyming) to *link* these three main sonic-semantic beats in a span across the line, thereby bracing in tension the two opposing members of the paired hemistichs (now 'rhymed' distichs) together. Two main forces hence co-act upon the full-line: the weights of the hemistichs pulling apart, and the brace of the alliteration pushing them together.

In the *on*-verse incidence of alliteration is governed by relative stress.<sup>98</sup> The *one* of the two lifts which takes the *heaviest* stress is *required* to participate in the alliteration. This will typically be the *first unless* decidedly weaker than the second,<sup>99</sup> according to 'Sievers' Law' (of Precedence).<sup>100</sup> Both lifts in the *on*-verse are permitted to alliterate; it is not proscribed when the two are of unequal accentuation, but it is expected as regular when the two are of roughly equal weight.<sup>101</sup> This kind of *on*-verse *double* alliteration does *not* (of course) occur in the *off*-verse. Bliss asserts that it is 'nearly compulsory whenever the second breath-group' within the hemistich exceeds the strength of the first.<sup>102</sup> That is, double alliteration is expected in the heavier patterns, emphasising once again how alliteration is wedded to accentuation and

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<sup>96</sup> Sievers, "Old Germanic," 277, 285; Tolkien, "Translating *Beowulf*," 66-67.

<sup>97</sup> Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxvii.

<sup>98</sup> Pope, *Eight Poems*, 134.

<sup>99</sup> Sievers, "Old Germanic," 277; Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxvii.

<sup>100</sup> In fact first recognised by Rieger; Pope, *Eight Poems*, 134; Sievers, "Old Germanic," 278-79.

<sup>101</sup> Sievers, "Old Germanic," 277; Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxvii-lxxxviii.

<sup>102</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 16-17.

content.<sup>103</sup>

This frequent ‘full’ alliterative pattern recapitulates, with headrhyming emphasis and association of the *first three* lifts across the line, the general principle of ingrained bias (in which, therefore, the poetic diction is also implicated, §VII.iii) towards front-stressing, focussing sonic-semantic weight at the *onset* of utterance; the rhythmic profile on the hemistichal level is preponderantly falling, as well as on the horizon of the full-line, a ‘fall[ing] away in force and significance together’.<sup>104</sup> The cadence of the full-line can hence be seen to be leading in to the ensuing on-verse of the next line, a metrical shaping correlated to this verse’s *style*, its rhetoric, syntax, and characteristic techniques of arrangement in presenting content (§VII).

Logically, this architecture is, then, vitiated by the chiasmic schemes, since these comprise alliteration on the fourth lift, as well as tending to impair the headstave (§ VI. iii), and should thus be regarded as a special provision of an exceptionally additional capacity for variation supplying an extraordinary effect.<sup>105</sup>

#### *i. Consonantal.*

In classical practice *s*-consonant clusters *sc-*, *sp-*, *st-*, are treated as single consonants (or ‘consonantal diphthongs’, of individual phonetic character) alliterating only with the selfsame cluster, probably for historical linguistic reasons; according to Sweet *sn-*, *sw-* with *s-*.<sup>106</sup>

#### *ii. Vocalic.*

*All vowels* are treated as alliterating with one another. It is not the vowel-quality which alliterates, but, in the absence of a particular consonant, originally the glottal stop preceding vocalic articulation, just as in the modern interjection ‘Uh-oh!’ As a poetic refinement, *since* linguistically initial vowels were insufficiently frequent to alliterate identically, there is a tendency to alliterate different vowels: Snorri (*Háttatal*, 4) avows skaldship considers headrhyming identical vowels inelegant; the evidence suggests a

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<sup>103</sup> Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxvii; Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 67-68, *Gawain*, 150; Pope, *Eight Poems*, 134.

<sup>104</sup> Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 67, 70-71, *Arthur*, 228-29.

<sup>105</sup> Sievers, “Old Germanic,” 277, Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 68.

<sup>106</sup> Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxv; Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 66, Bliss, *An Introduction*, 11.

similar stylistic canon may have obtained among the *scopas*.<sup>107</sup>

### iii. *The Headstave.*

The most important position in every respect in the full-line is however in the *off*-verse: the *first* lift in that hemistich, after the caesura. The initial sound of this syllable determines the alliterative scheme of the full-line: with *it* the initial sound of at least the stronger of the two lifts in the *on*-verse *must* chime. It is dubbed by Snorri the *hǫfuðstafr*, ‘headstave’: the kingpost; the keynote, clef; keystone of the line’s arch (*Háttatal*, 4). Snorri, consistently with this timber-framing terminology—all the alliterating lifts he nominates *stafir*, ‘staves’—names these two positions in the *on*-verse *stuðlar*, singular *stuðill*, ‘props, supports’ (*Háttatal*, 4). Sweet calls these ‘under-staves’.<sup>108</sup>

But, just as *stafr* is cognate with Old English *stæf* > ‘stave’ (cf. German *Stabreim*), Snorri’s *stuðill* is cognate with Old English *stud/ðu*, > ‘stud’, ‘one of the smaller upright timbers between principle posts in framing a wall’ as in lath-and-plaster or half-timbered ‘stud-wall’, ‘studding’, ‘studwork’ (also metallurgic ‘stud-welding’), whilst *stuðill* itself is represented in Modern English ‘studdle’ < Old English *stodl*, having the same senses as ‘stud’ with special connotations of the posts in a mineshaft, and the beams of a loom. (‘Stave’ also brings musical associations; a loom, textual.) ‘Headstave’ and ‘studdle’ could thus be the Modern English terms.

In the so-called “Málskrúðsfræði” section of the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld echoes Snorri’s *stuðill* and *hǫfuðstafr*, remarking that alliteration holds the verse together as nails do a ship.<sup>109</sup> Though Tolkien and Lewis symbolised the metre as stonework ‘strong to stand’<sup>110</sup> Ross notes that the ‘indigenous’ skaldic terminology is drawn from weapon-smithing and carpentry, including as noted shipwrighting: drawing us back into the authentic technology of the early-medieval

<sup>107</sup> Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxv; Bliss, *An Introduction*, 11 Pope, *Eight Poems*, 130, 133.

<sup>108</sup> Sweet, *Reader*, lxxxv; Sievers, “Old Germanic,” 276.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. *Maxims* 1B, l. 23a, in T.A. Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1976), 68: all citations of the *Maxims* hereafter from this edition, 64-79. Ross, *History*, 87, 199.

<sup>110</sup> Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 71.

North.<sup>111</sup> The alliterations across the full-line can be thought of as a row of gleaming rivets nailing the clinkered lapstrakes which flex as the ship rides; or the iron bands the *Beowulf*-poet details bracing the timbers framing Heorot; the headstave lays the keel.<sup>112</sup>

Alliteration finds<sup>113</sup> the ‘loyal letters’<sup>114</sup> ‘leading from word to word’,<sup>115</sup> and spell-binds<sup>116</sup> them into a locked, unbreakable pattern, a single-shaped, indissoluble, lexicometrical organism<sup>117</sup> working thereafter as *aide-memoire* sonic-conceptual linkage; but it acquires the quality of appearing to elicit and actualise phonosemantic connexions apprehended as seeming meaningfully, non-arbitrarily, predestined, resident and latent *within* the language.

This kinship between words in a wordstock, signalled by initial sound, renders alliteration not an ornament, but meaningful, functional: a token of innate linguistic, emotional and conceptual *association*, capable poetically of signifying affinity or contrast.

Accentual-alliterative metre not only patterns phonic articulation, orchestrating the most emphatic, primordially expressive elements in pronounced speech with concentrated declamatory force, but seems also to impinge thereby upon, and render tangible, the very roots of speech, the quick of the oral-aural word, linguistic signification; the way the human mind and mouth produce and arrange semantic sound.

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<sup>111</sup> Ross terminology from metal- and woodworking, *History*, 39, 84-90.

<sup>112</sup> *Beowulf* ll. 771-75a.

<sup>113</sup> *Beowulf* ll. 867b-874a. Cf. Romance *trobar, trover > trouvère*, ‘troubadour’.

<sup>114</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, eds., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 2, ll. 31-35. Citations of the ME *Gawain* refer to this edition.

<sup>115</sup> *Hávamál*, stanza 141, ll. 4-5, in Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Eddukvæði (Sæmundar-Edda)*, (Reykjavik: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1949), 1:60; Ursula Dronke, trans. and ed., *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3:31.

<sup>116</sup> *Beowulf* ll. 867b-874a.

<sup>117</sup> Incidentally affording modern editors metrical criteria to identify textual corruption: Bliss, *An Introduction*, 1; Pope, *Eight Poems*, 131.

The metrical principle of alliteration, as sonic linkage effecting rhythmic and conceptual pointing and binding of the phrase, in creating associative patterns of similitude and antithesis, survived through Middle and Early Modern, and persists in Modern English, typifying innumerable pithy proverbial apothegms ingrained in speech—a vernacular tradition of trenchant, memorable utterance—and now exploited in headlines, political watchwords, advertising slogans.<sup>118</sup> In such idioms may be observed an exemplification of how Old English poetry’s syntactic tensility, syllabic economy (laconic, lapidary ellipsis of ‘little words’); semantic-rhythmic drive induced and promoted by the metrical form; and its clinching alliterations hammering home sentence, can combine to formulate pronouncements of conclusive emphasis. This efficacious verbal terseness, enabled by and capitalising upon the impact of compact archaic syntax, and expressive, contrastive or comparative, deployment of initial rhyme, might be epitomised as a ‘weaponisation’ of language: ‘brains or brawn’, ‘agree like chalk and cheese’, ‘cruel to be kind’, ‘neither hide nor hair’, ‘love laughs at locksmiths’, ‘practice what you preach’, ‘spoils the child who spares the rod’; ‘back to basics’, ‘keep calm, and carry on’.

Returning now to our sample (and simple) full-line, *Beowulf* 1.102, scansion may be accomplished and represented incorporating all interacting metrical components, with metrical type stated for each hemistich, following the practice of Tolkien and Lewis:<sup>119</sup>

Wæs sē grimma gæst Grendel hāten>

**Type B**  $\tilde{\ } \acute{\ } | \tilde{\ } \acute{\ } ||$  wæs sē GRIMMa GĀEST || GREndel HĀTen **Type A**  $\acute{\ } \tilde{\ } | \acute{\ } \tilde{\ } ||$

The alliterative scheme in this line appears to be ‘full’, but the *g*-consonant-clusters prove differentiated further. The *first* studdle, in this case the adjective, bears the *strongest* stress in the on-verse, and is headrhymed, attributing a typifying grimness,

<sup>118</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 4, “Appreciation,” 32; Daunt, “Speech Rhythm,” 56-72; F. N. Scott, “The Accentual Structure of Isolable English Phrases,” *PMLA* 33 (1918): 73-84.

<sup>119</sup> Lewis, “Alliterative Metre,” 24-26; Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 63, 68; *The Lays of Beleriand*, vol. 4 of *The History of Middle-earth*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985; citations refer to London: HarperCollins, 2002), 140-41; *Arthur*, 232-33.



with exact phonetic discrimination (and creating a succession of onomatopoeic growls or grinding teeth) with the initial consonant-cluster of the headstave, here eminently exemplified: suitably occupied by the subject, and proper noun, ‘Grendel’, the poem’s major named antagonist.

## § VII. Verse-Style.

### *i. Caesura and Hemistich to Full-line.*

Each hemistich is the rhythmic-rhetorical unit, an independent lexico-metrical phrase, regularly of contrasting rhythm, coinciding with a more or less discrete unit of sense.<sup>120</sup>

Hence the full-line represents a dialectic juxtaposition of terms, two abutted shapes of phonetic and lexical meaning. In some sense and degree on-verse answers to off-verse across the line. The binary structure must be ‘endemic’ to the speech-material, implicating metre and syntax, the duple hemistichal phrasal idioms falling into veritable rhythmic movements with a real medial break.

Thus the caesura’s fulcrum must register as some degree of breath-pause, hinging the twinned hemistichs’ compare-or-contrast equation of restatement or antithetical contrast.

The caesura is another component of this versification of variables capable of modulation of ‘weight’, differentiation in the degree of interval it interposes in the continuity of the line—effecting, combined with syllable-tally and accentuation, manifold impact of rhetorical-rhythmic shaping and tempo upon half- and full-line—from minimally notional, agogic hesitation, to clausal periods equivalent to modern commas or colons, to full arrest in the flow of syntax. Not merely a new sentence may often, but a new verse-paragraph could theoretically, begin with the off-verse; but both mid- and end-line break were of course variably finessed.

Metrically the caesura regularly heralds a rhythmical gearshift in the line, since the full-line juxtaposes two verse-types: a pregnant hesitation anticipating the headstave, a suspension syncopating hence amplifying the attack on the impending third main beat.

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<sup>120</sup> Lewis, “Alliterative Metre,” 22-23; Bliss, *An Introduction*, 2-6, 104; Pope, *Eight Poems*, 131.

The full-line hence assumes the condition of a musical rhetoric of suspense, an architectonics of sustained tension. It affords the poet multiple capabilities for dramatic manipulation by controlled, patterned deployment of the line's various, interacting component dynamics of sound and sense, for framing the kingpin and locking the line's forces dovetailed around it. The on-verse raises a certain range of possibilities in expectation of the off-, deferred till beyond the caesura, when all schemes mesh at the headstave's climactic sonic-semantic focus, the lynchpin of maximum phonetic, lexical, accentual and rhetorical significance and emphasis at which all the potential of the line converges in resolution.

*ii. Half-line to Paragraph.*

Attention must now shift focus from worm's view to eagle-eyed, from the microcosmic level of the single full-line, as one horizontal continuum spanning left to right, to view the macrocosmic dimensions of this verse, proceeding from *metre* to the importantly characteristic components of the verse *style*. These formal components of metre and style are interlocked; in turn likewise inextricably implicating syntax and diction; therefore, accordingly the rhetoric, register, mode or genre—even theme, content—*inherently proper* to the poetry.

The hemistich is a unit subordinate, yet in an important sense autonomous, to the line, which is in turn subordinate to passage, *paragraph*; and so on, to *narration*. Old English verse as we have it—in a fashion *inscribed in its very versecraft*—is *stichic*, *not*, as a rule, *stanzaic*.<sup>121</sup> The lines are not merely prone to enjambement (Hopkins' 'roving-over') but are *inherently* designed for and encourage it: this poetry is projected in continuous declamatory passages of variegated and run-on lines, *wordum wrixlan*.<sup>122</sup>

Phrasing is so conducted that this verse can move both *horizontally*, from on-verse flowing across caesura to off- within the single full-line; and *diagonally*, from caesura to off-verse across the end-line break to succeeding on-verse (enjambement as in the blank-verse paragraph). True of all enjambed verse, this verse-syntax is integral to Old English technique due to its constitutive hemistich-plus-caesura structure. It was noted

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<sup>121</sup> Sievers, "Old Germanic," 268-69, 286.

<sup>122</sup> *Beowulf*, l. 874a.

initially the medieval makers may have thought principally in terms of the half-line and combinations (including oral-formulaic runs) of half-lines, and it has been shown that the verse is *built* from these hemistichal rhythmic phrasal idioms.

Whilst the full-line, locked by the caesura and stave-rhyme, is nonetheless one, horizontal, axis in the verse, the half-lines are active conducting sense and content diagonally, phrasing through, with, or against the metrical units, syntax typically straddling end-line breaks—the ends of clauses and sentences coinciding more often mid-line at the caesura after the on-verse, than after the off- at the close of the full-line, though the run of sentences *can* override both. ‘Sense break and metrical [...] are usually opposed’, states Tolkien, discussing the ‘verse-period’; ‘the stop comes normally in the middle of the line’.<sup>123</sup> Bliss elaborates: ‘clauses[...] are linked [...] by the metrical structure of the line, complete break normally at beginning of new paragraph’.<sup>124</sup> This enjambement has been termed *Hakenstil*, ‘hooked-style’, in contradistinction to end-stopped *Zeilenstil*: self-contained, end-stopped hemistichs, paratactically juxtaposed, linked only to their off-verses by alliteration, are contrasted against developments of enjambed lines extending complex subordinated syntactical constructions.<sup>125</sup>

Hence poetic design is amplified beyond the linear level, to the shaping and patterning of larger passages of rhythm, from group to paragraph: the management of the conduct of the verse over its continuous paragraphing as orchestrated through the constantly varying, in weight and speed, pace and pause, counterpoint of apposed half- and full-line units. It is in such extended runs of lines ringing every change that the form and its style really comes into its own, projecting a flexing gait of breath and pulse, a *tempo rubato* vital to this *poiesis*: termed by Stopford Brooke (1832-1916) ‘the proper ebb and flow of Anglo-Saxon verse’ (see Chapter II pages 114, 118),

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<sup>123</sup> Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 70.

<sup>124</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 29; cf. Sievers, “Old Germanic,” 279-80, Sweet, *Reader*, xciv, Lewis, “Alliterative Metre,” 22-23.

<sup>125</sup> R. D. Fulk et al., eds., *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), clxi; Scragg, “Nature,” 60-61; Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 19-21, 23-25.

Alexander's 'check and run of Old English syntax and versification', whose 'interplay [...] makes the life of Old English verse'.<sup>126</sup>

### *iii. Diction and Rhetoric to Episode and Narrative.*

It has been explained how the full-line combines the halves in appositive juxtaposition of equivalent blocks of material, often enjambed in 'hooked' syntax diagonally, whilst horizontally the half-lines tend to paratactic or asyndetic coordination on either side of the caesura; and how, importantly, the verse-types preponderantly shunt their freight of accentuation and content, front-heavily, to the onset of the hemistich, especially in the off-verse beginning with its headstave, begetting a fall in force and significance towards the cadences.

Interconnected with this verse-syntax is the characteristic Old English poetic rhetoric by which 'the more significant elements in the preceding [off-verse] were frequently caught up and re-echoed or elaborated' in the ensuing on-verse, by which sense is restated, in differing aspects, suspended variously through the symmetries of the lines: that device of parallelism or variation Klaeber extolled as 'the very soul of the Old English poetical style'.<sup>127</sup> 'This "parallelism" is characteristic of [...] style and structure [...]. It both favours and is favoured by the metre [...]. So all Old English verse is rich in parallelisms and verbal variations'.<sup>128</sup> The half-lines seem to float in a forcefield: the characteristically unstraightforward 'one-step forward two-steps back' effect of the poetry: 'In Old English breadth, fullness, reflection, elegiac effect, were aimed at [...] the slow unfolding of an epic theme.'<sup>129</sup>

This parallelism and repetition of 'separate strokes' in 'parallel [...] with no expressed conjunction' is extended from the arrangement of period and passage, and 'written large' in the shaping of the whole narrative: narratives inlaid, braided like

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<sup>126</sup> Michael Alexander, *The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 69. Also identified in quantitative metre, and termed 'stirre', by George Puttenham (in 1589).

<sup>127</sup> Klaeber, *Beowulf*, lxxv; Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959), 39-70; Fred C. Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press), 1985.

<sup>128</sup> Tolkien, "Translating *Beowulf*," 71, *Arthur*, 229.

<sup>129</sup> Tolkien, *Sigurd*, 17, 20.

interlace-patterns, likewise characterised by modulated repetition, juxtaposed contrasting or elaborating ‘digressions and episodes’, making us perceive, as content is transmitted—sprouts and twines—shuttling sense through the syntactic weft, weaving through the half-lines—how this verse embodies in its texture and movement the very bequeathing and ravelling of Story.<sup>130</sup>

Thus the nature of the poetry impelled the phrasal idioms represented by the half-line to assume the status of stock poetic *formulae* in an originally bardic tradition of oral-formulaic improvisation, the formula coinciding with the hemistich: begetting a lexically and metrically stereotyped, poetic, mode of language.<sup>131</sup>

Variation, and the exigency of alliteration, demanded the development of a specialised traditional poetic *diction*, conventional for epic, of *synonyms* and near-synonyms, while front-stressing and the accentual and morpho-syntactic concentration characteristic of the speech-rhythms formalised as metrical favoured, as may readily be perceived from the heavier types comprising consecutive stresses, *compounding*, including the riddling *kennings*. ‘The success of alliterative poetry could [...] be said to depend on the size of the vocabulary’ constituted of these ‘archaic’ ‘obsolete’ words and ‘special compounds’.<sup>132</sup>

Therefore Anglo-Saxon poetry was a form whose whole, culturally collective, impersonal style, constellating at once metre, vocabulary, syntax, tropes, and concomitant heroic-narrative content, was—*intrinsically*—specially ‘poetical’, ‘high’, traditional and archaising. The inherited ‘wordhoard’ treasured up a thesaurus of heirlooms, ‘“poetical”’ dictional and formulaic ‘*archaisms* [...] preserved by [...] tradition’, ‘artificially maintained as an elevated [...] poetic language [...]’, a ‘native

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<sup>130</sup> Tolkien, “Monsters,” 28, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 71; John Leyerle, “The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 37 (1967): 1-17, cf. skaldic term *stæltr*, ‘inlaid’ (with hammered steel), *Háttatal*, 10; Ross, *History*, 39.

<sup>131</sup> Francis P. Magoun, “The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry,” *Speculum* 28 (1953): 446-67; A. Campbell, “The Old English Epic Style,” in Davis and Wrenn, *English and Medieval*, 13-26: cf. *Beowulf* ll. 867b-75, etc. *guma gilphlæden, gidda gemyndig* [...]

<sup>132</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 28-29; Sweet, *Reader*, xciv.

tradition’ ‘of many-storied antiquity’,<sup>133</sup> whose ‘poetical, archaic, artificial’, compounds, kennings and synonyms<sup>134</sup> expedited ‘a weighty packing of the language in sense and form’<sup>135</sup>—‘DICHTEN=CONDENSARE’—‘intensely [...]concentrated’ within ‘a slow sonorous metre made of short balanced word groups’, itself ‘conservative [...] archaic’, preserving ‘speech-patterns already obsolete’ in colloquial and prose language.<sup>136</sup>

Old English versification may thus be understood as a set, an array, of inextricably interacting metrical parts—an endlessly beguiling feat of ‘Dark Age’ engineering or architectonics—which the poet skilfully combines and modulates in variegated permutations, exploiting, by continual adjustment of his songcarpentry, to the utmost every available formal capacity for judicious vicissitude—*wordum wrixlan*.

***Modern Mystique: The Tale of the Tribe.***

Thus Old English metre is best likened to Classical hexameter—as in Pound’s Saxonising of the *nekuia*; to English heroic blank verse, Shakespearean-dramatic or Miltonic-epic (and choric); and to the latter’s ‘free verse’ posterity. Pope sets (Franciscus Junius’ friend) Milton’s note concerning ‘sense variously drawn out from one Verse into another’ in ‘English Heroic Verse’ on the title page of his *Rhythm of Beowulf*. Bliss’ contribution to the Tolkien *Festschrift* develops an extensive comparison between Old English verse and the iambic pentameter tradition, his ‘thesis’, ‘that the native rhythm, as formalised in OE verse, is always present in the pentameter line’, the *central narrative-verse* medium in English from Surrey and Marlowe to Browning, ‘but accommodated to an arbitrary [accentual-syllabic] pattern’: thus in Shakespeare, Milton, and Tennyson, ‘the old native rhythm still [...] break[s] through’.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Tolkien, *Arthur*, 229 (Tolkien’s italics); “Translating *Beowulf*,” 54-55; *The Old English Exodus: Text, Translation and Commentary by J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Joan Turville-Petre (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 133; “Monsters,” 46.

<sup>134</sup> Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 51-54, 57-59, 60, 69; *Arthur*, 229-30.

<sup>135</sup> Tolkien, *Sigurd*, 7.

<sup>136</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 3; “Appreciation,” 28. For Pound’s ‘DICHTEN=CONDENSARE’ see *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1987), 92.

<sup>137</sup> Bliss, “Appreciation,” 32-40, 37.

The same comparison conducted in Bliss' *Introduction*, appraising how much the Old English and the blank verse line have in common, recalls Auden claiming, 'the basic English line has four stresses [...] French works on an entirely different principle. [...] In the *Beowulf* line you keep hearing the base in blank verse', proceeding to scan *Paradise Lost* line 46 accordingly.<sup>138</sup> The postulate that English verse throughout its history is bottomed on an Anglo-Saxon strong-stress tetrametrical groundbeat, a prosodic kernel of four accents—as witnessed by ballad-metre and nursery-rhymes and Auden's blank verse, less pentametrical than characterised as four accents *plus one*, and that fifth being very often demoted in prominence relative to the predominant tetrad—predicated on the essential, ineradicably stress-timed linguistic basis of English, is traceable at least to Edwin Guest's 1838 *History of English Rhythms*—according to Saintsbury a 'falsehood' with 'more lives than a cat' against which his *Historical Manual* was 'directly and deliberately bent'.<sup>139</sup>

For the foregoing reasons, as argued here, holistically from linguistic roots up, it may be perceived—and the import recognised—that this is *intrinsically not a lyric* form. Its proper genres, for which it was originally designed, to which it is inherently suited, for which traditionally employed, are ethopoeic-elegiac, gnomic-didactic, and heroic-epic: extensive, impersonal poetry. The riddle is admittedly short, but not lyric, any more than is the *pula*. *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *Deor* are quasi-dramatic, allusive of *narrative*. Any modern revival of this verse restricted to *lyric* is therefore only an incomplete emulation of its original, and inauthentic, unfaithful to the intrinsic technical character of the form, its native capabilities and propensities. Rather, we should look to modern alliterative verse engaged in *narrative*.<sup>140</sup> This is, radically in every sense, and in all its inherent interrelated formal properties, an *epic* style.<sup>141</sup>

For Tolkien and Pound, the engagement with early medieval Germanic literature (as with Wagner and Morris amidst the Romantic-Nationalist philology of the previous

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<sup>138</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 5-6; Ansen, *Table Talk*, 61.

<sup>139</sup> George Saintsbury, *Historical Manual of English Prosody* (repr. New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 133.

<sup>140</sup> Phelpstead, "Auden," 439, 457. Contrast Jones' concentration on *lyric* in *Strange Likeness*.

<sup>141</sup> Campbell, "Epic Style," 13-26.

century) is connected to the heroic, indeed cosmogonic project—the ambition to create Epic. Pound appropriates a phrase from Kipling’s legend of the birth of storytelling (‘give Rudyard credit’), sloganising his *Cantos* ‘the Tale of the Tribe’ (a **Type B**),<sup>142</sup> defining the epic ‘a poem containing history’:<sup>143</sup> Tolkien, suffering from ‘the epic temperament’ speaks of recovering from medieval materials ‘a mythology for England’, ‘sett[ing] myself [the] task [...] to restore to the English an epic tradition and [...] a mythology.’<sup>144</sup>

It might be interjected that, curiously, though the epic became technically problematic in twentieth-century poetry, not a whit was there any culturally contextual lack of interest in mythopoeia. Myth, even heroic myth, was, elsewhere in the century of Freud, Jung and Frazer, far from regarded as anachronistic or irrelevant. In addition to its importance to Eliot and Pound, it is ubiquitous in the work of their contemporaries David Jones, Joyce, Robert Graves, D. H. Lawrence. Having been rediscovered by the German Romantics myth was of course rife in contemporary psychoanalysis and analytical psychology; among historians of comparative religion such as Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009), and mythographers such as Georges Dumézil (1898-1986) or Joseph Campbell (1904-1987): all of whom of exerted in turn no small impact upon literature. Within literary criticism and theory, Eleazar Meletinsky (1918-2005) and Vladimir Propp (1895-1970) might be mentioned, whilst Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* appeared two years after *The Return of the King* (1957). Still closer to home for Tolkien, Lewis and Auden are the studies of myth and epic authored by G. R. Levy (1884-1966), W. F. Jackson Knight (1895–1964), and C. M. Bowra (1898-1971).<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Pound, *Guide*, 194; *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-41*, ed. D.D. Paige, (London: Faber, 1950), 294; Michael André Bernstein, *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 7-9 passim; from Kipling’s “Literature” (Royal Academy Dinner, May 1906), in *A Book of Words* (London: Macmillan, 1928), 3-5.

<sup>143</sup> *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1954), 86.

<sup>144</sup> *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 90, 144-45, 231.

<sup>145</sup> E.g., Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber, 1948); Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon Books 1949); G. R. Levy, *The Sword from the Rock: An Investigation into the Origins of Epic Literature and the Development of the Hero* (London: Faber, 1953); Bowra, *From Virgil to Milton* (London: Macmillan, 1945); *Heroic Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1952); *Primitive*



Alliterative metre appeared to some to offer ‘an answerable style,’ a form for this project, in the twentieth century. Although fashion favoured progressive informality of versification, a colloquial, conversational register of quotidian diction, and generically the short, personal or private lyric—or the ‘realist’ bourgeois novel—the possibility of this form for poetry of the opposite kind, lengthy, formal, impersonal, became apparent to Pound, the Inklings, Auden, and the later Eliot.

The form, then, *arises from* the language. The ascendancy resides with the latter of these two: literature is made from, actualises, language. A given language is positively, in and of itself, ‘essential[ly]’ a tradition, ‘the very mode in which [its] literature exists’.<sup>146</sup> Forms likewise are traditions. The poetry arises from the form; the nature of the poetry *arises from* its *formal* constitution; what I have termed ‘the mystique of the technique’, proceeds *from* the technique. That form is, therefore, properly indissolubly interrelated with a style, which in turn annexes diction, tone, rhetoric, and even genre, mode, and theme. It is all integrally one.

Form itself is also content; *form* has—*is*—*meaning*: poetry being *ab initio* a method of cognition, and poetic form the mental instrument, not externally-affixed accidental apparatus, of that intellection, utterly interlocked with versification. Versification functions to elicit, organise, and express poetic *thought*. *Poiesis* is a cohesive totality.

These properties cannot be dismembered, dissociated from the entity of the mode, without belying and vitiating the true intrinsic nature and constitution of the form, and without sacrifice of technical and stylistic integrity.<sup>147</sup> The form is not a blank, a negatively neutral vehicle to be divorced from its linguistic, cultural and historical origins, and from its own proper *intrinsic* nature, and re-applied, extrinsically, to any style and theme; rather it is, or implicates, a style and theme as such, of itself. It is all part and parcel, of a piece: opportunistically detaching and adventitiously re-applying components of this metre to any, arbitrary, style or theme is tantamount to an unmaking, rendering the components irrationally dissociated from their inherently-

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*Song* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962). Lewis’ own *Preface to Paradise Lost*, in part a defence of epic, appeared in 1942 (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

<sup>146</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6-7.

<sup>147</sup> Tolkien, “Monsters”, 14, *Letters*, 226.

natured purpose and function: ‘effects without causes’, a disunion violating the canon of decorum—the unity of style, form and content.

Hence it makes, arguably, little aesthetic sense to revive alliterative verse for informal lyric in a colloquial idiom on personal and contemporary themes, in disjunctive contradiction to the qualities and capabilities intrinsically proper to the form and style.<sup>148</sup>

The contention that Old English *poiesis* is essentially narrative and, as strongly contended by Bliss, most closely comparable to enjambed, paragraphed blank verse is problematic with regard to Pound, anti-Miltonic, end-stopping, breaker of the pentameter. Yet the verse-paragraph is much in evidence in the earlier poetry which includes ‘The Seafarer’ and, indeed, the blank verse *Ur-Cantos*. Again, whilst Pound’s poetics are arguably lyric in principle and *The Cantos* ‘narrative’ in a sense which requires qualification, there can scarcely be any need to observe that Pound far from lacked commitment to the long poem: *The Cantos* is patently, avowedly, an epic project. ‘For forty years I have schooled myself [...] to write an epic poem [...]’<sup>149</sup>

Pound found in Old English a *substitute for* blank verse, by which he could retain some of its properties, equated with the Homeric, adapting its other qualities assimilable to *vers libre* and the ‘ideogrammic method’. Fenollosa’s representation, ‘a fantasia on themes from German Idealism’ with affinities to the notion of an Adamic perfect language,<sup>150</sup> of Chinese as an inherently poetic primitive language, irresistibly recalls, as Atherton has already argued, *Sweet*’s German Romantic construction of Old English as a ‘natural’ poetry of ‘primitive man’.<sup>151</sup> Atherton elucidates *Sweet*’s

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<sup>148</sup> *Contrast* Phelpstead, “Auden,” esp. 457, and Jones’ tendency to focus on lyric throughout *Strange Likeness*; with arguable exceptions, the conception of the revived form and style therein, certainly, is essentially lyric as opposed to epic.

<sup>149</sup> Pound, *Selected Prose*, 137, one example of many; NB A. David Moody’s title *The Epic Years 1921-1939*, for vol. 2 of his biography, *Ezra Pound: Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming September 25, 2014).

<sup>150</sup> Haun Saussy, et al., eds., *Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound: The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry, A Critical Edition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 26, 184ff.

<sup>151</sup> Atherton, “Priming Poets,” 31-49.

affiliations with E. B. Tylor and Max Müller,<sup>152</sup> but this tradition of speculation concerning the origins of poetry in primitive language and thought, rife in German Romanticism—for Wagner *Stabreim* is precisely this poetic *Ursprache*—harks back at least to Vico and most influentially Herder. It recurs amidst the Inklings with the linguistic philosophy of Owen Barfield.<sup>153</sup>

The ‘ideogrammic’ juxtaposition of ‘gists and piths’, as Pound himself perceived—‘I once got a man to start translating the Seafarer into Chinese. It came out almost directly into Chinese verse, with two solid ideograms in each half-line’<sup>154</sup>—suggests the Old English microcosmic and macrocosmic appositive, paratactic poetics of juxtaposition,<sup>155</sup> whilst Pound’s other slogan, ‘DICHTEN=CONDENSARE’, recognises and recapitulates the principle underlying Germanic verse-craft.

Brooke-Rose criticises the ‘static’ aspect of Pound’s *vers libre* as reflecting a (negative) influence of Old English poetry,<sup>156</sup> whilst Jones has emphasised the affinity between Old English verse, with its variation, ‘continual [...] contrapuntal [...] contrast’ and ‘flexibility’, and free verse:<sup>157</sup> an observation earlier developed by Bliss. Bliss’ *Introduction* closes with observations, having previously adduced Eliot’s poetry, on the aesthetic similarities between Old English poetry, ‘of immense power and flexibility, capable of achieving the most subtle and varied effects’ and free verse, remarking that ‘the student of today, familiar as he is with various varieties of “free verse”, is probably better equipped to appreciate OE poetry to the full than [...] any previous generation’.<sup>158</sup>

Bliss’ insight of Old English verse’s continuities with blank on the one hand and free verse on the other is fecund, in both prosodic and ideological aspects. Another source for free verse from Smart and Blake, to Whitman, to Eliot and Hughes and Hill,

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<sup>152</sup> Atherton, “Priming Poets,” 32, 34, 37-38, 41.

<sup>153</sup> Barfield’s output included books, such as *Poetic Diction* and *History in English Words*, dedicated to C. S. Lewis, acknowledged by Tolkien, prefaced by Auden, and published by Eliot.

<sup>154</sup> Pound, *ABC*, 5; Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 62, 66-67.

<sup>155</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 62-67.

<sup>156</sup> Christine Brooke-Rose, *A ZBC of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber, 1971), 88-92.

<sup>157</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 36.

<sup>158</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 3, 29.

is the English Bible. Hebrew verse is founded on parallelism, but Bliss suggests the parallel that for the Anglo-Saxon audience Old English poetry produced a characteristic ‘aesthetic effect’ of ‘inevitability’ and ‘familiarity’ comparable to that of the Authorised Version: ‘a rhythm both natural and yet more formal than that of ordinary speech; an archaic vocabulary; and circumlocution of diction’.<sup>159</sup>

This ‘Inklingsian’ construction of Old English metre—expressed by Lewis, Tolkien, Wrenn, Bliss, Auden, founded pedagogically on Sweet, in turn derived from Sievers, a figure, importantly, from the German Romantic philological tradition—emphasises its naturalness, its innateness, to English: its nativeness and nationalness, contrasted to Classical quantitative and, especially, post-Conquest Romance accentual-syllabics; and assimilates it, on linguistic, prosodic and stylistic premises, to the *central* tradition of English literary culture, Shakespeare, Milton, Tennyson, the Authorised Version.

The Inklings are intensely invested in this haunting tenet, that ancient English is still there, the past still here, in Modern. This philological apprehension forms an at once abstrusely technical and Romantically ideological basis for a radically ‘paleo-nationalistic’ alliterative-revivalist poetics. (I stress again that the present study is concerned with *these authors’* ‘Anglo-Saxon attitudes’ in re-constructing their early twentieth-century Saxonising poetics).<sup>160</sup>

Alliterative verse, because formalising resident prosody, consists not of one, fixed, regular (accentual-syllabic) metre of alternating syllables *accommodated to* English, variegated to evade monotony by licentious inversions and substitutions, but of many inherently varied, flexible, yet stipulated, rhythms; a metre not invading or imported to be imposed upon the language, but arising, autochthonously, from within the vernacular herself.<sup>161</sup> As for Victorian Old-Northernists, ‘The Fall’ was, of course, 1066.

Bliss prosecutes these arguments philologically. ‘The speech-patterns of [...] English [...] have changed very little’ in the millennium since the Conquest; the ‘loss of

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<sup>159</sup> Bliss, “Appreciation,” 40.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. in addition to relevant works already cited, Michael Alexander, “The Cult of Anglo-Saxon and the Literary Canon,” *Parergon* 10 (1992): 1-14.

<sup>161</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 3, 4; “Appreciation,” 28-30.

inflexional syllables’ and adoption of French vocabulary are but ‘superficial’, inflicting minimal impact on the tongue’s ‘basic rhythm’. ‘Innumerable phrases in MnE [...] follow precisely [the] rhythmical patterns [...] of OE poetry’.<sup>162</sup>

In his Tolkien *Festschrift* paper Bliss concedes ‘the disappearance of the unstressed final syllable in paroxytones’ and the introduction of ‘foreign, mainly [...] French’ oxytones, have resulted in ‘a substantial increase [...] in the proportion of rising rhythms at expense of falling’; nevertheless this ‘change in [...] proportion [...] does not mean the rhythm of the language [...] has changed in any significant way’: English rhythm ‘is now and always has been predominantly falling’, whilst **Type B** ‘of course’ is the ‘not infrequent’ ‘rising rhythm’ in Old English.<sup>163</sup> Bliss does argue, contrary to Tolkien and Lewis, that resolution is no longer functional in Modern English but ‘Apart from this one question of resolution [...] evidence show[s] [...] the rhythm of English has [not] changed substantially since Anglo-Saxon [...]:<sup>164</sup> *establishing, technically*, with moot questions arising only with regard to quantity hence resolution, a *linguistic foundation guaranteeing the practicable possibility* of alliterative revival in Modern English. Auden stated that the medievalist W. P. Ker ‘made me see the perpetual availability of metrical forms’: alliterative metre is perpetually available from the very language.<sup>165</sup>

In 1935, citing Tolkien and Auden, Lewis scents a ‘general reaction [...] against the long reign of foreign, syllabic metres’: ‘the moment seems propitious’ for advocating ‘a return to our own ancient [...] alliterative [...] system’,<sup>166</sup> opposing ‘our own [...] alliterative’ to the ‘foreign, syllabic’, developing his earlier antithesis, in which alliterative metre works by ‘natural accent’ in contradistinction to the ‘artificial accents of syllabic verse’.<sup>167</sup>

Of Sievers’ types Tolkien avers, in a sentence with a momentous second clause,

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<sup>162</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 4.

<sup>163</sup> Bliss, “Appreciation,” 31.

<sup>164</sup> Bliss, *An Introduction*, 4, 9-10; “Appreciation,” 32.

<sup>165</sup> Ansen, *Table Talk*, 43-44.

<sup>166</sup> Lewis, “Alliterative Metre”, 15, 15n1.

<sup>167</sup> Lewis, *Narrative Poems*, 177.

‘These are the normal patterns of four elements into which Old English words naturally fell, and into which modern English words still fall.’<sup>168</sup> In the wartime (1943; drafted from 1938) BBC radio talk “Anglo-Saxon Verse,” much preoccupied with the ‘*magnum bellum*’ of Brunanburh, Tolkien insists Æðelstān’s ‘language was then, as now, *Englisc*. If you have ever heard that Chaucer was “the father of English poetry”—forget it.’<sup>169</sup>

This signals how the construction of the modern mystique encoded by alliterative metre mythologises the genealogies of English versification, the native ‘Saxon’ pedigree opposed to the accentual-syllabic invading at Hastings. The resultant geological deposition of the language still eventuates a real impact on usage and association, far from excluding poetically. It aligns the Germanic accentual-alliterative subjugated substratum to the emotively natural and familiar register, the proverbial grain of idiom, the ‘native thew and sinew,’ instinctually, physically and viscerally expressive, the language of the body, heart, guts and collective unconscious: Anglo-Saxon as authentic, primitive, concrete, and hence, especially for the heirs of German Romanticism, inherently poetic, ‘a natural rise from some speech-[...] or tune-rhythm proper to the race and tongue. [...] no other poetry [...] contains [...] a metrical [...] arrangement more close to the naturally increased, but not denaturalised, emphasis of impassioned utterance, more thoroughly born from the primeval oak and rock.’<sup>170</sup>

Imposing itself oppressively from above is the language of a foreign hostile hegemony, originating decidedly from across the Channel, of the educated and privileged; metrically, ‘artificial’ syllabics, dictionally, sophisticated, superficial, abstract Franco-Latinism. In this mythology, post-Conquest vocabulary, versecraft, and culture wage a millennially-protracted field of Senlac, battling in the national psyche for sole soul sovereignty of the Island of the Mighty (an Albionic ‘England of the Mind’):<sup>171</sup> alliterative metre surviving as Saxon wolfshead or wodwo(se) hiding

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<sup>168</sup> Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 62.

<sup>169</sup> Tolkien, *Arthur*, 225.

<sup>170</sup> Saintsbury, *Historical Manual*, 316-17.

<sup>171</sup> Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations* (London: Faber 1980), 150-69; Heather Glen, “Geoffrey Hill’s ‘England of the Mind,’ ” *Critical Review* 27 (1985): 98-109.

out in the wildwood, Robin Hood, Hereward; Alfred exiled on Athelney.

A revival would be a return of an essential authenticity, a *once-and-future* Englishry; the recovery of what is still here, was always here. **Types C and D** ‘rescue’ ‘genuine English speech-rhythm’, ‘of daily occurrence’, yet ‘allowed no metrical recognition for centuries’: ‘In any English country tap-room the student may hear from the lips of labourers speech-groups which have a certain race and resonance in isolation. These are the elements of our native metre’, whose revival would ‘open [...] possibilities of resonance which have not been exploited for a thousand years’.<sup>172</sup>

Tolkien’s strategy of exemplifying the Sieversian types by means of Modern English phrases is designed in part to ‘bring out the ancestral kinship’ of Modern English to Anglo-Saxon,<sup>173</sup> the ‘old native metre’—a ‘tradition’ ‘independent of classical models’ ‘quite different [...] from [...] the rhymed and syllable-counting metres derived from France and Italy’ Tolkien hails as ‘the ancestral measure of England’.<sup>174</sup>

The accentual and alliterative verse-elements, linguistically native, natural, innate, by that token still survive, active, current, capable of viable re-animation. The ‘buried’ rhythms persist, resident, latently alive;<sup>175</sup> Pound’s ‘English national chemical’: *patet terra*.<sup>176</sup>

The Inklingsian revival of alliterative metre constructs a poetics predicated upon the chthonic leyline of the language, dowsing a subterranean mainstream continuous with the Anglo-Saxon source. According to this revivalist construction of the ideology, myth and mystique of the metre, alliterative verse is essentially characterised by its atavistic Englishness, is proposed as the archetypal and quintessentially English form, associatively retaining as a *modern* poetic mode this intrinsic heredity and identity, a cultural code connoting its origins and nature: symbolising ancient magics, medieval

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<sup>172</sup> Lewis, “Alliterative Metre,” 19, 23.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. ‘essential kinship’, “Monsters,” 33.

<sup>174</sup> Tolkien, *Arthur* 227, *Gawain*, 2, 149.

<sup>175</sup> Tolkien “Monsters,” 5, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 51.

<sup>176</sup> Canto XVI l. 57.

legend, national myth; the voice from what has been, like the dragons in the *Mabinogion*, buried; but buried at the centre.<sup>177</sup>

Such an inherently archaising, ‘historicist’ poetics is consistently associated with a concomitant auctorial imagination best described, as Eliot Kipling’s, as archaeological, haunted by a distinctively British remembering of the layering of the insular past. These are poets possessed by the philological understanding of language as fossilised history, as cultural memory. Delving through the linguistic and cultural substrata, harking back to ancestral bequeathings, they are in quest of discovering or recovering, finding in or founding on the ancestral inheritance, an *Ursprache*: that primally expressive, magically and mythopoeically potent poetic language, a mode of authentic utterance in which diction has a primordially concrete and terse semantic density, and a pristine etymological transparency of meaning; in which the metre is the language’s own inherent music, releasing the language to bespeak itself in its own rhythm. In such an evocative, conjuring poetry tongue, measure and matter might be ideally and sublimely united: and the collective past would find a voice to evoke and inspire the present.

Modern alliterative revivals are to be recognised as part of the quest by poets to invent or regain (with personal variation of reference and emphasis) a renewedly authentic poetic speech. Like the hero, Auden addresses Tolkien, ‘Nor is a tongue [...] immortal till [it] dies’;<sup>178</sup> to this archaeological imagination Old English, that ‘dead’, revived, in some important and actual sense still alive, atavistic and elemental language, appeals as an ‘ancestral voice’: Eliot’s ‘auditory imagination’. The revived metre supplies a fitting medium for this Eliotic canon—also formulated in the early 1930s—valorising ‘syllable and rhythm penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back [...]’.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Ted Hughes, “Myths, Metres, Rhythms,” in *Winter Pollen*, ed. William Scammell (New York: Picador, 1995), 310-72.

<sup>178</sup> W. H. Auden, “A Short Ode to a Philologist,” in Davis and Wrenn, *English and Medieval*, 11-12, ll. 37-38.

<sup>179</sup> T. S. Eliot, “Matthew Arnold,” in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 111. (First delivered in the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures for 1932-1933.)



If, as according to Jones, the surviving, rediscovered relics of Anglo-Saxon language and poetry, disinterred and resurrected by philologists, presented modern English poets with an image, Hill's 'strange likeness', of a lost inheritance, a haunting mirroring their own personal and cultural closeted skeletons, it is not surprising (is literally accurate) to find that recovered true-speech of poetry, chthonically authentic, echoing out of the depths and the past, figured as—the speech of the ancient ancestral Dead. Pound and Tolkien's Seafarings to Hades and Harrowings of Hell (Chapters II and III) function as tropes for a philological, and translation-ventriloquising, poetic *nekuia*, initiatory hierophantic descents into the palimpsestuous underworlds of cultural memory as part of the epic ambition to conjure recovered authentic vatic utterance.

Alliterative verse, with its archaic style and associations thus recurs as a figure for the archetypal 'Language of the Dead', a lexico-metrical necromancy (suitably for a poetics originally patronised by Óðinn) conspicuously performed in Poundian and Tolkienian epic. Kipling's *Puck* stories also narrate the dialogues of children with storytelling ghosts from British history, beginning with Weland Smith (Chapter I), umpired by the genius of the English countryside.

Such an organically and holistically, integrally metrico-philological, construction of the myth or mystique of the form to be revived, that of Old English alliterative poetry as *essentially and inherently* archaising, medievalist and nationalist in connotation, narrative in mode, and of impersonal high-mimetic mythopoeic content—an *epic style*—was certainly the one espoused by the poets in this thesis. Although championed by Tolkien, 'the chief artist of the revival,' especially,<sup>180</sup> all of these poets are engaged in availing themselves of the potentialities of alliterative metre in undertaking the epic project of retelling 'The Tale of the Tribe'.

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<sup>180</sup> Tolkien, *Gawain*, 2.

## Chapter I. The Runes on the Sword: Kipling and the Work of Wayland.

Huru Wēlandes worc ne geswīceð [...]

*Waldere*, I, line 2.<sup>181</sup>

betst [...] sēlest [...] lāf, Wēlandes geweorc [...]

*Beowulf*, lines 453a, 454-55a.

*Onband beadurūne...*<sup>182</sup>

It has not been usual to reckon Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), a name popularly (or infamously) associated with British Imperialism, so exotically redolent of the Raj, among those artists who emerged out of the Romantic Revival of interest in ancient *Germanic* culture, medievalists inspired by ‘the Old North’—a resonant and useful term resurrected by Wawn’s *Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, cf. Mackenzie’s “Kipling and *Northernness*” (ascribed to C. S. Lewis).<sup>183</sup>

Studies of Kipling, from those such as by Amis, Bodelsen, Carrington, Dobrée, Gross, Rutherford, Wilson, to those by Haggioannu, Keating, Kemp, Lycett, Mallet, or Walsh, have directed extremely little (or no) attention to Kipling’s medievalism.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> F. Norman, ed., *Waldere* (London: Methuen, 1933), 35. Citations refer to this edition.

<sup>182</sup> *Beowulf* l. 501a.

<sup>183</sup> Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000); Donald Mackenzie, “Kipling and *Northernness*,” *Kipling Journal* 82 No. 3 (September 2007): 21-43; C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 83, inspired by Wagner; ‘North’, ‘Northern’, also much used by Tolkien, e.g. “Monsters,” 20-21, 33. The term ‘Old-Northern’ appears to originate with philologist and runologist George Stephens (1813-1895).

<sup>184</sup> C. A. Bodelsen, *Aspects of Kipling’s Art* (Manchester University Press, 1964); Bonamy Dobrée, *Rudyard Kipling, Realist and Fabulist* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); Andrew Rutherford, ed., *Kipling’s Mind and Art* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964); Charles Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work* (London: Pelican, 1970); John Gross, ed., *Rudyard Kipling: The Man, His Work and His World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972); Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1977); Sandra Kemp, *Kipling’s Hidden Narratives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); Peter Keating *Kipling the Poet* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1994); Andrew Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999); Andrew Haggioannu, *The Man Who Would Be Kipling* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Phillip Mallet, *Kipling Considered* (London:

Conversely, studies of modern medievalism, such as by Frantzen and Niles, Scragg and Weinberg,<sup>185</sup> include no reference to Kipling. In David Clark's closing chapter "Past and Present in Modern Children's Literature" Kipling does receive one brief mention amongst those who have made 'Old Norse new'.<sup>186</sup> Kipling does not feature in *Northern Antiquity* edited by Wawn;<sup>187</sup> his magisterial *Vikings and Victorians* contains a few minor if significant references to Kipling<sup>188</sup>—as an admiring reader of the Kearys' *Heroes of Asgard* and H. Rider Haggard's saga-novel *Eric Brighteyes*—and closes with a brief discussion of Kipling's Old-Northern work perhaps most often commented upon hitherto, "The Finest Story in the World".<sup>189</sup> Wawn has developed his remarks on "Finest Story" in his essay "Victorian Vinland".<sup>190</sup>

Noteworthy exceptions to this neglect include a Cultural-Marxist reading of Weland, including Kipling's, by Maria Sachiko Cecire;<sup>191</sup> and, pre-eminently, Mackenzie's "Kipling and Northernness". It might be emphasised that Jones' *Strange Likeness* does not mention, still less discuss, Kipling, or his "The Runes on Weland's Sword".

Kipling's "Runes" is an original poem (not a translation) of 27 lines, Anglo-Saxon in title and Old-Northern in content, strikingly accentual-alliterative in verse-style and

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Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Sue Walsh *Kipling's Children's Literature* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010).

<sup>185</sup> Allen J. Frantzen and John D. Niles, eds., *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997); Donald Scragg and Carole Weinberg, eds., *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>186</sup> David Clark and Carl Phepstead, eds., *Old Norse Made New: Essays on the Post-Medieval Reception of Old Norse Literature and Culture* (University College London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2007), 143.

<sup>187</sup> Andrew Wawn, ed., *Northern Antiquity the Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga* (Enfield Lock, Middlesex: Hisarlik Press, 1994).

<sup>188</sup> Wawn, *Vikings and Victorians*, 331-35, 370-71.

<sup>189</sup> *Contemporary Review*, July, 1891; *Many Inventions* (London: Macmillan, 1893).

<sup>190</sup> Andrew Wawn, "Victorian Vinland," in Andrew Wawn and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, eds., *Approaches to Vinland* (Reykjavík: Sigurður Nordal Institute, 2001), 191-200.

<sup>191</sup> Maria Sachiko Cecire, "Bān Wēlonde: Wayland Smith in Popular Culture," in Clark and Perkins, *Anglo-Saxon Culture*, 201-17.

form, which appeared as early as 1906—five years *before* Pound’s ‘Seafarer’—at the narratological and codicological centre of Kipling’s classic ‘children’s’ story *Puck of Pook’s Hill*.<sup>192</sup>

This first chapter is presented as an introductory case-study of Kipling-as-Medievalist, contextualising a reading of this overlooked poem towards proposing Kipling, hitherto uncelebrated thus, as a pioneering, and probably influential, twentieth-century alliterative poet.

By way of further indication of chronological and cultural context: Pound’s ‘Seafarer’ first appeared in *The New Age* on November 30th, 1911 (collected in *Ripostes*, 1912); the early, arguably Saxonising *Cantos* date from c.1912-c.1917, published in book form 1925; Hopkins’ poems, in whose innovative diction, syntax, and prosody (‘Sprung Rhythm’), it is routine to discern an Old English influence, though composed the previous century did not begin to emerge until 1918. Around the same year Tolkien commenced alliterative composition, but published no alliterative verse till the 1950s; Auden began publishing in the late 1920s; C. S. Lewis’ “Planets” appeared in the mid-1930s.<sup>193</sup> Tennyson’s 1880 “Battle of Brunanburh”, though featuring insistent alliteration and imitating its original’s lexico-rhetorical tropes is, arguably, fundamentally not Old English prosodically; to the best of my present knowledge neither Kipling’s other older contemporary, William Morris, nor such other likely candidates W. G. Collingwood (1854-1932) or Rider Haggard (1856-1925), published any original alliterative verse.<sup>194</sup> There was of course a history in England of translations of Old English and (especially) Norse poetry since the late eighteenth century, and many contemporary translations, versions, retellings of Old-Northern

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<sup>192</sup> London: Macmillan, 1906; tales first published in magazines, January-October. All references to text and pagination here to Rudyard Kipling, *Puck of Pook’s Hill and Rewards and Fairies*, ed. Donald Mackenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), hereafter cited parenthetically in-text as (*Puck* followed by page-number).

<sup>193</sup> Accompanying “The Alliterative Metre,” *Lysistrata* 2 (May 1935), first reprinted in C. S. Lewis, *Rehabilitations and Other Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 119-32.

<sup>194</sup> Matthew Townend, *The Vikings and Victorian Lakeland: The Norse Medievalism of W. G. Collingwood and his Contemporaries* (Kendal: Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, Extra Series 34, 2009); *but* see now Phelan esp. on Morris, *Music of Verse*, 111-17.

verse were available to Kipling;<sup>195</sup> but to my knowledge it appears in order to find *original alliterative verse* prior to Kipling's 'Runes' we may have to go to the German operatic *Stabreim* of Wagner—who had himself published a sketch *Wieland der Schmied*, based on *Piðrekssaga* and *Völundarkviða*, in 1849.<sup>196</sup>

Kipling's poem has not passed entirely unrecognized. Eliot, in the courageous and insightful essay which may be the best commentary on Kipling, extols "Runes", along with another notable Old-Northern—but end-rhymed—poem in *Puck* (43-44), "The Harp Song of the Dane Women", as 'very fine'. Although he avers that, formally, Kipling 'introduces remarkable variations of his own, but as a poet he does not revolutionise', here he may err, and indeed he acknowledges "Runes" one of Kipling's 'very remarkable innovations'.<sup>197</sup>

The poem is in fact intended as a Modern English evocation of ancient Germanic verse. Not only does it exhibit an elemental 'Saxonising' diction and a gnomic, riddling, Norse terseness of phrasing, it is purportedly runic: in fictional conceit the poem represents a 'translation' of an alliterative runic incantation inscribed in an ancient sword-blade; but it is, above all, overtly and boldly accentual-alliterative in metrical form.

Therefore what does not appear to have been recognised hitherto is the nature of this poem as an original work of accentual-alliterative verse in Modern English, and the status which it should be accorded in the real history of nineteenth- to twentieth-century alliterative-accentual poetry in English inspired by or imitative of Old-Northern verse. Kipling's "Runes" may in fact be the first original poem in Modern English, as distinguished from translation or adaptation, in (if somewhat impressionistically) the verse-form, in the history of the twentieth-century alliterative revival.

"Runes" can, then, assume a position as an early, crucial and pioneering, piece of

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<sup>195</sup> In addition to relevant works already cited, Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse in Britain 1750-1820* (Trieste: Edizioni Parnaso, 1998).

<sup>196</sup> Richard Wagner, *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, Zurich, 1849; *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, Leipzig, 1911-16, 1:194-206; Spencer, Millington, et al., *Wagner's Ring*; Goldman and Sprinchorn, *Music and Drama*.

<sup>197</sup> T. S. Eliot, *A Choice of Kipling's Verse, with an Essay on Rudyard Kipling* (London: Faber, 1941), 17, 34.

twentieth-century alliterative verse, a poem of pre-eminent interest and significance in this history; and Kipling deserves to be re-assessed as among the most important figures in 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century ‘Old-Northernism’ and in the Modern English alliterative revival.<sup>198</sup> He can be recognised as a very considerable presence, his influence credible on the grounds that his medievalist work, that of an author so widely-read by the late Victorian and Edwardian English-reading world, can claim both priority, and popularity.

In “The Runes on Weland’s Sword” Kipling composed and published an original poem in alliterative-accentual verse, in 1906, in a children’s book everybody read.

I suggest Eliot may have had Kipling’s ‘very remarkable innovation’, “Runes”, in his ear when he composed ‘The river sweats [...]', *The Waste Land* III., “The Fire Sermon”, lines 266-92.<sup>199</sup> These lines are predominantly of two accents and feature some, including cross-, alliteration; whilst they are, of course, accompanied by the alliterative ululations of the Wagnerian Thamestöchter.<sup>200</sup> It may have passed unnoticed that Lewis’ *Narnia* children are surnamed ‘Pevensie’, yet neither Lewis nor Auden, both twentieth-century alliterative poets whose own works were profoundly influenced by Old English and Norse, for whom—as also for Pound, Eliot, and Tolkien—Kipling was a formative general literary presence, seems to contribute any specific remarks on this aspect of Kipling when writing on him.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> As by Mackenzie, “Kipling and Northernness,” 26, recognising Kipling as an Old-Northern Edwardian Modernist.

<sup>199</sup> (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1922). Kipling’s Kadmiel also fore-echoes Eliot’s Tiresias: ‘and I have walked between the living and the dead,’ *Puck*, 167.

<sup>200</sup> On Kipling’s Vinland voyage “Finest Story” as a source for *The Waste Land*, Robert Crawford, *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 133-36.

<sup>201</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Kipling’s World”, in *Selected Essays*, 232-50; W. H. Auden, “The Poet of the Encirclement”, *New Republic* 109 (October 24, 1943): 579-81. Tolkien and Lewis also knew and admired the work of Haggard: Scull and Hammond, *Reader’s Guide*, 355-58; Lewis, e.g. *Selected Essays*, 268-69. The strongest Inkling-Kipling link is embodied by Roger Lancelyn Green, who published on—*Kipling and the Children* (London: Elek Books, 1965)—and edited Kipling—*Kipling: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), *Stories and Poems* (London: Dent, 1970); and was editor of the *Kipling Journal* 1957–79.

*Kipling's Victorian Old-Northern Context: Morris and Haggard.*

Although the studies of modern medievalism contain minimal reference, if any, to Kipling, what this literature does amply if not exhaustively demonstrate is the phenomenal fashionable interest in and enthusiasm for The Old North in Victorian and Edwardian Britain—the currency of this literature in the period, from scholarly editions and translations to popular fictional, poetic, and other artistic, versions and visions. This previous scholarship enables us to perceive no difficulty in situating Kipling's Old English/Norse-influenced works within this general cultural movement and in the context of this literary history.

A fact less well generally and popularly recognised is how close Kipling can be shown to have been personally to the very centre of the political-aesthetic movement of Romantic medievalist revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>202</sup> Kipling had intimately close social and familial connexions with important figures in this movement, for example Andrew Lang (1844-1912), H. Rider Haggard—and no less a figure than William Morris himself.

Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) was Kipling's maternal uncle by marriage, and in terms of the influence of this upon Kipling's writing, in addition to his own library and advice it was while staying with 'Uncle Neddy' that Morris, 'our Deputy Uncle Topsy' 'pass[ed] [...] between his teeth' by telling it to Rudyard and his cousin Margaret, while 'slowly surging back and forth' (with the rhythm of the phrases?) on 'our big rocking-horse', 'a tale full of fascinating horrors'. Kipling writes in *Something of Myself*, 'Long afterwards [...] it dawned on me that we must have heard the Saga of Burnt Njal, which was then interesting him.'<sup>203</sup>

*Brennu-Njáls saga* was one of the Icelandic texts the Victorians seem to have found

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<sup>202</sup> Excepting substantive documentation from Wawn, *Vikings and Victorians*, 331-35, 370-71, and Mackenzie, "Kipling and Northerness", 23.

<sup>203</sup> Published posthumously, (London: Macmillan, 1937); citations refer to Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself*, ed. Robert Hampson (London: Penguin, 1987); 40-41.

particularly appealing. It was widely read in George Webbe Dasent (1817-1896)'s famous and influential 1861 translation *The Story of Burnt Njal*.<sup>204</sup> However Kipling is here in error. As Mackenzie comments, Morris was retelling a yarn not from *Njála* but from *Eyrbyggja Saga*.<sup>205</sup> Morris was familiar with the abstract of this saga contributed by Sir Walter Scott to the 1814 edition of Paul-Henri Mallet's *Northern Antiquities*, and in 1892 published (with Eiríkr Magnússon) his own translation, *The Story of the Ere-dwellers*.<sup>206</sup>

Who can say what other instances of direct transmission from Morris could have transpired, what Old English, Old Norse, and Arthurian literature Kipling could have been retold as a child by 'Uncle Neddy' and 'Uncle Topsy'?<sup>207</sup>

If Morris is likely have been Kipling's prime contact with the Old-Northern world in childhood, the most telling instance from Kipling's adult social circle is probably Rider Haggard. Wawn observes that Kipling was among the 'many devotees' of Haggard's *Eric Brighteyes* (1890), 'arguably the finest Victorian Viking-Age novel'.<sup>208</sup> In fact Kipling and Haggard were notably close friends, witness Kipling's

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<sup>204</sup> *The Story of Burnt Njal* (Edinburgh: 1861); see Wawn, *Vikings and Victorians*, e.g. 152-66.

<sup>205</sup> Mackenzie, "Kipling and Northernness", 23.

<sup>206</sup> Mallet's work was published in English as translated and adapted by Bishop Thomas Percy, famous for his 1765 *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, in 1770, under the title of *Northern Antiquities*; republished with further additions in 1847.

<sup>207</sup> David Ashurst, "William Morris and the Volsungs", in Clark and Phelpstead, *Norse Made New*, esp. 45: 'Eiríkr [Magnusson] tells us, [at] his first meeting with [Morris] [...] the poet displayed a knowledge of George Dasent's translations of *Njals saga* and *Gisla saga* (1861 and 1866), Benjamin Thorpe's translation of the *Poetic Edda* (1866), Amos Cottle's *Icelandic Poetry* (1797) [...] Percy's *Northern Antiquities* (1770 and 1847) [...] Sir Walter Scott's account of *Eyrbyggja saga* (1814) [...] Morris had knowledge by [...] early 1869, of Edmund Head's translation of *Viga-Glums saga* (1866), Samuel Laing's rendering of *Heimskringla* (1844) and Dasent's version of Snorri's *Edda* (1842).' These, or any of their contents, along with the sagas of Gunnlaug 'Wormtongue' and Grettir the Strong, which Morris and Magnusson translated in 1869, could have been orally retold to Kipling by Morris. Carrington, *Life and Work*, 441-42, quotes a rambunctiously-worded letter to Kipling from 'Uncle Neddy' recommending to him the seminal Celtic-Arthurian works of [Pseudo-] Nennius and Geoffrey of Monmouth. If Kipling followed Burne-Jones up on this he may have known of Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini* and Lazamon's *Brut*, linking Weland to the forging of Caliburn=Excalibur: suggestive in the present context of the Excalibur-like narrative role and qualities associated with Weland's sword in *Puck*.

<sup>208</sup> Wawn, *Vikings and Victorians*, discusses *Eric Brighteyes* at length, esp. 331-35, from which pages the quotations throughout the current discussion are taken.



extensive testimony in *Something of Myself*.<sup>209</sup> The two writers not only worked side-by-side but even composed jointly: '[...] between us we could even hatch out tales together—a most exacting test of sympathy'.

Wawn notes that Haggard, like so many other enthusiasts of the time (cf. W. G. Collingwood's 'pilgrimage'), visited the 'saga-steads' of Iceland in 1888, bearing letters of introduction from Morris' teacher and collaborator, Eiríkr Magnússon.<sup>210</sup> 'Outside of the Bible and Homer there exists [...]' declared Haggard, in his autobiography, of the *Íslendingasögur*, 'no literature more truly interesting'.<sup>211</sup>

Some further selective quotation from Wawn's account of *Eric Brighteyes*' contents should suffice to indicate the relevance of Haggard and his 'romance' to Kipling's Weland, Weland's sword and the Anglo-Norman tales in *Puck*: 'We find [...] predictive [...] portentous verses [...] the interplay of the natural and supernatural [...] the wondrous sword Whitefire [...] shipboard songs [...] gods, pagan temples, dwarfs, barrow-dwellers [...]' It is moreover difficult to avoid perceiving how generally well Wawn's description of the literary style Haggard specially devised for this book chimes with Kipling's poetic voice in "Runes": 'coordinate and paratactic syntax, inverted word-order, compounding, archaic pronoun and verb forms, and alliterative doublets'.<sup>212</sup> If Kipling's essays in Old Northernism tend to eschew Haggard's and Morris' more full-bloodedly Teutonic archaising style they share much the same air or flavour.

'No footnotes draw attention to the weight of reading that lies behind the novel', but the style and the plot-elements, narrative episodes and incidental atmospheric motifs of *Eric Brighteyes* exhibit Haggard's direct and detailed knowledge of and indebtedness, in what is in a sense, like Kipling's "Runes", a *pastiche*, to a long list of specific sagas (catalogued by Wawn)—those narratives hailed by Haggard as 'the

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<sup>209</sup> E.g. 84, 147.

<sup>210</sup> W. G. Collingwood and Jon Stefansson, *A Pilgrimage to the Saga-Steads of Iceland* (Ulverston: 1899); Collingwood's Old-Northern fictions: Wawn, *Vikings and Victorians*, 335-41; Matthew Townend, "In Search of the Lakeland Saga: Antiquarian Fiction and the Norse Settlement in Cumbria," in Clark and Phelpstead, *Norse Made New*, 63-82; *Victorian Lakeland*.

<sup>211</sup> Wawn, *Vikings and Victorians*, 332.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 333-34.

prose epics of our race'. Likewise extremely suggestive, in more than one application, in the present context is Wawn's telling observation, 'Haggard's novel is a remarkable illustration of just how inward a knowledge of Icelandic sagas could be developed in 1890 by a dedicated enthusiast of the old north, even one who was in no real sense a professional philologist'.<sup>213</sup>

Thus, in addition to the close friendship in later life of one of the foremost popular retellers of Norse saga, family connexions with the Burne-Joneses had placed the young Kipling at *the centre* of Pre-Raphaelite medievalism: the boy's contact with William Morris situates him at the very vortex of an intense and profound Victorian re-creative engagement with the Old North.

*Identifying Kipling's Old-Northern Corpus.*

The impact of the Old North on Kipling's imagination may be gauged from numerous sporadic allusions, such as "The Playmate" line 18's reference to the Nornir,<sup>214</sup> or "The Bonfires on the Ice", 19, 'We know the Fenris Wolf is loose',<sup>215</sup> not to mention the major, best-known Viking piece in Kipling's output, "Finest Story". The Viking thread in this artful and erudite intertexture of Old Norse and Victorian writings, tissued with the supposed recollection of past lives (or past literatures?) is the Old Norse Vinland sagas. "Finest Story" has already attracted a certain amount of scholarly commentary.<sup>216</sup>

Demonstration of Kipling's medievalist credentials need quest no farther than *Puck* and *Rewards and Fairies*.<sup>217</sup> As Eliot has asserted, Kipling is 'the inventor of a mixed form', 'an integral prose-and-verse writer', whose 'verse and prose are inseparable', and "Runes" is the verse component to Kipling's reforging of the Weland myth

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<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 333; *Gisla, Volsunga, Grettis, Njals, Eyrbyggja, Olafs saga Tryggvasonar...*

<sup>214</sup> *Limits and Renewals* (London: Macmillan, 1932).

<sup>215</sup> *London Morning Post*, November 13, 1933.

<sup>216</sup> Wawn, *Vikings and Victorians*, 370-71; "Victorian Vinland," 191-200; Mackenzie, "Kipling and Northernness," 23-26.

<sup>217</sup> *Rewards and Fairies* (London: Macmillan 1910), first published magazines 1909-1910.

commencing in the tale “Weland’s Sword” which opens *Puck*.<sup>218</sup> The story of the sword, and the meaning encoded and augured in its runic inscription, continues through the book. The tales directly following “Weland’s Sword”, “Young Men at the Manor” and “The Knights of the Joyous Venture”, are also framed by poems, “Harp Song of the Dane Women” and “Thorkild’s Song”.

*Rewards and Fairies* includes the early-medievalist masterpieces “Cold Iron”, which features Thor, and “The Knife and the Naked Chalk” and its associated poem “Song of the Men’s Side”, a retelling of the Eddic myth of the ‘The Fenris Wolf’ and (explicitly) the god Týr as the struggle for survival between Kipling’s prehistoric ‘Flint Men’ of the Downs and ‘the Beast’ (the Wolf); and “The Conversion of St Wilfrid” and *its* poem, “Song of the Red War-Boat”, which make reference to Wotan/Odin; Thor, also in the more English form ‘Thun’; Balder, and ‘Lok’ (*Puck*, 333, 343, 341).<sup>219</sup>

In *Puck* “Old Men at Pevensey”, “The Treasure and the Law”, in *Rewards* “The Tree of Justice”, are narratologically continuations of the same Anglo-Norman story-span, notwithstanding that they unfold in a later medieval, rather than Old-Northern/‘Dark Age’ world. Of these, “The Treasure and the Law” is of self-evident importance and relevance as the last tale of the book and the climax of the role of Weland’s runic sword in the national destiny.

In contrast to the unmistakably accentual-alliterative “Runes”, none of the other poems cited above, though Old-Northern in subject or other element, matches this theme or content with style and form. Whilst “Harp-Song”, ‘Thorkild’s Song’, feature imitation *kenningar* and suggest plausible thematic and textual echoes of the Old English *Seafarer*, neither actually imitates the ancient metre, but are ballads or shanties in what Hopkins called ‘running’ rhythm, normal accentual-syllabic Modern English versification, end-rhymed.

“Runes” is, then, the *sole* alliterative-accentual poem in *Puck*, and, save for the runic quatrain inscribed on Thor’s ring adapted from an Old Norse source in “Cold Iron”, in *Rewards*. Its remarkable formal characteristics mark it as conspicuously unique within

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<sup>218</sup> Eliot, *Kipling’s Verse*, 5, 22.

<sup>219</sup> Thun(or) and Lok(i) perhaps intended, characteristically for Kiplingsian onomastics, as a historically-expressive worn-down forms.

*Puck*, heightening its impact, its impression of magical specialness.

It must be adverted however that not only do Anglo-Saxon runes also appear, not just as a verbal reference in the text but as actual calligraphic *futhorc* characters in the author's illustrations, in Kipling's immensely popular *Just So Stories*,<sup>220</sup> but that "Runes" is not metrically unique in Kipling's poetic output. Kipling is to be credited with two other pieces of alliterative verse.

The first is "The Advertisement", subtitled "In the Manner of the Earlier English", the first in a series of poetic parodies titled *The Muse among the Motors*.<sup>221</sup>

The second is much more significant, Kipling's imitative translations of lines 6b-8a, 33-34, 38-41 of the Old English *The Ruin*, included in "The Uses of Reading", an address given at Wellington College, 1912, published in *A Book of Words* (1928).<sup>222</sup> 'About fifteen hundred years ago some early Anglo-Saxon writer saw [...] the ruins of an old Roman city half buried and going to pieces in the jungle somewhere in the south of England [...].'<sup>223</sup> Regrettably, presently available room precludes fuller treatment of Kipling's "Ruin" here, a neglected text which would, especially in the context of Kipling's vision of British history, richly reward attention; it must suffice to remark and remember the fact of it.

Notwithstanding Kipling's distinctively Anglo-*Indian* imaginative response to the Anglo-Saxon *Ruin* and to the Norse Vinland sagas in "Finest Story", "Weland's Sword" and "Runes" represent Kipling's most intense and significant engagement with the ancient Germanic inheritance. *Puck* is a phantasmagorical meditation on British history. Read in the book's sequence, this history commences with mythopoeia about the origins and rise of English civilisation. England begins with the Germanic smith-'god' Weland, an oracular, riddling runeblade—and alliterative metre.

*'The Tale of the Tribe.'*

Although in the form of apparently juvenile fairytales, and while, often, with a strange

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<sup>220</sup> *Just So Stories For Little Children* (London: Macmillan, 1902).

<sup>221</sup> First published serially, *London Daily Mail*, February 5-27, 1904.

<sup>222</sup> *A Book of Words* (London: Macmillan, 1928), 77-96.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81.

artfulness decentred, refracted, fragmented, the *Puck* books constitute Kipling's national myth, his 'Tale of the Tribe'. This phrase—itsself in form an alliterative **B-Type** hemistich—is associated with Pound, a slogan for his *Cantos*: 'There is no mystery about the *Cantos*, they are the tale of the tribe—give Rudyard credit for [...] the phrase'.<sup>224</sup>

It derives from Kipling's "Literature", in which Kipling invents 'an ancient legend' of the birth of storytelling, of the Tribe's mythopoet, the primordial archetypal artist—a 'masterless man [...] afflicted [...] with the magic of the necessary word'.<sup>225</sup> Pound, again speaking of the *Cantos*, defined epic as 'a poem including history'.<sup>226</sup> 'The Tale of the Tribe' also, of course, formulates Kipling's own historical-epic project in the *Puck* books:

[...] since the tales had to be read by children, before people realised that they were meant for grown-ups; [...] since they had to be a sort of balance to, as well as a seal upon, some aspects of my 'Imperialistic' output [...], I worked the material in three or four overlaid tints and textures, which might or might not reveal themselves according to the shifting light [...] like working lacquer and mother o' pearl [...] into the same scheme as niello and grisaille, and trying not to let the joins show.[...] I loaded [...] the series [...] up with allegories and allusions [...]<sup>227</sup>

Kipling's vision of British history is one of archaeological palimpsest: 'The simplest summary of [...] Kipling in his middle years,' writes Eliot 'is the development of the imperial [...] into the historical imagination'.<sup>228</sup> Eliot develops his observation with perspicacious formulations:

The historical imagination may give us an awful awareness of the extent of time, or it may give us a dizzy sense of the nearness of the past [...]<sup>229</sup> But at the same time his vision takes a larger view, and he sees the Roman Empire and the place of England in it [...] his geographical and historical imagination [...]<sup>230</sup> Having previously exhibited

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<sup>224</sup> Pound, *Guide*, 194; cf. Mallarmé's "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe" l. 6, *donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu*, paraphrased by Eliot, *Little Gidding* II.74.

<sup>225</sup> *Book of Words*, 3-5.

<sup>226</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 86.

<sup>227</sup> *Of Myself*, 145.

<sup>228</sup> Eliot, *Kipling's Verse*, 30.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

an imaginative grasp of space, and England in it [...] now proceeds to a similar achievement in time [...] the contemporaneity of the past [...] <sup>231</sup> In his later phase England, and a particular corner of England, becomes the centre of his vision. He is more concerned with the [...] core of empire [...] buried beneath it [...] an ideal of what [...] The British Empire [...] should be; this core is something older, more natural and more permanent. <sup>232</sup>

In *Puck*, then, ‘History—and *Prehistory*—is now, and England’. *Something of Myself* includes the following episode of dowsing and delving to a source, dredging by the way the Plutonic treasures of the Past. This account of a well of memory is situated emblematically at the threshold of Kipling’s account of beginning composition of *Puck*:

Then, out of the woods that know everything and tell nothing, came two dark and mysterious Primitives. They had heard. They would sink that well, for they had the ‘gift’. [...] When we stopped, at twenty-five feet, we had found a Jacobean tobacco-pipe, a worn Cromwellian latten spoon, and, at the bottom of all, the bronze cheek of a Roman horse-bit. In cleaning out an old pond which might have been an ancient marl-pit or mine-head, we dredged two intact Elizabethan ‘sealed quarts’ that Christopher Sly affected, all pearly with the patina of centuries. Its deepest mud yielded us a perfectly polished Neolithic axe-head with but one chip on its still venomous edge. <sup>233</sup>

—Another ancestral weapon, still sharp.

The *Puck* books, like this symbolic well-sinking, exhibit a cross-section of this varved stratigraphy of the past, <sup>234</sup> but Kipling’s narrative architectonics forgo linear sequence to foreground another deliberate design, in which the narratively displaced location of “Runes” in the volume is significant.

*Puck* commences with the English horizon, the first stories taking us from the prehistoric mythic Weland through the Anglo-Saxon period, Hastings, and Runnymede. This narrative yarn weaves through the weft of both books, a span of story associated with the ‘Saxon’ Englishman Hugh of Dallington and the Norman Sir Richard Dalyngridge. It is a narrative of national progress, in which Saxon and

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<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>232</sup> Eliot, *Kipling’s Verse*, 32, 27.

<sup>233</sup> *Of Myself*, 142.

<sup>234</sup> Cf. “Puck’s Song,” *Puck*, 5-6.

Norman are *welded*—exactly the presently relevant metaphor in Kipling’s dislikeable ‘Making of England’ poem “The Anvil”—into one England, climaxing in the achievement of Magna Carta as told in the last story in *Puck*, “The Treasure and the Law”.<sup>235</sup> The theme undergoes recapitulation and modulation when ‘Santlache’, Law, Saxon and Norman, Hugh, Richard, and Harold Gōdwinsson himself, return at the end of the second book, *Rewards*, in its final tale “The Tree of Justice”.

But this uprising, progressive movement of initial four stories recounting the birth and rise of England, is counterpoised *against* a *following* group of three stories set *earlier* in the island’s history, amid the *decline* of Roman Britain. Between the end of “Old Men at Pevensey” and the beginning of “A Centurion of the Thirteenth”, Kipling’s Wheel of History whirls us backwards, the juxtaposition of these movements marked by two great Kipling poems set face to face, at the centre of the book: “Runes” and “Cities and Thrones and Powers”. “Runes” is placed *after* “Old Men at Pevensey”, the last in the Anglo-Norman narrative which began with “Weland’s Sword” (until, to be sure, the book swings back round to it at the end in “The Treasure and the Law”); “Cities and Thrones and Powers” immediately *before the first* of the *Roman* stories, “A Centurion of the Thirteenth.”

Thus from the nascent *beginning* of one empire we are conducted back in time to the *end* of another: Parnesius and *Pertinax* valorously, dutifully—but hopelessly—defending that North-West Frontier of the Great Wall against ‘The Winged Hats’: exerting, tacitly, a subversive, pessimistic counterforce to what would plainly seem a triumphalist myth of Progress, that of English civilisation from prehistoric pagan magic, to Magna Carta, to Imperial superiority, narrated by the Anglo-Norman story symbolised by Weland’s Sword—the Tale of the Tribe.<sup>236</sup>

Weland’s runewrit Excalibur may rise, as out of the deeps of the national collective unconscious figured as the mythic Germanic past, and lead England to the political

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<sup>235</sup> Line 12, ‘England’s being hammered, hammered, hammered into shape!’ (l. 8, ‘into one!’) C. R. L. Fletcher and Rudyard Kipling, *A School History of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).

<sup>236</sup> Cf. Auden’s observation ‘Kipling is obsessed by a sense of dangers threatening from outside [civilisation] [...] in Kipling there is [...] no belief in Progress. For him civilisation [...] is a little citadel of light surrounded by a great darkness full of malignant forces [...]’, Auden, “Encirclement,” 579; Auden might be describing Heorot, and Mackenzie, “Kipling and Northernness,” 38, notes how well this mentality accords with the Northern ethos, referring explicitly to *Ragnarōkr*.

unity, and constitutional liberty and law, upon which is predicated, and justifies (for Kipling), its eventual Imperial dominance.<sup>237</sup> but Kipling knows all Empires must eventually fall—the Kipling of the Elgar-like (majestic and disquieting) “Recessional”, of, within *Puck*, “Cities and Thrones and Powers”, set, literally, against “Runes”.

The book hinges on this cusp of poems. The theme of Progress and Permanence—Weland’s inherited talismanic blade—is juxtaposed to the answering countersubject, of *Transience*; Rise riposted by Fall. Kipling’s juvenile fairytale proves, by tacit arrangement of the structuring of its tales and poems, a Vergilian national epic encoding a cyclical vision of imperial history: civilisations rise and inevitably, inexorably collapse, as in Vico, Yeats, Spengler; as in Indo-European myth; as in the Old English *Ruin* Kipling tellingly translated.

Thus Kipling’s historical myth of the epic rise of English civilisation begins with the ‘Smith of the Gods’ (*Puck*, 14-15, 19-20), in the tale “Weland’s Sword”, and the narrative proceeds along with the ‘dark grey, wavy-lined’ weapon whose blade the Smith has inscribed with runes: ‘and he carved Runes on Prophecy on the blade’ (*Puck*, 19-20).<sup>238</sup> This mysterious, foredooming incantation, encoded on the steel in magical letters no person within the fiction seems able to decipher, is finally presented as the poem “Runes”.

Hence the reader, in a sequential progress through the book, is placed in the same condition of ignorance and suspense as to the meaning of Weland’s runes as the characters within the fiction. The narratively ‘prophetic’ nature of the runes—by literary conceit purportedly transliterated and translated—becomes evident to the reader; if partially: the first half of the poem’s Nordically cryptic and laconic stanzas may be perceived to refer to episodes we have just read, while the remainder of the poem remains darkly ‘prophetic’ at this point, however, and will not be made plain until the *last* story “The Treasure and the Law”.

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<sup>237</sup> Cf. ‘lesser breeds [sic] without the Law’, “Recessional,” l. 22. On Law as an Old-Northern cultural inheritance, in connexion with Kipling and *Puck*: Mackenzie, “Kipling and Northernness,” 36-37.

<sup>238</sup> A Norse example of the motif of a sword inherited through the narrative would be ‘Tyrfing’, see further G. Turville-Petre, ed., *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, introduction by Christopher Tolkien (University College London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1956), although this magic blade is *accursed* by its dwarven smiths.



Weland had portentously declared at its ritual forging that his gift to Hugh ‘ “shall do him good the wide world over and Old England after him” ’: ‘ “this is the best blade that Weland ever made. Even the user will never know how good it is” ’ (*Puck*, 19-20). We finally perceive the significance of the Sword and the meaning of the runic poem in the context of Kipling’s great theme: the progress of English civilisation to Magna Carta. Puck himself is made to sum this up in the last story (*Puck*, 173): ‘ “Well,” said Puck calmly, ‘what did you think of it? Weland gave the Sword! The Sword gave the Treasure, and the Treasure gave the Law. It’s as natural as an oak growing.” ’<sup>239</sup>

The daimonically-sentient Sword forged by the fallen pagan Germanic god is within the fiction literally fateful; the bequeathed blade forms the spine of the book until the final culminating tale: its mysteriously ‘prophetic’ runic inscription, rendered as the cunningly-located riddling poem turning out—as the narrative’s events prove and solve it—to be the key to Kipling’s historicopolitical myth for England.

The *Exeter Book*’s Roman Ruin, the downfallen Wall, mouldering relic of a lost past, emblem of the superposed, defunct Roman *imperium*, may stand in symbolic opposition to Weland’s Sword. Like a gleaming blade brandished aloft, cleaving upwards with the impetus of the ascending ‘gyre’ or ‘*corso*’, it may be read as an emblem of progress out of, yet fuelled by sublimated, barbarism, waxing into English civilisation founded on the vernacular, Germanic *folc-riht*,<sup>240</sup> culminating in Runnymede, ‘The Thing’ (“Runes”, 15, 27). Weland’s Sword represents the viable posterity of a living, dynamic future, a symbol of *inheritance* and *permanence*: *Wēlandes weorc ne geswīceð*.

### *Smith and Scop*

Kipling’s modern reforging of the Weland/Vǫlundr myth has an iconic quality. His characterization of the Smith making an unforgettable impression. Savage, brooding,

<sup>239</sup> Cf. Mackenzie, “Kipling and Northernness,” 37-38.

<sup>240</sup> Cf. Pound, Canto LXVII, lines 2-3, ‘[...] folcright for a thousand years’: Pound shared Kipling’s Victorian Old-Northern construction of ‘Saxon Liberty’ and identified its history ‘from jury trial to [...] John Adams’ as ‘an epic subject’, to be included amongst other epic matter in *The Cantos*: William Cookson, *A Guide to The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, rev. ed. (London: Anvil Press, 2001), xxix.

chthonically powerful and supernaturally creative, a ‘heathen’ fallen god who after humiliating but utilitarian, millennially purgatorial expiatory labour is granted benediction and redemption (or at least oblivious release?): and who bestows upon posterity a benevolent, perdurable gift in return—his ‘last task’ and ‘best blade’ (*Puck*, 15-20).

Anthropologists and historians of comparative religion since Kipling’s contemporary J. G. Frazer (1854-1941) have recognized the traditional cultural perception of the Smith as a magician, a figure associated with the Shaman, whose person and craft is surrounded with a numinous ambience of mystery and taboo.

Early societies perceived metaphorical analogies between the sacred mysteries of the procreative and cosmically creative processes, and those of smithcraft. The Smith, by dint of his miraculous technique, a process suggestively rife with devilish (Tubal-Cain,<sup>241</sup> Mulciber) and seething erotic-generative symbolism—the chthonic focus of sweaty heat and fuming fuliginous darkness, the uterine furnace, anvil, matrices, and crucible, smelting the molten mettlesome ore, the phallic hammer—transmutes unpromising, ugly amorphous lumps of natural base matter into useful cultural items, into precious adornments, into artefacts, such as weapons, of power and prestige. The Smith plays thus quickener of and midwife to Nature, performing the thaumaturgic—even demiurgic—creative feat, of transforming, wielding in mastery all the Elements, Chaos into Cosmos.

The mythological and folkloric record testifies to the cultural impact of these primal smiths, regarded as magicians or alchemists of seemingly supernatural skill and potency, to ancient cultural perceptions surrounding the once-novel technologies of metallurgy.<sup>242</sup>

The mythic smiths seem to embody a blending of characteristics derived from their actual circumstances with archetypal imaginative attributes: smiths appear often to have worked underground; they were often peripatetic.<sup>243</sup> In Germanic (as other)

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<sup>241</sup> Gen. 4:22; *Book of Enoch*’s Fallen Angels, associated via pseudepigraphical tradition with the Giants in *Beowulf*, teach mankind the forging of weapons; cf. *Maxims* 1C, 62b-66.

<sup>242</sup> Esp. Mircea Eliade, *Forgerons et alchimistes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1956), trans. Stephen Corrin, *The Forge and the Crucible* (London: Rider and Co., 1962).

<sup>243</sup> Lotte Motz, “The Craftsman in the Mound,” *Folklore*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (1977): 46-60; Stephen Pollington, et al., *Wayland’s Work: Anglo-Saxon Art, Myth and Material Culture from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> C* (Swaffham, Norfolk: Anglo-Saxon Books 2010), 124.

myth, smiths (and workers in related gnome-like trades such as mining) are, famously, often represented as supernatural or Otherworldly beings, chthonic ‘craftsmen of the mound’ —subterranean Nibelungen, netherworldly swart-elves, dwarves living in the rock, like Reginn who reforged Gram for Sigurðr (and taught the hero *rúnar*),<sup>244</sup> like those who forged the magical weapons and other attributes for the Æsir (*Skáldskaparmál*, 41-42).<sup>245</sup> Völundr himself appears to be designated an ‘elf’ in *Völundarkviða* (stanza 10 line 3, 13 line 4, 32 line 2).<sup>246</sup> What this meant beyond that he is, as all the sources and analogues attest, a magical being, is unclear; Kipling, influenced by Vulcan, may or may not have deified him.<sup>247</sup> His smith-hood is entirely consistent with this ambiguous genus, as is Weland’s association with a prehistoric site.

Uncanny, satanic, often sexually potent and predatory Smith-figures, whose trade is a Mystery, who exude a sorcerous mystique, appear in such later medieval sources as the anonymous and untitled Middle English ‘Alliterative Revival’ poem *Swarte smeked smithes smattered with smoke* [...] and the British folk-ballad “O Coal-Black Smith” (“The Two Magicians”).<sup>248</sup> Weland/Völundr is the great Germanic incarnation

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<sup>244</sup> R. G. Finch, trans. and ed., *Völsunga Saga* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1965), 23, 26ff.

<sup>245</sup> The *svartálfar* brothers Brokkr, (<‘brock, brack’, i.e. smithereens) and Sindri (*sindr*, >‘cinder’, ‘sinter’); the dwarfs of Svartálfaheimr devise ‘Gleipnir’ for the binding of the Fenris Wolf, *Gylfaginning*, 25, 28, Re. the Norse ‘swart-elf’ wondersmiths, cf. e.g. the ‘six smiths’ in the Old English Metrical Charm *Wið færstice*, London, British Library, MS Harley 585, (Lacnunga), Sweet, *Reader*, 104-105. H. R. Ellis Davidson, “Weland the Smith”, *Folklore* 69, No. 3 (September, 1958): 145-59.

<sup>246</sup> Jónsson, ed., *Eddukvæði*, 1:189, 196; Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, 2: 246, 247, 251: *vísi álfa* is applied to Völundr as an epithet.

<sup>247</sup> For a suggestive discussion of what Weland-Völundr’s genus might have to do with his myth see Armann Jakobsson, “The Extreme Emotional Life of Volundr the Elf,” *Scandinavian Studies* 78, Issue 3 (September 2006): 227–54. For what ‘elves’ may have been in pre-Christian Germanic culture, Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007).

<sup>248</sup> Early fifteenth century, London, British Museum, MS Arundel 292, fol.71, anthologised in e.g. Celia and Kenneth Sisam, eds., *The Oxford Book of Medieval English Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 372-73; NB line 8b, the smiths ‘[...] spellen many spellen’; Child Ballad #44; Francis James Child’s *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 1882-1898, the successor to Percy’s *Reliques*, known by Kipling: Ann Matlack Weygandt, *Kipling’s Reading and Its Influence on His Poetry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939). This ballad’s folktale motifs of ‘courting-pursuit/transformation-chase’ and ‘magic flight’, Arne-Thompson Types 313, 325, afford suggestive parallels to Weland/Völundr’s seduction of Beadohild/Böðvildr, and his winged escape.

of the uncanny magician-wondersmith of this type.<sup>249</sup>

If early smiths hawked their invaluable skills from settlement to settlement, this migrant aspect would only have contributed to the Smith's status as a socially ambiguous, alien, liminal figure: likewise the real origin of the mythic lamed Smith is obviously explicable as a brutal pragmatism to keep your smith inconveniently migrating, and disadvantageously vending his skills, to the another community.

The lameness of the archetypal Smith is however suggestive in the context of the association of archaic smiths with shamans and sacral kings; as is well-known from Frazer's theory, in primitive religion sacred persons, among other taboos, may have been ritually prohibited from letting their heels touch the ground, hence the 'vulnerable heel' motif widely attested in myth. In that of Weland/Völundr, his hamstringing, confirming him as the archetypal deified lame Smith reminiscent of Hephaistos/Vulcan, familiar, as evidently recalled by Kipling, as the Smith of the Gods in Classical myth, is done as one of several special precautions taken by his captors to prevent his escape, again testifying to his magical nature—as does the fact and the manner in which he does escape, his 'magic flight' in which he recalls the archetypal Classical artist/artificer, Daidalos, also associated with the alphabet and the labyrinth (Icelandic, *völundarhús*).

The modern Romantic type of the *figuratively* 'lame' artist who transcends, soars, by his art, as expressed by Baudelaire's allegorical Albatross, is conjoined with Weland in Wagner's *Wieland der Schmied*. The theme of ironic bondage and release intrinsic to Weland's myth—attested in *Deor* lines 5-6 by the notable conceit of expressively identifying conceptual antitheses (the—implied—cutting of 'bonds' is riddlingly re-perceived in the context of the narrative as the *laying on* of bonds, *nēde legde,/swoncre seonobende[...]*)<sup>250</sup>—is strongly registered, refashioned, in Kipling's version, while the concept of the Life versus the Work, the tension between the imperfections of the former, which includes the messiness of the creative process and the honourable expiatory onerousness of the labour, but which is passing, and the perfection and permanence of the latter, is also powerfully present.

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<sup>249</sup> James Bradley, "Sorcerer or Symbol?: Weland the Smith in Anglo-Saxon Sculpture and Verse," *Pacific Coast Philology* 25, No. 1/2 (November 1990): 39-48; Motz, "Craftsman," Davidson, "Weland". See also Dronke's account of *Völundarkviða*, *Poetic Edda* 2:243-328.

<sup>250</sup> Kemp Malone, ed., *Deor* (London: Methuen, 1933), 23; all citations refer to this edition.

As one who transmutes Chaos into Cosmos the Smith is of course a prototype of the artist, intimating, inviting, numerous symbolic applications, doubtless alive to Kipling and Wagner: he is a maker or shaper— a *scop*, (*scōp* < preterite of *sciëppan*, shape, make, destine, assign, give name to > MnE *shape*, cf. Greek *poieein*, to make, > *poet*, Scots *makar*) as the parallels can be perceived to include those between the two men of art even in prehistory: they may be unified in the Shaman, the Magician. Eliot speaks of Kipling in exactly these terms, as a magician and craftsman.<sup>251</sup>

The minstrel and the smith were both originally peripatetic masters professing a mystique and technique of secret magical craftsmanship, and alike bearers, the embodiment and mouthpiece, in a preliterate culture, of tradition.<sup>252</sup> In a society which saw Roman stone architecture, as in *The Ruin* (line 2b) as ‘the work of Giants’, whose other materials were timber, bone, horn, hide, the poet’s well-wrought versecraft, the bard’s tale, the work of the smith, were the cultural items, the legacy of two kinds of ‘makers’, of permanent, heritable, effective beauty.

Old Norse perception of parallels between smithcraft and versecraft is indicated by such lexical details as the figurative transference of ‘inlay/aid’, *stál*, *stælt*, to skaldic terminology, and the *kenningar skapsmiðr*, *hagsmiðr* for ‘skald’ (*Háttatal*, 10; *Skáldskaparmál*, 83-84). Ross expounds this topic at some length, discussing the Norse conception of the poet as prestigious craftsman and related analogies between poet and smith, including exploration of the uncanny ‘elvish/dwarvish’, nature, or as we would say psychology, of these literary representations of poets and craftsmen; Völundr and Reginn are nominated as illustrations.<sup>253</sup>

*Scop* and *smiþ*, *wordsmith* and *swordsmith*, forged artefacts of the greatest heroic significance: rare things that endured as if with their own life, transcending the mortality of individuals, to be bequeathed through generations. The work of the poet,

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<sup>251</sup> Eliot, *Kipling’s Verse*, 20, citing R. G. Collingwood on “Art and Magic,” also discussed by Auden, “Encirclement,” 579; Kipling and craftsmanship, *Kipling’s Verse*, 14. Kipling writes how he later perceived, having since undergone them himself—his ‘adult craftsman’s knowledge’, Mackenzie, “Kipling and Northernness,” 23—the tale-birthing Morris was suffering ‘a maker’s pains’: *Of Myself*, 40-41.

<sup>252</sup> Witness *Widsið*, or *Gwydion* in “Math fab Mathonwy”, etc: R. W. Chambers, *Widsith: A Study in Old English Heroic Legend* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912); Kemp Malone, *Widsith* (London: Methuen, 1936); Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, trans., *The Mabinogion* (London: J. M. Dent, 1996), 48.

<sup>253</sup> Ross, *History*, 12, 39, 84-90.

indeed, was primarily to commemorate and transmit the deeds of heroes, to shape knowledge of those acts into a permanent form capable of surviving in and of being bequeathed through the collective memory. Thus alliteration, as versification generally, was probably originally in part a *mnemotechnic*, yet also *elicitative* mental instrument, the *scop*'s 'magic' technique of finding in language the secret pattern by which words can be spell-bound into a single unbreakable lexico-metrical whole somehow endued with its own 'life' as a whole and in every part, hence capable of enduring in 'the Tribe's' memory as inherited tradition. As the effective sword, so too the poem.

Thus we hear from the surviving Old English corpus of on the one hand the *þēodgestrēon*, the inherited treasure-store of the Folk: and on the other of the *wordhord*, the *thesaurus* of traditional heroic utterance. The intricately-textured artifice of alliterative verse, crafted to be durable and memorable, of the wordsmith, and the pattern-welded, interlaced artefacts of the metalsmith, were the great heirlooms in early Germanic civilisation.

One might perceive here Kipling's myth of 'the masterless man [...] afflicted [...] with the magic of the necessary word', the grammar-grimoire of Kipling's 'gramarye' ("Puck's Song", line 35): a Rudyardian *ars poetica*. This absolute, non-'belletristic' Poetry is an act—'For Kipling the poem is something which is intended to *act*'<sup>254</sup>—hence this poet's genres of ballad, shanty, anthem, hymn, charm, works of words that do work: poetry as a feat of incantatory and mnemonic archaic verbal magic, elicited from language-tradition by the technique, the mental instrument, of metre.<sup>255</sup> Again, *runes* are a species of verbal magic, *made graphemic*, of just this kind. The Poem is a sword of words: a blade of runes; thus Weland becomes the archetypal wordsmith: and the alliterative "Runes" an archetypal *poiesis*. Scop and Smith *make by technique*. It is *artifice* which forms the effective work and shapes it as permanent artefact: and a *patron of artifice* is inter alia what Kipling has discovered and presented in his Weland.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Eliot, *Kipling's Verse*, 18.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 6-16: Kipling as balladeer and hymnodist, 'Runes and charms are very practical formulae designed to produce definite results': Eliot, "The Music of Poetry" in *Selected Prose* (London: Penguin, 1953), 56-57.

<sup>256</sup> *Techne* in Kipling: e.g. Lewis, "Kipling's World," 234-35.

In the extant Old English texts this name appears, as a byword for artifice in weapons, in the orthographic/dialectal variants ‘Wēland’ (*Beowulf* 455a, *Waldere*, Fragment I, 2a; ‘Wēlund’, (Alfred’s vernacular versions of Boethius’ *Consolatio Philosophiæ*), and ‘Wēlund’ (*Deor*, 1a).<sup>257</sup> Though ‘Weland’s Sword’ introduces the Smith (in a striking scene which associates him with ‘Brunanburgh’, *Puck*, 14-15) as an Anglo-Saxon immigrant with a vaguely Scandinavian background Kipling never uses the Old Norse form *Vǫlundr*. Of the Smith’s appellation Kipling uses both English forms: Old English ‘Weland’ and the derivation, ‘Wayland’. ‘Wayland-Smith’, ‘Wayland [/the] Smith’, the accepted Modern English usages, as in Scott’s 1821 *Kenilworth*—and the still-current name for the Neolithic long-barrow on the Berkshire Downs by the Ridgeway near Ashbury (now in Oxfordshire), ‘Wayland’s Smithy’—<Old English *Wēlandes smiððan*: as recorded in a Berkshire charter of 955AD, testifying the site has been so called continuously and since, restrictively, the tenth century:<sup>258</sup> an eminently Kiplingesque fact of the kind recreated in the story by the onomastic fable that the place known to the children as Willingford was originally (according to *Puck*), ‘Weland’s Ford’ (*Puck*, 16-17.)

Kipling avails himself of the folkloric superstition, probably of extreme antiquity and apparently the only story associated with Weland remembered in England after the Middle Ages, of the phantom smith at the earthwork, who will shoe your horse if you leave him a groat, but because Kipling has to transplant Weland to Sussex, he omits the barrow.<sup>259</sup>

Notwithstanding such shuffling, it is notable how Kipling’s retelling, whilst omitting most of its particulars, which would be highly unsuitable for his treatment (Nīðhad/Níðuðr, Bēadohild/Bøðvildr, Widia, go unmentioned), deftly sidesteps

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<sup>257</sup> In his, standard, edition of *Beowulf*, Klaeber, in the article annotating the hemistich *Wēlandes geweorc* (455a)—having discussed *Deor*, the Franks Casket, *Vǫlundarkviða*, *Þiðrekssaga*, and ‘the cromlech in White Horse valley in Berkshire’—proceeds to direct the reader to *Kipling’s story!* Klaeber, *Beowulf*, 145.

<sup>258</sup> OS grid reference: SU281854; J. M. Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici* (London: English Historical Society, 1839-48), 5:332, no.1172.

<sup>259</sup> Davidson, “Weland,” 145-59, Motz, “Craftsman”; note how in attributing to him a reiterated association and way with horses (*Puck*, 15,17) Kipling manages, despite his fictional relocation, to maintain, hintingly ‘explain’, Weland’s traditional link with Uffington: White Horse Hill, just over a mile from Wayland’s Smithy along the Ridgeway.

*gainsaying* the ‘original’ version of the myth, and could be said indeed to continue its themes and to enhance and culminate it—in the way Kipling seems to dovetail his narrative, themes, and characterisation to the attested primary sources. In narrating Weland’s moral career from savage godhead, to humbled expiatory but honorable labour, to benediction, valediction and release, Kipling not only avoids contradicting but could almost be supplying the missing, eventually happy, redemptive ending to Weland’s biography; again, Kipling’s story resonates with and remodulates the thematic antimonies (permanence/transience, loss/gain, bondage/release, memory, inheritance/oblivion, transcendence, vengeance/justice, making/breaking...) animating the mythos.

The tale’s and poem’s title use the Old English form, while internally to the former both occur: indeed Kipling conspicuously differentiates them, distinguishing the Old English from the later folkloric form by making the Smith himself observe “‘I am not even Weland now,”[...] “They call me Wayland-Smith””, in commentary on the morphological mutation of his name with change of culture, lapse of time: as index of his decline from ungentle deity to a wayside farrier ‘shoeing horses for hire’ (*Puck*, 17).

The etymology of the name may be Proto-Germanic *\*weila-handuz* > Old English *\*wīl-hand*: *wīl* < *\*weil-* ‘artifice, skill, trick’ > Modern English *wile*, + *handuz*, > ‘hand’.<sup>260</sup> An alternative, related, etymology has also been proposed: as an active participle used as an agentive noun derived from Proto-Germanic verb *\*wēlan*, ‘to work dexterously, with craft, to make with cunning skill’ (> Old Norse *véla* ‘create, construct with art’, as in *smið-véla*, ‘art of the smith: metalwork’) > *\*wēland*, ‘one who makes things with skill, craftsman’, morphologically analogous to Old English *hāelend* (< *hāelan*), *wrecend* (< *wrecan*).<sup>261</sup>—*Wayland Wilyhand*: his name may then be interpreted ‘the cunning craftsman’: hence King Alfred’s use of ‘Welond’ to render Boethius’ ‘Fabricius’ < *faber*, ‘a workman in hard materials, craftsman, metal smith’ > Modern English *fabric*, *fabricate* in his translation of *De Consolatio Philosophiæ*. He Englishes *Ubi nunc fidelis ossa Fabricii manent* [...]? as *Hwæt synt nū þæs foremæran 7 þæs wīsan goldsmiðes bān Wēlonde*? [...] *Hwær synt nū þæs Wēlonde bān, oððe*

<sup>260</sup> George T. A. Gillespie, *A Catalogue of Persons Named in Heroic German Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

<sup>261</sup> Pollington, et al., *Wayland’s Work*, 126-27.



*hwā wāt nū hwær hī wæron?*’ (*Metres of Boethius* 10 lines 34-44, *Hwær sint nū þæs wīsan Wēlandes bān, / þæs goldsmiðes, þē wæs gēo mærost?*[...])<sup>262</sup>

Thus Alfred’s vernacular adaptation of Boethius emphasises Weland as the archetypal, most renowned *faber* in his tradition in an etymologising play on, or creative misunderstanding of, his text. We may again be struck by an instance of Kiplingesque British *persistence* when we surmise the king, ancient to us, may even have been thinking of Wayland’s Smithy, already ancient to him, (NB *Metres* lines 43-4, *Hwā wāt nū þæs wīsan Wēlandes bān, / on hwelcum hī hlēwa hrūsan þeccen?*) when translating Boethius’ *Ubi Sunt*: Alfred was born seven miles away at Wantage.

Boethius’ famous eroteme assuredly is a trope rhetoricising *mutability*, yet (prompted by *fidelis* and *manent?*) Alfred, in the same breath as he consigns to oblivion Weland’s bones, interpolates a gloss of antithetical tenor—whose gist is what *remains*, what *survives*: the *faber*’s handiwork, his *craft*: *Forþī ic cwæð þæs wīsan forþy þā cræftegan ne mæg nǣfre his cræft losigan, ne hine mon ne mæg þon eð on him geniman ðe mon mæg þa sunnan āwendan of hiere stede*. The paradox of Weland representing permanence in an *Ubi Sunt*-context of transience recalls the analogous tensions associated with him in *Deor*, wherein he also appears to be (this oblique, riddling poem’s nuances of irony and ambiguity are elusive) as a type of at once endurance, *ānhygdig* (line 2) persistence in purpose and suffering (lines 1-5), of what passes (or may pass, *mæg swā oferēode*, the poem’s elliptic, equivocal burden), and what is outlived, and outlives: thematic scintillations, which include ironies of constraint and deliverance, which continue to coruscate in Kipping’s refashioning. Alfred’s consolatory amplification of Boethius underscores the worth and lastingness—likened even to the unfaltering sun in her fixed course—of Weland’s craftsmanship, the permanence of imperishable artifice.

#### *Rudyard Runemaster*

*He lette þeron grauen sǣlcuðe runstauen [...]*

Lazamon, *Brut* line 4968.

<sup>262</sup> Walter John Sedgfield, ed., *King Alfred’s Old English version of Boethius De consolatione philosophiae* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 19:46.

Kipling's "Runes", incantatory alliterative poem, purported runic artefact, revives the ancient Germanic metrical form and also re-invokes the interrelated ancient Germanic genres of the magical runic inscription and the riddle, including the prosopopoeial riddle.

Magical lettering on Migration Age weaponry is widely archaeologically attested in runic epigraphy. It is fitting, indeed, that the history of twentieth-century alliterative verse may begin with Kipling's 'Runes', since *the history of extant alliterative verse itself* begins, not in script inked on vellum, but with runes inscription upon artefacts. We can observe the ancient Germanic devices of versecraft emerge into History together with the ancient Germanic system of writing—poetic incantation and mnemonic together with magical and memorial literacy. (The presence of runes persists, a spectral echo in the secret architecture of language, even if we are unwitting of it, in Modern English—every time we use the verb 'write': < Old English *writan*, originally to *carve, scratch* [runes].)<sup>263</sup>

On the second of the two fifth-century Golden Horns of Gallehus, found in the prolific earth of South Jutland in 1734, may be read an inscription in the Elder Futhork, immortalising on his handiwork, in a line in his Proto-Norse dialect, the name of the smith:

:M<HIMPFXF&TIIY:H&TTI>FY:H&RTF:TFFPIM&:

e k h l e w a g a s t i z : h o l t i j a z : h o r n a : t a w i d o :

Editorialised by underlining the headrhyming staves and insertion of medial caesura, the familiar profile of the verse structure emerges unmistakably:

ek Hlewagastiz Holtijaz || horna tawidō

—*the first recorded alliterative line* to survive, written in runes on a work of smithcraft, redeemed from oblivion: 'I, Hlewagastiz Holtijaz, made the horn'. To our knowledge, the long continuity of alliterative verse, with all its survivals and revivals,

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<sup>263</sup> For runology here I rely on two standard monographs: Ralph W. V. Elliott, *Runes: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press 1999).

begins here. On the basis of his illustration to one of the *Just So Stories*, of a runic tusk, I suggest it is very possible Kipling had seen images, current in print from the eighteenth century, of this artefact.

Runic inscriptions have been found on Migration Age sword- and scabbard-furniture, for example the Vimose, and Thorsberg chapes, the Chessel Down scabbard-fitting; also on swords themselves, on the Ash Gilton (Kent) pommel, and in the instances of the Sæbø sword and the Thames *seax* (whence the very ethnonym ‘Saxon’) of Beagnoth, on the blades. The iron inlay of five runes (and a swastika)<sup>264</sup> along the centre of the blade of the Sæbø sword, published in George Stephens, *Handbook of the Old-Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England* (1867), remain enigmatic. The Thames *seax*—“Runes,” 9, 21, ‘Out of deep Water’— a 9<sup>th</sup>-century Excalibur for the 1850s, is fortified by a magical 28-letter rendering of the complete Anglo-Saxon *futhorc* (the only one known)

ƵŃĐƲƲĶǷƳĤĬĴĴƳŲŲŢƆMǼMŦMƆFƲMŲ

and the name *Beagnoth*. Kipling was keenly interested in archaeology and may well at least have known of the Thames ‘Scramasax’, a real talismanic runewritten blade, which had re-surfaced in the decade before his birth.

Much later poetic details chime with the archaeological findings; rune-written swords feature in the Old English and Norse literatures Kipling probably read. In the Eddic *Sigrdrífumál* stanza 6, the valkyrie Sigrdrífa enjoins Sigurðr (in the *ljóðaháttr*-stanza typical of wisdom dialogue), to engrave ‘runes of victory’ on the hilt and (?)fuller of his dragon-bane brand (1.6 suggests the superimposed or reiterated, multiple ų T, \**teiwaz*> Týr, bindrunes evidenced in such epigraphical inscriptions as the Lindholm Amulet, the Kylver Stone, and on the Kentish sword-pommel), inviting comparison with *Beowulf* lines 1694-1698a describing the runestaves marked on the ettenish sword-hilt. Sigrdrífa elaborates to Sigurðr (in stanzas 7 and 8) on the ‘rist’ing of ‘ale-runes’, *ǫlrúnar*, tempting to relate to the talismanic **a l u** archaeologically attested on amulets, the most common of the early runic magical formulae, and to associate with the name of the swanmaiden taken to wife by Weland’s brother Ægil,

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<sup>264</sup> Adopted by Kipling himself from India.

on his drink-horn.<sup>265</sup>

*Sigrdrífumál* stanzas 8-14, 17-21, cf. *Völsunga Saga* Chapter 21,<sup>266</sup> also prescribes that ‘runes of magical power’ of sundry kinds (‘help-runes’, ‘sea-runes’, ‘limb-runes’, ‘mind-runes’...) should be written not only on gold, on glass, but on the fingernail, the midwife’s hand, the bulwarks and rudder-blades of ships, and on the limbs of beasts and beaks of birds, the bear’s paw, the wolf’s claw, the nebs of owls and eagles.<sup>267</sup>

Perhaps the most celebrated and intriguing Anglo-Saxon runic artefact, the Franks Casket, re-emerged during Kipling’s lifetime and combines extensive riddling runic inscriptions *with depictions from Weland’s legend* as known from *Deor* and *Völundarkviða*.<sup>268</sup> It seems very probable Kipling knew of or had seen the Franks Casket and the Thames ‘Scramasax’. The corpus of runic epigraphy may also include the very name of the Smith, in the numismatic shape of the Schweindorf Solidus, which appears to be inscribed with the name **we l a [n] d u** in Anglo-Saxon/Frisian runes: ƿMƿMƿN.

Poetry, prophecy, riddles, runes of divination, spellcasting, and occult knowledge, are intimately related in ancient Germanic culture: all are kindred attributes of the vatic god of inspiration, Óðinn.<sup>269</sup>

Specifically Kipling’s ‘Runes’ recalls the Old English and Norse Rune Poems, and, especially, the familiar Anglo-Saxon literary genre of the *verse-riddle*. ‘Read’, ‘rede’, and ‘riddle’ are linguistically related, suggesting the Riddle as a primordial and paradigmatic mode of poetry, epitomizing poetic thought, exhibiting the operation of metaphor, and the performance of hermeneutics. The Old English Riddle is richly

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<sup>265</sup> Jónsson, *Eddukvæði*, 2:307-308; cf. Bjarni Einarsson, ed., *Egils Saga* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003), 59.

<sup>266</sup> Finch, *Völsunga Saga*, 36-39.

<sup>267</sup> Jónsson, *Eddukvæði*, 2:308-312.

<sup>268</sup> Franks donated the panels to the British Museum in 1867.

<sup>269</sup> E.g. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 35-74.

represented in the *Exeter Book*;<sup>270</sup> some of which 95 (e.g. Nos. 42, 64, 75?/6) avail themselves of the cryptographic potential of runic acrophony (the runes riddles in themselves), a device also found in *The Dialogues of Salomon and Saturnus*, *The Husband's Message*<sup>271</sup> (lines 49-50; also preserved in the *Exeter Book*, perhaps connected with Riddle 60 and possibly itself a riddle), and most famously in Cynewulf's runic signatures.<sup>272</sup>

I observed in passing above Anglo-Saxon runes appear in Kipling's work four years prior to the publication of *Puck*, in *Just So Stories*. "How the Alphabet Was Made" nominates 'Runics' in a catalogue of arcane scripts, but the most interesting evidence is supplied by Kipling's illustrations to "The Cat that Walked by Himself" and "How the First Letter was Written".<sup>273</sup>

The 'wonderful marks' on the Cave Woman's 'big flat blade-bone' from a wild sheep (with reference to the divinatory practice of scapulomancy) by which she makes 'the first Singing Magic in the world' are revealed by Kipling's drawing to be Anglo-Saxon runes.<sup>274</sup>

In the instance of "How the First Letter was Written" Kipling's illustration depicts, according to his commentary, an 'old tusk [...] part of an old tribal trumpet' upon which the story was 'carved [...] a very long time ago by the Ancient Peoples [...]'. He continues, 'The letters round the tusk are magic—Runic magic [...]': and he

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<sup>270</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, vol. 3, *The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 204, 230, 234.

<sup>271</sup> Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 102; Krapp and Dobbie, *Exeter Book*, 227.

<sup>272</sup> E.g. ll. 160b-197a, John M. Kemble, *The Dialogue of Salomon and Saturnus* (London: Ælfric Society, 1848), 140-42; *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, vol. 6, ed. Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), 35-36; the prose version includes the catechism 'Who first devised bookstaves? —Mercurius the Giant', Óðinn being equated to Mercury according to the *interpretatio romana*: J. S. Ryan, "Othin in England: Evidence from the Poetry for a Cult of Woden in Anglo-Saxon England," *Folklore* 74, No. 3 (Autumn, 1963), 476. Shippey, *Wisdom*, 86-103. Cynewulf: *The Fates of the Apostles*, ll. 96-106, *Elene*, ll. 1256-71, *Christ II*, ll. 793-807, *Juliana* ll. 703-709: see e.g. P.O.E. Gradon, ed., *Cynewulf's Elene* (London: Methuen, 1958), 72-74.

<sup>273</sup> *Just So Stories* (London: Macmillan, 1902; repr.1961), 126-27.

<sup>274</sup> *Just So*, 181.

challenges the reader to decipher them.<sup>275</sup>

I have:

THIS IS THE STORI OF TAFFIMAI ALL RITTEN OUT ON AN OLD TUSK IF YOU BEGIN AT THE TOP LEFT HAND CORNER AND GO ON TO THE RIGHT U CAN SEE FOR URSELF THE THINGS AS THA HAPPENED THE REASON THAT I SPELL SO QUEERLI IS BECAUSE THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH LETTERS IN THE RUNIC ALPHABET FOR ALL THE OURDS THAT I OUANT TO USE TO U O BELOFED<sup>276</sup>

The specific *forms* of Kipling’s runes are to the runologist’s eye of a strikingly peculiar mode which renders them uniquely distinctive, and I propose it appears they are derived from those in the ninth-century Freisingen MS No. iv 6.

Kipling’s atypical, bowed H and doubled B above all seem unmistakably those of this manuscript. If this is correct, Kipling most likely took them from John Kemble’s “On Anglo-Saxon Runes”, *Archaeologia*, 1840 (reproduced as Fig. 20; Kemble’s monograph also contains other examples of similar calligraphic *futhorcs*—sometimes termed ‘Marcomannic’—from Continental manuscripts).

Transliterated into Latin (letters, and also, we then perceive, language) the legend these remarkable runes record may be deciphered, with interpolated spaces, as follows (in my transliteration I have presumed to emend what I might note here seems to be a typographical omission in Kemble’s transliteration—or at least, in the reprint I am using—supplying the missing first person singular pronoun which my transliteration certainly finds to be present in the runic text):

OMNIS LABOR FINEM HABET PREMIUM EIUS NON HABET FINEM MADALFRID  
SCRIPSIT ISTAM PARTEM D[E]O GRATIAS QUOD EGO PERFECI OPUS MEUM

‘Every labour has an end: its reward has no end. Madalfrid wrote this section. Thanks be to God that I have completed my work’—a pleasingly apposite sentiment from Madalfrid, which might be felt to have exerted some appeal for the writer of *A Day’s*

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<sup>275</sup> Kipling’s use of runes as an integral element in a 1902 children’s book pre-dates Tolkien’s in *The Hobbit* (1937) by a generation; Kipling’s contemporary M. R. James (1862-1936), a scholar of medieval manuscripts, published “Casting the Runes” in *More Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (London: Edward Arnold) 1911.

<sup>276</sup> John M. Kemble, *Anglo-Saxon Runes*, Additional Notes and Translations by Bill Griffiths, (Hockwold-cum Wilton: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1991), 63-65; page of Continental MS runes, 26 (figs. 1-7).

*Work*,<sup>277</sup> one whom many commentators have regarded as the poet of *Work*, and who emphasizes Weland's 'work-ethic' (*Puck*, 14, 15, 19, 20) related to the thematic content of the story of Weland's labour as expiation—' "I was not a gentle God in my Day and my Time and my Power" ', Kipling's reference to the original, here untold, Weland story?—and his eventual receiving of benediction: ' "I shall never be released until some human being truly wishes me well" ' (*Puck*, 17). The pagan past is propitiated and enabled to pass, a blessing is bestowed and a blessing is received, Weland renounces the tools of his craft (and of his vengeance), and attains redemption, 'release' (*Puck*, 19-20).

While one could speculate that Kipling read works on runes by Stephens or Hodgetts,<sup>278</sup> these *Just So* illustrations constitute proof positive Kipling actually did know, prior to writing *Puck*, the forms and values of at least one version of the *futhorc*. The distinctive fashion of the runic characters he uses very strongly suggests, furthermore, Kemble's monograph as his source, study of which work would have equipped him with a fair working knowledge of the runes, their names, history and use.

In *Puck*, Kipling introduces the runes at the climax of Weland's ritualistic forging in 'Weland's Sword', narrating how the 'Smith of the Gods' 'said 'Runes (that's charms)' over the sword, 'and [...] carved Runes of Prophecy on the blade' (*Puck*, 19-20). Later they are described as being 'on either side just below the handle': there '[...] the Runic letters shivered as though they were alive' (*Puck*, 27). This mysterious quality of uncanny animation—'sorcery and quick enchantments' (*Puck*, 29)<sup>279</sup>—in the magical letters may at least in part be taken to account for, and to represent and express, the sword's attributes of sentience and volition. It flies from Hugh's hand at 'Santlache', fulfilling the prophecy of the first stanza of "Runes"; when Sir Richard reaches out to accept the proffered weapon, it 'groaned like a stricken man, and I

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<sup>277</sup> (London: Macmillan, 1898). E.g. Lewis, "Kipling's World," 234-35.

<sup>278</sup> George Stephens, *The Old-Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England* (London and Copenhagen: 1866-1901); J. Frederick Hodgetts, *Older England: Illustrated by the Anglo-Saxon Antiquities in the British Museum in a Course of Six Lectures* (London: Whiting, 1884).

<sup>279</sup> <Old English *cwic*.

leaped back crying, “Sorcery!” [The children looked at the sword as though it might speak again.]’ (*Puck*, 28). As the book proceeds Weland’s sword sings, speaks, foretells, ‘answer[s] low and crooningly’, even emits a Pentecostal ‘rushing noise of music’ (*Puck*, 29, 38, 48). On the occasion of the combat with the ‘Devils’ for winning the Gold, it sings again, ‘loud and fierce’, ‘as a Dane sings before battle’ (*Puck*, 56).<sup>280</sup>

Such enchantments as the runes magically bespeaking themselves in these vocalisations, or as the manifestation of the daimonic spirit of, or invoked by, Weland the heathen god and conjured into to his artefact, seem to be suggested, and just as the children’s response strengthens our sense of the weapon’s lively presence, this animation powerfully assists Kipling’s narrative conceit of the sword as agent in England’s future.<sup>281</sup>

“Runes” itself is ‘spoken’ in the first person by the sword: ‘A Smith makes me [...] I am sent [...] The Gold I gather [...]’ (1, 6, 7). This is particularly reminiscent of the device of prosopopoeia typically employed in the Anglo-Saxon riddle tradition (*Exeter Book Riddles* 16, 17, 25, 25, 27, 30, 95...) in which inanimate, or voiceless, things are by poetic magic quickened and lent voice, and uncannily address us in the first person, often beginning with the formula  *Ic eom...*,  *Ic wæs* and ending on the challenge  *Frige* or  *saga*,  *hwæt ic hātte*.  *The Dream of the Rood* is an extended prosopopoeial riddle: the Rood speaks; indeed the Ruthwell Cross is engraved with runes writing lines similar to lines in that poem. An example of an inscribed (not with runes in this case) Anglo-Saxon  *artefact* ‘speaking’ in the first person is that known as the Alfred Jewel,<sup>282</sup> which ‘tells’ us: ÆLFRED MEC HEHT GEWYRCAN: ‘Alfred commanded me wrought’.

Kipling’s poem may thus resonantly be contextualised in real Old-Northern culture. In this tradition Kipling’s sword ‘speaks’ its runic inscription, a prosopopoeial riddle and moreover a proleptic, predictive one. The Sword was forged and enchanted by a

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<sup>280</sup> Kipling referring to  *Heimskringla*, the  *Gesta Danorum*, or  *Germania*...?

<sup>281</sup> Magic swords as sentient vocal agents, cf. Tolkien’s ‘Gurthang’, sword of Túrin derived from the sword of  *Kalevala*’s Kullervo: Tolkien,  *The Silmarillion* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), 272; Elias Lönnrot, ed.,  *The Kalevala*, trans. Francis Peabody Magoun (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 255.

<sup>282</sup> Ashmolean, Oxford.



god (*Puck*, 19), and runes are of course not merely magical but divinatory, ‘Runes of Prophecy’. The riddle will not finally and fully be decoded until the end of the narrative: the animate Sword itself will play its part in making the prophetic verses it bears come to pass, fulfilling and solving Kipling’s mythopoeic version of the *wyrd* of English history.

Kipling’s representation of runes in *Just So* presents obvious points of relevant comparison with Weland’s: runes, runic inscription as incantation, runic artefacts as of magical talismanic cultural significance. “Runes” does not obviously employ runic characters in its text, but it is informed and formed by Kipling’s now-demonstrated runelore, therefore a close reading of his alliterative rune-poem should be alive to the foregoing.

If as I hope I have shown Kipling framed for “Runes” a certain authenticity in conception, theme, and content, in what sense, and to what quantifiable extent, is Kipling’s runic poem also Old-Northern *formally*? Can its early attempt to revive the accentual-alliterative metric and associated style be demonstrated?

“Runes”: *‘The Magic of the Necessary Word’*.

Upon first beholding “Runes” Kipling’s reader is probably struck initially by how it looks, this poem’s features of visual appearance and its presence upon the page.

#### THE RUNES ON WELAND’S SWORD

	A Smith makes me To betray my Man In my first fight.
5	To gather Gold At the world’s end I am sent.
	The Gold I gather Comes into England Out of deep Water.
10	Like a shining Fish Then it descends Into deep Water.

15                   It is not given  
                       For goods or gear,  
                       But for The Thing.

                      The Gold I gather  
                       A King covets  
                       For an ill use.

20                   The Gold I gather  
                       Is drawn up  
                       Out of deep Water.

                      Like a shining Fish  
                       Then it descends  
                       Into deep Water.

25                   It is not given  
                       For goods or gear  
                       But for The Thing.

As remarked above, there is no other poem in *Puck* in this verse-form or in this, corresponding, dictional style, and naturally this has an effect on typographical lineation, engenders how the verse looks. It shows itself immediately dissimilar to the other, *formally familiar*—hymn- or shanty-like, balladeering, anthemwise, carolkind—poems in the book. “Harp Song” evokes a similar Old-Northern culture, and is also arranged stanzaically in triplets, but it is accentual-*syllabic* and above all, end-rhyming. “Runes” bears no likeness to the very hymnal “Cities and Thrones and Powers”, an eminently direct comparison as the poems are set facing each other, only the seam of the gutter of the spread sundering them. “Runes” stands out, as the only poem of its lexico-metrical kind in the volume, and this is visually evident. As we understand from the title, we are to imagine these verses inscribed along a blade, hence it strikes one as appropriate for the individual lines, the first-time reader would likely observe, to be so unusually short, creating, of course, the poem’s narrow, long, and noticeably even-bordered shape down the page.

Cast in this mould, the poem’s thin profile silhouetted against whitespace even suggests a piece of ‘concrete poetry’, the ‘calligram’ of sword, complete with crossguard formed by the title, an eye-catchingly unique blade of words. For many readers, especially when it was first published, it is possible it may have been *the first poem like it they had ever seen*—or, indeed, heard.

### *Syllabification*

It is apparent this shape has been achieved by an effort drastically to restrict the number of syllables per line. This again may be felt to be an appropriate formal characteristic in a poem purportedly from an inscription, and one engraved in a stiff angular character. The lines are lapidary, chiselled, rigid; or as if minted—punched or stamped as with a die—or as if etched, chased, into the chill, stubborn metal. It feels right also as spoken runes or gnomes, intended as the words of the sword: the ‘voice’ has a cold, hard, impersonal ring, while the secret foreknowledge in these riddles impresses with its unquestionable assurance: laconic yet authoritative statements with a fateful, oracular clang of finality. If they are incised, they are also concise, and decisive.

Less impressionistically, one finds that the syllable-tally varies between four, five, and three. Just under half the poem’s lines consist of four syllables: none exceeds five. This underlying norm of 4 syllables is congruent with the *tetrasyllabic* count exhibited by the Germanic alliterative-accentual hemistich in its paradigmatic form: a minimal four syllables, in which the disposition of two main accents is varied according to metrical type.

### *Accentuation*

And indeed it may accordingly be perceived that the line of “Runes” is also one characterised by two main accents. Lines 9, 12, 21, and 24 possess, arguably, a third secondary-grade stress created by prosodic intonation for sense: but this is audibly less prominent than the heavier two. Thus all the lines evince two main beats, and some one half of the poem’s lines are tetrasyllables, whilst the other are but pentasyllables. The two remaining three-syllable lines (6, 20) are catalectic according to the rules, but Kipling’s lines therefore conform tolerably, in effect, to the 4:2 proportion basic to Germanic versification.

### *Alliteration*

We have established the *accentual* metre of this poem by Kipling. It is moreover an *alliterative* poem—albeit inconsistently, without attempting to imitate accurately the patterns in ancient Germanic verse. Alliteration appears unsystematically irregular—not consistently yoked to principal sense-words—but is sporadically, not insistently

yet emphatically, present. *Every* tercet has *some* alliteration. ‘Smith’ (line 1), ‘betray’ (2), ‘world’ (5), ‘Fish’ (10, 22), ‘Water’ (9, 12, 21, 24) instantiate words which should, but do not, participate in alliterative schemata. However, lines 1-2 seem to prosecute a more properly-distributed scheme on *m*-, ‘Makes me [...] Man’, and 3 on *f*-, ‘first fight’; note the *g*-alliteration in 4, 7, 16, 19, headrhyming ‘Gold’ and ‘gather’, and 13-14, 24-6, ‘given [...] goods [...] gear’ (triple alliteration); on the voiceless velar plosive in 17, ‘King [...] covets’, and, 20-21, on *d*-, ‘drawn [...] deep’.

Less orthodox phonic chiming may have been devised for stanza IV (repeated as stanza VIII), wherein a pattern of sibilant voiceless fricative consonant-clusters ‘fish [...] shining [...] descnds’ may be intended (licentiously), to salvage a quasi-alliterative effect. Kipling may have perceived alliteration in stanza IV, linking 11-12, on the verb ‘descends’ and the adjective ‘dark’, but he can hardly have it both ways, if he did intend to play on the sibilant amid the disyllabic verb, the onset of the accented stem-syllable. In the latter case he would be deploying alliteration more correctly, since ‘de-’ is a prefix.

The alliteration is all consonantal, and save for the rhymed initial voiceless labiodental fricatives in 3, all offer the hard clear onset rhyme of the voiced and unvoiced velar plosive stops. Although by sight they appear vowels both, ‘Ill use’ is not really an instance of vocalic alliteration, emphasising—as I have attempted here by using phonetic terms—how head-rhyme is a matter of *sounds* and not, as implied by the misnomer ‘alliteration’, *letters*, as the *u* is sounded like the consonantal palatal approximant initial *y*.

These alliterations have an effect of picking out or pointing up the phrases—often the repeated lines, another echoic device in the poem. Line 4, ‘To gather Gold’ and the variant ‘The Gold I gather’ (7), is reiterated four times, and ‘Out of/Into deep Water’ four times: stanzas IV and VIII are duplications identically replicating one another: as are stanzas V and, the *fourth*—again—stanza following, IX. These produce something like the impression of traditional oral alliterative formulae, or the echoic repetitions of magical or ritual incantation, and themselves create a variant patterning of phonic association even if not strictly alliterative, the best example being the reiterative phrases pertaining to ‘deep Water’, 9, 12, 21, 24. Palpable also are the cadential echoes ‘end/sent’ (5/6, an oblique or half-rhyme), and ‘gather/Water’ (7/9, 12/16, 19/21, / 24), a syllabic rhyme on a reiterated trochee—mention of which prompts notice of how Kipling varies rising and falling rhythms through the poem, a

rhythmic effect reminiscent of the cadential diversification characteristic of Germanic verse.

Eliot, speaking of the antecedent poet in terms of ‘the artist as magician’, declares how in Kipling’s verse ‘repetitions and refrains [...] contribute an incantatory effect’.<sup>283</sup> These reiterations are not wholly unknown from the surviving corpus of Old English verse: *Deor* has its cryptic refrain, as does, *Wulf and Eadwacer*; the Old Norse ‘spell, incantation’ modification of *ljóðahátt*, *galdralag*, also employs a reiterative hypnotic, ritualistically or obsessively ‘binding’, device of parallelistic near-repetitions and variegated echoes.<sup>284</sup> In “Runes” the most obvious instance is the reiteration of stanzas, which create an almost circular design: the repetitions help shape and unify, spell-bind, the poem aesthetically, while suggesting these magical affinities.

### *Caesuration*

Hence Kipling appears to conceive of his lines correctly as a normative four-syllable verse to which syllable count is attached two main accents; review of the alliteration especially, inevitably (because of its function), induces the metrist to perceive that what is *not* clearly in evidence is the now characteristically noticeable medial caesura: these lines are *not hemistichs*. Kipling seems to regard what should be half-lines as full-lines, and he lineates, and intermittently alliterates, them accordingly. Where the incidence of alliteration happens to allow it to function as intended in the accurate form of the versification, there is a sense of the potential emergence or incipience of half-lines linked by headrhyme, for example lines 13-14, 25-26, but because the lines are actually not conceptualised as twin hemistichs caesurally pivoted and alliteratively braced, caesura, hemistich, and alliteration are an attenuated presence at best.

This is I suggest the result of Kipling’s *imitating the appearance* of Old English and Norse poetry as published in the nineteenth century, and perhaps particularly the layout of translations in which the metre was not consistently imitated. A good example, including because Kipling must have known it, of a nineteenth-century representation of Old English poetry not wholly metrically understood and printed as

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<sup>283</sup> Eliot, *Kipling’s Verse*, 9, 20; cf. Mackenzie “Kipling and Northerness,” 31.

<sup>284</sup> Old Norse *galdr*, ‘spell, incantation, (en)chant(ment)’, Old English *g(e)aldor*, <verb *galan*, *giellan*, ‘to sing’, > ‘yell’, ‘nightingale’, suggesting how *galdrar* were vocalised, in an uncanny falsetto: cf. Kipling’s singing sword, *Just So*’s ‘Singing Magic’.

unjoined half-lines is Tennyson's "Brunanburh" (lines 1-10):

Athelstan King,  
 Lord among Earls,  
 Bracelet-bestower and  
 Baron of Barons,  
 He with his brother,  
 Edmund Atheling,  
 Gaining a lifelong  
 Glory in battle,  
 Slew with the sword-edge  
 There by Brunanburh [...] <sup>285</sup>

But a yet-more promising model may be acknowledged even within *Puck's* text (14): when Una is said to have been reading A. and E. Keary's *The Heroes of Asgard*. As the casually familiar tone in which this is mentioned suggests, this was the chief schoolbook version of the Norse myths from the middle of the nineteenth century. Based on the scholarship of Samuel Laing, Benjamin Thorpe, George Webbe Dasent, and Paul-Henri Mallet, first published in 1857, it endured through various editions, redactions and re-issues, to the early 1940s: Kipling may well have known and used one of the Macmillan editions.<sup>286</sup> Mackenzie's points out that the 1857 edition 'orientates Northern myth to the coming of Christianity', which is of course is suggestive with regard to Kipling's *Weland*.<sup>287</sup> As Wawn notes, the Kearys intersperse their prose retellings with suitably-bowdlerised Eddaic verse. Wawn quotes their version of the famous lines from *Völuspá*:

An axe age,  
 A sword age,  
 Shields oft cleft in twain;  
 A storm age,  
 A wolf age  
 Ere the earth met its doom. <sup>288</sup>

Translations from Old Norse mythological poetry were popular in Victorian and

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<sup>285</sup> Tennyson, *Ballads and Other Poems*, 169-70.

<sup>286</sup> Wawn, *Vikings and Victorians*, 197-201ff.

<sup>287</sup> Mackenzie, "Kipling and Northernness," 36.

<sup>288</sup> Keary and Keary, *Asgard*, 299, cited Wawn, *Vikings and Victorians*, 199; Jónsson, *Eddukvæði*, 1:15; stanza 44 in Dronke, lines 7-10, *Poetic Edda*, 2:19.

Edwardian England, and though Tennyson does remain another candidate, we can be positive Kipling knew these verses in Keary, and the resemblance to “Runes” is striking. The lineation, typical of earlier conventions in printing Old English and, especially Norse Eddaic half-lines, is identical; we find too here the duple-triple accentual stress of Kipling’s poem (thence perhaps transmitted to Eliot’s ‘The river sweats’.) This is fortified by adducing the only other, closely comparable, example of the approximated metre (and litotes) in the *Puck* books, the four-line verse translating ‘the runes on the iron’ of Asa Thor’s ring in the *Rewards* story ‘Cold Iron’ (*Puck*, 197):

Few can see  
Further forth  
Than when the child  
Meets the Cold Iron.

The transposition ‘Further forth || few can see’ would be alliteratively preferable, but these lines are, though two-beat, catalectic. Notwithstanding this it is still unmistakably accentual-alliterative verse intended as imitative of Eddic Old Norse: in fact, it is identifiable as an allusive adaption by Kipling of an actually extant *fornyrðislag* stanza, 15 of *Völuspá hin skamma*,<sup>289</sup> hence the Kearys’ quotation of it in their Chapter IX, “Ragnarok, or the Twilight of the Gods”—plainly Kipling’s source:

Few may see  
Further forth  
Than when Odin  
Meets the Wolf.

Thus, probably as a result of the effect of models such as Keary and Tennyson on his grasp of the lines’ structure, Kipling’s “Runes” cannot be said to recognise and attempt accurately to imitate the hemistich+caesura form—in which the alliteration is implicated—authentic to Germanic verse: very clearly however it does exhibit an unmistakably frequent incidence of alliteration which, like the restriction of the syllable-count and the consistent two main beats per line, must betoken a deliberate effort towards producing a stylistic and formal *effect intended to recall* that of the Old-

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<sup>289</sup> Lines 5-8, Jónnson, *Eddukvæði*, 2:503.

Northern sources.

This failing is mitigated by remembering, as adduced in my Introduction, that Kipling, like his predecessors associated with alliterative-accentual metre in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—Wagner, Tennyson, Morris, Hopkins—were all working *prior* to the publication, or dissemination and assimilation, of Sievers deciphering of *Altgermanische Metrik* (1893). Since Sievers' metrics only appear to have reached Anglophone readers in the form of university students of Anglo-Saxon via Sweet in the early 1900s, there was accessible to Kipling no standard account of how the metre worked. Saintsbury, an authority on metre, still did not know in 1910.

Assaying metrical analysis of “Runes” turns out to reveal that some of Kipling's dipodic lines (those with only three syllables make of course less metrical sense) are, as it happens, susceptible to Sievers' scansion: rhythmic ‘piths and gists’ of ancient Germanic verse, probably the felicitous result of the marriage of Kipling's intuitively good ear for the desired stylistic effect, and, suggestively in the context of discourses concerning the relation between metre and linguistic prosody, the inherent speech-rhythms of the English language.

Line 2, ‘To betray my Man’, could be an **Type B**, with anacrusis. The alliterating lines afford more completely convincing instances. Line 4, ‘To gather Gold’, would be a perfect, tetrasyllabic and alliteratively intact, **B Type** hemistich, the second most frequent rhythm; its variant, 7, 16, 19, ‘The Gold I gather’, could be scanned as a **Type A** half-line with anacrusis, or, scanning ‘gather’ as a resolved stress, as a **B**, in either case correctly alliterated. Lines 14, 26, ‘For goods or gear’ is another straightforward **B**, whilst 17, ‘A King covets’, conforms to a **Type C** verse. The numerous **B-Types** noticed suggest the acculturated poetic dominance of the iamb, but the **C-Type** intrudes a Germanic metrical characteristic normally avoided in familiar ‘running-rhythm’ versification, the ‘clashing’ pattern Lewis declared a natural English speech-rhythm alliterative verse saves from metrical non-recognition, and which was also extolled by Pound, Joyce, and Auden (as noted in my Introduction, page 23, see further Chapter II page 116). In such medial clashes one might think here of the abutted beats as acoustically expressive of theme and content, as echoing the hammer-blows of the Smith's making.

Although all Germanic alliterative versecraft is based on a principle of condensation,



omitting extraneous speech-material so that the rhythmic-semantic core may be exhibited in relief—paring and polishing the language to hard, clear profiles of sound and sense—in Scandinavia language and culture fostered the ancestrally inherited common metre towards maximal gnomic compaction and laconic vehemence. In contrast to the (as extant) predominantly stichic style in Old English and German, lines were gathered into stanzaic aggregates.<sup>290</sup>

The place of single hemistichs in Old English verse is unclear.<sup>291</sup> There is a prominent example in Eddaic poetry—unless it represents a case of corruption, although it could be seen as a natural development fulfilling the logic of the metre—of drastically *reduced* stress- and syllable- count, the famous stanzas 76-77 of the “Gestaþátttr”) from *Hávamál*, in which the line is slowed and weighted down from the normative hemistichal weight of 4:2 to 2:2, so that the heavy syllables emphatically tell, enunciating crucial content:

deyr fé,  
deyja frændr [...]<sup>292</sup>

Kipling’s oblique abruptness in “Runes” strikes one as in this tradition of Norse terseness. Its premorsed, rhymeless lines must have struck the book’s immediate readership as remarkably alien and remote. In the accentual metre, so strangely unlike the familiar movement of verse in lyrical, ‘running’ rhythm, each sense-word in the short lines assumes a new and other emphasis and penetration of meaning, the metre paradoxically imparting to the brief lines a weight of mass, and a force of gravity by which they seem to hover, poised, in a field of tension and balance. To some—including juvenile readers unmoved and bored by what they had come to know as ‘Poetry’—this may have suggested a new world of trenchant utterance in strong rhythm.

That “Runes” is stanzaic is initially suggestive of another token of Norse influence. It is constituted of nine tercets—note Kipling did *not* for instance choose *quatrains*;

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<sup>290</sup> Sievers, “Old Germanic,” 268-69, 286; Tolkien, *Sigurd*, 20, 34.

<sup>291</sup> A. J. Bliss, “Single Half-Lines in O.E. Poetry,” *Notes and Queries*, n.s., 18 (1971): 442-49.

<sup>292</sup> Jónsson, *Eddukvæði*, 1:41-2; Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, 3:17. Also attested in Eyvindr Skáldaspillir, *Hákonarmál*, stanza 22, line 1: Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, trans. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 127.

each tercet is formed of one run-on sentence of three clauses divided and so lineated that each clause occupies one enjambed line: twenty-seven lines: three lines x nine stanzas. Hence “Runes” appears, appropriately, for an incantatory inscription in magic letters—and quite in character for the mentality of the author—to have been founded by Kipling on a magical numerology, if not perhaps on runic numbers (based on three x eight *aettir* = twenty-four-rune *fubark*), *not* inconsistent with magical numbers in the *Eddas*, which reiterate the three, nine, and twenty-seven deployed by Kipling to structure his poem.<sup>293</sup> For one (out of very many), contextually apposite, examples, Óðinn is said to have dreed three weirds to win the runes, hanging (on Yggdrasil—which has three roots, linking nine worlds; and under each root three wells...), impaling with his Spear, and starvation, for the duration of nine nights, attaining eighteen runic spells; similarly he spent three nights with Gunnlōð (to obtain the Mead of Poetry, of which he took three draughts, one from each of three vessels (*Völuspá* stanza 2, lines 5-8; *Hávamál*, stanzas 106-107, 138-164, “Rúnatal;” *Skáldskaparmál*, 4.))<sup>294</sup>

The ‘magic’ of these numbers appears to derive from the Moon and the lunar calendar. Kipling painstakingly specifies that Weland tempered the Sword three times, ‘in running water twice, and the third time [...] in [...] evening dew’, ‘and then he laid it out in the moonlight and said Runes (that’s charms) over it’ (*Puck*, 19-20.) Three and its multiples are Moon numbers; as tides, of the dews she also is mistress; and of those slower currents, the seams of ore whose lodes quicken and gestate under lunar influence within the veined earth. I suggested above, discussing “Runes”’ phonic patterns, at possibly numerically-directed or significant organisation at play in the poem’s ‘binding’ repetitions, and it is conceivable further work could be undertaken concerning numerological structures and relationships encoded in Kipling’s magical poem. The author’s Mercurial tease hinting at ‘allegories and allusions’ and ‘*cryptogram*’ should be recalled.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> The 24 runes may correspond to the 24 syllables stipulated for one *dróttkvætt helmingr*; my hunch endorsed by the same observation, Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 34; 3 and 8 in runic magic: Elliott, *Runes*, 13-14, noting the the incidence of 3x8 numerology on the Lindholm amulet.

<sup>294</sup> Jónsson, *Eddukvæði*, 1:2, 49, 59-66; Dronke, *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997; 2011), 2:7; 3:23, 30-35.

<sup>295</sup> *Of Myself*, 145.

*Runes in "Runes"?*

As noted the poem is itself a riddle. We should recall the reader's experience of the poem, due to its position in the book (separated from the story by some 60 pages), in relation to the events as s/he then knows them of the narrative: of that reader's condition as s/he reaches this page, after the last of "Old Men at Pevensy", having been kept in suspenseful anticipation—enduring all the strange episodes pertaining to the weapon and its enigmatic runic inscription throughout "Young Men at the Manor" and "The Knights of the Joyous Venture"—ever since the evocative narration of the Sword's forging in the first story at the beginning of the book.

The reader knows there are enchanted 'Runes of Prophecy' engraved in the fateful, vocal, blade: but, reading the book sequentially, according to due conduct of the narrative process intended and devised by Kipling, s/he has no notion of what the inscription says. It has persisted as an obscure portentous enigma, and in this way the reader is placed and suspended in the same condition of awful ignorance with regard to the Sword as the characters, with the possible exception of that distinctly Kipling-esque man of action and *knower*, the wise Viking *Witta* (*Puck*, 49). At this point of having reached the poem, not the end of the book, much in the poem still remains a riddle.

Consistently with the Eliotic concept of Kipling's mixed form,<sup>296</sup> while "Runes" may be immediately impressive and imaginatively appealing, it is of course not fully meaningful and comprehensible, mere incantatory 'music' and evocative-sounding words, without knowledge of the corresponding narrative in *Puck*. Ignorant of any narrative reference, the reader is drawn by its aesthetic impact to wish to supply a story to it.

' "What happened to [...] the sword?" ' the children ask (*Puck*, 20): it is the Sword which provides the spine, and key, for the Anglo-Norman narrative, referring to its episodes. The career of the Sword carves the destiny of the nation. It is apparent that stanza I correlates to the first two stories, "Weland's Sword" and "Young Men at the Manor", tercets II and III to "Knights of the Joyous Venture" (the Sword's role as the weapon wielded in winning 'The Treasure' from the 'Devils'), stanza IV to "Old Men

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<sup>296</sup> Eliot, *Kipling's Verse*, 5, 22: cf. the mixed (prose plus verse) form of Morris and Tolkien.

at Pevensey”, and the last verses to “The Treasure and the Law”. The ‘Treasure’ is “Runes”’s ‘Gold’, undergoing its ‘as above: so below’ immersion and emergence, for the poem spoken by the Sword chiefly concerns the Gold.<sup>297</sup> the covetous king of l.17 alludes to John, and it also becomes transparent—by the book’s *final* tale—that ‘The Thing’ (lines 15, 27) is an apposite Old-Northern locution meaning *Runnymede*, and ultimately, ‘the Mother of Parliaments’.

This mysteriousness of reference, reminiscent of the allusive prophetic style as used by Nostradamus and associated with Merlin, the reader may perceive as perhaps betokened by another salient characteristic of the poem: the idiosyncratic initial capitalisation. Seven of the poem’s *nouns* are given capitalised initial letters: ‘Smith’ line 1, ‘Man’ 2, ‘Gold’ 4, 7, 16, 19) ‘Water’ (9, 12, 21, 24), ‘Fish’ (10, 22), The Thing (definite article also capitalised), (15, 27), ‘King’ (17). Are these intended to lend to these nouns an impression of weighty, esoteric significance, archetypal force, portentous suggestiveness? Of which ‘The Thing’ might strike the reader accustomed only to modern idiom as the most ominous and arcane of all. Not all the nouns are so treated, but of the poem’s lexical items only words from this word class are: but why?

“Runes” shares the Old-Northern culture of its preceding Viking poems “Harp Song” and “Thorkild’s Song”. While these latter two do not attempt revival of Old English or Norse *metric* they do feature noteworthy imitation of the *rhetoric* of that poetry, Kipling’s new-coined skaldic kennings ‘the old grey Widow-maker’ (line 3) (=sword) and ‘the ten-times fingering weed’, 8 (=arms, as in embrace); and Thorkild’s ‘wake the white ash-breeze’ (4) (=sail/row) “Runes”’ diction affords none. No nouns—notwithstanding ample skaldic opportunity and conducive occasion (Man/Warrior, Gold, Water, Fish, King)—are substituted by *kenningar*: no *heiti*, neither *kend* nor *ókend*, even though a riddle would be the perfect excuse for them. Instead, the poem presents a stylistic freightage of puzzlingly irregular nominations.

I have shown that Kipling knew the *fuporc*, and we have the auctorial profession that the book contains allusions and cryptography. These are “*The Runes on Weland’s Sword*”: could the title be a clue? Could “Runes” include runes in some allusive

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<sup>297</sup> The Smith, the Sword, the Gold in and out of Deep Water, again recall the thematic and narrative trajectory of Wagner’s *Ring*, whilst the progress from barbarism to Law recalls Wagner’s own Greek model, Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*.

manner? Could these idiosyncratic initial capitalisations be a device to suggest acrophonic runes embedded riddlingly in the *deorc*, *dygel*, prophetic verse?<sup>298</sup> This would be wholly in-keeping with such Old English poems as the Riddles, *The Husband's Message*, Cynewulf's runic signatures, and the  $\text{ð}$  a scribe used as brachygraphic grammalogue (denoting *ēpel*) in the manuscript of *Waldere*.<sup>299</sup>

This would be in every way apposite, not least because of the (by fictional conceit) predictive, predestinative nature of these 'Runes of Prophecy'. Runes are depicted not merely to as magical (which may include influencing events), but as *divinatory*. Originating from the Otherworld of the deities and the dead through the 'Passion' of Óðinn, divine patron of runes, riddles, poetry and wisdom, they may be held to be instinct with and as transmitting the occult wisdom of these entities *outside* the dimension of Time, who may be imagined as thus able to behold what we experience as temporal categories 'simultaneously', Past and Future folded into an eternal 'Present'—as an author surveys his plot synoptically at one view. This runeblade was, after all, forged and inscribed by an 'Old Thing', and 'Smith of the Gods'. Kipling's "Runes" unites in itself the runic enigma, prosopopoeial riddle, and the genre of the Rune Poems—with which indeed it presents several close resemblances. As a speculative heuristic experiment, an exploratory attempt *to read the runes* with which Kipling may be suspected to have secretly studied his poem could tentatively and suggestively be adventured.

The safest candidate is the second encountered, line 2, the elemental noun, 'Man'. This is the M-rune,  $\text{M}$ , [m] of both the Anglo-Saxon *fuporc* (*Man*) and Scandinavian *fuparks* (*Maðr*), deriving commonly from Elder *Fupark* \**mannaz*.

Very remarkable is the fact that the corresponding *verb* in the clause (line 2) should be 'betray'.

Within Kipling's *Puck* this stanza intelligibly refers—transpicuously to the reader coming to 'Runes' in narrative sequence—to the episode in 'Young Men at the Manor' when, fulfilling the 'prophecy', at 'Santlache' Weland's Sword flies from Hugh's hand: 'said he "It has lost me my first fight." ' (*Puck*, 28.) Kipling's Hastings is a single combat determined by a magic sword, which passes, symbol of sovereignty,

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<sup>298</sup> Shippey, *Wisdom*, 4.

<sup>299</sup> I. 31a.

from ‘Saxon’ hand to Norman.

For the student of Old English it suggests an improbable coincidence—or direct reference, evidence of transmission. This topos of the ‘betraying’ sword appears twice in *Beowulf*: i) line 1524b, *ac sēo ecg geswāc*, and ii) 2681, *geswāc æt saccce sweord Bīowulfes*.<sup>300</sup> Kipling’s description of the Sword, ‘dark grey, wavy-lined’ (*Puck*, 19), looks like an allusion to *Beowulf* 2682a, wherein the ‘treacherous’ Nægling is *grægmæl*, combined with 1489a *wrætlic wægsweord* (evoking the blades’ pattern-welding).

Two further instances of *swicolnes* (*swīcan*, ‘desert, withdraw allegiance, not be of service, be a traitor to, fail [- specif.] of sword’)<sup>301</sup> are attested in the extant corpus, and these evince still more substantial relevance to Kipling’s sword. The first bears relevance to the verb in “Runes” line 2, the betraying sword and Weland; the second to the capitalised noun in that line, the suppositionally runic ‘Man’.

The former is from *Waldere* Fragment I, ll2a-4a:

Hūru Wēlandes worc ne *geswīceð*  
monna ænigum ðāra ðe Mimming can  
heardne gehealdan. [...] <sup>302</sup>

This *collocates* the ‘betraying sword’-topos, complete with *geswic*- wording, with the name Weland: though obviously in this case the sentiment is the secure expectation (*if* the warrior is worthy) that Mimming will *not* ‘fail/betray’: hence an expressive inversion of the topos. If Kipling knew these lines from *Waldere*, a poem much concerned with swords and with Weland, in which a sword forged by Weland does not betray, in “Weland’s Sword” he—reverts the inversion.<sup>303</sup>

My second instance is the equally curious coincidence of an Old English verse

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<sup>300</sup> Thomas Jay Garbáty, “The Fallible Sword: Inception of a Motif,” *The Journal of American Folklore* (1962): 58-59; James L. Rosier, “Design for Treachery: The Unferth Intrigue,” *PMLA* 77 No.1 (March 1962): 1-7; Geoffrey Hughes, “Beowulf, Unferth and Hrunting: An Interpretation,” *English Studies* 58 (1977): 385-95.

<sup>301</sup> Henry Sweet, *The Student’s Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), s.v. *swīcan*.

<sup>302</sup> Norman, *Waldere*, 35. The *editio princeps* of *Waldere* is George Stephens’ edition of (Copenhagen) 1860, hence the poem was available to Kipling.

<sup>303</sup> II. 8b-9 refer again to Weland.

which, like Kipling's "Runes" stanza 1, appositionally collocates 'man' and 'betray', adjacently within the space of two consecutive lines. The source of this verse will be self-evidently suggestive in the context of Kipling's (in *at least* one sense) runic poem: lines 59-60 (stanza 20) of the *Old English Rune Poem*:

ᚱ [Man] byþ on myrgþe his māgan lēof:  
sceal þēah ānra gehwylc oðrum swīcan [...]

A potential embarrassment complicating the inference of any conclusions regarding the *Old English Rune Poem* threatens of course from the intrinsically dubious unique surviving attestation we have for the text, Hickes' transcription.<sup>304</sup> As Shippey remarks, Hickes' representation of the poem includes the layout 'b) runic letter c) rune-name d) verse stanza printed consecutively as prose' of which 'probably only b) and d) come from the *Rune Poem* MS, though c) is of course an integral part of the poem and must have been supplied, at least silently, by any reader'.<sup>305</sup>

Regarding d), however, every verse is attached to its proper rune, and is thus bounded by determinate limits as defined by grammar and syntax, since every verse is a single statement enjambed across the poetic lines—forming self-contained linguistic-stanzaic units. The *Old English Rune Poem* comprises 29 of these linguistically-defined, syntactically self-contained stanzas—each attached to the rune with which it begins, and running on to the period at the end of the sentence. Of these 29, *most fall into tercets*, groupings of three alliterative lines—19 of them to be more precise: rounding up, some 66%, well-nigh two thirds. This may be suggestively compared with Kipling's "Runes", which as I remarked above is constituted of tercets, and each tercet of one run-on sentence of three clauses divided and lineated so that each clause occupies one enjambed line.

The *Icelandic Rune Poem* is similarly arranged in stanzas of *three* lines, forming short *þulur* of *kenningar*, glossing each rune (introduced in the initial line). Furthermore the three-line glosses take the form of a triadic series, the first three lines (reckoned with the first) formed by the separated clauses of one sentence, enjambed

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<sup>304</sup> George Hickes, *Linguarum veterum septentrionalium thesaurus grammatico-criticus et archaeologicus* (Oxford: 1703-1705), I:135; Bruce Dickins, *Runic and Heroic Poems of the Old Teutonic Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 12-34; Dobbie, *Minor Poems*, 28-30; Shippey, *Wisdom*, 80-85.

<sup>305</sup> Shippey, *Wisdom*, 81.

by the conjunction *ok*. (The additional Latinising fourth lines supply glosses.)<sup>306</sup> If, as this evidence just presented might be taken tentatively to suggest, Kipling knew the original Rune Poems, they may be another important, or even the primary, Old-Northern source for the verse-form of short tercets chosen by Kipling for his poem: they could probably be suspected as even intertextual with Kipling's much later runic poem. This would, then, be the reason for Kipling's choice of tercets (and *not*, say, *fornyrðislag* quatrains): a formal allusion to the original Rune Poems. Kemble does include the *Old English Rune Poem*, with a translation, in his *Anglo-Saxon Runes* of 1840; and yet further, he lineates its verses as *dipodic* lines.

Since, as I have shown, Kipling almost certainly knew Kemble's work as the source for his runes in *Just So*, the *Old English Rune Poem* as known to Kipling from Kemble may well be a source for "Runes".

The next instance, in order of plausibility of runic allusion, is the 'deep Water' of lines 9,12,21,24. The acrophonic name of the Old English L-rune ƿ [l], is *Lagu*: 'sea, flood, water', glossed in the *Old English Rune Poem* (ll.63-6, stanza 21—the stanza directly following ƿ) as 'the sea/ocean'. The Scandinavian Younger *Fuþark* Rune Poems corroborate, supplying the cognate *Løgr*. Of additional relevance are the textual facts that the couplet in question in *The Norwegian Rune Poem* (lines 29-30) collocates this water with gold (*gull*), while the stanza in the *Icelandic Rune Poem* (stanza 15, lines 57-60) supplies the kenning for its *Løgr* as *glømmungr grund* (59), 'land of fishes'. Could these primary-text collocations perhaps have suggested Kipling's associations in his "Runes" of 'deep Water' with 'Gold' (lines 4,7,16,19,) and — a simile for the Treasure in the Water — 'Fish' (10,22)?<sup>307</sup>

The former is confessedly rather less convincing as a runic reference. Perhaps taken along with Kipling's alliterative quasi-formulaic 'goods or gear' (14, 26) it could

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<sup>306</sup> Dickins, *Runic and Heroic*, 28-33.

<sup>307</sup> The last rune in the *Old English Rune Poem* may also be relevant if, as Elliott, *Runes*, 69-70, has suggested, *Ear*, ƿ, is really a variant of the penultimate verse's obscure 'Īar/Īor', and that, though the verse in the *Rune Poem* re-interprets the rune as 'earth' (cf. *hrūsan*, 1.92b, same stanza) in the sense 'grave' (forming a thematically suitable end to the poem—where *geswīcaþ* makes a re-appearance) the standard rune-name was the Old English homonym *ēar* with its more usual sense 'sea', cf. *ēa*, water, river, stream, and in compounds *ēar-gebland*, *ēargrund*: Shippey, *Wisdom*, 136.



represent the F-rune,  $\mathfrak{F}$ , [f] Old English *Fēoh*, Scandinavian *Fé*, >Modern English ‘fee’. The rune-name signifies ‘wealth, possessions, chattels’ and has an original meaning of ‘cattle’—*capital*, in the etymological sense. The argument for the F-rune’s allusive presence here is strengthened when considered in conjunction with the narrative episodes to which these verses correspond, relating to the use and fate of the Gold/Treasure in *Puck*, by the insistence in both Scandinavian Rune Poems that ‘wealth’ is a cause of discord (Icelandic, *Fé er frænda róg*, line 1); Norwegian, *Fé vældr frænda róge*, 1), and the *Old English Rune Poem*’s Christianised exhortation (lines 2-3) that it must be *given away*: *sceal ðēah manna gehwylc miclun hyt dāelan/gif he wile for drihtne dōmes hlēotan*. These sentiments in the original Rune Poems chime suggestively with Kipling’s narrative of the Gold; as does the *Icelandic Rune-Poem*’s kenning for Gold (an idea attested elsewhere, e.g. in Snorri’s *Edda*, with reference to the Nibelung hoard sunk in the Rhine, *bál Rínar*, ‘fire of the Rhine’, *Háttatál*, 36), *flæðar viti* (line 2), ‘fire of the sea’. In Kipling’s narrative the Gold will indeed be given away, and sunk in the sea so it cannot be put (line 18) ‘For an ill use’ (*Puck*, 172). “Runes” lines 13, 25, ‘given’, suggests a tenuous possibility of reference to the G-rune,  $\mathfrak{G}$  [g]/[ɣ], *Gyfu*, ‘gift’—connoting the Anglo-Saxon aristocratic ritual of the prestigious and ethically-approved *giving away* of treasure.

Last is Kipling’s ‘shining Fish’; if this represents a rune, a connexion with line 87 (the first of the penultimate tercet of the *Old English Rune Poem*) may be a remote possibility. The verse is problematic both linguistically and (hence concomitantly) runologically: the meaning of the rune-name it appears to give, \**Īar/Īor*, is a crux. Whatever the creature is, the poet thinks of it as amphibious:

\* [*Īar*] byþ ēafix      and ðēah ā brūceþ  
fōdres on foldan,      hafap fægerne eard  
wætre beworpen,      ðær hē wynnum lēofap.

Guesses from the context include ‘eel’, ‘newt’, and ‘beaver’ (‘otter’ would seem to me a solution as equally plausible as the last). But whatever this vignette is intended to describe, with or without poetic licence, it does designate it ‘*ēa-fix*’, whose plain meaning is ‘river/stream-fish’: Kipling’s ‘shining Fish’ ?

Kipling also wrote “What Say the Reeds at Runnymede? A poem commemorating the signing of Magna Carta, Runnymede, Surrey, June 15, 1215,” published in the same *School History of England* as “The Anvil”. His great overarching theme in *Puck*,

his ‘Tale of the Tribe’, is ‘How England Achieved Magna Carta’, and to this he makes *runes* in every way central, from the prophetic “Runes on Weland’s Sword” to “The Treasure and the Law”, *Runnymede* itself—unriddled etymologically.

‘Rudyard’ is a toponym; Kipling’s eminently Victorian amateur-philological interest in etymology and onomastics, in the roots and sound-changes of place- and personal- names as fossilising and exhibiting history, is abundantly attested in ‘Weland’s Sword’ alone. ‘ “Hob of the Dene was my Hobden’s name” ’, ‘ “ [...] Willingford Bridge [...] was Weland’s Ford then” ’, whilst the Weland-worshipping pirates led by *Peofn*’s (>Pevensey) ‘ “called [...] Beacon Hill [...] Brunanburgh” ’ (*Puck*, 15-17). The book’s very title, juxtaposing the name of its presiding *genius*<sup>308</sup> and his eponymous magical venue, ‘one of my oldest hills in Old England’, quibbles, like Weland>Wayland, on a philological sense of language as archaeologically recoverable history (*Puck*, 8). The inheritance of the past is permanently resident and latent in language: Puck’s own analogy is the organic growth of an English oak (*Puck*, 173).

Hence perhaps Kipling’s inspiring mead was the etymology of Runnymede (unrelated to the beverage, of any consistency): <*Rūnīegmæð*, ‘meadow of the island of assembly’.<sup>309</sup> Ekwall comments ‘The name seems to indicate that Runnymede was an ancient meeting-place’, i.e. prior to Magna Carta: it was a Thing (“Runes,” l.15, 27), a place of runes both in the sense, perhaps, of augury by sortilege, and of counsels. The first element is indeed Old English *rūn-*, as in *rūn-wita*, *gerūna*, ‘councillor, confidant’, the Privy Counsellor who perhaps, originally, consulted runes and ‘whispered’ (*rūnian*) their secret wisdom to the king, like Unferð.<sup>310</sup> Thus the “Runes”

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<sup>308</sup> *Puc* is found in closely similar forms in both Celtic and Germanic, yet does not appear to derive from within, and therefore may pre-date and be originally independent of, either. William Bell, *Puck and His Folkslore* [sic]: *Illustrated from the Superstitions of all Nations, but more especially from the early religion and rites of northern Europe and the Wends*, had been published in London in 1852, a work Winifried Schleiner, “Imaginative Sources For Shakespeare’s Puck”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36 no.1 (Spring 1985): 65-68, calls ‘a monument to nineteenth-century antiquarianism gone rampant.’ Cf. Tolkien’s discussion, ‘Púkel-men’, “Nomenclature of *The Lord of the Rings*,” in Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader’s Companion* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), 782.

<sup>309</sup> Eilert Ekwall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Placenames* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 396.

<sup>310</sup> *Beowulf*, ll. 499-501.

culminate in the very name of their prophesied Runnymede: Weland's Sword bequeaths the 'runes' of 'The Law', Magna Carta. It happened just so.

Kipling's "Runes" plays a *metrical* part in the author's mythopoeic enterprise of retelling 'The Tale of the Tribe' which involves an archaeological delving into the layered underground of national history and identity to divine and unearth from the foundations an authentic voice. The poem itself *pioneers* in that it may well be the first accentual-alliterative poem in the twentieth-century alliterative revival, 'a very remarkable innovation', or renovation. Kipling 'is discovering and reclaiming a lost inheritance',<sup>311</sup> enduring as the stubborn wrought steel, not merely an obsolete artefact, but a living, singing, blade rune-written with English destiny.

Eliot saw that in Kipling 'something breaks through from a deeper level[...] [than] the conscious [...] mind—something which has the true prophetic inspiration'; Kipling has 'the [...] gift of prophecy'; 'not merely possessed of penetration, but almost "possessed" of a kind of second sight'. 'There are deeper and darker caverns which he penetrated [...] hints [...] foreshadow[ings] [...] Kipling knew something of the things which are beneath, and of the things which are beyond the frontier.'

This 'gift [...] of transmitting messages from elsewhere, a gift so disconcerting when we are made aware of it that thenceforth we are never sure when it is *not* present',<sup>312</sup> recalls another Eliotic formulation which might well stand as epigraph to this study so apposite is it to the revival and the revivalists of alliterative metre: his notion of 'the auditory imagination' adduced in my Introduction (page 50): a 'feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to an origin and bringing something back [...] fusing the most ancient and civilized mentalities'.

With "Runes" Kipling, that 'most inscrutable of authors, a writer impossible wholly to understand and quite impossible to belittle',<sup>313</sup> exhumed and honed the accentual-alliterative heirloom. Weland's sword inscribed with runes encoding an alliterative poem is an apt symbol for the revived metric.

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<sup>311</sup> Eliot, *Kipling's Verse*, 33.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 19-20.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

## Chapter II. Breaking the Pentameter: Ezra Pound and ‘the English National Chemical’.

### *Gathering the Limbs*

Pound’s [...] ‘Seafarer’ [...] with Canto I [...] largely influenced by Pound’s Old English studies, are, in [...] themes and structures, an anticipation, a nucleus, a technical synthesis [...] from the start; [...] “a structural X-ray” behind which one finds the [...] Middle Ages as the driving force. [...] Pound’s poetics in a nutshell.<sup>314</sup>

Pound’s ‘Seafarer’ was first published *The New Age*, November 30<sup>th</sup> 1911, page 107, introducing his twelve-part series of articles on poetic history and theory, “I Gather the Limbs of Osiris”.<sup>315</sup> Reprintings in *Ripostes* (1912) *Cathay* (1915) and *Umbra* (1920) followed, before collection in *Personae* (1926).<sup>316</sup> In *New Age* it was explicitly subtitled ‘A Translation from the early Anglo-Saxon text’, and accompanied by Pound’s ‘Philological Note’.<sup>317</sup> In accordance with the construal of *The Seafarer* delineated there, Pound translates lines 1-99a of the 124-line Old English poem.<sup>318</sup>

The unique, untitled text of *The Seafarer* is preserved in the Exeter Book, fol.81<sup>b</sup>-83<sup>a</sup>, donated to Exeter Cathedral Library by Bishop Leofric not later than 1072; the manuscript hand has been dated to 970-90.<sup>319</sup> With its twin ‘elegy’ *The Wanderer* among the most studied of Old English texts, *The Seafarer* amassed extensive scholarly commentary during the nineteenth century. The *editio princeps* and first

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<sup>314</sup> Georg M. Gugelberger, *Ezra Pound’s Medievalism* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 1978), 166. ‘Structural X-ray’: Hugh Kenner, “Blood for the Ghosts,” in Eva Hesse, ed., *New Approaches to Ezra Pound* (London: Faber, 1969), 340.

<sup>315</sup> *The New Age*, December 7, 1911-February 15, 1912. One detects of course the Frazerian influence but, oddly for Pound, the phrase may come from Milton (*Areopagitica*).

<sup>316</sup> Richard Sieburth, ed., *Ezra Pound: Poems and Translations* (New York: Library of America, 2003), 1239-40, 1244-46. ‘The Seafarer,’ 236-38.

<sup>317</sup> Sieburth, *Poems and Translations*, 1275.

<sup>318</sup> To differentiate original and translation sharing the same title, I *italicise* the former and ‘enclose in single quotation marks’ the latter.

<sup>319</sup> Ida Gordon, *The Seafarer* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996) (1<sup>st</sup> ed. London: Methuen 1960, 1930s material prepared by E. V. Gordon and Tolkien); text derived from authoritative facsimile edition, R. W. Chambers, M. Förster, and R. Flower, eds., *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry* (London: 1933). See further edition and commentary in Klinck, *Elegies*.

English translation appears to be Thorpe's 1842 *Codex Exoniensis*. Gordon lists only German editions (Ettmüller, Grein, Wülker, Kluge) between it, and Sweet's Seventh Edition of his standard *Anglo Saxon Reader*. *The Seafarer* appears as text XXIX.

Sweet's edition has been identified by Robinson, in his watershed presentation of research into Pound's engagement with Old English, as Pound's Anglo-Saxon textbook. His marked-up copy is archived at the University of Texas.<sup>320</sup> Pound read Anglo-Saxon with Joseph D. Ibbotson at Hamilton College for three terms, academic year 1904-5, with such success he became the Professor's favourite student, '“Bib” 's pride'.<sup>321</sup> Sweet's *Seafarer* is the poem as Pound studied it.<sup>322</sup> Robinson states Pound's was a copy of the Seventh Edition, Oxford 1898; I am using, due to availability, the Seventh Edition of 1894 (the original printing). On the evidence of Robinson's references the pagination is, and the [‘contents appear, identical: Jones notes 1898 ‘may have been the year in which Pound's copy had been reprinted. Every seventh edition I have examined is dated 1894’.<sup>323</sup>

Sweet's text XXIX, pages 171-74, gives lines 1-108 of the poem, relegating 108-24 to his Notes, pages 222-24. Here Sweet describes *The Seafarer* ‘by common consent the finest of the Old-English lyric—or [...] half-lyric—poems’; ‘belong[ing] to the same class of “exile-poems” as *The Wanderer* [...]’. However, as is signalled by his cutting, the received text is found problematic. For Sweet ‘whole passage[s] are obscure’, citing the (now-discredited) theories of Rieger, Ettmüller, Grein, and Kluge: the poem ‘offers many difficulties’ of which the first is the supposed inconsistency of lines 108-24: ‘It is evident the majority of these verses could not have formed part of the original poem [...] of the [...] half-heathen [...] seafarer [...] If we stop, as is done in the present text, just before the text becomes corrupt, we get a conclusion [...] in form as well as in spirit’ which convinced Sweet, his contemporaries and immediate followers, as authentic, and reminiscent of that of *The Wanderer*.

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<sup>320</sup> Fred C. Robinson, “‘The Might of the North’: Pound's Anglo-Saxon Studies and *The Seafarer*,” *Yale Review* 71 (1982): 199-224: citations hereafter to repr. in *The Tomb of Beowulf and Other Essays* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 239-58.

<sup>321</sup> Robinson, “Might,” 240-41.

<sup>322</sup> The Seventh was the first edition to include *Seafarer*: Gordon, *Seafarer*, 51.

<sup>323</sup> Robinson, “Might,” 248-49; Jones, “‘Ear for the sea-surge’: Pound's Uses of Old English”, in *Strange Likeness*, 20.

The background of Pound's 'Seafarer' in terms of contemporary Anglo-Saxon scholarship has been documented thoroughly by Robinson, Atherton, and Jones.<sup>324</sup> The immediate *Poundian* context for 'The Seafarer'—chronologically, only the *third* English translation listed in Gordon's bibliography—is "I Gather the Limbs of Osiris".<sup>325</sup>

'The Seafarer' features here as an opening illustration of 'a New Method in Scholarship', 'the method of Luminous Detail'.<sup>326</sup> This has been perceived as prefiguring, prior to Pound's encounter with Fenollosa's Chinese, and *Imagisme* proper, the 'ideogrammic method'.<sup>327</sup> He strives to define here a 'method' of selecting 'significant facts' from the 'history [of] the development of civilisation and literature'.<sup>328</sup> Hence Pound presents his 'Seafarer' as an illustration of an instance of 'luminous detail': a translation of the distinctive '*virtù*' [...] present[ed]' by the *Seafarer*-poet: the Anglo-Saxon 'significant fact' of the exilic sea-voyage. The 'luminous detail [...] present[ed]' by '[t]he artist [...] remains the permanent basis of psychology and metaphysics. Each historian will "have ideas" [...] but the luminous details remain unaltered':<sup>329</sup>

In [...] *Spirit of Romance* I attempted to present certain significant data on medieval poetry in Southern Europe, of the troubadours, [...] Tuscans, [...] Villon [...] to make a chemical spectrum of their art. I have since augmented this study with translations from [...] Cavalcanti and [...] Daniel. [...] I have, moreover, sought in Anglo-Saxon a certain element which has transmuted the various qualities of poetry which have drifted up from the south, which has sometimes enriched and made them English, sometimes rejected them, and refused combination. [...] I have [...] a hope [...] this sort of work may not fail utterly to be of service to the living art. For it is certain that we have had no 'greatest poet' [...] no 'great period' save at, or after, a time when many people were busy examining the media and the traditions of an art.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 17-67.

<sup>325</sup> Pound, *Selected Prose*, 21-43.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>327</sup> Pound, *Selected Prose*, 8; Jones, *Strange Likeness*, Pound's syntax and Fenollosa, 62-67. Pound's exposition: e.g. *ABC*, 19-23. See further Saussy, et al., *Chinese Written Character*.

<sup>328</sup> Pound, *Selected Prose*, 22-23.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 23, 31.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

A pregnant early passage of Poundian theory, exactly contemporary (published with) with ‘Seafarer’, we may midwife from it the implications (confirmed by Pound’s subsequent criticism) that *Seafarer* represents ‘significant data on medieval poetry’ in *Northern* Europe, paralleling that discerned by Pound in the South; that it affords ‘a certain element’, an Anglo-Saxon *virtù*, ‘a permanent basis’ with the potential to ‘transmute’, ‘enrich’, or ‘reject’ Southern influence; and that Pound’s ‘New Method’ is, though ‘historicist’, not merely “academic”, but a form of *practical* research, a ‘busy examining of the media and traditions’ of ‘the living art’, in anticipation of stimulating a ‘great period’ in poetry. This latter note is of course sounded by the very title of the whole sequence—alluding to a primordial myth of ‘re-membering’, and revival, popularised by Frazer’s *Golden Bough*.<sup>331</sup>

That ‘examin[ation]’ of ‘the media and [...] traditions of an art’ includes *translation*: ‘great period’ above fore-echoes ‘A great age of literature is perhaps always a great age of translations; or follows it’: ‘After [the Anglo-Saxon] period English literature lives on translation, it is fed by translation; every new exuberance, every new heave is stimulated by translation, every allegedly great age is an age of translations [...]’.<sup>332</sup> The Anglo-Saxon, then, is the *only native* English literature, *not* a cultural infusion from the South via translation; and *it* has *not* been translated.

In his theoretical prose thereafter Pound never ceased to champion *The Seafarer*, which assumed for him the status of *the* quintessential, epitomising, Old English poem. In one of his earliest (1914) literary-critical ‘new table[s] of values’, Pound canonises *Seafarer* with Homer, the *Cid*, the troubadours, Dante, Villon: a typical list of favourites; likewise in 1927-31’s “How To Read”.<sup>333</sup>

Here he terms *The Seafarer* a ‘fragment [of] indigenous art’, of ‘native subject’ (the sea-voyage).<sup>334</sup> In “The Constant Preaching to the Mob” (1916), Pound finds ‘The

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<sup>331</sup> That ‘work of anthropology [...] which has influenced our generation profoundly’: Eliot, “Notes on *The Waste Land*”; cf. Pound’s intense engagement with the *Kulturmorphologie* of Leo Frobenius, (1873-1938) a figure between Frazer and Spengler, who inspired Pound’s ‘*paideuma*’ and ‘*Sagetrieb*’. Pound also refers to Jung, cf. Alexander, *Poetic Achievement*, 67, Lévy-Bruhl, Canto XXXVIII l. 89. Frazer’s (Vergilian) golden bough appears in Canto I.

<sup>332</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 35, 232.

<sup>333</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 215-16; 28.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

beginnings of English poetry’—that ‘lordliest of the arts’, ‘the solace of lonely men’—in *Seafarer* ‘[a]nd [...] *The Wanderer*’, extolling *Seafarer* as ‘alone in the works of our forebears [...] fit to compare with Homer’: ‘Such poems are not made for after-dinner speakers, nor was the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*’—assimilating *Seafarer* to the *nekuia*.<sup>335</sup>

*ABC of Reading* (1934) lauds *The Seafarer* by assimilating it to Li Po’s ‘Exile’s Letter’, repeating *Cathay*’s manoeuvre of publishing the Old English exilic poem with Chinese, a cross-cultural ‘rhyme’, of corresponding period, ‘displaying the West on a par with the Orient [...] There are passages of Anglo-Saxon as good as paragraphs of the *Seafarer*, but I have not found any whole poem of the same value’.<sup>336</sup>

What this ‘value’ is may perhaps have been best declared in “Osiris”, which Pound restated in closely similar but more decisive terms in “Patria Mia”, originally published, in *New Age*, a year later. Whilst “Osiris” phrases formulations of a ‘chemical spectrum’ of Southern medieval poetry, and a ‘certain [...] Anglo-Saxon [...] element [...]’, in “Patria Mia” Pound claims to ‘find [...] [i]n [the] Anglo-Saxon [...] “Seafarer” and [...] “Wanderer”

[...] expression of that quality which seems to me to have transformed the successive arts of poetry [...] brought to England from the South. For the art has [...] found on the island something in the temper of the race which has strengthened it and given it fibre [...]

and—cf. ‘*indigenous*’, ‘*native*’ in ‘How to Read’, and the kin-claiming ‘our forebears’ in “Constant Preaching”—to have isolated in the Old English elegy ‘a trace of what I should call *the English national chemical*’.<sup>337</sup> ‘[...] It wd. be difficult to find ‘form’ originating in English’, as opposed to ‘from the Mediterranean basin’, ‘after the *Seafarer* (ang. sax.)’<sup>338</sup> Pound proclaims in *ABC* ‘I have translated the *Seafarer*’—‘the beginnings of English poetry’ in “Constant Preaching”—‘so that they can see [...]

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<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65.

<sup>336</sup> *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1987), 51-52.

<sup>337</sup> *Patria Mia* (Chicago: Ralph Fletcher Seymour, 1950), 45.

<sup>338</sup> Pound, *Guide*, 168.



where English poetry starts.’<sup>339</sup>

This interest in the indigenous beginnings of English poetry, in a native form and matter, is additionally motivated by technical preoccupations, at this particular ‘Osiris-moment’ in the 1900s when Pound and his fellow avant-garde poets are perceiving a crisis of exhausted, derivative decadence in English verse-form and style.

Fenollosa’s striking formulations include ‘The chief work of literary men in dealing with language, and of poets especially, lies in feeling back along ancient lines of advance’.<sup>340</sup> This ‘return to origins’ is a quest to find the best grounds from which to start again, following the best models, in the right trajectory: which describes perfectly the programme reiterated throughout Pound’s prose, from “A Retrospect” (c.1912-1918), “The Serious Artist” (1913), “The Tradition” (1913) on, up to and including *ABC* (1934) and *Guide to Kulchur* (1938).<sup>341</sup> As we have seen, this reform commences publically with 1911’s “Osiris”—in which ‘Seafarer’ first appeared—explicitly presented, not least by title, as a document in that ‘busy examining of the media and traditions’ of poetry indicative of a new ‘great period’.

The rest is literary history. From this reform, spearheaded by Pound, sprang *vers libre*, beginning with *Imagisme*, then ‘Vorticism’, and, though its importance may be said to have diminished, even failed somewhat of its promise, upon Pound’s 1913-14 encounter with Fenollosa’s representation of Chinese, Pound’s 1911 rediscovery and re-invention of Anglo-Saxon metric and style played a substantial role in these developments. In particular Pound was, and would remain, vehemently dissatisfied with ‘accepted [...] standard and classic’ English poetry from the Elizabethans to the Victorians, with its systems of prosody, especially end-rhyme and accentual-syllabic iambic pentameter.<sup>342</sup>

He is much exercised by prosodies with the potential to afford *irregular*, ‘musical’ rather than ‘metronomic’, rhythms, enabling the poet to avail himself of the natural

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<sup>339</sup> Pound, *ABC*, 58.

<sup>340</sup> “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry,” in Ira B. Nadel, ed., *Ezra Pound: Early Writings* (London: Penguin, 2005), 321.

<sup>341</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 92.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 3,7.

linguistic-prosodic patterns of utterance, less ‘an imitation of [...] convention’ than ‘an interpretation of speech’,<sup>343</sup> and to eschew superfluous verbosity, ‘words [...] shovelled in to fill a metric pattern or to complete [...] a rhyme-sound’,<sup>344</sup> already censured in “Osiris” as ‘verse-froth [...] in [...] iambics’,<sup>345</sup> ‘verse [...] having a [...] swat on every alternate syllable, or at least formed [...] on the system of *ti Tum ti Tum ti Tum*, sometimes up to ten syllables’.<sup>346</sup> Pound would also contend in *New Age*’s pages:

Obviously one does not discard ‘regular metres’ because they are a ‘difficulty’. Any ass can [...] begin a new line on each eleventh syllable or [...] whack each alternate syllable with an ictus [...] no [...] platitude [...] cannot be turned into iambic pentameter without labour. It is not difficult, if one have learned [*sic*] to count up to ten [...] one discards [them] because there are [...] energies which are not to be represented by the over-familiar devices or patterns [...].<sup>347</sup>

In “Osiris” he is already mapping a historicist genealogy of prosody, reviewing the Classical quantitative, the Romance accentual-syllabic, and ‘the Anglo-Saxon system of alliteration; these all concern the scansion [...] all these systems concern us [...] English verse of the future will be a sort of orchestration [...] of all these systems.’<sup>348</sup>

These are limbs to be gathered and revived. He has ‘no especial interest in rhyme. It tends to draw away the artist’s attention from forty to ninety per cent of his syllables [...] into prolixity and pull him away from the thing’.<sup>349</sup> It is at the very time of his engagement with *Seafarer*, the immediate context of the publishing his Old English translation, that we find Pound writing:

As far as the ‘living art’ goes, I should like to break up *cliché*[s] [...] that stand between the reader of poetry and the drive of it [...] [...] not until poetry lives again ‘close to the thing’ [...] will [it] be a vital part of everyday life. As long as the poet [...] say[s] something ornate and approximate, [...] so long will serious people, intently alive,

<sup>343</sup> Pound, *Selected Prose*, 37 (“Osiris”).

<sup>344</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 3 (1912).

<sup>345</sup> Pound, *Selected Prose*, 35.

<sup>346</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 72.

<sup>347</sup> “Affirmations: As for *Imagisme*,” *New Age*, January 28, 1915: Pound, *Selected Prose*, 345; cf. ‘the god damn iambic magnetizes certain verbal sequences’, Pound, *Selected Letters*, 260.

<sup>348</sup> Pound, *Selected Prose*, 33.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 42

consider poetry [...] balderdash [...] for dilettantes and women. [...] we must have a simplicity and directness of utterance [...] different from the simplicity and directness of daily speech [...] more ‘crucial’ [...] dignified.[...] This [...] cannot be conferred by florid adjectives or elaborate hyperbole; it must be conveyed by art [...], the art of the verse structure.<sup>350</sup>

By “A Retrospect”, 1918, Pound is looking back upon the ‘new fashion in poetry’, a ‘“movement”’, and ‘recapitulate[s]’ its revolutionary principles, many of which had first been issued as “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” (1913), ascribed by Pound to the ferment of early 1912. “PROLEGOMENA” also collected here was first *published* February 1912, whilst Pound dates his remarks ‘Bridges, Maurice Hewlett and Frederic Manning are in their different ways seriously concerned with overhauling the metric, in testing the language’ ‘Dec. 1911’.<sup>351</sup> Pound’s commandments, developing his inveighing against metrical ‘clichés’ in “Osiris”, include:

Don’t chop your stuff into separate *iamb*s. Don’t make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin every next line with a heave. Let the beginning of the next line catch the rise of the rhythm wave [...] your rhythmic structure should not destroy the shape of your words [...] their natural sound, or [...] meaning [...]<sup>352</sup>

In preference to familiar ‘set metres’ in ‘the sequence of a metronome’, the aspiring poet is exhorted to discover rhythms ‘more real, more a part of the emotion of the “thing”, more germane [...], interpretative than the measure of regular accentual verse; [...] which discontents one with set iambic or [...] anapaestic’, but ‘If you are using a symmetrical form, don’t put in what you want to say [...] then fill up the remaining vacuums with slush’.<sup>353</sup>

Pound expects ‘we shall look back upon’ the nineteenth century ‘as a rather blurry, messy [...] sentimentalistic, mannerish sort of a period’, anticipating, ‘Twentieth century poetry [...] will [...] move against poppy-cock [...] will be harder [...] saner, [...] “nearer the bone” [...] as much like granite as it can be [...]’: ‘luxurious riot’,

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<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>351</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 3, 4, 8, 12, 14.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 7.

‘emotional slither’ will not ‘imped[e] the shock and [...] stroke of it.’<sup>354</sup> Later ‘retrospects’ in the 1930s and 1940s evince Pound speaking of ‘a revolution’ in poetry, ‘the *stil’nuovo* or the awakening’, in which he had been ‘instrumental’ in London, via little magazines, c.1912 onwards.<sup>355</sup> There had been a ‘poetical reform between 1910 and 1920 tackled in addition to, almost apart from, the question of content’,<sup>356</sup> Pound’s *kampf* waged against the ‘decadent [...] British mind in 1909’<sup>357</sup> the ‘Victorian’ poetics then still prevalent in English verse:

The common verse of Britain from 1890 to 1910 was a horrible agglomerate compost, not minted, most of it not even baked, all legato, a doughy mess of third-hand Keats, Wordsworth, heaven knows what, fourth-hand Elizabethan sonority blunted, half melted, lumpy.<sup>358</sup>

Pound admits he was himself—the date he gives is again significantly 1910, the year before ‘Seafarer’—‘obfuscated by [...] Victorian language [...] the crust of dead English [...] present in my own available vocabulary. I hadn’t in 1910 made a language [...]’.<sup>359</sup> ‘A younger generation’, (1934), ‘has been brought up on a list of [Pound’s] acid tests, invented to get rid of the boiled oatmeal consistency of the bad verse of 1900’.

‘The revolution has occurred’: in *The Cantos* Pound identified ‘the first heave’ had been ‘to break the pentameter’.<sup>360</sup>

On Pound’s testimony it appears this ‘breaking of the pentameter’ is datable to 1911-1912: could ‘the first heave’ (of the oar?) have been ‘Seafarer’?<sup>361</sup> Pound’s experimental investment in Old English is to be seen in this context, chronologically

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<sup>354</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 11-12. Cf. C. S. Lewis, composing alliterative verse ‘is like carving in granite,’ “Alliterative Metre,” 23.

<sup>355</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 80, 83.

<sup>356</sup> Pound, *Selected Prose*, 291.

<sup>357</sup> Pound, *Guide*, 228.

<sup>358</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 205.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 193-94.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 206; 83. Canto LXXXI l. 54.

<sup>361</sup> Cf. Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 41.

early in this period, of ‘overhauling the metric [...] testing the language’, ‘making it new’, of his seeking after alternative preferable models for poetics and sources of metric available to English.<sup>362</sup>

His researches to find, found, a new basis for Form in another tradition were as I have shown driven by pronounced hostility to the standard, ‘over-familiar devices or patterns’ of versification traditional since the Elizabethans: he desired, instead, a measure: without end-rhyme, and of an irregular, non-‘metronomic’ rhythm, a rhythm of ‘waves’ and ‘heaves’. Intimately familiar with the Provençal troubadours and the Southern *Spirit of Romance*,<sup>363</sup> and not yet captivated by ‘Chinese’, he seems at this phase to be responsive to what could be innate and natural to English, the ‘native’ and ‘indigenous’; and, related to his dissatisfaction with ‘set’, closed, ‘symmetrical’ regular metres, a criterion of prosodic naturalness, though ‘more dignified than daily speech’: something which could be described as ‘granitic’ and masculine, ‘vital’, characterised by ‘drive’, ‘shock’ and ‘stroke’. With such desiderated criteria as these, it is not hard to see what led Pound to remember Anglo-Saxon poetry; and this makes Old English metre, as construed and advocated by Pound in his 1911 ‘Seafarer’, seminal to the revolutionary twentieth-century invention of ‘free verse’.<sup>364</sup>

Stated in generalised terms, this has already been recognised, not least by Pound’s professional progeny, the poets themselves. Berryman reckons *Ripostes* ‘the volume with which modern poetry in English may be felt to have begun’.<sup>365</sup> Gunn affirms, ‘the Old English accentual line as [...] loosened and revised by Pound [is] one of the most useful and flexible technical innovations of the [twentieth] century’; having repeated the widely-documented understanding that in Canto I’s *nekuia* Pound is ‘translating the archaic’ of Homer into the ‘archaic measure [...] of “The Seafarer”’, Gunn remarks that in *Canto II* Pound proceeds to ‘develop [...] [t]he Old English line [...] into a rhythmically looser [...] flexible free verse’.<sup>366</sup> Similarly Edwin Morgan

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<sup>362</sup> Pound, *Make It New* (London: Faber, 1943); cf. Canto LIII ll. 68-74.

<sup>363</sup> (London: Dent, 1910).

<sup>364</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 19.

<sup>365</sup> John Berryman, “The Poetry of Ezra Pound” (1949), repr. in Richard Sieburth, ed., *Ezra Pound: New Selected Poems and Translations* (New York: New Directions, 2010), 380.

<sup>366</sup> Thom Gunn, “Living in the Present,” in *Shelf Life: Essays, Memoirs and an Interview*,

remarks, '[...] in the early *Cantos* there's a very strong kind of evolution from Anglo-Saxon poetry, a lot of alliteration and four-stressed lines and falling [...] trochaic rhythms'.<sup>367</sup>

These makers, plying in Pound's wake, thus show a proper professional concern with the practicalities of versecraft, alluding to 'technical innovations' 'evolved' from the formal components of Old English prosody: but they do not elaborate with further details, giving away any tricks of the trade. If it is true, as Gunn and Morgan, testifying to their own practice, aver, that Pound's technical development of Old English metre was formative to *vers libre*, I would argue one might wish to examine and discover more exactly *how* this was achieved.

Pound's 'breaking the pentameter' is obviously a verse-technical remark: would it be possible to ascertain *how, technically*, the pentameter was 'broken', analysing what role Pound's reception and deployment of Old English metre played in this and in his development of a Saxonising accentual-alliterative 'free verse' in *The Cantos*? Gunn indicates Pound innovating technically from Anglo-Saxon, 'loosening and revising' the Old English line into something 'rhythmically looser [...] flexible', whilst Morgan gestures to an 'evolution' of versecraft from Old English, claiming the early *Cantos* exhibit frequent alliteration and a predominance of four-beat measures, and trochaic cadences. Both refer to rhythm, accentuation. This invites the undertaking of establishing if this is the case, of finding out whether, and *how*, these 'innovations' and 'evolution' were accomplished by Pound. How can we positively know, quantifiably, verifiably, and demonstrate, that Old English versification is present and operant in Poundian free verse; and how does this actually—technically—work?

Such investigation commends itself here because previous scholarship on Pound's engagement with Old English, whilst it has thoroughly established the context in which this aspect of Pound's work is to be interpreted (and much more), appears as a rule to have accepted assumptions on metrical matters, or to have stated any data in

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London: Faber, 1994), 98; Nicholas Howe, "Praise and Lament: The Afterlife of Old English Poetry in Auden, Hill, and Gunn," in *Words and Works: Studies in Medieval English Language and Literature in Honor of Fred C. Robinson*, ed. Peter S Baker and Nicholas Howe (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1998), 305-306; Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 19; *Ezra Pound: Poems Selected by Thom Gunn* (London: Faber, 2005), xii.

<sup>367</sup> Chris Jones, "Edwin Morgan in Conversation," *PN Review* 31 no.2 (2004): 50; *Strange Likeness*, 19.

frustratingly generalised terms. Alexander, writing in 1979 in his brilliant exposition of ‘Seafarer’, asserts Pound ‘does not keep to the rules of stress and alliteration’, but ‘succeeds in giving the impression of a metre based on stress pattern rather than syllable count. Metrically, then, the translation is faithful rather than accurate’.<sup>368</sup> This may be true, but no details are adduced.

Robinson’s landmark paper succeeded in comprehensively demonstrating and documenting, contra Pound’s detractors, the lengthiness and scholarly integrity of his Old English studies, how his ‘Seafarer’ is informed by and follows the tradition of academic interpretation then current, defending Pound’s editorial and translational strategies—principally against (Tolkien’s tutor) Sisam’s critique, and the reservations of e.g. Davie and Witemeyer.<sup>369</sup>

Thus Robinson has largely vindicated Pound as Anglo-Saxon scholar, documenting his successful studies under Ibbotson at Hamilton, his familiarity with and conscientious use of Sweet’s *Reader*, Stopford Brooke’s 1892 *History of Early English Literature*, and Clark Hall’s *Dictionary*, his knowledge of *Beowulf*, *The Wanderer*, *Cædmon’s Hymn*, and the other canonical Old English poems.<sup>370</sup> He shows Pound’s extensive Old English-inspired, till-then-unpublished pre- and para-‘Seafarer’ writings, including translations and original compositions.<sup>371</sup> “Might” argues for ‘the [...] crucial [...] centrality of “The Seafarer” to Pound’s poetic development’.<sup>372</sup> Quoting Pound’s 1936 statement, ‘the CANTOS started in talk with “Bib”’, Robinson observes that ‘through his *Seafarer* Pound achieved the only poetic idiom adequate for the *nekuia* in English’ and that the *Seafarer-persona* persisted throughout Pound’s tempest-tossed poetic career.<sup>373</sup> Yet, while Pound’s diction in his translation is discussed and defended, there is little reference to, still less technical treatment of, his ‘Seafarer’-metre—notwithstanding the claim ‘Seafarer’ ‘exert[s] a *measurable*

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<sup>368</sup> Alexander, *Poetic Achievement*, 70.

<sup>369</sup> Robinson, “Might,” e.g. 239, 250, 253-57. Kenneth Sisam, *TLS*, June 25, 1954, 409.

<sup>370</sup> Robinson, “Might,” 240-49, 253.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 240-47.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 258; Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 18.

influence on Pound's own subsequent verse and on that of other modern poets'.<sup>374</sup>

Robinson's "Might" should be taken with his other paper "Pound and the Old English Translational Tradition", which elucidates Pound's place in a longer tradition of imitatively Teutonising renderings which includes Longfellow, Tennyson, such medievalists as Conybeare, Stephens, Cockayne, and above all Morris and Stopford Brooke: and affords numerous important remarks on Pound's attention to poetic style and form.<sup>375</sup>

The exception to the rule is Jones, whose work, of much more recent date than other commentators (suggesting a specific vector of progress in Poundian metrical studies), *does* assay scansion of Pound—applying Sievers' system.<sup>376</sup> Remarking 'criticism of [...] "Seafarer" has advanced little since Alexander and Robinson's work', though ' cursory mention is often made of the intertextual [& thematic] relationship' 'between it and Canto I' —Pound's re-translation of Divus' Homer (and Douglas' Vergil, *inter alia*) into a 'Seafarer'-allusive form and style— 'little headway has been made with the rhythm of "The Seafarer" and Canto I', and argues further that, whilst true that 'The ghost of "The Seafarer" is briefly resurrected in Canto I', Pound's Saxonising mode is not, *pace* Kenner, 'thereafter abandoned': 'Pound continued to use the style he developed from "The Seafarer" [...] far beyond the shores of Canto I'. 'Old English constitutes a significant part of the bedrock' of *The Cantos*, and Jones traces conspicuous outcrops even in the yonder *Cantos*.<sup>377</sup>

In substantiation of this, affirming 'Pound saw "The Seafarer" [and Old English] as integral to his [...] poetic', even 'post-Fenollosa', Jones instantiates Pound's Sieversian metrics in some detail. He identifies—in preliminary corroboration of Morgan—**A-Type** 'falling rhythms': 'Pound favours rhythmical patterns that are predominantly falling (corresponding to trochaic and dactylic feet in standard accentual syllabics), just as Sievers' **Type A** is the most commonly occurring pattern

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<sup>374</sup> Robinson, *Tomb*, 259, citing K. L. Goodwin's appraisal of Pound's stylistic impact on Auden, Eliot, Frost, R. Lowell, Merwin, etc, *The Influence of Ezra Pound* (London: Oxford University Press), 1966.

<sup>375</sup> Robinson, "Ezra Pound and the Old English Translational Tradition," in *Tomb*, 259-74. Pound and Morris: Robinson, *Tomb*, 241-42, 268-71; Jones, *Strange Likeness*, e.g. 21, 32-33. *ABC*, 133 associates Morris with the 'injection' (cf. 'chemical') of 'Norse sagas' into English.

<sup>376</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 17-67; "Where Now," 485-502.

<sup>377</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 18-19, 30-31, 41-47.



in Old English.<sup>378</sup>

He explores Pound's interest in the signal 'clashing' C hemistich-type, observing '[c]onsecutive stresses are rare in pre-twentieth-century accentual-syllabic English verse—the occasional spondee being the nearest equivalent', recognising too how it is implicated in the Saxonising style—as in *kenningar*—of noun or genitive phrase *compounding*.<sup>379</sup> The Old English 'clashing' accentuation is not, in fact, restricted to the medial nodule of **Type C**, albeit this spondaic rhythm seems to have proved most noticeable. Indeed, its doubled stress has, in the twentieth century, attracted remarkable attention. Jones notes Pound's spondees, 'especially at the ends of lines', have been remarked as a Saxonism by Brooke-Rose, and by Kenner—who ascribes it to Chinese.<sup>380</sup> Jones further cites C. S. Lewis on C, Joyce's identification of abutted stress as 'the double-thudding Anglo-Saxon motive', and adduces Christine Styros' remarking the accentual-syllabic strangeness of Pound's spondees in *Greek* translation (germane to Canto I); the Saxon spondee is also distinguished by Auden.<sup>381</sup>

Jones discerns 'approximate' **D** and **E Types**, with their 'spiky cadences', especially in Canto II, and canvasses the possibility of Pound's availing himself of the hypermetric.<sup>382</sup> Jones argues that Pound 'developed' these 'rhythmic features' in *The Cantos*—a 'violent assault on traditional [...] familiar accentual-syllabics' 'from "The Seafarer"': they 'come to typify certain varieties of his free verse'.<sup>383</sup>

Still more impressive and significant is his citation from Pound himself, who perceived in his unpublished, c.1920s, treatise *The Music of Beowulf*, 'the misunderstood principle of alliterative verse is possibly radical in all proper *vers libre* in our language'.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37, 45; "Where Now," 491.

<sup>379</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 24, 34-35, 47-48.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, 34; "Where Now," 492, 495.

<sup>381</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 34-35. Ansen, *Table Talk*, 62. Christine Styros, "Beyond Language: Ezra Pound's Translation of the Sophoclean *Elektra*," *Paideuma* 23 (1994): 121.

<sup>382</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 34-35, 37, 46; "Where Now," 491.

<sup>383</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 31, 37.

<sup>384</sup> New Haven, Beinecke Library, Ezra Pound Papers, YCAL MSS 43 Box 69 Folder 3045, TS, 3; Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 47; Robinson, *Tomb*, 242.

I have shown Pound's preoccupation with 'the art of [...] verse structure' 'with 'overhauling the metric', from the 1910s, to the 1930s and 1940s: 'Without a rigorous technique, NO renaissance' there must be 'rigorous overhauling of technique and rigorous demands laid on technique', a 'struggle to renew technique'.<sup>385</sup>

In no way was *il miglior fabbro* uninterested in the nitty-gritty nuts and bolts of his craft. 'Beauty is difficult.'<sup>386</sup> I will show he regarded Form as 'permanent' and objective. He instructs the aspiring poet learning rhythm to 'dissect' the poetry he studies 'into [...] component sound values, syllables long and short, stressed and unstressed, into vowels and consonants',<sup>387</sup> complaining '[i]n London as late as 1914 the majority of poetasters still resented the idea that poetry was an art, they thought you ought to do it without any analysis [...]',<sup>388</sup> inviting sardonically 'the seven people seriously interested in the technic and aesthetic of verse' to 'communicate with me in person'.<sup>389</sup>

Jones surmises Pound probably acquainted himself with Sweet's account of Sievers' system (*Reader*, pages lxxxv-xcvi).<sup>390</sup> Sweet's exposition of Sievers is arguably less appealing and practically usable by the revivalist than the rather clearer one published in the American Bright's contemporary *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, but there appears no positive evidence Pound read Bright.<sup>391</sup>

Robinson has presented persuasive evidence from the Beinecke papers that Pound's 'strenuous apprenticeship for poetry' 'at Hamilton' 'included exercises in composing poems in early English language and meter': 'labouring to open his mind and ear to new harmonies of tone and accent, to break through the exhausted rhythms of his immediate predecessors to something literally radical—formed from the root of his English [...] heritage'. Throughout the papers 'one sees amid the various verse

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<sup>385</sup> Pound, *Guide*, 204.

<sup>386</sup> E.g. Canto LXXIV ll. 595, 564.

<sup>387</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 5.

<sup>388</sup> Pound, *ABC*, 74-75.

<sup>389</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 115.

<sup>390</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 33.

<sup>391</sup> James W. Bright, *An Anglo-Saxon Reader* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1895); "Appendix II., Anglo Saxon Versification," 229-40. Robinson, *Tomb*, 248, eliminates Bright as at any rate Pound's textual source for 'The Seafarer'.

experiments scansions of various kinds [...] on one page', 'of uncertain date', '[...] patterns of breves and macrons with occasional acute accents' are 'scribbled alongside [...] two Old English longlines from [...] *Seafarer* [l. 3] and *Beowulf* [l. 1] quoted from memory', in phonetic spelling: 'It seems as if he is [...] trying to abstract the rhythmic principle'.<sup>392</sup> The papers include a catalogue of metres in *chronological* order, in which Coleridge's *Christabel* is reckoned 'last of ang. sax.'<sup>393</sup>

Robinson advances the probability that Pound laboriously refined his own way with Old English versification and style by, also, learning from the work of Morris, and Stopford Brooke, including developing their felicities, and avoiding their aberrations. Describing Old English metre as rhythmically 'emphatic and rigorously organised but with superficial [sic] variations which to the modern ear seem [...] to obscure the strong underlying patterns or verse types', Robinson declares Pound's 'a carefully restrained imitation' whose 'taut rhythm[s]' amount to 'a careful selection' by Pound 'of just those features of the original [...] the modern ear can detect, [...] an avoidance of those features which would suggest randomness', in contrast to his antecedents Brooke, and Morris, whose *Beowulf* 'tends to fall [...] too often into a [...] singsong anapaestic measure'.<sup>394</sup>

Robinson persuasively proposes Brooke's translations as the direct stimulus to Pound's 'Seafarer', not only documenting the strikingly close textual echoes between Brooke's *Seafarer* and Pound's, but also suggesting, compellingly, that Brooke's confessed dissatisfaction with his imitative renderings, in the preface to his *History*, may have been taken as a challenge by the budding Pound ' "to invent a rhythmical movement [...] to express [...] the proper ebb and flow of Anglo-Saxon verse" which was satisfactory'.<sup>395</sup>

In much later, rather different circumstances—Italy, 'Year XXI of the Fascist era'—Pound informed (a possibly merely notional) audience of blackshirts, 'I consider the hours spent with Layamon's *Brut*, [...] copying a prose translation of Catullus [...] Ibbotson's instruction in Anglo-Saxon, or W. P. Shepard's on Dante and the

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<sup>392</sup> Robinson, *Tomb*, 241-42, 264-65.

<sup>393</sup> Erroneously. Beinecke, Pound Papers, YCAL MSS 43, Box 87, Folder 3732: Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 20.

<sup>394</sup> Robinson, *Tomb*, 260, 264, 270; Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 21.

<sup>395</sup> Robinson, *Tomb*, 273-74.

troubadours of Provence, more important than any contemporary influences',<sup>396</sup> and cautioned, 'your understanding will not be complete unless you take a look at Anglo-Saxon metric'.<sup>397</sup>

Therefore it will be but to obey the poet's own *rappel à l'ordre* to attempt in what follows to develop more extensively and systematically the Sieversian 'déchiffrage' of Pound's rhythms initiated by Jones.<sup>398</sup>

The first experiment is to *find out* what results when one *does* 'take a look at Anglo-Saxon metric' with regards to Pound's 'first heave': when one *scans* 'The Seafarer' according, as is appropriate, to Sievers' system. This will demonstrate in empirical, measurable terms what happened metrically-stylistically when Pound performed his imitative, 'literal', and iconic, translation of his Old English source.<sup>399</sup>

As seen above, it appears to have tended to become established critical orthodoxy that the technique of Pound's translation of *The Seafarer* represents an *allusion* to Old English metre, a more-or-less impressionistic, unsystematic stylistic approximation of its most immediately recognisable formal effects.<sup>400</sup> In several instances Jones seeks to refute criticisms of Pound by Brooke-Rose, who on one occasion states very clearly her contention (three contentions) that Pound's lines 'do not actually obey [...] the complicated Anglo-Saxon rules of scansion (which would be undesirable in modern English and in fact impossible [...])'<sup>401</sup>

Alexander asserts Pound 'does not in fact observe alliteration nor stress-pattern, though he sounds as if he does'.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Pound and Lazamon: Canto XCI; Christine Brooke-Rose, "Lay me by Aurelie: An Examination of Pound's Use of Historical and Semi-Historical Sources," in Hesse, *New Approaches*, 242-79.

<sup>397</sup> Pound, *Selected Prose*, 289, 294.

<sup>398</sup> Pound, *Guide*, 252.

<sup>399</sup> ' "The Seafarer" was as nearly literal, I think, as any translation can be', "Osiris," *New Age*, February 15, 1912, 369; Pound, *Selected Prose*, 39. Robinson has defended Pound's *lexical* literalness.

<sup>400</sup> E.g. Hugh Kenner, ed., *Ezra Pound: Translations* (New York: New Directions, 1963), 11.

<sup>401</sup> Brooke-Rose, *ZBC*, 86-87; Brooke-Rose's discussion of Pound and OE: *ibid.*, 84-92; Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 31-34.

<sup>402</sup> Michael Alexander, "Old English Poetry into Modern English Verse," *Translation and*

One might perceive two ‘*in fact*’s here: and no facts. *Does* Pound’s versification not ‘actually obey’ the rules? If it doesn’t, can we glean how and why, when, and by how much? Sometimes and not others? If so, when? Actually how far or how close? Surely Alexander’s comment tantalises. It could be true. But how, exactly, does Pound contrive to ‘*sound as if* he does’ imitate Old English metre, while not ‘in fact’ doing so? Is it analogous to modes of Modernist *vers libre* practice, familiar from Eliot and Pound, which evoke the impression of blank verse or *terza rima* whilst continually evading actually conforming to those forms? If so, this would again be a technical matter susceptible to scansion. It would be behovely then to put the accuracy of these suppositions, capable of at least some degree of verification or refutation, to the proof. Can we *test to what measure* Pound’s ‘Seafarer’ *actually is* metrically imitative?

It should then duly be possible, second, concerning the recognition that Pound, as he himself affirmed, applied the style and form developed for ‘The Seafarer’ to Canto I, and the claim that this Saxonising mode of free verse, these Anglo-Saxon rhythms, persist later in *The Cantos*, to ascertain more precisely how, technically, this transfer of stylistic influence was effected. What is found when, having scanned ‘The Seafarer’, we conduct the same experiment with the *XXX Cantos*? ‘After [‘Seafarer’] they become part of Pound’s rhythmic signature’: these rhythmic cells, originating in and transmitted from ‘The Seafarer’ to *The Cantos*, should be objectively identifiable—metrical DNA inherited from *The Seafarer*+‘The Seafarer’.<sup>403</sup> —‘The English national chemical’.

I should perhaps also explicate, I am not seeking to reduce Pound’s poetry to its scansion; and I do not *assume* a priori that Pound *was* seeking to compose ‘correct’ (as reconstructed) Old English metre conforming perfectly to the strict requirements of his model, and intend then to censure him for failing to do so. Rather, this is an experiment, a heuristic hermeneutics, entertained to ascertain more precisely the *what* and *how* of what he was doing. I am however implementing this *by* applying Sievers’ system to Pound’s work, as this seems, as also recognised by Jones, self-evidently appropriate. Without a system of metre we *could* not intelligibly demonstrate whether

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*Literature* 3 (1994): 72.

<sup>403</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 37-38.

Pound's lines are measurably Old English or not; Sievers' scansion was (still is) standard: 'Ang. Sax.' metric as Pound learned it.

(It should be noted that whilst Pound did know and refer to the sagas, Old *Norse* skaldic and Eddic *versifications* seem not—very regrettably—to be a poetic tradition of which Pound had any knowledge.)<sup>404</sup>

I *am* unconvinced it would be justified and credible to extend such a procedure so far as to seek to contrive to force all of Pound's 'Seafarer' lines to fit the more arcane, rare, or doubtful subtypes.

Brooke-Rose's Damoclean 'undesirable in modern English and in fact impossible' hangs over this entire thesis, and over the issue of the tolerances of judging how closely Pound or other Saxonising poets revive the metric. (It is worth adverting that Brooke-Rose is evidently unsympathetic, if not hostile, to Old English metre, including as revived by Auden.) It is not clear Pound, like Tolkien, believed it either 'undesirable' or 'impossible', though there is an absolute linguistic sense in which the latter approaches truth, and therefore fortifies the former: it is questionable, but perhaps irresolvable in the abstract as opposed to attending practically to concrete examples, just how far Modern English is linguistically capable of actually reproducing the phonic and rhythmic qualities of Old English poetry. Obvious besetting difficulties are the queries pertaining to quantity (vowel-length), and more or less intractable disparities between the grammatical-syntactic natures of the ancient and modern forms of the language (see my Introduction, pages 19-20, 47-48 above).

Presently available space, if no other more theoretical factors, constrain scope and scale practicable here, though a tentative prospecting would be valid and feasible, a limited, rudimentary survey, with the purpose of eliciting a more informed if still indicative assessment calibrating to a greater nicety how close to, or how far from, Old

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<sup>404</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 28, *ABC*, 52. The 800-odd pages of *The Cantos* yield only 'Ygdrasil' (sic), contextualised with appositive phrases 'the ash-tree', and 'the tree of heaven', *Cantos* LXXXV ll. 30-31 and XC l. 4, and 'Fafnir the worm', Addendum for [Canto] C', ll. 1-2, 16-19; Fafnir occurs in l. 8, as (cf. Wagner) one of the dragonish hoard-gloating incarnations of 'Usury, [...] the serpent': and, as if occasioned by mention of the name Fafnir, Pound adds a flourish of archaising alliterative variations, 'Wart of the common-weal, / || Wenn-maker' (ll. 10-11; cf. the OE *Metrical Charm*.) In a Great War poem unpublished till 2003, "1915: February," Pound likens a military engineer to 'some figure out of the sagas' (l. 3, cf. 9), 'Grettir [...] or [...] Skarpheddin (sic)' (4), whereas his traction-engine (1-2) is 'Like Grendel' (8): Sieburth, *Poems and Translations*, 1176-77; Nadel, *Early Writings*, 70-71.

English metre *is* to Pound's verse. Though this research is precluded from being exhaustive and (insofar as this is metrically possible or desirable) definitive, any findings could serve as an objective basis for further commentary, which would no longer have to content itself with indefinite opinions on this verifiable point. Metrics entails quantification, implies Measurement. As Jones ripostes, 'either imitating Old English [...] exactly is undesirable and impossible, or it is not'; Pound himself avers apropos '*Technique*.—I believe in technique as a test of a man's sincerity; in law when it is ascertainable.'<sup>405</sup>

What is at stake here, is an accurate and intelligible assessment of the part played by Old English metre, technically, in 'breaking the pentameter', in the twentieth-century development, via Pound's poetry, of free verse—a major instance of the intersection of Medievalism and Modernism, evincing what should now be recognised as the vital role played by the former in relation to the latter.<sup>406</sup> It should thereby, that is, be possible to calibrate, to delineate, empirically, the precise nature and extent of Pound's engagement, as manifested in his verse, with Old English metre; and to explicate further the inception of the revival of Old English versification in Modern English poetics.

*'The Sound of Pound': Note on Aural-Oral Resources.*

'The way to learn the music of verse is to [...] LISTEN to the sound that it makes.'<sup>407</sup> My scansion of Pound's 'Seafarer' and *Canto I* is informed by consultation of the recordings of the poet's performances.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 32; Pound, *Literary Essays*, 9.

<sup>406</sup> Medievalism is, of course, a *modern* mode, and an incidental motive of the present thesis is to indicate the pervasiveness with which Medievalism influenced Modernism and Postmodernism. Cf. Lucia Boldrini, "Translating the Middle Ages: Modernism and the Ideal of the Common Language," *Translation and Literature* 12 (2003): 41-68.

<sup>407</sup> Pound, *ABC*, 56, 201.

<sup>408</sup> Richard Eberhart, author of the alliterative-verse epic *Brotherhood of Men* (1949), recalls Pound's performance of 'Seafarer' as 'powerful, strident, exhilarating', "Pound's New Cantos," *Quarterly Review of Literature* 5 (1949): 178. His declamation of "Altaforte" in Soho, 1909, caused public alarm (Nadel, *Early Writings*, 346), and the infamous radio broadcasts might be viewed as Vorticist-style poetic agitprop: Willam Levy, ed., *Certain Radio Speeches of Ezra Pound* (Rotterdam: Cold Turkey Press, 1975); Leonard W. Doob, ed.,

An oratorical recitation<sup>409</sup>—with timpani accompaniment contributed by the poet—of ‘The Seafarer’ was committed to 78RPM discs at Harvard, May 17<sup>th</sup> 1939.

Pound was recorded declaiming Canto I in Washington DC, June 1958, originally issued by Caedmon/HarperCollins on vinyl in 1960. Both are now accessible ‘online’ as part of the archive of Pound recordings made available by the Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing, University of Pennsylvania.<sup>410</sup>

Very striking from the recording of ‘Seafarer’ is Pound’s acoustic articulation of the full-line, a pronounced rising and falling alternation of vocal intonation which seems to echo the shape of the verses, a to-and fro sway corresponding approximately to the see-sawing of the two hemistichs from on-verse to off-verse, the latter inflected with a cadential falling of pitch; though this *undulation* can also extend to local units of longer range according to the sense phrased through them.

Distinctly apparent too is the impression of analogous larger, structurally macrocosmic phases of differentiated tempo and tone, Pound extending his linear *rubato* of intonation to the level of faster and lighter, then slower and heavier, louder then quieter, internal movements, which divide the poem into rhythmically and dynamically contrasting sections.

The other prominent feature of the performance is Pound’s accompaniment of his declamation with drums. On the occasion of the Harvard recordings the poet had requested a set of kettledrums, tuned to a tonic-dominant interval: Sieburth includes a résumé of Pound’s moonlighting career as a percussionist, with its connexions to the music of Antheil and the African anthropology of Frobenius.<sup>411</sup>

After attempting to discern a rationale for the timpani this auditor concluded it seems erratic and inconsistent, more an atmospheric effect than a dimension of coherent metrical significance, Pound appearing to add a beat or roll when he feels like it, or if he remembers.

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‘*Ezra Pound Speaking*’: *Radio Speeches of World War II* (Westport: Greenwood, 1978). Further on this general subject of ‘vocality’ and orality: Jones, “Where Now”.

<sup>409</sup> Alexander, “Old English Poetry into Modern,” 72, remarks Pound’s ‘liturgical cadence’.

<sup>410</sup> Penn Sound Ezra Pound page ed. Richard Sieburth, accessed June 22, 2013, <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Pound.php>

<sup>411</sup> Richard Sieburth, “The Sound of Pound: A Listener’s Guide”, published April 2007, accessed June 22, 2013, [http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/text/Sieburth-Richard\\_Pound.html](http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/text/Sieburth-Richard_Pound.html)



Bessinger observes ‘sometimes muffled and tentative [...] they sound out to suggest a boom of surf or thunder [...] ominously evocative in [...] conjunction with words like “eternal”, “earth”, [...] “waneth” ’, but noting that in fact the drum-taps ‘occur anywhere in a line or before or after it, either alone or upon a stressed syllable...’ and are thus—corroborating my own findings— ‘not strictly or regularly complementary to the verse-rhythm [...].’<sup>412</sup>

Interestingly in the context of Pound’s acceptance of the Sieversian model of Old English metre, and suggestive in that of Pound’s own highly ‘musical’ conception of lyric poetry, traced by Pound to the Greeks and the troubadours, Bessinger comments Pound’s ‘percussive self-accompaniment [...] anticipated [...] Pope’s theory [...] of Anglo-Saxon poetics’; yet, again, ‘extraneous beats are heard, often as if at random’, he computes ‘about once in five lines on average’, and ‘according to Pope’s system we should expect several times that number of initial rests (or solo beats [strummed chords?] on the harp) in an equivalent number of Old English verse-pairs, and these would be present only in specific metrical types.’<sup>413</sup> (Once again, further study of this specific avenue beckons.)

Of course the recording contributes its own literally authoritative testimony, but should be regarded not as clinching definitive evidence but as a helpful but flawed (including sonically) documentation, to be taken into consideration along with other factors, of a particular performance with all the attendant imperfections of such an occasion, and one delivered by Pound almost thirty years after the poem’s publication: on the matter of textual disparities between the recording and published text, it is impossible positively to distinguish inadvertent slips from possibly intended emendation.<sup>414</sup>

The clarity of the late-1950s recording, benefitting too from what seem to have been less public circumstances of performance and production—moreover the recitation is unaccompanied, though a beat giving the pull of the oarstroke might have been as

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<sup>412</sup> J. B. Bessinger, “The Oral Text of Ezra Pound’s ‘The Seafarer,’ ” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 47 (1961), 174. Appears to be the only commentary on Pound’s recording.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, 174. Bessinger omits any specific technical *metrical* analysis beyond the reference to Pope’s theory quoted.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

proper to this Homeric seafare—and absence of textual discrepancies between recording and print, render the audio Canto I a more satisfactory resource.

Unfortunately no audio of Pound performing Canto II is available. PennSound's recording of Bunting reading lines 1-98 may claim provenance from the Poundian ambit, but Bunting's earnest, meticulous style of slow, even enunciation risks a stasis which strikes this mind's ear as a far cry from what is likely to have been the limber lambency of Pound's own realisation—which one may to some extent extrapolate from the documentation of the stylistically akin Cantos I and IV.

### 'The First Heave': Scanning 'The Seafarer'.

[...] πολλά παθεῖν [...]

—Canto LXXVI line 156.  
(‘suffer much [upon the sea]’, *Odyssey* I.4)

Although I acknowledge this attempts to *develop* Jones' pioneering work in the field, my scansion is independent, commencing afresh from first principles.

#### *Alliteration*

It is customary to label Old English poetry for convenience 'alliterative verse'. The most obvious, even infamous, distinguishing characteristic is the associative repetition of initial accented sounds; the designation implies a contradistinction between head- and end-rhyme.

Accordingly the most initially conspicuous, even deliberately cacophonous, uncouth, feature of Pound's 'Seafarer'—its most recognisable imitation of its source—is its insistent alliteration, a primitivist aesthetic akin to that of Pound's contemporaries, the Picasso of the tribal masks, the Stravinsky of *Le Sacre*'s pagan Russian peasants. Pound's poetic primitivism in 'Seafarer' arises from his construction of an aboriginal Anglo-Saxonity:

ll. 1-2a my own self song's truth  
                   journey's jargon  
 l. 4     Bitter breast-cares have I abided  
 l. 98    His born brothers, their buried bodies, &c

It is immediately obvious Pound's 'Seafarer' is 'alliterative', indeed often to clotting excess. 'Pound peppers his verse with alliteration', without always strictly reproducing Old English disposition, but with a 'density' 'giv[ing] an impressionistic sense of the richly woven consonance of Old English poetry'. 'This acoustic texture is distinct from that heard in nineteenth-century verse (except [...] Hopkins) and clearly audible'.<sup>415</sup>

But just as a versification dependent solely upon endrhyme would be doggerel, Old English verse is of course (certainly according to Sievers) not merely 'alliterative' (itself a misnomer since it is used to denote a matter not of written 'letters' but of oral-aural phones), but also accentual and caesural, with, additionally, quantitative and syllabic elements.<sup>416</sup> Since the presence of alliteration in Pound's 'Seafarer' is blatant—and yet, as is also immediately apparent, in incidence and distribution divergent from Old English practice—scansion proper requires examination of the other, more fundamental, structural components of this verse.

Alliteration pertains to a patterning in moments of phonics, yet the breathing and shaping of all poetry is poised amidst silence, less the opposed contradiction, than the necessary counterpart, to sound. Ultimately the rhythmic movement of a line, Pound's 'form cut into time', is inseparable from it, vocalised as syncopation against the silence through which its temporality extends.<sup>417</sup> Even more important than the positive sounds of Old English poetry—according to one of Pound's acute insights, though without explicit metrical reference, that of a race 'believing in silence'—is the silence standing at its centre: the caesura.<sup>418</sup>

### *Caesura and Hemistich*

*Can chai la fueilla* is [...] like a sea song [...] interesting for its rhythm, [...] the sea-chantey swing produced by the simple device of caesurae [...]<sup>419</sup>

It is immediately evident that although Sweet prints the verse with the medial caesura, as conventionally in modern editions, indicated by the insertion of a space, so that the

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<sup>415</sup> Jones, "Where Now," 491; Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 31-33.

<sup>416</sup> Tolkien, "Translating Beowulf," 66.

<sup>417</sup> Pound, *ABC*, 198.

<sup>418</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 64-65 ("Constant Preaching").

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

hemistichs are identified and isolated visually on the page, this is *not* the typographical appearance presented by the lineation of Pound's translation.

Considering his familiarity with Sweet's *Reader*, and noticing his evident willingness to experiment with lineation and typography, from metrical and other motives, elsewhere in his publications—lineation, interpreted as indicating rhythm, in *The Cantos* being the most relevant instance—it is to be assumed that the non-caesural lineation of the printed 'Seafarer' is as Pound intended.<sup>420</sup> Pound does not insert a space betokening medial caesurae in his 'Seafarer'. The caesurae and hemistichs in this allegedly Old English-derived verse are not identified, ready-prepared for reader or reciter.

Are they there, 'Ang.-Sax.' pivots 'unwobbling'?<sup>421</sup> This single most crucial metrical feature of the form normally—excepting the disputed issue of single half-lines—divides the full-line into two hemistichs, the units of rhythm and sense from which this verse is built. The building-block is the rhythmic *phrase*, of which the *whole* shape, the contour, must be intact, abutted to a second rhythmic phrase, because Old English poesis is—like Homer—genetically formulaic, the hemistichal verse-types corresponding to formulae.<sup>422</sup>

Laboured rehearsal of rudimentary platitudes regarding Old English metrical elements is risked here to emphasise the point that the caesura hinging a pair of accentually-weighted hemistichs is so fundamental to the versification that if *only* these features are present in a performance of (stress-timed) language, a resemblance to the verse-form will be—and this is particularly important, cf. Gunn and Morgan, when it comes to *The Cantos*—detectable, indeed palpable.

Alliteration is important—the way the constituent components of the verse all interact resists easy treatment of any one or two aspects in schematic isolation—but

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<sup>420</sup> NB Pound's own special attentiveness to caesurae in his two favourite, signally vernacular, translators of Vergil and Ovid, Douglas, "Notes on Elizabethan Classicists," in *Literary Essays*, 245, and Golding, *ABC*, 124-31.

<sup>421</sup> "The Unwobbling Pivot" (1947), in Ezra Pound, *Confucius* (New York: New Directions, 1969).

<sup>422</sup> Francis P. Magoun, "The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry," *Speculum*, Vol. 28 (1953): 446-67; Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).

not (in the Sieversian tradition) fundamental. Accentually, hypermetric, ‘swollen’, verses attest not to the normative two stresses per hemistich but three;<sup>423</sup> whilst the intervallic magnitude of the caesura varies, it must in some degree be present, as must more than one accented syllable on either side of it. Syllabically, if in some modern version of Old English verse the hemistichal minimum of four dwindles to three or two, so long as two accents precede and follow a medial caesura, authentic *metre* aside, the fundamental rhythmic effect is retained.

The primary operation to accomplish in a scansion seeking to examine the extent and nature of the imitative metricality—or not—of Pound’s ‘Seafarer’ must therefore be to determine whether his lines are in fact accentual-caesural. Do they evince caesurae, are these medial, do we encounter paired hemistichs, and of what syllabic-accentual character? Or could Pound’s lines be, in accordance with the common misconception, alliterative (and conspicuously so) merely?

Conducting such an initial pass it is found: that the greater proportion of the translation’s lines do fall into two hemistichs on either side of medial caesurae; that the evidence preponderantly supports the inference that Pound was aware that the minimum number of syllables per hemistich is four.

Lines in which the medial caesurae are maximally clear—coinciding with clauses demarcated by punctuation of comma, semicolon, or period—are readily exemplified. (To clarify, punctuation is emboldened and a double vertical bar inserted):

- l. 2 Journey’s jargon, || how I in harsh days
- l. 6 And dire sea-surge, || and there I oft spent
- l. 15 Weathered the winter, || wretched outcast
- l. 31 Near<sup>e</sup>th nightshade, || snoweth from the north
- l. 60 Over the whale’s acre, || would wander wide
- l. 92 Grey-haired he groaneth, || knows gone companions
- l. 10 Chill its chains are; || chafing sighs
- l. 24 In icy feathers; || full oft the eagle screamed
- l. 64 O’er tracks of ocean; || seeing that anyhow
- l. 8 While she tossed close to cliffs. || Coldly afflicted
- l. 12 Mere-weary mood. || Lest man know not
- l. 32 Corn of the coldest. || Nathless there knocketh now
- l. 55 The bitter heart’s blood. || Burgher knows not
- l. 83 Tomb hideth trouble. || The blade is layed low

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<sup>423</sup> On hypermetrics see my Introduction, page 17 above.

In line 56 the caesura coincides with a parenthetical dash: ‘He the prosperous man— what some perform’; and twice Pound capitalises on the caesura, following a full stop, to commence a new verse-paragraph: line 25, in which the two halves are linked across the indented break by the alliterating ‘pinion’ (25a) and ‘protector’(25b), and, not unreasonably since 80b may legitimately be felt to initiate the new movement beginning *Dagas sind gewitene* [...],<sup>424</sup> 80, by that of ‘Delight’, ‘doughty’ (80a) and ‘days’, 80b. Indeed the fourth position is permitted to participate, ‘durable’, not strictly tolerated save in the special cases of the ‘crossed’ or ‘double’ alliterative pattern. One presumes Pound intends this *d*-alliteration to include ‘Delight’; correctly however the word alliterates on *l*, since the *second* syllable is *stressed*. He may have contrived his translation of 80b, ‘Days little durable’ to extenuate the alliterative weakness of his 80a.

Regarding ‘alliteration’, which aspect has inevitably recurred to attention, and indicative of its function (to *point* the stressed syllables and *link* them across the caesura, binding the two hemistichs into one full-line) these lines bestraddling paragraph-breaks usefully exhibit Pound’s mindfulness of the *hofuðstafr* and of the true purpose of alliteration. In both cases the first accented syllable of the off-verse, forming the first line of the new paragraph, is scrupulously headrhymed with the foregoing understave—an attentiveness to alliteration not elsewhere consistently demonstrated by Pound, as will have appeared already in the other lines quoted.

Verses in which the caesura is not so emphatic but in which it is, certainly to the ear attuned to Old English verse, evident from phrase and rhythm, are of course very numerous. A first example could be the opening of the poem, in which in spite of Pound’s clotting of the line with excessive accentual-alliterative weight in the on-verse (in the original a light **Type A3**), ‘I...own’, and internal end-rhyme through the full-line, *own...song...reckon*—an ancillary but congesting scheme designed to correspond with the cadence of the ensuing (2a) on-verse, ‘Journey’s jargon’—the caesura and resultant hemistichs are still clear:

May I for my own self || song’s truth reckon

<sup>424</sup> Sweet’s editing, *Reader*, 173, would have encouraged this.

The (slight) pause must fall after ‘self’ in the articulation of the line, a hesitation suspended before the emphatic pronouncement of ‘song’, and the two accented syllables alliterate on *s* across the gap. Whilst ‘I’ and ‘own’ compete with ‘self’ in this translation of 1a with what should be the prime accent, *sylfum* > ‘self’,<sup>425</sup> it is manifest from the page, and supported by the poet’s recorded performance, that Pound’s ‘song’ emphatically does command the *hofuðstafr* (1b), orally-aurally mimicking (but *not* ‘translating’ the *lexical sense*) of *Seafarer* 1b’s initial syllable *sōð*[...].<sup>426</sup> In the original full-line the caesura falls in the same place.

Further examples, in which one may appreciate the vital synergy of caesura, hemistich, accent and alliteration, in the authentic manner, are abundant from the first 13 lines alone. (I represent simplified, *two-terrace*, accentuation by capitalising full stresses):

l. 4 BITTer BREAST-cares || have I aBIDed  
 l. 5 KNOWN on my KEEL || many a CARE’s HOLD  
 ll. 7-8 NARRow NIGHTwatch || NIGH the SHIP’s head,  
 While she tossed CLOSE to CLIFFS. || COLDly affLICTed

The alliteration in the first three instances is ‘classically’ regular, not excluding the ‘simple’ scheme in 5. Note 5’s exemplification that alliteration is not a matter of graphemes. Line 8, in which the caesura is patent, appears to exhibit an overcompensating effort to contrive alliteration on *cl*.

Lines 10-13 offer a short continuous passage demonstrating varying ‘weights’ of caesura, its interaction with alliteration, as well as an instance of Pound’s management of *Hakenstil*, or *enjambement*. In Old English verse the *mid*-line break of the caesura and the *end*-line-break exert interacting forces on the conduct of the hemistich. (For present purposes the rendering of the accentual dimension is again simplified):

CHILL its CHAINS are; || CHAFing SIGHS ↵  
HEW my HEART round || and HUNGER beGOT ↵  
MERE-weary MOOD. || Lest MAN KNOW not ↵  
 That he on DRY LAND || LOVELest LIVeth, ↵

<sup>425</sup> In the original, in the *dative*.

<sup>426</sup> Was Pound swayed against salvage of *sōð* > ‘sooth’, as Morris would have favoured (Pound uses the archaism in Canto I l. 63) by the paternal shade of Whitman?

From such examples now adduced we can observe Pound's appreciation of the normative status and function of caesura, twinned hemistichs, and alliteration (including the headstave). Alliteration in lines 10-13 is impressively accurate, especially the threefold alliteration on the consonant-cluster in 10, until 13 with its excessive and misplaced alliteration on *l*.

Also apparent is that Pound (one of whose slogans was to be 'DICHTEN=CONDENSARE') understands the importance of, normally, reducing so far as feasible the number of syllables per hemistich: but note also, even restricting ourselves to the early lines quoted *supra*, 4a, 5a, 10a, 11a, and both verses of lines 7 and 12, what appears to be witness to an awareness of the tetrasyllabic minimum, further testified to by e.g. lines 2a, 6a, 22a and b, 32a, 53a, 57b, 87a, 89a, 91b, &c.<sup>427</sup>

But, as has already appeared, Pound's 'Seafarer' contains multiple instances of lines which, *according to Old English* 'number, weight and measure', are deficient, irregular.

Line 10 begins promisingly. 10a, a phrase of four syllables and two stresses naturally coming to rest at a caesura coinciding with the semicolon. Across the caesura its mate, 10b, also starts well with a resounding headstave alliterating with 10a's two *stuðlar* on *ch*, but while 'chafing sighs' yield two *accents* it consists of only three *syllables*: a catalectic hemistich.

The previous line, 9, 'My feet were by frost benumbed' must alliterate on *f*, with 'frost' identified as the headstave; but where is the caesura to be staked into place? It must be divined between 'were' and 'by'—'My feet were || by frost benumbed'—thus whilst the off-verse boasts the full minimal complement of syllables and stresses, 9a is lacking, having only three syllables, only one of which can be accented.

—What begins to emerge here is how Pound sometimes falls *victim* to his original. *Seafarer* line 9 runs (Sweet's metrical emendation) *Wæron fēt mīne || forste gebunden*, and in this case (cf. line 25) the *Old English* halfline is doubtful.<sup>428</sup> It also displays how, due to linguistic change, *literal* rendering of Old English into Modern can result

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<sup>427</sup> E.g. Pound, *ABC*, 92.

<sup>428</sup> Sweet, *Reader*, 171, Gordon, *Seafarer*, 34; Klinck, *Elegies*, 128.



in syllabic and accentual *disparity*. *Wæron fēt mīne* is, literally, ‘Were feet mine>my feet’. Pound’s metaphor, as he himself protested, is ‘as literal as it could be’—here at least; he mistranslates 9b, changing the thematically significant, cf. 10a, ‘bound’ (the ‘binding’ and releasing of the ethopoeic exile-persona’s thoughts, the binding of cold, the bondage of anxiety) to ‘benumbed’. However, re-ordering to the more (in archaistic Modern English) idiomatic ‘My feet were’ is of no avail against the fact that whilst in Old English *wæron* and *mīne* are disyllabic and, quantitatively, long, in Modern their derivatives ‘were’ and ‘my’ are (unless extraneously rhetorically stressed) short monosyllables.

Note too how it is actually Pound’s practice to preserve the caesura as nearly as possible in the same location. Regarding the caesura in the translation, Pound possibly intends his line 9 to be read with the weakest possible pause, almost as one unbroken, perhaps single, line: his recording seems to confirm this.

To the same category may be relegated, due to analogous causes, and again likewise regrettably as they are, Old English metrical requirements aside, striking (archaistic) Modern English poetry as well as worthy translations, such lines as

- l. 36 Moaneth alway || my mind’s lust  
 l. 42 But shall have his sorrow || for sea-fare  
 l. 65 My lord deems to me || this dead life  
 l. 70 Disease or oldness || or sword-hate

all wanting a fourth syllable in the off-verse. In line 59 ‘My mood ’mid || the mere-flood’ Pound’s apparently aphae(re)tic ‘ ’mid’—a typical stylistic habit of greater significance than would at first appear<sup>429</sup>—causes the shortfall (cf. his favourite third-person singular verbal suffix *-eth* causing an *excessive* monosyllable elsewhere). Line 59b, moreover, has two stresses—as in all the above off-verses spondees packed into the *end* of the half-line—whilst the on-verse’s *preposition* cannot, strictly (Kuhn’s *Satzpartikelgesetz*), carry accent.

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<sup>429</sup> Pound habitually uses the prepositions ‘with’ and concomitantly ‘mid’ in a peculiar manner, wishing to interpret the former with a force *reversing* the normal *Modern* English acceptance of the word, and, accordingly, by corollary seeking to re-introduce the preposition ‘mid’. That is, he wishes to use ‘with’ in the Old English sense of *wið* surviving as an adversative prefix as in *withstand* (<OE *wiðstandan*—which Pound would have known from *The Wanderer* l. 15: he quotes ll. 15-18 of *The Wanderer* in “The Constant Preaching to the Mob”), and *mid* in the Old English sense, cognate with German *mit*, a force surviving in MnE in the compound *midwife*; see *Selected Letters*, 303.

In lines 83, 93 the caesurae must be implanted as follows, respectively: ‘Nor gold-giving lords || like those gone’, ‘Lordly men, || are to earth o’ergiven’ (caesura coinciding with comma).<sup>430</sup> However 93 is problematic: is Pound banking on the caesura falling after ‘are’, supplying (manifoldly dubious) vocalic alliteration, and a fourth syllable, to the on-verse? The recording testifies, to my ears, to a slight pause after ‘men’, consistent with the punctuation.

Similarly in 83, one presumes that ‘lords’ in the on-verse is intended to alliterate with ‘like’ in the off-, even though ‘like’ cannot assume the role of headstave, in the hope of reinforcing the alliteration on *g* encompassing 83a’s ‘gold-giving’ and ‘gone’ in the fourth position of the off-verse. Such lines as these are, to use a nauticism, all ahoos metrically—*except for* the stubborn presence of the caesurae.

Of Pound’s line 34 ‘The hear’t’s thought || that I on high streams’ should be noted, again, how close it cleaves, this time in every aspect including lexically (*gebōhtas* to singular being trivial), to the Old English 34, *heortan gēbohtas, || þæt ic hēan strēamas*. Yet again the caesura holds the selfsame stead; yet again Old English disyllables with long diphthongs come across into Modern as lighter monosyllables: with again the result that Pound’s 34a is catalectic. The alliteration is correct, indeed *identical* with the source, and the hemistich has two accents, but it wants a final unstressed syllable. It appears Pound is *counting stresses not syllables* in these instances (as in Hopkinsian ‘sprung rhythm’), and it could be suggested Pound is extrapolating the logic of Germanic compaction of speech-material in poetry—*condensare*—a development already apparently in progress later in the Middle Ages in Old Norse.

*Longer* lines present difficulties regarding *medial* caesura, falling into periodic subordinate clauses demarcated with commas, which *compete* with the binary hemistichal structure.

Line 23, ‘Storms, on the stone-cliffs beaten, fell on the stern’ involves the commentator in both metrical and lexical issues, since (to take the latter first) Pound misconstrues (or alters) the sense of 23-24a; whereas, regarding the former, the Old

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<sup>430</sup> NB quoted in Canto LXXIV ll. 264-275; ‘Lordly men are to earth o’ergiven/these the companions’, (‘Seafarer’ 92b, ‘gone companions’, qualified as ‘lordly men’ in 93a.) the Tiresian knell ‘lose all companions’ Canto I, l. 67, with ‘envelope-pattern’ ‘[...] to earth o’ergiven.’ Cf. Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 57-61.

English 23a is itself a hypermetric line with three mimetically expressive beats.<sup>431</sup> Pound *has lengthened his line accordingly*, amplifying his on-verse correspondingly with *three* heavi(est) accents. Caesurally, the matter is complicated by the commas but it must be meant to stand after the second, ‘beaten’, while the fourth stress, which normally does not participate in the alliteration, must again be intended to participate, must indeed be taken as a kind of dislodged *hofuðstafr* for the off-verse, on *st* with the two *stuðlar* in the hither hemistich. Subsidiary (licentious) alliteration on *f* must be designed to ‘bind thru’ the line in the meanwhile.<sup>432</sup> Line 72, ‘And for this, every earl whatever, for those speaking after’, is in Old English terms yet more metrically chaotic. Pound must be relying on vocalic alliteration through the whole line, (every...earl...after) but this is indeed a purely *alliterative* structure, failing, particularly, to requite (though this would be not be easy) the concision and control of original’s off-verse, which consists merely of the single, rhythmically-accommodative word *æftercweþendra*.<sup>433</sup>

Finally in relation to caesurae and hemistichs, insofar as they are extricable in scansion, is the matter of single half-lines. *One* of this common but questionable category appears in *Seafarer* line 16 *winemægum bidroren*, translated (with adequate lexical accuracy) by Pound ‘Deprived of my kinsmen’.<sup>434</sup> Although Sweet does advert to 16 with a marginal dagger and appends a brief note, Pound does not attempt to emend, or supply a conjectural off-verse (or accept and translate any of those proposed by scholars), but seems rather to have taken *Seafarer* 16 as authorisation to the licence of waif hemistichs, since he *multiplies* their occurrence in his ‘Seafarer’ to five instances in addition to 16:

- l. 3 Hardship endured oft.  
l. 30 Must bide above brine.

<sup>431</sup> Gordon, *Seafarer*, 35, Klinck, *Elegies*, 129.

<sup>432</sup> E.g. Canto XCIX l. 107.

<sup>433</sup> Termed ‘**Type X**’ in T. P. Dunning and A. J. Bliss, eds., *The Wanderer* (London: Methuen, 1969), 76-7; all citations to this edition. Several times achieved, *tetrasyllabically*, by Tolkien, e.g. “Húrin” 867b, ‘Thangorodrim’; “Winter Comes to Nargothrond,” 23b, ‘stony-glinting’ (*Lays*, 37, 129); “Sheave” 18a, ‘evilhaunted’ (*The Lost Road and Other Writings: Language and Legend before The Lord of the Rings*, vol. 5 of *The History of Middle-earth*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins, 1993), 67; *Arthur* l.198b, ‘faithfulhearted’.

<sup>434</sup> Bliss, “Single Half-Lines,” 442-9. Gordon, *Seafarer*, 34, Klinck, *Elegies*, 128.

- l. 38 Seek out a foreign fastness.  
 l. 76 Daring ado, ... (rhetorical aposiopesis with ellipsis),  
 and (the final line in his translation) l. 90, Be an unlikely treasure  
 hoard.

Pound's lines 3, 30, 38, 76 all feature irregular, *internal* alliteration, absent from *Seafarer* 16 and from his rendering of that line. Although *Seafarer* 97-102 do concern burial with grave-goods, 'Seafarer' 90 is Pound's *own* line, hence should not, maybe, be sorted with the other lone hemistichs, but understood rather as a *non*-alliterating interpolation fabricated to afford closure to the translation—although it is, potentially, an addition of Poundian interest in terms of its content, the strange Plutonic idea of the dead as 'treasure hoard'. 'In the gloom the gold || gathers the light against it.'<sup>435</sup>

The foregoing census should demonstrate that in Pound's translation medial caesurae and hemistichal pairs *are* usually present, interacting with alliteration, and accent.

#### *Metre*

'Accent', of course, entails the next obviously crucial element, *metre*—in the restricted sense of the patterned disposition of heavily and more lightly accented syllables within the hemistichs. Authentic Old English versification prescribes, and proscribes, these rhythmic arrangements, and as remarked at the outset, it is claimed Pound's 'Seafarer' is not metrically imitative to the extent of observing these verse-forms with strict accuracy. I wish to test more thoroughly how far this is true.

I proved above that Pound is generally quite correct in his management of the caesura, and in that process the accentuation (and concomitant alliteration) of his hemistichs, and their syllable-count, impinged ineluctably on our attention. I showed that Pound often strives to map very closely the rhythmic contours of his original, the 'faults' in his rendering not infrequently originating in his sticking *too* close.

The widely recognised allusion to, the generalised impression of, Old English verse is certainly tangible. Pursuing the number and disposition of the stresses in the half-lines further, however, to what extent, if any, can Pound's translation be scanned

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<sup>435</sup> Canto XI, l. 137. Is this line an alliterative-verse Type **B** hypermetric with anacrusis, or an alexandrine with alliterations? —A case in point of how Pound's versification may be scanned according to different systems of metric.

in terms of Old English metre? Can, and how far can, Pound's imitative alliterative verse be *typologised* by Sievers' 'Fünftypensystem'?

### *Type A Verses*

I have already quoted a number of Pound's lines which are actually metrical according to Old English versification, identifiable as Old English verse-types. The simpler example, the more readily perceived; their success more immediately self-evident. The first most salient is 2a. Pound renders *Seafarer* 2a, *sīþas secgan* ||, 'journey's jargon' ||. In treating this metrically, I wish for the present (as above) to set aside the literary-critical concern as to the Modern English poetic felicity of Pound's line, together with the philological question of how accurately Pound's 2a translates the *lexical* meaning of *Seafarer* 2a—on which score, although sense is not completely misrepresented, there are obvious problems, both of vocabulary and grammar (furthermore Pound's 2 is *alliteratively* anomalous)—and attend solely to the *rhythm* of the hemistich: to find whether it is metrical.

It is not hard to see, in this simple example of four syllables, comprising two consecutive rhythmic units consisting of a clear full stress followed by an unaccented syllable—in familiar Classical prosody, two trochaic feet—that Pound's 2a does rhythmically *replicate* *Seafarer* 1.2a, classifiable as a **Type A1** hemistich: ' ~ ~ ~ ||. At 2a at least, Pound has *matched exactly* the *rhythm* of his original; the result is a hemistich of correct Old English metre, in Modern translation.

I cited 'Seafarer' 7, 'Narrow nightwatch || nigh the ship's head', earlier as an instance of Pound's success in handling the metrical components caesura, hemistich (including syllable-count), and alliteration; reviewing it *accentually*, and concentrating on the on-verse—since Pound's off- (unlike the source 7b) has three accented syllables, and whilst 'nigh' must be the *hōfuðstafr* we should have then to determine which of the two remaining takes the second full accent—it seems likely Pound intended his 7a to be scanned as an 'overweighted' **A**. In Pound's recording there is, as anticipated, a slight accentual promotion of the compound's second member, producing a heavy second dip.

It is obvious that Pound's translational strategy in this case, *as whenever possible*, has been to import the Old English directly into Modern by rendering the source diction *with its Modern English derivatives*: *nearo nihtwaco* > 'narrow nightwatch'.

Pound's target echoes the source as closely as may be, a 'phonetic simulacrum'—which here again includes *metrical* mimicry.<sup>436</sup> Conceptually 'narrowness' in Old English, an important lexis and topos, connotes anxiety, distress, and there may be play in the original between literal and figurative senses.<sup>437</sup> Pound chooses not to change the adjective *perhaps* understanding it merely literally, or risking that the Modern English adjective could connote the same semantic range—and I think his gamble pays off. Unfortunately as in other cases Pound's very dictional and syntactic *literalist fidelity* to the Old English has, due to linguistic change, resulted in metrical disparity, ameliorated in this instance by his hemistich being still scannable as an **A**. Notice what happens when Old English feminine noun *nihtwaco* is translated directly into the Modern English calque: it loses its metrically crucial unaccented cadence; it shrinks to a disyllable.

The first element in the compound alliterates and carries the principal accent; this holds true for *nihtwaco* and 'nightwatch' alike; but in the source compound the second element must bear a half-stress (although in fact in the case of *nihtwaco* it is a light stressed syllable), whereas in 'nightwatch' Pound probably intends, as the recording supports, 'watch' to be demoted to as light an accent as practicable with a consonant-cluster-closed syllable. Pound hyphenates some of his combined forms, such as lines 6a 'sea-surge', 12a 'mere-weary', 94a 'flesh-cover', but 7a's 'nightwatch', cf. 31a's compound 'nightshade', he has not hyphenated, from which one may be inclined to infer a potential rhythmical differentiation: in the hyphenated forms, both terms are more equally accented, but in the unhyphenated compounds, it could be that the second element is intended to be accentually demoted.

Taking into account the compound, and with resolution of *nearu*, *Seafarer* 7a comes out in scansion as (suitably *outré*, remote from the norm of **Type A**, for registering distress) a **D**-subtype (**D2**, the half-lift in the third position being, as noted, short); what is frustrating here (and not exclusively here) is that if we scan Pound's rendering strictly according to Old English practice, his 'narrow' would, shadow-miming its source, likewise undergo resolution, and the second element in 'nightwatch' properly

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<sup>436</sup> Alexander, *Poetic Achievement*, 71.

<sup>437</sup> E.g. Cynewulf, *Elene*, ll. 1260b-1261a, 912a, *nearusorge*, *nearolic*, etc, Gradon, *Cynewulf's Elene*, 60, 73; Gordon, *Seafarer*, 74 glosses 'anxious', Klinck, *Elegies*, 434, 'perilous'.

be promoted to a half-stress: and this would produce ˈ ˘—almost a Modern resurrection of a **D**, lacking only that cadential drop provided in Old English by the final unstressed vowel of *waco*. In the rhythmic ‘pith or gist’ Pound has composed one may discern a kind of *fragmentary torso* of an Old English metrical type.<sup>438</sup>

I faulted Pound’s line 10 ‘Chill its chains are; || chafing sighs’ in the foregoing for its glaring syllabic (yet *not* accentual) shortfall in the off-verse. This defect aside, Pound might almost be said to have improved, alliteratively, on the original, while his 10a is an **A** replicating rhythmically the metrical type of the original 10a, *caldum clommum*. **Type A** is of course so termed because it is the most frequent, not difficult to reproduce in four syllables of Modern English, and it is interesting to observe how many **As** actually do appear in Pound’s translation: in *direct parallel* to their prevailing proportion in Old English verse, scansion proves **As** preponderate in Pound’s Modern imitative alliterative verse.

Line 2a’s ‘journey’s jargon’ is the first indisputable (contrast 7a) instance, one in which Pound matches the metrical type of the source hemistich as is, one would think, seldom to be attained (and not *necessarily* desirable); 4b, ‘have I abided’ may be scanned as **A** with anacrusis, or **C** with resolution of the second lift—and intriguingly, *Seafarer* 4b, *gebiden hæbbe*—note once again the homophonic, etymological, lexical closeness of Pound’s rendering—also proves a subtype of **C** (**C2**, having—lexically corresponding, *gebiden*>‘abided’—resolution of the first lift). *Seafarer* 13b, *fægrost limpeð*, yields a simple **Type A1**; Pound translates ‘loveliest liveth’, begetting an **A** with resolution of the first lift: ‘LOVELIest LIVeth’.

*Seafarer* 15, *winter wunade* || *wræccan lāstum* represents an instance of an Old English full-line which yokes a brace of hemistichs of the same verse-type: **A1** (second lift, the light first stress *wun-* followed by the unstressed *-ade*, resolved) + **A1**, a straightforward business of two ‘trochees’. Pound’s rendering of 15 matches this metrically with a corresponding pair of Modern **As**, ‘Weathered the winter, || wretched outcast’. ‘Wretched outcast’ is not accurate verbal translation of *wræccan lāstum* (‘the track’, the footprints, as in the cobbler’s ‘last’, cf. 73b *lāstword-*, ‘of the—etymological salvage—>‘wretch, the exile’), but Pound’s off-verse *reproduces his*

<sup>438</sup> Pound, *ABC*, 92, ‘Poetry consists of gists and piths’.

*source's rhythm exactly*, whilst also replicating much of its phonic properties, 'wretch-' echoing (its *etymon*) *wræcc-*, and (purely acoustically) 'cast', *lāst*.

In terms of lexical transmission, 15a is 'better': although 'weathered' for *wunade* (>'woned', 'dwelled; remained; lasted out') is not literal it is effective 'dynamic equivalence', a nicely apt choice of idiom. In the modernising syntactic reshuffle the verb has been transferred to the beginning, and although 'winter' now follows *wunade*>'weathered' it has remained largely unchanged. With the syntactic shifting of the verb's location has also transpired, *metrically*, a *parallel* transposition of the resolved lift: in Pound's translation the two syllables of 'weathered' are resolved, so that 'weathered the' corresponds rhythmically (as well as lexically) to *wunade*. The process of translation has exchanged the on-verse's feet: the Old English second foot has been transposed to firstfoot the Modern version.

One can identify lines 31a, 'Neareth nightshade', 36a 'Moaneth alway', 52b 'far departing', 57b 'widest draweth' and 54b, 'bodeth sorrow', as further uncontroversial **A-Types**; noting incidentally that these all share Pound's favourite, archaising (Old English>) (but inconsistently, opportunistically applied) '-eth' suffix to form the third-person singular present tense of verbs, an archaism which here affords the *metrical* advantage of transforming otherwise monosyllabic verbs into viable *trochees*. Pound's 49a, 'Fields to fairness' is also clearly an **A** (not so in the original), whilst with his 53, in the source of which the *off-verse*, *gēomran reorde*, is also **A**, he again achieves an acceptable metrical full-line, 'Cuckoo calleth || with gloomy crying', comprising two **As** with anacrusis in the off-verse.

Just as **Type A** would register in Classically-derived prosody as trochaic—in its simple form constituted of two consecutive trochees (all its subtypes, at least as distinguished by Sievers, retain an essentially trochaic character, the first 'lift' in the rhythmic profile of the 'foot' is always a full lift, followed by some grade of relative 'drop' be it a half-lift or a light stress as in **A2a**, **A2ab**, **A3b** or an *unstressed* syllable as in **A2b** and **A3**), **B-Type** verses may be assimilated to the *iambic*, with the simple form being, two *iambic* feet. That is, **B** fulfils the logical permutation of *reversing A*: its feet are **A**'s 'substituted'.

### *Type B Verses*

Though the 'iambic' **B** hemistich is not hard to compose in a Modern emulation of Old English verse (the novice is advised by Lewis to be on his guard against slipping



into undiversified runs of **B Types**),<sup>439</sup> **Bs** seem rather scarce in Pound's 'Seafarer'. A notable example is 45b where Pound's translation, though (slightly) lexically inaccurate (*hyht*, closer to 'hope', 'joyful expectation', than 'delight'), affords a more concise **B** than does the original (also **B** but with anacrusis and resolution of the first stave): *ne tō worulde hyht* > 'Nor world's delight'. Pound's 60b 'Would wander wide', and 95a, 'Nor eat the sweet' (< *ne swēte forswelgan*) are further sound and succinct examples of Modern **Bs**.

Regarding rhetorical rather than metrical issues (only abstractly extricable), these latter two lines from *Seafarer* occur in that poem's passages of anaphoric *ne...*-clauses. Here is the Old English source from which Pound derived, notice his rendering of Old English *ne* > Modern 'nor' in 'Seafarer', his *nor...*-anaphora in *The Cantos*.<sup>440</sup>

The matter of the presence, character, and frequency of especially **Types A** and **B** in Pound's 'Seafarer' impinges significantly upon the questions pertaining to the supposed rhythmic natures, comparatively, of Old and Modern English, including the issue of how well Old English prosody can be transferred into Modern.

**A**, by definition the most frequent Old English metrical type, may be analysed in Classical terms as two trochees, **B**, two iambs, and whilst Old English is widely recognised as being predominantly trochaic and falling, Modern is supposed to be essentially iambic and rising, associated with the tenet that iambic pentameter is natural to Modern (Early Modern?) English. There is truth in this characterisation of Old English: the metrical types formalise resident linguistic prosodic patterns; of the six simple and paradigmatic rhythms only two (**B** and **E**) are rising, and only two (**B** and **C**) present an 'iambic' onset, the others markedly front-stressing. Comparing Old and Modern English, the most obvious cases in point of how language-change impacts linguistic and metrical prosody is the grammatical proliferation in Modern of articles and pronoun subjects and the loss or attenuation of inflexional endings: it is easily seen how this engenders an iambic bias.

Nonetheless one should emphasise that the 'iambic' **B** is still, as the taxonomy states, the second most frequent rhythmic pattern, and as Lewis observes, the Modern

<sup>439</sup> Lewis, "Alliterative Metre," 23.

<sup>440</sup> *Seafarer ne...* rhetoric, ll. 40-46, 82-83, 94-100, cf. *Wanderer*, ll. 15a (*Ne mæg wērigmōd* [...]), 16a, 66-69a: Canto I l. 15, Canto XX ll. 170-78, both Saxonisms in Poundian Homeric (Circe, *nekuia*, Elpenor, 'sea-board') contexts; cf. Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 47.

English ear may easily evince a nîsus towards it. *Pound's tendency to avoid it* is therefore interesting. —The present relevance of all this is, of course, the Poundian project of ‘breaking the pentameter’.

What the foregoing survey begins to indicate is, in confirmation of Jones and Morgan, ‘trochaic’ and falling **Type As** are indeed highly frequent in Pound’s ‘Seafarer’, proving, in the general context of the revival, if proof were needed, that **A** is perfectly achievable in Modern English: and strongly suggesting, specifically, that Pound’s translational engagement with the Old English elegy may well have been a substantial factor in ‘the first heave’.

### *Type C Verses*

Whilst **Types A** through **C** are all regarded as ‘equal’ in accentual ‘weight’—they consist of two ‘feet’, each of which contains (in variegated disposition) one ‘lift’ and one ‘dip’—**D** through **E**, the permitted rhythms furthest from the norm, the even pace, of **A** and **B**, are *unequal*: these express in varying permutations the possibilities of adding a *third*, intermediary-grade, stress. They are front-heavy.

This topic is complicated by the existence of hypermetrics, formed by an additional foot and hence a third lift, and demand acknowledgement here because I suspect the hypermetric may prove important in assessing the influence of Old English on characteristic Poundian rhythm.

The upshot being that in **D** through **E** the rhythmic contour is typified by ‘clashing’, directly juxtaposed, consecutive, stresses. The simple rhythmic germ of **D** and (therefore) most (excluding the **D\*** class) of its subtypes features a maximally heavy onset consisting of three consecutive stresses, the first two (the entire first foot) being full accents, the third half-stressed: ‘ ‘ | ‘ ~ ‖.

**E** also comprises three accents, though the weight in this case is leavened by abutting the opening full accent with a half-stress, so that the first foot is lighter than in **D**’s attack, and by beginning the second foot with the one unstressed element. The third lift in **E** comes as coda, so that—like **B**— it has a *full*, ‘masculine’, and indeed iambic, rise in the cadence: ‘ ‘ | ~ ‘ ‖.

Hence, although **C** can claim kin with **A** and **B** on grounds that it is one of the three (reckoning by the six simple forms) equal, balanced, verses, in **A** and **B** alike the accents are evenly spaced by intervening slacks. **C** shares in common with the *outré*,

farther, types the characteristic of ‘clashing’ accents, clustered at the second and third positions, the end of the first foot and the start of the second—forming a keystone in its span: ~ ‘ | ‘ ~ ||.<sup>441</sup>

In other words (although the accent in the second foot may weigh in at tertiary rank) **C** contains a *medial spondee*, a heavily, and to ears accustomed to ‘running rhythm,’ discordantly ‘clashing’ rhythm one perceptive early reviewer, Scott James in the *Daily News* in 1909, singled out as a typical Poundian mannerism:<sup>442</sup>

‘these curious metres of his [...] have a law and order of their own [...] a strange beating of anapaests [...]; again and again he unexpectedly ends a line with the second half of a reverberant hexameter [...] a few lines later comes an example of his favourite use of spondee, followed by dactyl and spondee, which comes in strangely and, as we first read it, with the appearance of discord, but afterwards seems to gain a curious and distinctive vigour: “Eyes, dreams, lips, and the night goes.”’<sup>443</sup>

Scott James fails to recognise one source for the ‘law and order’ of the ‘strangely [...] distinctive vigour’ of Pound’s incipient *vers libre*: Old English metre. The line quoted is “Cino” line 10 (1907), from *A Lume Spento* 1908, an early dramatic monologue on the ‘Wanderer’/Exile-theme in its troubadour-vagabondage guise, in which also occur the Saxonising locutions ‘wind-runeing’ (14), and *rast* (50), recurring in Canto XV line 87.

Pound’s taste for clashing accentuation may have derived from or been encouraged by his Anglo-Saxon studies. This could have been one of the technical effects he found, and found appealing, in *Seafarer*, and took from it, emulating its conspicuous occurrence in Old English metre as it is normally avoided in conventional Modern ‘running-rhythm’ dominated by the iamb, trochee, dactyl and anapaest.

However, Pound’s spondees tend not conform to strictly correct Old English practice. He puts them in the ‘wrong’ place. In the foregoing I examined ‘Seafarer’ 34 as an example of how Pound’s translational literalism, his very fidelity to the

<sup>441</sup> If **Type A** is a *ditrochee* and **B** a *diiamb*, **C** is an *antispast*; but Classical *epitrites*, are not—‘lie quiet Saintsbury’—applicable to OE **Types D-E**.

<sup>442</sup> Cable, “Clashing Stress,” 42-50, asserts that the first of the two consecutive stresses in **C** and **D-Type** verses *always* receives the heavier accent; cf. Tolkien, “Translating Beowulf,” 62.

<sup>443</sup> T. S. Eliot, “Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry” (1917), in *To Criticize the Critic* (London: Faber, 1978), 165.

source, results not infrequently results in *rhythmic* discrepancy in the target. When *heortan gepōhtas*, || *þæt ic hēan strēamas* is rendered ‘The heart’s thought || that I on high streams’ we may be witnessing the emergence—from linguistic causes in a feat of translation attempting to be literal metaphorise—in ‘The Seafarer’ of the characteristic Poundian spondaic cadence: but these do not appear in Old English versification. The nearest are subtypes of **A** which juxtapose a full stress and a subordinate in the final foot (Pound’s 34b could possibly be scanned as a **Type A3b**). The original *Seafarer* 34b is a **Type C** verse. Pound, in losing a final fourth syllable in his on-verse and in both halflines shunting, typically, his spondees to the (rising) cadence, has produced a **C catalectic**, a torso, its accentual ‘gist’: the ‘clashing’ nucleus.

In fact Pound relishes clashing accents of any practicable number and exhibits no great daintiness regarding where they occur in the line. In arriving at the Old English ‘clashing’ metres, in relation to Pound, we should be keeping a weather-eye on all such rhythms of abutted beats, rather than restricting the scope to correct **Cs**.

These we do find nonetheless. *Seafarer* 20b, *ganetes hlēoþor*, is an **A** with *auflösung* of the two short syllables in the first lift. Pound’s (not verbally inaccurate) translation ‘the gannet’s clamour’ could be scanned as another Modern English **A** with anacrusis, but the last beat, following the double consonant, of ‘gannet’ is so light in performance that the disyllable invites resolution, producing a **C** hemistich. As is, as we have seen, notably frequent—it strikes me as sufficiently remarkable we should find it happening at all—metrical types of original and translation converge again at 44b, Old English *ne tō hringþege*, a **C3** (second lift *kurz*, and rhetorically one of *Seafarer*’s *Cantos*-influencing *ne...*-clause anaphora) being closely echoed by Pound’s ‘nor in ring-having’, ~ ] ~ ’ | ’ ~ ||, a rhythmic profile repeated in Pound’s rendering of l.60a, ‘Over the whale’s acre’, a **C** with anacrusis—and, dictionally, a very pleasing Modern version of a standard kenning: ‘acre’ for *ēpel* contributing, acoustically, an enhancing assonance and strongly recalling (and since it does not seem to have been used by Morris) Kipling’s “Harp Song of the Dane Women”, which latter itself as whole poem resounds with what must be deliberate echoes of, indeed palpable textual allusion to, *The Seafarer*.

Further clear and simple examples of Poundian **Type Cs** include lines 22a ‘the mew’s singing’, 61a, ‘On earth’s shelter’, 87b, ‘but the world holdeth’, 91b ‘his face

paleth’, and the penultimate on-verse (98a) of Pound’s curtal text ‘His born brothers’. In the case of 22a one wonders if, dictionally, this includes paronomasia, since particularly in Pound’s American English ‘mew’s’ and ‘muse’ are homophones. The recording may be consulted for this (and cf. his pronunciation of ‘*dew-haze*’ in the recording of Canto IV, line 7). Would reading *sea-mews* as including *sea-muse* be to ‘finneganswake’?

Pound’s 94a once more closely mimics source rhythm, *Ne mæg him þonne se flāschoma*, C3 with its long preludial anacrusis (as *Maldon* line 249a), with ‘Nor may he then the flesh-cover’, metrical imitation here, as elsewhere, won *at cost* of questionable semantic intelligibility, in full ‘Nor may he then the flesh-cover, || whose life ceaseth’: removing the hyphen here would yield some kind of sense(?), but the hyphenation represents an effort *to retain* in semi-calque (rejecting \*‘flesh-hame’) the source’s *compound*.<sup>444</sup> Line 94b is *also* a C: ‘whose life ceaseth’: as is the original 94b.

‘Seafarer’ would yield more Cs had Pound more frequently accommodated his predilection for the spondee to Old English metrical patterns, but as shown above he seized upon C’s accentual gist and ignored how in the original verse-type the clash crests amidmost of the halfline’s wave and is followed by a dwindling ebb, exhibiting instead a tendency to thrust the spondee to the *end* of the line, producing, as noted, C-catalectics:

- l. 13a that he on dry land ||
- l. 5b || many a care’s hold,
- l. 18b || save the harsh sea
- l. 37 That I fare forth, || that I afar hence
- l. 46b || save the wave’s slash,

He seems to want this abrupt rising cadence: 36b ‘my mind’s lust’, for example, rather than ‘my mind’s *lusting*’, is just *one* unstressed syllable short by the Old English meteyard; likewise the trisyllabic l.70b ‘or sword-hate’ <*oþþe ecghete*, emendable into metrical correctness (if only that) to ‘or sword-hatred’.

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<sup>444</sup> Bessinger, *Oral Text*, 176; Alexander, *Poetic Achievement*, 68.

Of course, Pound's terminal-spondaic catalexes do have the arguable merit of begetting a spikier effect—relieving the danger of the verse lapsing into a monotonous singsong of trochaic cadences.

The statement that Pound exhibits a partiality to the spondee is accurate but incomplete: as I suggested above it is the impact of clashing, consecutive accents as such which appeals to him, and *molossi* are also attested. Cases of three abutted stresses pertain more properly, rather, to discussion of triple-accented **Types D** and **E**, and of hypermetric verses.

### *Type D Verses*

Had Pound rendered line 31a *Nāp nihtscūa* not 'Neareth nightshade' but—with trifling adjustment (and retaining Pound's convenient mistranslation of *nāp*)—'nears nightshadow', he would have included a metrically-preferable **D**, rather than another overweighted **A**, (cf. 7a, *nearo nihtwaco* > 'narrow nightwatch', = **D2**>**A**+) achieving the authentic goal of greater rhythmic variety within licensed parameters, as well as another near-replica of the original pattern.

With 32a however Pound does succeed in producing a Modern English **D** hemistich matching his original, rendering the foreboding clangour of *hrīm hrūsan band* with 'Frost froze the land'—**D4** for **D4** (the drop in the third position and a half-lift in the fourth), ' ' ~ \|

### *Type E Verses*

**E** is obviously by definition the least frequent half-line measure, and I find two clearly successful specimens in 'Seafarer': lines 12a and 71a: noteworthy instances of the achievement of the verse-pattern in Modern English.

Line 92a, 'Grey-haired he groaneth', patently attempting close mimicry of *gomelfeax gnornað*, must be disqualified. 'Grey-haired he groans' would have produced an **E**: a case of Pound's *-eth* suffixation and this time preference for a *falling* cadence seducing him away from his source.

His 12a 'mere-weary mood' is not strictly accurate lexically, as the source actually means 'hunger (incl. loneliness, suffering) inwardly gnawed at the mind of one weary (incl. anguished, oppressed by) (because) of the sea', the adjective used substantively

(cf. *wērigmōd*, *Wanderer*, 15a).<sup>445</sup> *Merewērges mōd* > ‘mere-weary mood’ is however successful translation *metrically*. Not quite rhythmically identical, since *mere* is a *disyllable* of two light accents, and therefore the line requires *auflösung* of the first lift, this does not alter the fact that the original hemistich *is* an **E**—and so, pure and simple, is, *once again*, Pound’s rendering. As ‘mere’ is in Modern English monosyllabic no metrical resolution is required: ‘ ~ ’ ||

The second instance, 71a, is comparably successful metrically, if Pound’s is not indeed more expressively mimetic, with its plosive alliterations, phonically than the original: *fægum fromweardum || feorh oðþringeð* > (dynamic equivalence) ‘Beats out the breath || from doom-gripped body’. ‘Out’ is to be demoted to the required half-lift in the second position on the grounds of ‘beat’ and ‘breath’ ’s alliteration on the voiced bilabial plosive, erroneously completed by Pound’s ‘body’ occupying the *fourth* beat in the off-verse, one of Pound’s dislocated *hofuðstafir*.

Also, syntactically, notable here is the omission (in the off-verse) of the definite article, a mannerism which will persist as characteristic of this poet, to be justified by the theory of Fenollosa; but it may well appear that the stage-Chinaman/Yorkshireman pidgin idiolect familiar from Pound’s later style in *The Cantos* originates here, in the terse syntactic compaction of Old English.

### *Hypermetric Verses*

It is sometimes doubtful whether a verse is to be regarded as lengthened or only extended.  
—Sweet, *Reader*, xciv

Evidently Pound is impressed by Old English metre’s capability to concatenate three stresses, or two heavy stresses and one subordinate, and instances of Poundian lines potentially including three heavy accents raise the possibility he may have been influenced by the hypermetric mode, termed by Sweet with the presently apposite and suggestive label, ‘three-wave verses’.<sup>446</sup>

<sup>445</sup> Gordon, *Seafarer*, 34; Dunning and Bliss, *Wanderer*, 107; Klinck, *Elegies*, 109.

<sup>446</sup> Bliss, “Origin and Structure,” 242-48; Sweet, *Reader*, xciv §385, ‘reinforcing the idea that this prosody is intimately suited to versifying the sea and sea-voyaging’, Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 33.

An immediately outstanding decisive test-case is *Seafarer* 23a, the onomatopoeic *Stormas þær stānclifu bēotan*, a ‘swollen’ verse (subtype **H**[ypermetric]**A2L**[ang]) encompassing three crashing ‘beats’ rhythmically mimetic of the battering storms described in its verbal content. Pound seems alert to this as he translates ‘Storms, on the stone-cliffs beaten’, and the recording testifies to his clear enunciation of the line with evenly heavy emphasis on all accents (the second term in the hyphenation, analogous to that of the source compound, should bear intermediate stress).

‘Seafarer’ exhibits further examples of verses with three heavy stresses, identification of which is again assisted by the recording, but the matter resists definitive positive conclusions, since Pound does not in fact seem to exhibit a consistent rationale in his treatment, acoustically, of accent+pitch, or, in the end, notationally of his hyphenation.

In 6a, ‘And dire sea-surge’ (with which Homer’s ear is endowed in *The Cantos*, by way of *Mauberley*), alliteration is of no assistance because the only possible *hofuðstafr*, the only remotely alliterating position in the off-verse, is the final word ‘spent’. Pound’s line proves how sound are Old English metrical stipulations by its falling apart: ‘spent’ shoved to the very end of the off-verse does not effectually alliterate with ‘sea’ and ‘surge’, notwithstanding that they do of course alliterate with each other; and even though Pound has invented an alliterative formula of his own, one which would prove momentous. *Seafarer* 6a is *atol yða gewealc*; the alliterative scheme, not immediately very salient, is vocalic, with *oft* in the off-verse: the original 6a’s metrical type is identifiable as a **D4** with *auflösung* of the first lift, *-wealc* bearing half-stress, the prefix constituting the drop in the third position, the resolved *atol* and *yða* contributing alliterating full lifts in the first and second staves. In Pound’s declamation ‘dire’ and ‘surge’ are delivered with greater prominence and higher pitch than ‘sea’, perhaps as tokened by the hyphenation, though, again, it proves such differentiation is too inconsistent really to be maintained.

Lines such as 7b, ‘nigh the ship’s head’, in which ‘nigh’ must be a full lift (and headstave) as it alliterates with the *stuðlar* in the on-verse; 4b ‘on ice-cold sea’, and 19a ‘and ice-cold wave’, which are lexically literal translations (of **E** verses); 17b ‘where hail-*scur* flew’, 62b ‘the crying lone-flyer’ (sic), and 71b ‘from doom-gripped body’, are all performed by Pound with three lifts of equal, frequently peculiarly protracted, agogic duration and weighty emphasis, but they cannot be classified as Old



English hypermetric hemistichs, nor does his deployment of such ‘three wave verses’ imitate the characteristic Old English usage of the hypermetric mode, that is (although as with *Seafarer* 23a even lone verses seem to appear, if these be not scribal errors) in runs or batches of lines whose tone and content is intended to be received as especially sententious and grave.<sup>447</sup> In the elegies, including *Seafarer*, conclusory moralising statements typically assume the hypermetric mode. Pound’s line 88, ‘Tomb hideth trouble. The blade is layed [sic] low.’ does invite attention in this context however, as (leaving aside the lexical matter of how they render the verbal sense),<sup>448</sup> if not genuine hypermetrics, a pair of solemn-toned heavily triple-accented halflines, whose sepulchral gravity is reinforced by similarly heavy end-stopping (and assonance), including medially at the caesura.<sup>449</sup>

One observation which might be deduced is how the licences—or innovations—noticed as characteristic of Pound’s *vers libre*-incipient revival of the metre result in, as indeed they may perhaps have been calculated to produce, an effect of greater rhythmic and cadential *variation*, a effort of avoidance of monotonous, ‘metronomic’ regularity.

I would argue Old English versification attracted Pound, especially c.1911, because of the relative freedom and irregularity it offered as against familiar ‘set, symmetrical’ forms; and in his renewal he has refashioned his model towards yet greater freedom and irregularity, innovating from the authentic correct patterns.

Two initial prominent features of this technically, as we have now witnessed, are his tendency to avoid the iambic **B-Type** rhythm; and to maximise ‘clashing’ rhythms of consecutive accents (**C-E** and, questionably, hypermetrics).

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<sup>447</sup> OE masc. n. *scūr* (>Mod.E ‘shower’), in dat. pl. *scūrum*, hence ‘hail flew **in showers**’ >Poundian \*Mod. English compound ‘*hail-scur*’, left untranslated in the target language by Pound: cf. Canto XLIX l. 20: Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 55-56. Poundian ‘Sino-Saxon’ culminates with LII ll. 47-151, Pound’s extended allusion to the Confucian classic *Book of Rites* (*Li<sup>3</sup>-ching<sup>1</sup>*), which exhibits numerous similarities in content, purpose, and (in Saxonising Poundese) style, to the Old English *Maxims*—‘Stag droppeth antlers’, (74), ‘Cricket bideth in wall/Young goshawk is learning his labour’ (85-86), ‘This month winter ruleth (138), ‘Ice thickens. || Earth cracks.’ (141)—which may thus be advanced as an Anglo-Saxon source—hitherto unrecognised—for Canto LII, in Sweet’s *Reader*.

<sup>448</sup> Bessinger, *Oral Text*, 176.

<sup>449</sup> *TLS* June 25, 1954, 409. These ‘schoolboy howlers’ have been comprehensively defended by Robinson, *Tomb*, 251-55; line 88’s phonetic synecdoche *blād*>‘blade’: Alexander, *Poetic Achievement*, 73.

The second manoeuvre includes the metrical mannerism of shunting accentuation to the cadence, ending the hemistich on spondees, possibly developed to *offset* the falling rhythms begotten by his shunning of **B** and hence frequent trochaic **As** and **Cs** (the proportion of **D-E** being lower naturally).

A third development presented in the foregoing is Pound's multiplication of the single half-line (*Seafarer* 16: 'Seafarer' 3, 16, 30, 38, 76, 99). The Old English lone hemistich may have attracted Pound because of its impression of quasi-, proto-Modernist fragmentariness. Pound does tend to refer throughout his prose to Old English poetry as 'fragments'—recalling to mind his interest in Sappho, the poetics of the fragment, the aesthetics of lacunae, and the 'ideogrammic' impact of abruptly juxtaposed 'gists' of material.

The latter, which becomes the very poetic and conceptual grammar of Pound's technique in *The Cantos*, may, indeed, have owed at least partial origin to the very evident Old English verse-syntax of abutted hemistichs, the full-line constituted of the more-or-less abrupt juxtaposition of two more-or-less independent blocks of material. Of course, 'ideogrammic' proclaims its genealogy in Fenollosa's Chinese, but Pound had been trained in and translated Old English prior to his encounter with the former. It may also be suggested that his incremental preoccupation with, and ascription to, Far Eastern paragons *masks* a prior and continuing investment in Old English, and Pound reiterates equations he perceives between Old English and Chinese (and Homer). Examples from throughout his output, beginning with publishing 'Seafarer' in *Cathay*, are too numerous to catalogue here, but the most presently relevant is perhaps in *ABC*: 'I once got a man to start translating the Seafarer into Chinese. It came out almost directly into Chinese verse, with two solid ideograms in each half-line.'<sup>450</sup> Poundian slogans, 'Poetry consists of gists and piths', 'DICHTEN=CONDENSARE', and 'the ideogrammic method', are all very strongly and suggestively relatable to Old English poetics.

Pound's multiplication of the lone hemistich may also be interpreted in the context of further potential links between Pound's reception of Old English poetics and his development of the stylistics and aesthetics of 'free verse'. Robinson, cited earlier,

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<sup>450</sup> Pound, *ABC*, 51. Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 66 remarks Kenner's insight 'the kenning is ideogram'; runes, mentioned in his juvenilia (Robinson, *Tomb*, 22, 24) and early "Cino" (line 14) might have offered Pound an indigenous equivalent.

quoted Stopford Brooke's extremely interesting comment concerning the translational challenge of 'invent[ing] a rhythmical movement' towards reproducing more satisfactorily in Modern English 'the proper ebb and flow of Anglo-Saxon verse'; note too how Brooke's language to express that verse, like Sweet's and Pound's 'waves' and 'heaves' adopts a metaphor drawn from the movement of water, element of 'Seafarer' and Cantos I and II. Jones likewise observes how Pound found in and capitalised upon a 'flexibility' and 'variation' in Old English, the 'continual contrast' of half-lines offering Pound the capability of 'a contrapuntal music of great variation', '[i]n essence quite different from the accentual-syllabic tradition' in which variation in the verse depends upon 'minor divergences' from 'one dominant metrical pattern'.<sup>451</sup> Alexander also awards Pound 'full marks' for achieving in his translation 'the sensation of the check and run of Old English syntax and versification', 'reproduc[ing] the interplay between the two which makes the life of Old English verse'.<sup>452</sup>

An essential and *intrinsic* property of Old English poetry is this relieving and diversifying effect of variation and contrast. All the constituent components of the versification are capable—within definite parameters—of variation, are indeed intended, designed, to be combined and recombined in those varied forms: variables to be variegated. (Failure so to do will result in a distinct foursquareness.)

The caesura *varies* in its degree of emphasis and duration of interval—is not uniform in the degree to which it breaks the full-line. The syllable-count per hemistich *varies* upwards of its tetrasyllabic minimum (it should be remarked that this affects the *speed* of the verse: the fewer syllables, the slower and heavier the line). The phonetic articulation of the alliteration *varies* between vocalic and consonantal (a gamut unto itself), whilst the number, and 'simple', 'full', 'crossed' or 'double' (another quaternity) arrangement of the staves (excluding the lodestar *hofuðstafr*), *vary* according to the hemistichs' accentual configurations—which of course, above all, *vary* to produce the differentiated verse-types, *variations* in the disposition of two or three heavier stressed, and less-stressed elements, the full-line being built of two

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<sup>451</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 36.

<sup>452</sup> Alexander, *Poetic Achievement*, 69.

such verses of normally *contrasting* rhythmic patterns, *differing* in weight and speed, poise and pace.

Variation (aside from, here, in the rhetorical dictional-formulaic sense) is also applied to the conduct of sense phrased through, with, or against the metrical units, including from on-verse to off-verse within one full-line (horizontally), and from off-verse to succeeding on-verse (*Hakenstil*, diagonally), and so on, again implicating the caesura (and rhetorically characteristic Old English device of paratactic parallelism). Syntactically-self-contained, endstopped hemistichs, linked only to their off-verses by alliteration, are contrasted against runs of enjambed lines.

Since the art of Old English versecraft is one of variation and contrast, it is therefore one of licensed, prescribed *irregularity*, within fixed limits. As Jones observes, it in this respect differs fundamentally from post-Conquest accentual-syllabic metre, in Hopkins' apposite nomenclature 'running rhythm', the *irregularity* of the former even prompting the accusation that it is not metrical, as indeed it is not according to conventional 'metronomic' representations of prosody. It does not measure in the same regular way.<sup>453</sup> Each (full)-line in Old English poetry is made up of the very *juxtaposition of differing* rhythmic patterns: in contrast to, for example, a piece of iambic pentameter, in which the (notional) norm of every single line is five iambs; the basal rhythm is always iambic —substitutions and inversions only make sense against this. Irregularity and variation is intrinsic (prescriptively so) to Old English verse: it consists of many subtypes of not one but six paradigmatic rhythmic modes, which are *natural speech-patterns*, and the *scop's* art is to *capitalise* upon this inherent capability, presenting suitably differentiated variations and *avoiding monotony*, the monotony of an unvaryingly inflexible symmetrical form. The danger of this monotony is also endemic to the (as to all formal) versification; hence also its inbuilt counteracting features.

This quality of variation, contrast, and irregularity intrinsic, and as Alexander comments vital, to Old English metre, stands in clear contrast to the (at least notionally) fixed symmetrical forms of accentual-syllabic prosody, and obviously suggests an affinity with the principles of *vers libre*: rhythmic irregularity, and

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<sup>453</sup> To Saintsbury's 'foot-system' concept of metre Old English poetry (*Historical Manual*, a year prior to 'Seafarer') is simply *not* metrical. 'Running rhythm' antedates Hopkins: George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, 1589, Chapter III, "Of Proportion in Measure", ed. Edward Arber, (London, 1869), 81.

closeness to natural speech. In fact, Old English metre is most fitly comparable to *vers libre* on the one hand and to blank verse on the other; it evinces affinities with both. In the latter variations are continually being performed—on the unvarying underlying theme of five iambs; in the former, however, theoretically, all and any regular repetition of rhythm(s) is banished, a non-metrical anarchy Old English versecraft does not accommodate.<sup>454</sup>

Such exposition of Old English metre should further elucidate its potential connexions with free verse, and should fortify our appreciation of why Pound perceived and attempted to fulfil that potential. Anglo-Saxon metric, with its own provision of certain ‘freedoms’ in comparison with accentual-syllabics, particularly the way in which its rhythms formalise those organically prosodically resident in speech rather than one metre imposed upon speech, must have appeared to promise one way to a ‘freer’ versification.

One suspects Old English verse appealed to Pound formally because of the capability it offered for rhythmic variation greater than ‘conventional’ accentual-syllabic prosody because of its very irregularity and sharawaggi asymmetry; and Pound extends this inherent quality in his largely freer, yet so often remarkably close, imitative adaptation, amplifying it at times beyond Old English limits. Pound’s innovated irregularities are more numerous, and (as Robinson apprehended) coarser, than those available to strict Old English metre, but this renders them arguably more noticeable, and more effective, for the modern reader. The overall result is to attenuate the besetting danger of accentual monotony, syllabic regularity and symmetry, and alliterative insistence, yet further.

Thus while Pound was, I suggest, in the first place attracted by Old English verse’s capacity for greater rhythmic variety, contrast, and irregularity than that offered by ‘conventional’ metre, and for its stylised formalisation of natural (English) speech-rhythm, Pound’s departures from the strict requirements of authentic Old English metre may well have been motivated by his desire for yet more immediately evident irregularity than the ‘correct’ versification could provide. He continually inveighs in

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<sup>454</sup> For Pound on the threat of ‘anarchy’ in *vers libre* see *Literary Essays*, 421.

his theoretical prose against perfectly completing ‘symmetrical form’ for the sake of it, and against the notion that ancient Greek and mediaeval Romance poets wrote to rigidly fixed rules: for Pound, all good, all authentic, poetry has always been a kind of incipient ‘free verse’.<sup>455</sup> Old English poetry thus offered him certain attractive aspects, or potential qualities, whilst still proving ultimately too formal.

Hence he licenses himself to proliferate and innovate irregularities, of which multiplying single half-lines, which off-sets the sees-saw oar-pull of paired caesural hemistichs, is one example, together with hemistichs of three rather than the strictly minimal four syllables, deficient or improperly distributed alliteration, and incorrectly disposed or drastically reduced and condensed, accents. In its (to trained ears rather crude) way it allays the danger of monotonous foursquare symmetry and regularity, and amplifies that quality of fluctuation, irregularity and variation, ebb and flow, rise and fall, expansion and contraction—systole and diastole and tempo-modulations of *pulse*—Pound correctly perceived as intrinsic to the original metre, and has developed beyond its prescribed limits.

This also supplies the explanation for those occasional lines in ‘Seafarer’ which in themselves strike one as prosily shapeless, rhythmically faltering, 38, 51, 64b, 68, 72. Pound has hit upon the trick, later to be re-discovered by Heaney in his *Beowulf*, but again already present *in a subtler manner* in the authentic Old English model, of supplying periodic *relief* from the metre’s formal insistence, interspersing sporadic ‘deliberate-throwaway’ lines or half-lines, looser, more relaxed phrases which afford in Modern English a welcome, refreshing *slackening* of metrical tension, a *leavening* of ‘overstressed’ weight. In themselves these parts are weak, but they contribute a greater lissomness and variation to the whole.

What Pound’s version of Old English certainly avoids, is the peril of monotonous trochaic cadences besetting Tolkien’s stricter revival of the form. As Alexander anticipated, Pound’s achievement almost could be identified as that of imitating the effect of Old English verse without *always* adhering strictly to the correct metre: ‘The

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<sup>455</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 7, 93.

Seafarer’—along with Tolkien’s alliterative poetry—remains the best impression, of how Anglo-Saxon verse sounds, feels, moves, available in Modern English.<sup>456</sup>

However, what I hope I have shown here is how often, with what deliberate frequency and fidelity, and successfully, Pound *actually did replicate* the rhythms and other formal-stylistic elements of his original.<sup>457</sup> Though this is still not a complete account, the Old English element in Pound’s technique has never hitherto, I think, been analysed on this scale and in this detail, treating the translation *philologically*, as though it were itself an Anglo-Saxon text.

We may now proceed from scansion of ‘The Seafarer’ to a more tentative and limited foray tracing the Saxonising rhythmic signatures, pentameter-breaking DNA of ‘the English national chemical’, transmitted from *Seafarer* to the early *Cantos*.

**Ear, Ear || for the ȳða gewealc: Scanning Cantos I, II, XIII, XIV, XV.**

[...] *hwetep on wælweg* [...] —*Seafarer* line 63a (MS reading).

[...] *dēop dēada weg/?wæg* [...] —*Maxims I B* line 8.

‘Been to hell in a boat yet?’ —Canto XXXIX, line 66.

Pound wrote in 1916:

I don’t know that one can read any trans. of the *Odyssey* [...] you could read Book XI. I have tried an adaptation in the ‘Seafarer’ metre, or something like it [...]<sup>458</sup>

This affords explicit auctorial testimony that it was Pound’s purpose to adapt the *nekuia*, the voyage to the Underworld to raise and question the Dead, into ‘in [...] “Seafarer” metre [...],’ and that, chronologically, he had ‘tried’ this *by* 1916, five years after publishing his translation of the Old English elegy. Pound is uncertain of the year

<sup>456</sup> Alexander, *Poetic Achievement*, 69-78.

<sup>457</sup> Cf. Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 37, ‘many of his lines echo [...] the rhythm of the original exactly’.

<sup>458</sup> Pound, *Selected Letters*, 87.

he happened upon the catalyst, Divus' Latin crib of Homer, but 1910 is the latest offered.<sup>459</sup> This suggests a Saxonising re-conjuration of the *nekuia* was in the offing 1910-16, and Canto III of the *Ur*-'Three Cantos of a Poem of Some Length', eventually Canto I, duly first appeared in *Poetry* August 1917.<sup>460</sup>

1918's "Early Translators of Homer" prints a second draft, directly following quotation of Divus' Latin *nekuia*, with Pound's interjection 'The meaning of the passage [...] as I have interpolated it in my Third [sic] Canto'. A third version was published as 'Three Cantos. III' in *Quia Pauper Amavi*, 1919. It was not however until *A Draft of XVI. Cantos*, 1925, that the opening three Cantos assumed their more familiar, *Draft of XXX* (1930) form, including the relocation of Canto III's *nekuia* to the inaugurating, initiatory infernal portal to the epic.

This chronological rehearsal demarcates the period, c.1911-c.1925 during which Pound's metrical, lexical, and syntactic Saxonising, which proceeded from imitative translation *The Seafarer* to a Saxonising of the Homeric seafare to Hades, was at, perhaps, its most intense: this also indicates that—just as for Tolkien—Pound's Old English-rooted epic project for the twentieth century was prepared amidst late Victorian Anglo-Saxon philology; and emerged from the epoch of the First World War.

Pound 'translated the Seafarer' as a 'luminous detail' representing 'where English poetry starts'. But the canonical, *European* tradition starts with *Homer*. In the *Odyssey* 'the deep is so deep, [...] clear fathoms down'.<sup>461</sup> Homer is *the Classic*; *Kulchur* is founded on Homer.<sup>462</sup> Oldest, best, he appears as the first name in the reiterated canons Pound scheduled throughout his criticism. In "The Renaissance",<sup>463</sup> "How To

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<sup>459</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 259 ("Translators of Greek: Early Translators of Homer, II. Andreas Divus," 1918).

<sup>460</sup> Nadel, *Early Writings*, 145-62.

<sup>461</sup> Pound, *Selected Letters*, 274.

<sup>462</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 21.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, 214-26.



Read”,<sup>464</sup> in *ABC*<sup>465</sup>, all *four* canons in *Guide*,<sup>466</sup> Homer commands priority and primacy.

Homer may be the ‘deep[est]’ we can reach: but Pound, following a couple of centuries of analytic textual criticism (cf. *The Seafarer*, and *Leidertheorie* in Tolkien), recognises that ‘Homer’ is ‘him’self a palimpsest’<sup>467</sup>—of which the *nekuia* is the *most* archaic: ‘The Nekuia shouts aloud that it is *older* than the rest’, harking back to ‘the ‘hinter-time’.<sup>468</sup>

For Pound *translation* is the mode by which the tradition is conserved, renewed, and transmitted. Translating *Seafarer* re-injects, a shot in the arm, ‘the English national chemical’ into English verse; but for Pound, whilst such other of the Classics as Ovid and Vergil *have* been recuperated into English via the successful translations of Golding and Douglas, Homer has never *never yet* been successfully translated.

In “Translators of Greek: Early Translators of Homer”<sup>469</sup> Pound declares ‘Greek in English remains almost wholly unsuccessful’;<sup>470</sup> in “How To Read”, dismissing Chapman and Pope as ‘of interest to specialists’ only, ‘We have no satisfactory translation of any Greek author’.<sup>471</sup> In 1916, prior to both, there is the quoted epistolary testimony: translations of Homer ‘mostly ain’t [...] readable.’<sup>472</sup> Pound felt Divus had got Homer into *Latin*, ‘Caught up his cadence, word and syllable[...],’ exemplifying the role of Latin translation, ‘cribs’, in renovating and transmitting the *paideuma* by translational ‘*Sagetrieb*’,<sup>473</sup> and epitomising the historico-cultural and linguistic

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<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

<sup>465</sup> Pound, *ABC*, 43.

<sup>466</sup> Pound, *Guide*, 236, 344, 348.

<sup>467</sup> Pound, *Selected Prose*, 120.

<sup>468</sup> Pound, *Selected Letters*, 274.

<sup>469</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 249-75.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>472</sup> Pound, *Selected Letters*, 92.

<sup>473</sup> *Paideuma*: ‘the gristly roots of an idea [...] in action’ in a given historical period, Pound, *Guide*, 57-8; *Sagetrieb*, lit. ‘saying-drive’: Man’s ‘inborn urge to use poetry as a means of

geology of European *kulchur*, an archaeological palimpsest: ‘The classic culture of the Renaissance was grafted on to medieval culture, a process [...] excellently illustrated by [...] Divus’ [...] translation of the *Odyssey* into Latin.’<sup>474</sup> Divus Latinises Homer as Pound’s two other favourite translators, Golding and Douglas, respectively Englished Ovid and Vergil: but there is *no English nekuia*:

Of Homer two qualities remain untranslated: the magnificent onomatopœia, as of the rush of waves on the sea-beach and their recession in:

παρά θίνα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης

untranslated and untranslatable [...]’<sup>475</sup>

Transliterating the Homeric formula (*Iliad* I.34), Pound comments:

Para thina poluphloisboio thalasses: the turn of the wave and the scutter of receding pebbles. Years of work to get that. Best I have been able to do is cross cut in *Mauberley*, led up to: *imaginary/Audition of the phantasmal sea-surge* which is totally different, and a different movement of water, and inferior.<sup>476</sup>

In *The Cantos* ‘audition of the [...] sea-surge’ is accordingly applied to typify Homer, blind but gifted with a poet’s ‘ear’—for the *sea*. In both instances of the Poundian Homer’s appearance in the *Cantos* the vignette is typified by his attributes, ‘And poor old Homer blind, blind, as a bat,/Ear, ear for the sea-surge,[...]’ —Canto II lines 12-22, recapitulated Canto VII, lines 3-6. The ‘ideogram’ is formed of the ‘gists’:

HOMER : πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης : *ear for the sea-surge*.

And yet, ‘sea-surge’ is *not from* Homer. It derives from Pound’s ‘Seafarer’, line 6a,

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giving expression to and interpreting his past and almost forgotten culture and tradition’: Brooke-Rose, “Lay me,” in Hesse, *New Approaches*, 251.

<sup>474</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 101 (1913).

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, 250-52.

<sup>476</sup> Pound, *Selected Letters*, 274-75.

translating *atol yða gewealc*.<sup>477</sup> Thus Pound *translates Homer*—who ‘knew something of a ship and a sword’—into ‘Ang. Sax.’.<sup>478</sup> Canto I extends the process πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης > ‘sea-surge’, translating the *nekuia* into the lexically, metrically, and syntactically Saxonising style Pound developed for ‘Seafarer’: “Constant Preaching”: ‘*The Seafarer* in Anglo-Saxon [...] alone in the works of our forebears [...] fit to compare with Homer [...] the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*’. ‘[...] It wd. be difficult to find ‘form’ originating in English’ (as opposed to ‘from the Mediterranean basin’) ‘after the Seafarer (ang. sax.)’. By this sleight Pound translates both the quintessentially Old English and Homeric at once, and, the twin foundations ‘ply over ply’,<sup>479</sup> form *the beginning* of his historiographical ‘Tale of the Tribe’.

The ‘hinter-time’ of the *nekuia*<sup>480</sup> is ‘where it starts’<sup>481</sup> because it is the authentic essence of ‘Homer’, primordially archaic, ‘older than the rest’.<sup>482</sup> but also because, of course, *nekuia* enables Pound (finally, by an inspired stroke) to make his epic begin with an inaugurating enactment of a Descent into the cultural-linguistic underworld of the ancestors, in conjuration, and *as performance of*, authentic inspired epic utterance. It functions as a figure for Translation, renovation of inherited Tradition: the voices of the Dead, conjured to ventriloquise, to and through, us, revitalised by the sacrificial offering of lifeblood. Pound knew language is kissed into our mouths by ghosts. The descent to parley with the spirits is also a myth of poetic initiation and inspiration, undergone by Milton, Dante, Orpheus.<sup>483</sup> Canto I becomes itself a palimpsestuous linguistic stratigraphy, resonating with revenant voices, reservoir, aquifer, of the accumulated cultural energy exerted in retelling the *nekuia*: Homer, *The Seafarer*,

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<sup>477</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 42.

<sup>478</sup> Pound, *Selected Prose*, 31 (“Osiris”).

<sup>479</sup> E.g. Canto IV ll. 72, 79.

<sup>480</sup> Pound, *Selected Letters*, 274.

<sup>481</sup> Pound, *ABC*, 58; *Selected Letters*, 274.

<sup>482</sup> Pound, *Selected Letters*, 274.

<sup>483</sup> ‘a confirmed literary habit of the race,’ *Spirit of Romance* (1910, cited from rev. ed. London: Peter Owen, 1952), 161.

Vergil, Divus, Douglas... ‘That is *Sagetrieb*,/That is tradition’.<sup>484</sup>

Pound ‘outline[d] the main scheme’ of *The Cantos* as a fugue:

A.A. Live man goes down into world of Dead

C.B. The “repeat in history”

B.C. The “magic moment” or moment of metamorphosis, bust thru from quotidien into “divine and permanent world”. Gods, etc.<sup>485</sup>

This recalls later auctorial pointers, shell-sounding with Pound’s Homeric-Old English sea-music: ‘What is [...] permanent? The Sea; what is recurrent? The voyages’.<sup>486</sup>

Notably, the early versions were in cast in blank verse, of energetic mode derived from Browning’s dramatic monologues. Browning was the first of the ghosts; but this reveals Pound did not initially perceive how ‘Seafarer’ could supply an alternative epic style to some form of the traditional English heroic verse-line and -paragraph. In “How I Began”, the expatriate Wanderer hints at self-identification with Odysseus: ‘I have “known many men’s manners and seen many cities.” ’ [...] I came to London [...] knowing no one [...] I have come in touch with the tradition of the dead’.<sup>487</sup> Ur-Canto III’s ghosts of poets prominently include those of ‘Layamon, Chaucer’, whilst also mentioning Doughty.<sup>488</sup> apt for its already (1917) Saxonising diction, after the robust vernacularism of Pound’s approved masters in Englishing the Classics, Golding and Douglas. The ‘breaking of the pentameter’ here is a ‘bust[ing] thru’ of unquiet ancestral voices, aboriginal accentual *poltergeist* progressively interrupting the iambic decasyllable, in what is already a palimpsest of retellings.

If in 1917 the diction coming to Pound is already tangily Saxon, rhythm and phrasing seem to be drawn in the same direction—luffing in the sea-wind whistled up

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<sup>484</sup> Canto XC, ll. 15-16. *ABC*, 123 notes Gavin’s acknowledgement of Homer; Pound comments ‘Romans who knew no Greek got their [...] NEKUIA from Virgil’.

<sup>485</sup> Pound, *Selected Letters*, 210.

<sup>486</sup> Cookson, *Guide to The Cantos*, xxvii.

<sup>487</sup> Nadel, *Early Writings*, 211-15 (1913). ‘No-one’: ΟΥ ΤΙΣ, cf. e.g. Canto LXXIV ll. 59-61.

<sup>488</sup> Nadel, *Early Writings*, 157. Cf. ‘Seafarer’ l. 80a, ‘Delight mid the doughty’: the adjective (collocated with Pound’s Saxonising ‘mid’), possibly a nod to C. M. Doughty, whose epic ‘English’ idiolect was partly derived from that of William Barnes. Pound read Doughty, together with Morris, to Yeats: Canto LXXXIII, ll. 187-89; “Provincia Deserta,” *Lustra* (1916), Sieburth, *Poems and Translations*, 297-99; Pound, *Guide*, 267.

by the witch-goddess to waft them to the Other Side described and imitated in, through, the lines: tightening, puffing out the buxom bunt of their trimmed sheets through the already irregular, insufflated, percussive Browningsque blank verse and tugging it towards lines less basally iambic-pentametrical, more *alliterative-caesural*. This is most apparent in the way the lines start to divide, rocking, on medial caesurae often indicated by punctuation, into two halves bearing two main accents, and not excluding alliteration (70-3, 78-82):

[...] Caught up his cadence, || word and syllable:  
 ‘Down to the ships we went, || set mast and sail,  
Black keel and beasts || for bloody sacrifice,  
Weeping we went. ||  
 [...] on the swarthy ship,  
Sheep we bore aboard her, || and our bodies also  
 Heavy with weeping. || And winds from sternward  
Bore us out onward || with bellying canvas—  
 Circe’s this craft, || the trim-coifed goddess. [...]’

Thus now the canonical Canto I lines 2-7, a slipway-launch of thrusting, billow-cleaving accentual energy, leap, kick of the tide-elk, mere-hengest, swell-riding lurch:

And then went DOWN to the SHIP,  
 Set KEEL to BREAKers, || FORTH on the GODly SEA, and ↘  
 We set up MAST and SAIL || on that SWART SHIP, ↘  
BORE SHEEP ABOARD her, || and our BODies ALso ↘  
 5 HEAVy with WEEPing, || and WINDS from STERNWARD ↘  
BORE us OUT ONward || with BELLYing CANvas,  
CIRCE’s this CRAFT || the TRIM-COIFED GODdess. [...]’<sup>489</sup>

Lines 3, 6, though the clauses are not demarcated with punctuation, divide syntactically and rhythmically into two hemistichal units, caesurae falling after ‘sail’ and ‘onward’ respectively, whilst 4, 5, and 7, if not strictly metrically accurate, could scarcely exhibit more conspicuous allusion to the sound and feel, *on-verse: caesura: off-verse* rhythm—not excluding *hakenstil*-enjambements from *b* to *a*, and even formulaic half-line parallelistic variation in line 7, an epithet corresponding appositively in qualification of ‘Circe’—and the (consonantal) alliteration, of Old English verse.

<sup>489</sup> Smaller capitals denote proposed subordinate stresses.

1917's 'Sheep we bore aboard her' became 'Bore sheep aboard her' (Canto I, 4a), a clarifying and strengthening consolidation of rhythm and alliteration bringing the later version *closer* to an Old English hemistich (and creating anaphora with line 6). If 5 initiates a sequence of lines beginning conspicuously with trochees, the revised 4 with its consecutive subordinate accent 'sheep' alludes to a **Type E** offset with an added falling cadence: ' ` ~ ' + ~`.

Intriguing is Canto I line 2's 'and', inserted, compositionally, at the end of the revised line 2 formed out of the splicing of what was originally the second hemistich of 1 and a lone, independent 'Forth on the godly sea'. This 'and', repeating the initial conjunction of 1, phrasally hooks across bestraddling to 3, but *rhythmically* seems somehow trailing to lengthen the cadence of 2: 'Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, *and*' feels over-eked, the 'and' after the second comma prolonging breathlessly (the first two lines with their conjunctions have something of the quality of a child telling a story: or the prose of the *Chronicle*.)<sup>490</sup>

This is because Pound's line refuses to conform at once either to the Old English, or blank verse, line, which underlies much of Canto I, the *Ur-Cantos*' Browningsque blank verse Saxonised towards accentual-alliterative rhythms. Lines 3-6, e.g., could be voiced as blank verse; 3, 5, decasyllables, 4, 6, hendecasyllables. In fact both 'sea' and 'and' are extra: 'set KEEL to BREAKers, || FORTH on the GODly [...]' has the movement and weighting of the Old English full-line: 'SET KEEL to BREAKers, FORTH on the GODly [...]', that of loose blank verse. Thus line 2's 'tail' has the effect of subverting the verse's formal models, counteracting symmetrical regularity: an implicit metrical declaration of *vers libre*. Nonetheless, here, a *vers libre* tuning itself in allusive relation to formal metrickery (if not depending thereon as contingently as Eliot's upon Jacobethan music), dancing variations in a gravitational atmosphere metricality exerts, remaining a spectral auditory presence, an echo of pulse moving in and out of earshot's focus.

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<sup>490</sup> The *Chronicle* was to have been a major source for a *Cantos* as 'epic of Anglo-Saxon times': Christine Froula, *To Write Paradise: Style and Error in Pound's Cantos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) 12, 66-67, 43-44, 93, 105. Elements survive: e.g. Canto XCVII includes a *pula* of English kings, Offa, Alfred, Athelstan, Canute, Edgar (ll. 70-76), Canto LXVII ll. 2-3, 'Ina, Offa and Aethelbert, folcright/ for a thousand years', with reference to the Common Law in the context of Edward Coke (Cantos CVII-CIX), admired by John Adams, charged with treason by James I for defending Common Law, Parliament, Magna Carta (cf. Kipling's *Puck*). The 'Chinese History Cantos' (LII-LXXI) may be seen as Anglo-Saxon Chronicle orientalisised.

Pound continues to deploy and exploit this trailing extended cadence, contriving to morph, meld, stretch, shrink, the shape and boundaries of the metrical model, drawing the phrasing across, through, the units or as it were ‘bar-lines’ of the verses—compare line 2’s extra ‘foot’ ‘[...] sea, and’ with 29-30’s cadential ‘[...] of brides’, ‘[...] girls tender’—throughout the measures of Canto I: which indeed grows *less evenly* hemistichal-caesural as the action proceeds, from seafaring to necromancy.<sup>491</sup> In Canto I the opening 18 lines (17-18 marks landfall at ‘the place/Aforesaid by Circe’, the ‘rites’ begin 19, the *sulcus* delved, 21) are the most *rhythmically* ‘Saxon’. Lines such as 32-33, ‘Men many, mauled with bronze lance heads/Battle spoil, bearing yet dreory [sic] arms’, are overtly alliterative and caesural, and again perfect demonstrations of the *hofuðstafr*:

MEN MANy, || MAULed [...]
   
BATTle SPOIL, || BEARing [...]

Notice further the Old English style of parallelistic variation, but neither hemistich is Old English in accentual arrangement or syllabic tally.

1917’s ‘Forth on the godly sea’ appears as an isolated half-line, affording rhythmically a slight pause, and recalling in terms of metrical provenance the simple halflines attested in Old English (as noted *supra*, *Seafarer* 16); in Canto I ‘forth on the godly sea’ has become the off-verse of line 2, but it exhibits such short, single-hemistich lines as 14, ‘With glitter of sun-rays’ and 8, ‘Aforesaid by Circe’, of similar effect: a rest in the carriage of the verse-paragraphs and a relief from the insistent accentual tension.

One might suggest Pound is rediscovering the variegating effects desirable in

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<sup>491</sup> Perhaps a re-incipience of the hexameter in the versification?—testifying again to Pound’s fluidly modulating orchestration of several metrics in the Canto. This dynamic metrical evolution only begins by adapting blank verse to OE, and continues its development as the *Ur-Cantos* proceed, a progress retained and exhibited in *XXX Cantos*. Pound himself did speculate ‘Whether alliterative metre owes anything to Latin hexameter [...]’, *Literary Essays*, 34, which might prompt attention to the possibility of an identifiable, quantifiable cross-fertilisation of OE rhythm and Homeric metre. Pound could have been playing at practical experimentation to find whether and how OE rhythms could interact with the hexameters.

accentual verse already practised by the early medieval makers. If Pound is re-inventing Old English hypermetrics in such extended lines as 2, 29, 30, and mimicking, and multiplying, single half-lines with 14, 18, 71, Canto I also exhibits a tendency to drastic *reduction* of syllables, hence maximising the duration and emphasis of the stresses, slowing and weighting the half-line so that the heavy syllables toll and tell, in a fashion more reminiscent of Norse compression—*Deyr fé*, || *deyja frændr* (*Hávamál*, stanzas 76-7).<sup>492</sup> ‘Old Norse aims at concision, weighty packing of the language in sense and form’:<sup>493</sup> ‘DICHTEN+CONDENSARE’. The most salient example, fittingly in this canto of ‘blood-rite’, is line 28, ‘Dark blood flowed’, a tenebrous, arterial ooze of consecutive long-stressed vowels (cf. the heavier hemistich-types), the expressively heavy, slow, syllables elocutionary of the crucial content.<sup>494</sup> The existence and location of a caesura in this line is debatable. I would scan:

DARK BLOOD || FLOWED in the FOSSE

staking the caesura after the second rather than third word, producing an on-verse contracted to two consecutive accents (*deyr fé //*), and an off with internal alliteration on *f*.

Rhythmically of course such juxtapositions are consistent with Pound’s established proclivity for the spondee, quasi-**Type C** ‘clashing’, ‘sprung-rhythmic’ accents: ‘souls stained’ (line 31) ‘battle-spoil’ (33, with resolution). Such are, again, like ‘gists and piths’, of Old English hemistich-types, DNA signatures of the inherited English chemical.

As crudely notated in the quotations above, alliteration contributes palpable texture throughout Canto I but is, analogously to Pound’s management of the rhythm, non-systematic, dancing around ‘accurate’ formal regularity. There is, as noticed above in ‘Seafarer’, frequent internal consonance, cunningly inwoven in polyphonic schemes,

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<sup>492</sup> Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, 3:17.

<sup>493</sup> Tolkien, *Sigurd*, 7.

<sup>494</sup> Canto XXV l. 123.



as if to smuggle a similar effect in a less obviously imitative and insistent, more diversified, fashion; where initial, it is still more incidentally localised: ‘flowed in the fosse’ (the labiodental fricatives combining with the sibilants to onomatopoeic effect, line 28), ‘limbs that we left’, (44), ‘bloody bever’ (62). Line 2’s alliteration on initial plus consonance of internal *ks* creates an evocative impression of mimesis of its lexical semantics, the wave-shearing *k* of ‘keel’ seeming to bisect the ‘breakers’, while 2 is ‘bound thru’ by a tissuing of alternating *ss* and *ts*: ‘set [...] mast [...] sail || [...] swart ship’. 7’s hemistichs alliterate on the voiceless velar plosives, ‘craft || [...] coifed’, enhanced by ancillary patterning through the line of, at beginning and end, three alliterations on *s*, ‘Circe [...] goddess’, the assonance ‘craft’:‘coifed’ again producing a curious effect of content-imitating intricacy as the speech-organs are forced to linger—to ‘observe the elegance of’ *benecomata* ‘Circe’s hair’—over the tonguetwisty phonemes of ‘[...] craft, || the trim-coifed [...]’.

Pound develops line 7’s device of phonic complication of inwrought cross-,off-alliterating sibilants, fricatives, stops at lines 25-27, with their cunning contrapuntal texture of echoic cross-alliterations, patterns of consonance, and assonance, ‘set [...] sterile [...]’(25) — ‘Tiresias’(27), ‘Ithaca’ (25) — ‘sacrifice’ (26), ‘bulls [...] best’ (25) — black [...] bell- [...]’ (27), ‘heaping [...] pyre’, (26), and line 35’s alliteration of ‘Pallor’ with, correctly, the second stressed syllable of ‘upon’, a scheme prolonged across lines 37-38, ‘Poured [...] Pluto [...] praised Proserpine’, suggesting a parallelism between the verbs, an equivalence of ritual actions, extending back to ‘Poured’ and prayed’ in lines 22, 24; while in 38 the bilabial plosive alliteration is additionally combined with internal consonance, as in 40’s ‘impetuous, impotent’, cf. the effect of ‘unwept, unwrapped’, 45.

Threefold alliteration on *b* (involving also assonance in the on-verse, cf. l.16, ‘stretched [...] wretched’,) enhances the closeness in shape and movement to an Old English line of line 4, whose off-verse may actually be scanned as **Type A** with anacrusis. Lines 5, 6 are as palpably hemistichal-caesural as the preceding, 5 evincing two clear beats per half-line—and disposed in patterns again suggestive, with resolution of ‘heavy’ and anacrusis in the off-verse, of **As**—but with its three alliterations on *w* canted towards the yonder end of the whole. Line 6 weighs in with triple, ‘three wave’ accentuation in the on-verse including consonance, but with alliteration again on *b* bracing the two halves into a full-line, perhaps aided by ‘on’ in the on-verse chiming with the first stressed syllable of the last word in the off- —

which hemistich again suggests with *auflösung* and anacrusis an **A**.

The medial caesura is still apparent in line 9, coinciding with the comma, ‘Thus with stretched sail, || we went over sea till day’s end’. This on-verse could so easily be a line from ‘Seafarer’ with its masculine spondaic cadence, the two abutted stresses of a **C** bunched at the end: cf. the same rising, thrusting rhythm in 15a, ‘Nor with stars stretched’. Dictionally, ‘stretched’ recurs thrice, in 9,15,16, but there seems no lexical-semantic reason for this; it may be Pound felt the reiteration helped to unify to this initial c.18-line movement, or he may have regarded it as an example of primitivist stylistic naïveté. The off-verse lo(o)ses strict accentual tension (how many stresses?) but retains alliteration with the on-verse on *s*, the initial alike of the whole line’s two main, and most heavily accented, sense-words, ‘sail’ and ‘sea’, not failing to produce a generalised impressionistic rhythmic allusion to the shape and movement of Old English verse. The effort to condense is apparent in the on-verse but most evident syntactically in the idiom of elided definite articles in the off-.

Though ‘ocean’ adds excessive alliteration in the fourth position, and consonant-clusters *sl* and *sh* may not have been held, in strict best practice, to alliterate with *s*, line 10 has an outstandingly satisfying *schwung*, of rhythm, carriage and cadence, as a line of Modern alliterative verse: ‘Sun to his slumber’—shaped like an **A** hemistich phrased perfectly to the caesural comma with the first accent of ‘shadows’ after it a convincing, instructive demonstration of the effect of the *hofuðstafr*, rhythmically juxtaposed and also syntactically, by parataxis, any connective preposition or conjunction elliptically omitted. 10 also is pleasingly authentic in the way it reads like a parallelistic variation restating and in the off-verse amplifying 9b’s ‘days end’, while here again the condensing omission of the definite article and the gendering personalising of the sun by the masculine possessive pronoun adds a beguilingly archaistic touch.

Etymologically, as Alexander has remarked, 5 full-lines have already made seaway before the first Romance-derived word, ‘canvas’: ‘Pound’s usual Mediterranean palette has acquired a northern [...] primitive pigment [...] “the English national chemical”. A kind of linguistic tar has been mixed in [...]’.<sup>495</sup> Line 2 is obviously

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<sup>495</sup> Michael Alexander, ‘Ezra Pound as Translator’, *Translation and Literature* 6 (1997): 26.

especially ‘tarry’ with its blatantly Anglo-Norse ‘swart’; further examples of Canto I’s archaising ‘linguistic tar’ (in addition to the less noteworthy ‘art’, ‘cam’st’, ‘shalt’, ‘thou’ ‘unto’, etc) include ‘pitkin’ (21), ‘fosse’ (28), ‘dreory’ [sic] (33), ‘ingle’ (50), ‘bever’ (62), ‘sea-bord’ [sic] (55), ‘mid’ [sic] for ‘with’ (57, cf. ‘Seafarer’ 80a), and Tiresias’ ‘soothsay’ (62-3), in a strikingly rugged syntactic construction.

A further archaising, Germanic stylisation in Canto I—developed in Canto II—is its fondness for compounds, hyphenated combinations as ‘trim-coifed’(7b), ‘close-webbed’(13), ‘sun-rays’ (14), ‘death’s-heads’ (24), ‘bell-sheep’ (21), and (the alliterative) ‘nape-nerve’ (53), cf. ‘Seafarer’ 4a, 7a, 17b, 22b, 58b, etc. Compounds impact rhythm and metre, while conceptually, in terms of poetics of thought, impinge upon *Imagisme* and ‘ideogram’.

Rhetorically, line 15 ‘Nor with stars stretched, nor looking back from heaven’, consists of another pair of Old English *ne>nor* [...] -clauses: note just how clearly one hears here in Canto I line 15 the same at once rhythmic and rhetorical-syntactic structure of e.g. *Seafarer* lines 45, 96, *ne tō wīfe wynn, || ne tō worulde hyht; ne hond onhrēran || ne mid hyge þencan*, or *Wanderer* 15a, *ne mæg wērigmōd* [...], etc. 15a is also noteworthy for its archaistic syntactic inversion, itself stylistic part and parcel of the Saxonising, *contra-iambic*, spondaic profile of the accentuation—contrast iambic ‘nor stretched with stars’ (which however would provide a **B**.) While 15a alliterates, *st* [...] *st*(r), 15b does not, but its sounds are echoed in 16a’s ‘Swartest’ and that third ‘stretched’ which may now be perceived to justify itself by also supplying *phonic linkage* with its off-verse, not by alliteration but by assonance: ‘Swartest night stretched || over wretched men there’.

This distinctively mannered, archaistic idiom Pound creates for Canto I includes, as glimpsed, a ‘Sino-Saxon’ syntactic condensation, a palpable special effort towards ellipsis of grammatical function words articles, particles, pronouns, the ‘telegraphese’, or stereotypically Chinese or Yorkshire idiom, noticed in ‘Seafarer’.<sup>496</sup> And then [ ] went down [...], / [ ] Set [ ] keel to [ ] breakers; ‘Thus with [ ] stretched sail, we went over [ ] sea till [ ] day’s end,/ [ ] Sun to his slumber, [ ] shadows o’er [...]’ (lines 1-10); ‘And drawing [ ] sword from my hip’, (20, contrast 39, ‘the narrow

<sup>496</sup> Saussy, et al., *Chinese Written Character*, e.g. 48.

sword’, where definite article and adjective imbue the phrase with the resonance of Homeric formula).

This affords him the advantage of a rhythmically concentrative, condensed, emphatic form of English which, lexically and syntactically, by excising ‘little words’, restores to nouns and verbs greater force and prominence.<sup>497</sup> This conforms to Fenollosa’s description of Chinese, which emphasises the vital agency of the verb;<sup>498</sup> but it also, and due to ‘The Seafarer’ before Pound read Fenollosa, brings Pound’s rugged, strengthened, epic idiolect closer to the linguistic qualities of *Old English*, especially, due to its versification, Old English poetry.

Pound’s syntactic strategy extends, most conspicuously, to subject-verb and noun-adjective inversions, which like the omission or at least suppression of articles, impress as memorably characteristic of Pound’s formal, archaistic voice (the alternatives would be modern, conversational: low-mimetic). ‘Bore sheep[...]’ (4a), ‘*sat we amidships [...]*’ (8a, alliterating with the internal *ms* in the off-verse, ‘wind jamming the tiller’, imagery recalling *Seafarer*); ‘*Came we then [...]*’ (11, construction repeated 17), ‘Here *did they rites [...]*’ (19, a line with the lapidary ring of ancient inscription, set in stone), ‘*Poured we libations [...]*’ (22), ‘*Prayed I [...]*’ (24), ‘souls stained’, ‘girls tender’ (31), ‘men many’ (32). Many of these inversions shift the lead to Fenollosa’s ‘Chinese’ verb; *accentually*, this syntax causes bunching, trochaic or spondaic abutted stresses, at *onset* of the line, cf. ‘Bore us’, ‘Circe’s this’ (6,7), etc.

Elpenor’s 55 orchestrates these stylistic components. Medial caesura, clangorous half-rhyme (‘arms’ / ‘tomb’), alliteration (‘be’ / ‘bord’), elliptical syntax (parataxis and omission of definite articles), and one of Pound’s Old English-etymological respellings, *bord* for ‘board’— Old English *mid* instead of ‘with’ appears in the next line—combine to engender a plangent, potent heroic utterance showcasing in concert the archaisms mustered by Pound for his epic style. Line 22b, ‘unto each the dead’, exhibits once more this style of (here Common-Prayer liturgical) archaistic ellipsis which endows Pound’s verse with a compacted phrasal tensility and *torque*—a

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<sup>497</sup> Cf. Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 226, ‘little “empty” words (as the Chinese say)’, and *Lays*, 95.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-51.

rhythmic and syntactic Saxon musculature, that ‘certain [...] Anglo-Saxon [...] element’ ‘which has strengthened it and given it fibre’: here anatomised.

Recalling Gunn’s impression that in Canto II Pound develops this style by ‘loosening’ the line, it is visible how the metrical oarstroke, the paired hemistichal ‘heaves’, of Canto I, modulate towards a recognisably Poundian *vers libre* of hovering pointillist phrases. Old English half-lines are being ‘translated’ more completely into ‘Chinese’ ‘ideograms’. ‘Seafarer’’s strenuous accentuation is growing attenuated, along with the alliteration and ‘tarry’ lexical archaisms, towards something fleeter, sensuous, less Homeric-necromantic than Ovidian—in this canto of protean metamorphic theophany.

Elementary scansion elicits, nevertheless, how close the English verse of Canto II, a littoral, maritime canto of ‘ear for the sea-surge’, still is to the accentual-hemistichal measure upon which Canto I was founded.<sup>499</sup> This begins self-evidently to crystallise merely by inserting medial caesurae:

- l. 7 SLEEK HEAD, || DAUGHTer of LIR
- l. 10 And the WAVE RUNS || in the BEACH-GROOVE
- l. 13 EAR, EAR || for the SEA-SURGE
- l. 27 COLD-WELTer, || CLOSE COVer.
- l. 28 QUIET SUN-TAWNy || SAND-STRETCH
- l. 57 GOD-SLEIGHT then, || GOD-SLEIGHT
- l. 58 SHIP STOCK FAST || in SEA-SWIRL
- l. 60 GRAPES with NO SEED || but SEA-FOAM
- l. 78 EYE-GLITTer || out of BLACK AIR
- l. 87 GRAPE-CLUSTer || over PIN-RACK
- l. 88 VOID AIR || TAKing PELT
- l. 117 FISH-SCALES || over GROIN MUSCles
- l. 118 LYNX-PURR || aMID SEA
- l. 137 BRIGHT WELTer || of WAVE-CORDs

Thus line 6, ‘Seal sports in the spray-whited circles of cliff-wash’, again the combination of abutted, ‘sprung’ accents, compounds, omission of articles; cf. 7-9, ‘Sleek head, daughter of Lir,/eyes of Picasso/Under black fur-hood, lithe daughter of Ocean’: again dropped definite articles and conjunctions in lines that succeed in

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<sup>499</sup> Canto II (ll. 29, 32, 139) is intertextual with *The Wanderer* (ll. 48-49, the bathing sea-fowl): Robinson, *Tomb*, 243; Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 49-53. *Wanderer* (c. lines 79-84b) is also alluded to in Canto XXVII ll. 1-6, with 81b repeated in Canto LXXVII l. 85: *sumne fugol othbar* [sic]; Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 58-61; “One A Bird Bore Off: Anglo-Saxon and the Elegiac in *The Cantos*,” *Paideuma* 30 (2001): 91-98.

evoking the selkie by a technique at once notably ‘Chinese’ *Imagiste*-‘Ideogrammic’ and notably *Old English*: paratactic juxtaposition of half-lines paralleled in variation.

Lines 75-80 provide a definitive instance of Pound’s ‘Sino-Saxon’ style of abrupt, paratactic, imagistic/ideogrammic presentation, seasaw of parellistic lines, condensed by omission of definite articles and *minimal* use, in a conspicuous effort towards ellipsis, of trivial grammatical elements, conjunctions, adverbs, prepositions, with the aim of drastic abbreviation of speech-material to the most *semantically substantive and hence concomitantly emphatically accentuated* lexical items, concentrating ‘piths and gists’ of content-words (and again note compounds): ‘Lynx-purr, and heathery smell of beasts,/eye-glitter out of black air./The sky overshot, dry, with no tempest,/Sniff and pad-foot of beasts’, or 87-8, ‘grape-cluster over pin-rack/void air taking pelt’, 88 another remarkable example of Pound achieving Fenollosan concreteness, agency, compaction.<sup>500</sup>

Canto II’s verbal texture is notably replete with compounds, of which line 57’s ‘god-sleight’ <Old Norse *slægð*, might have rejoiced Morris, Barnes, Hopkins, or Doughty, and most significantly Seafarer’s *yðā gewearc*> line 13’s ‘sea-surge’—13*b*, for the translation of the Old English formula re-appears in a line whose structure of four beats and medial caesura is, when exhibited as above, seen to be derived transparently from Old English: cf. 58, Saxonising rhythmically, and dictionally, with another *sea-* compound.

This ultimately Old English verse-technique empowers Pound to achieve, poetically, ‘god-sleight’, making us feel with Acœtes that ‘the god stood by me’.<sup>501</sup> Pound defined ‘The miracle of Homer’ as a ‘raw cut of concrete reality combined with [...] tremendous energy [...] contact with [...] natural force [...] The Argicide, Hermes, carried past, the movement tak[ing] the god into nature’.<sup>502</sup> Reference to ‘the golden bough’ of Hermes *Pyschopompos*, in the context of ecstatic vision of Aphrodite, occurs in the Frazerian last line (76) of Canto I, yet Canto II’s Dionysian theophany also performs ‘the THEOIO’, ‘strong magic’ by which Pound’s ‘“divine or permanent”

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<sup>500</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 47.

<sup>501</sup> Canto II, ll. 57; 62-63.

<sup>502</sup> Pound, *Selected Letters*, 273.

[...] original world of [...] Gods, etc’, of the ‘hinter-time’, when ‘[t]he “magic moment” [...] of metamorphosis’ ‘bust[s] thru’ the ‘quotidien’.<sup>503</sup>

It may now be perceived that there is accentually at play in this *Cantos*-versification a rhythmic core of two clashing stresses—Pound’s favourite **Type C** spondee—in lines stretching to three or five beats but often hovering around *four main* accents per full-line. This *vers libre* allusion to Old English metric, deriving from ‘The Seafarer’, is not restricted to Cantos I and II but, being formative, persists through Pound’s Modernist epic, above all as hybridised with Poundian ‘Chinese’, as in Canto LII ‘Book of Rites’, and within the first XXX *Cantos*, Canto XIII.

In addition to employing simple metrical indications in the following specimens from Cantos XIII, XIV, XV, I relineate (if one were on these metrical grounds to count the lines as *half*lines constituting full-lines in the Old English fashion, rather than as separate successive lines, this would also mean reconceptualising lineation in *The Cantos*):

KUNG WALKED || by the dyNASTic TEMPlE  
and into the CEDar GROVE, || and then out by the LOWer RIVER  
[...]  
And KUNG SAID: || HE should HIDE him.

—Canto XIII, 1-3, 61-2.

If in Kung’s Shangri-La Old English rhythm evokes hovering equipoise, within the XXX Pound also avails himself of the denunciatory vehemence and kinetic leverage purchased by the accentual muscle of his adaptation of ‘Ang. Sax’, in the opposite, Dantescan-Infernal, ‘Hell Cantos’:

Above the HELL ROT || the great ARSE-HOLE,  
BROKEn with PILES, || HANGing STALACTites

—Canto XIV, 56-9.

In Canto XV’s episode of escape from the *malebolge* by petrifying the obscene mire with the power of Perseus’ shield into a ‘narrow rast,/Half the width of a sword’s edge’ (87-88), the verse itself stiffens tangibly into a relatively regular ‘ladder’ of accentual-caesural lines; rhythmically and syntactically dissolving again in responsive mimesis

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<sup>503</sup> Ibid., 210.

of the narrator's collapse ('Oblivion,/forget how long [...] Sleep, fainting nausea [...] lids sinking, darkness unconscious', 92-end) once the *re-ascent out* of Avernus has been attained:

- l. 66[-7] the BOG-SUCK || like a WHIRL-POOL
- l. 76[-7] HOLDing it DOWNward || he HARDened the TRACK
- l. 84[-5] The SERPents' TONGUES || GRAZing the SWILL-TOP

Significantly this reversion to Old English accentualism occurs in an infernal context, as in Canto I's Saxonising *nekuia*, and occasions lexically such accompanying 'linguistic tar' as 'dern' (XV, line 90), 'rast', and more com-Pounding ('bog-suck', 'swill-top'); and, syntactically, inversions, 'Prayed we' (74, not to 'sickly deaths-heads' but 'to the Medusa') likewise *nekuia*-echoic.

Darker magic indeed than Dionysos' metamorphic theophany in Canto II is the chthonic summoning enacted in, or between, Canto I lines 28-29, where archaic ellipsis and Modernist juxtaposition allow Pound an abrupt discontinuity, 'cross-cut', syncope. Suddenly, 'And, out of nothing' the 'Souls out of Erebus' are somehow there, as though we had started from a momentary blackout.<sup>504</sup> In the following lines, c.34-c.39, narrating in the first person Odysseus's panic as the phantoms, culminating in the revenant warriors (lines 29-33), 'crowd' swarming about him, breathless uncoordinating omission of conjunctions and pronouns in a sequence of six paratactic, asyndetic half-lines express syntactically the overwhelming, disorienting terror of the apparition of the thirsty spectres.

*The Cantos* thus commences with a poetics of inheritance, 'translation' (writ large), a mythopoetics—under the patronage of *vatic shapeshifters*, Tiresias and Proteus—signalling the vital activity of metaphor, transformation, and hierophantic transfiguration. Canto I itself, formally, thematically, *enacts* subject and countersubject of Pound's 'fugue': the *katabasis* of 'live man goes down into world of Dead' is also a 'repeat in history' and (as Canto II) 'the magic moment' of metamorphosis. It *is* a 'bust[ing] thru' of archaic-heroic mythopoeia from the 'hinter-

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<sup>504</sup> Canto I, l. 71.



time': unleashed, daimonically, into twentieth-century utterance.<sup>505</sup> —And not least *metrically*. Whilst Seafarer-Odysseus voyages to question the dead soothsayer as to how to get home (*Nostos*>*nostalgia*), Pound brings English *rhythm* 'home' prosodically, beginning his epic 'Tale of the Tribe' in a 'home-key' of alliterative-accentual 'indigenous art'.<sup>506</sup>

It can thus be shown how Pound's *Cantos*-poetics includes *Seafarer*-Saxonisms metrical, syntactic, dictional. Every stylistic component of Pound's style is designed to express significance; yet arguably the most overtly telling thematically is Canto I line 33's lexical detail of the adjective 'dreary'—spelt thus—in the description of the slain warriors rising up out of the Underworld, 'bearing yet dreary arms'.

Modern English, of course, spells the adjective 'dreary', connoting in colloquial acceptation a semantic range which would compass such synonyms as 'dismal, repulsively dull, bleak, gloomy, tedious', etc, but Pound's idiosyncratic respelling, substituting *o* for *a* in the diphthong, is intended to *call back* to the word its Old English *etymological* sense. *Drēorig*, cf. Norse *dreyrigr*, expresses a far stronger, *concrete*, meaning: 'bloody', or, with greater semantic accuracy and even more vivid concreteness, 'blood-dripping': the adjective formed by the suffix *-ig* + *drēor*, 'shed, spilt, dripping blood', < verb *drēosan*, 'to fall, to drop' (>'drizzle', 'drowse'). Thus rather suburban Modern English 'dreary' retains only a much weaker, more generalised—less vividly and precisely meaningful, specific, concrete, literal—force in comparison to its *full-blooded* Old English etymon.

The standard works of reference, well-established in Pound's day, are unanimous regarding the primary denotation of the lemma. Clark Hall's *Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (first edition 1894), defines *drēor* 'blood', referring the reader to the verb *drēosan*, adjective *drēorig*, 'bloody, bloodstained', continuing with related secondary developments, 'cruel, grievous, sad, sorrowful'; the researcher will also find *drēorfāh*, 'bespattered with gore', for good measure. Bosworth and Toller's *Anglo-Saxon*

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<sup>505</sup> By the 1940s, Jung having suggested Wotan was astir again in Europe ("Wotan," *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, n.s., 3 [March, 1936]: 657-69), the blood-offering was vast, and a possessed Pound, *wóþbora*, had 'lost all companions'; 'that greater magician' had become the caged sybil Eliot fetched out of Petronius.

<sup>506</sup> Cf. Heidegger's poetics as *heimkunft*: George Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 142-43.

*Dictionary*, first edition 1898,<sup>507</sup> concurs, as does Sweet's *Student's Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon* of 1896.<sup>508</sup>

This is a word Pound would have known with the intimacy of the translator, for a form appears in *Seafarer* 86a, *Gedroren is þēos duguð eall* [...], which he rendered adjectivally with the apparently 'poetical' back-formed shortening 'drear', 'Drear all this excellence [...]', ('Seafarer', 86). As ever Pound seeks to contrive an etymological rendering, his distinctive art of translation at once philological and phonetic, in which the phonetics of the source are carried over audibly to the target. 'Drear' eventuates not or not merely as a 'poeticism' but as another Poundian feat of etymological and homophonic translation of *gedroren*—which Pound, consulting page 244 of the glossary in his copy of Sweet, must have realised is the *past participle* of the verb *drēosan*, 'to fall', from which also derive *drēor* and *drēorig*, as is immediately visible from the page: discovery of the verb illuminates its webbed circuitry of morpholexical correlations. Here Sweet clearly defines *drēor* as 'blood' and *drēorig* as 'blood-stained', with 'sad' listed secondarily as a developed sense.

Pound is likely to have first encountered the specific adjectival form *drēorig* also in Sweet, text XX, pages 106-119, "Beowulf and Grendel's Mother", (*Beowulf*, 1251-1650), and *The Wanderer*, text XXVI, pages 160-3.

*Drēorig* occurs at line 167a in the former (*Beowulf*, 1417a), but Pound knew *Beowulf* well beyond its representation in Sweet: in its entirety in Wyatt's edition—connecting Pound further to the legacy of Morris.<sup>509</sup> Wyatt collaborated with Morris on his 1895 *Tale of Beowulf*, an extraordinary work of archaising and etymologising Pre-Raphaelite 'translation' whose extremity and totality of linguistic aesthetic anticipates Tolkien and the modernist experiments of Joyce and of Pound himself.

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<sup>507</sup> Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>508</sup> Pound may well have consulted Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary* (heavily cited by Fenollosa), rev. ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910, and noted this authority's vehement insistence, furnished with extensive philological evidence, on 'gory' as the original force of the adjective. The developed sense 'sad' (cf. German *traurig*) already existed in Anglo-Saxon; but I need prove here only that that *dreary* 'really meant "bloody"' in Pound's etymological sources.

<sup>509</sup> Robinson, *Tomb*, 241-42, Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 21, 32-33; Mary de Rachewiltz, et al., *Ezra Pound to his Parents: Letters 1895-1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 47-48.

Morris translates *Beowulf* l. 1417a's *drēorig* 'dreary', defining the adjective 'bloody' in his glossary.<sup>510</sup>

The 'difficult' masculine accusative singular adjective form *drēorigne* appears in *The Wanderer* line 17b.<sup>511</sup> Pound quotes *Wanderer* 15-18 no less than three times in his prose; one of three candidates for the 'one passage out of *The Wanderer*' alluded to in "The Renaissance", he embeds in "Constant Preaching" his own Saxonising translation (contextualised in fascinatingly quirky commentary), ' "For the doom-eager bindeth fast his *blood-bedraggled* heart in his breast" '.<sup>512</sup>

For *drēorigne* Pound would not have had to look any farther than page 244 of Sweet's glossary, which probably persuaded him to dismiss the apparently secondarily-developed weaker senses 'sad,-ly,-ness' in favour of the dramatic, and concretely literal, force so as to render the word 'blood-bedraggled'.

The final 'ply' to be layered in over Canto I's Saxonising 'dreory' is Douglas' Middle Scots adjective *Drery*, attested three times in his *Eneados*, the first complete translation of a major Classic into any Germanic vernacular, preferred by Pound to Vergil's original—'Virgil came to life again in 1514 [...] because [...] Douglas *knew the sea* better than Virgil had'—and the source of a distinctive lexical stratum in *The Cantos*.<sup>513</sup> *Drery* first appears at the very beginning of the epic, with reference to Juno, line 15. The adjective here should almost certainly be construed in the sense 'cruel', but when Pound quotes this passage, ll.1-18, as his first 'Exhibit' of Douglas in *ABC*, he intervenes to interpolate the gloss: 'orig. Sax. means *bloody*'.<sup>514</sup>

Thus Pound was following numerous significant poetic and scholarly authorities in his re-invocation (unique in the twentieth century?) of the etymological, literally *sanguinary*, 'dreory'. 'Dreary' 'really means' 'dripping with blood', and in Canto I line 33 Pound, as recognised by commentators, intended his 'conspicuously opaque'<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> (London: Longmans, 1898), 82, 190.

<sup>511</sup> Dunning and Bliss, *Wanderer*, 107; Klinck, *Elegies*, 393. Also cf. *drēorighlēor*, line 83b.

<sup>512</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 215, 53, 64; *ABC*, 96.

<sup>513</sup> Pound, *ABC*, 45. David F.C. Coldwell, *Virgil's Aeneid Translated into Scottish Verse by Gavin Douglas*, (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons Ltd, 1964).

<sup>514</sup> Pound, *ABC*, 115. Pound appears to have discovered Douglas c.1916, first publishing on him along with Divus and Golding 1917-18: *Literary Essays*, e.g. 248-49.

<sup>515</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 45.

‘dreory’ with this Saxonising force, respelling the adjective etymologically (emended in revision of the *Ur-Cantos*) to signal that the meaning he intends is the archaic, *hitherto*-obsolete force of the Old English radical, as if requickening the primordial ‘Ang. Sax.’ to throb, dark red, through the anaemic modern term.<sup>516</sup>

We are to understand therefore that the ghosts of the slain warriors conjured up in Canto I (Homeric hordes ‘ply over ply’ with the fallen of the trenches who ‘walked eye-deep in hell’?) are to be imagined as still carrying their weapons running with spectral gore from their final fatal battles.<sup>517</sup>

But Pound’s procedure with ‘dreory’, this single Saxonising item of diction, must be viewed as the lexical symbol, in little, of the lexical and metrical resurrection enacted by Pound in his revoicing of the *nekuia*. Canto XXV contrasts ‘the solid, the blood-rite’, with ‘dead concepts’.<sup>518</sup> In Canto I the linguistically ancestral ghosts are empowered to speak again, as metric, and as etymology: *drēor* is restored, a performance of transfusion and transubstantiation, to blanched ‘dreary’ whose meaning has been leeching out of it by abstract (‘dead concept’). The word, translated back into Old English (a ‘dead language’), is revived and bespeaks itself again, ‘strong with the blood’ (Canto I line 65), with its full ‘solid’ atavistic force: physically concrete, literal and specific, viscerally vivid.<sup>519</sup>

Pound commented c.1918, ‘A man [...] may [...] try to resurrect a forgotten mode if he finds in [it] some [...] element lacking in contemporary art which might unite that art again to [...] life’.<sup>520</sup> Again, of his ‘translation’ of Propertius—as controversial with scholars as his Chinese and ‘Ang. Sax.’—Pound defined his ‘job’ ‘to bring a dead

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<sup>516</sup> Carroll F. Terrel, *A Companion to The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 2; Cookson, *Guide to the Cantos*, 5; Sieburth, *New Selected*, 304. Pound missed a trick: *bletsian* > ‘bless’.

<sup>517</sup> *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920) IV line 11: Sieburth, *Poems and Translations*, 551.

<sup>518</sup> Cf. Fenollosa: ‘the anaemia of modern speech’, Saussy et al., *Chinese Written Character*, 96-97; ‘bloodless concepts’, Nadel, *Early Writings*, 312.

<sup>519</sup> Cf. ‘Strong as with blood-drink’, Canto XXI line 145.

<sup>520</sup> Pound, *Literary Essays*, 11

man to life'.<sup>521</sup> With Old English Pound is 'feeling back along ancient lines of advance', to 'the tradition of the dead', recalling 'indigenous art' from cultural memory (Mnemosyne) 'To [...] gather from the past a live tradition', for 'the living art'.<sup>522</sup> In 1911 he prophesied 'English verse of the future will be a sort of orchestration taking account' of culturally ancestral systems of metric; we have now witnessed, 'concern[ing] the scansion', 'the art of the verse structure', 'the technic and aesthetic of verse', *how* and *why* Pound mobilised a 'certain [...] Anglo-Saxon [...] element' 'to resuscitate the dead art/Of poetry', harrowing from the cultural underworld its chthonic 'energies [...] not to be represented by the over-familiar devices or patterns'.<sup>523</sup>

Pound's Saxonising style in *The Cantos* functions, then, as a figure for The Language of the Dead.<sup>524</sup> 'ΟΙ ΧΘΟΝΙΟΙ' 'rose out of χθόνοϋ'.<sup>525</sup> 'Dreory' blood, of manifold symbolic potency, is the means of this communion. In assimilating Saxonised English to Homer, Ovid, and Vergil Pound is bestowing upon 'Ang. Sax.' the status of a language of his 'permanent world' of 'gods'<sup>526</sup> *bequeathed* from the 'hinter-time'. In Canto I's incantation, calling up and mediumistically channelling this

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<sup>521</sup> Pound, *Selected Letters*, 148-49.

<sup>522</sup> Canto LXXXI line 169.

<sup>523</sup> *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, I, lines 2-3; Sieburth, *Poems and Translations*, 549.

<sup>524</sup> Another figure in Pound being 'The Language of the Birds'; these, and Chinese and Old English, represent Pound's archetypal perfect language, most frequently in the motif recurring through the prose and poetry both, of Clément Jannequin's *Chant des Oiseaux*: see esp. (Pisan) Canto LXXV. 'The Language of the Birds' is one mythemic representation of this archetype widely attested (as remarked in a manifoldly pertinent passage by Sir Thomas Browne in *Hydriotaphia*) in mythic and esoteric traditions—and still by the etymology of 'augury', 'inaugurate'—from the ancient Mesopotamian "Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld" and the Greek myths, to its association with Óðinn (ravens) and (among other heroes, due to drinking Fafnir's blood) Sigurðr in Norse, to its appearance in Yeats' 1939 "Cuchulain Comforted": Stephanie Dalley, trans., *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 155; Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, combined single volume ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992), 236, 372; W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, rev. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 332. Like Yeats his master, Pound would have encountered this trope in his mythological and occult studies, for which see Leon Surette, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats and the Occult* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 96-156 passim.

<sup>525</sup> Cantos LXXXIII, ll. 148-50, LXXVII l. 49.

<sup>526</sup> Cf. Heidegger: Steiner, *Martin Heidegger*, 156.

authentic poetic speech, Pound is performing the very revivification of Old English verse, an act of *metrical necromancy* conjuring Old English poetry into the distinctive, influential Modernist mode of *vers libre*, into Modernist epic. The instauration of poetry in the twentieth century was contingent upon the resurrection, and proves part of the ‘afterlife’, of an Anglo-Saxon *redivivus*.<sup>527</sup>

The collocation of ‘solid’ and ‘blood-rite’ is also notable in this context because Pound customarily applies the former adjective both to Old English, and to his art’s technical foundation of metrical rhythm. The ‘permanent basis’ of English is ‘solid, Anglo-Saxon’,<sup>528</sup> whilst he extols Antheil for ‘SOLIDITY [...] short hard bits of rhythm hammered down, worn down so that they were indestructible and unbendable. He wanted these gristly and undeformable [...] definite [...] “monads”’,<sup>529</sup> stating elsewhere ‘The [...] indestructible gist, the pith, the unbreakable fact [...] the bedrock of any art is composed of such solids.’<sup>530</sup> These ‘solid’ ‘unbreakable’ ‘short hard bits of rhythm’ re-appear here with those ‘piths and gists’ of which ‘poetry consists’.

It might be granted that these serve as good descriptions of ‘solid Anglo-Saxon’ *metres*; this chapter has sought to identify ‘definite[ly]’ and precisely what these ‘short hard bits of rhythm’ are, which ‘compose the bedrock’, the ‘permanent basis’, of Pound’s art, that ‘Anglo-Saxon element’ or ‘principle of alliterative verse [...] radical’—‘radical, formed from the root of his English [...] heritage’—‘in all proper *vers libre* in our language’. ‘Indestructible’, ‘unbreakable’, they partake of the ‘solidity’ of ‘the blood-rite’, which exhumes the lexicometrical ‘solid Anglo-Saxon basis’ of English. It is the blood of the ‘English national chemical’, its chthonic, aboriginal *virtù*, which makes for ‘solidity’.

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<sup>527</sup> Canto I’s blood and mead, ll. 23, 28, suggest Kvasir and the Norse elixir of inspiration (*Skáldskaparmál*, 3): poetry originates in the otherworld of magical beings (gods, giants, dwarves) and, bequeathed to Man, lives by living blood, breath (‘I made it out of a mouthful of air’ wrote [...] Yeats in his heyday[...],’ Pound, *Guide*, 152) and spit. ‘Afterlife’: Robinson, *Tomb*, 275.

<sup>528</sup> Pound, *Selected Letters*, 347.

<sup>529</sup> Pound, *Guide*, 94-95.

<sup>530</sup> Cookson, *Guide to the Cantos*, 143 (1938).

Again, Pound asks, in the context of the artist's craft, 'Has he [...] enforced [...] the grave and the acute?'<sup>531</sup> and, introducing in *The Cantos* one of his metaphors for poetic form, 'Hast 'ou seen the rose in the steel dust [...]?'<sup>532</sup> This occult symbol of perfection is associated with transcendence beyond death: 'so ordered, the dark petals of iron/we who have passed other Lethe'. Pound explains:

The *forma*, the immortal *conchetto* [...] the dynamic form which is like the rose pattern driven into the dead iron-filings by the magnet [...] the dust and filings rise and spring into order. Thus the *forma*, the concept, rises from death.<sup>533</sup>

Thus Pound affirms his belief in *Form*, as objective order, meaning, beauty, and vitality. This chapter has striven, 'enforc[ing] the grave and the acute' to chart that dynamic patterning. Analogously to the slain revived in the 'blood rite' of the *nekuia*, like Tiresias 'strong with [...] bloody bever for soothsay', Pound's revived accentual-alliterative Saxonising versification is a case of 'indestructibl[y] solid' poetic form 'ris[ing] from death'.

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<sup>531</sup> Canto LXXXI l. 103.

<sup>532</sup> Canto LXXIV, ll. 716, 718-19.

<sup>533</sup> Pound, *Guide*, 152.

### Chapter III. ‘Reviv[ing] Vanished Voices’: Tolkien as ‘Bard to Anglo-Saxon’.<sup>534</sup>

#### *The Language of the Dead: Dark Staves.*

[...] *descendit ad inferos* [...] *et habeo claves mortis et inferni* [...] *et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum* [...]

‘Thus spoke Malbeth the Seer, in the days of Arvedui, last king at Fornost,’ said Aragorn:

	<b>B</b>	Over  the <u>l</u> and there <u>l</u> ies    a <u>l</u> ong shadow,	<b>C</b>
	<b>A+Da</b>	<u>w</u> estward reaching    <u>w</u> ings of darkness.	<b>A</b>
	<b>C</b>	The <u>T</u> ower <u>t</u> rembles;    to  the <u>t</u> omb of kings	<b>B</b>
	<b>A/Da</b>	<u>d</u> oom <u>a</u> pproaches.    The <u>D</u> ead <u>a</u> waken;	<b>C/A</b>
5	<b>B</b>	for  the hour is come    for  the <u>o</u> athbreakers:	<b>C</b>
	<b>B</b>	at  the <u>S</u> tone of <u>E</u> rech    they shall <u>s</u> tand again	<b>Db/ B</b>
	<b>B</b>	and <u>h</u> ear there [a] <u>h</u> orn    in the <u>h</u> ills ringing.	<b>C</b>
	<b>A</b>	<u>W</u> hose shall [the] <u>h</u> orn be?    <u>W</u> ho shall call them	<b>A</b>
	<b>C</b>	from  the grey twilight,    the  forgotten people?	<b>C</b>
10	<b>B</b>	The <u>h</u> eir of him    to whom  the <u>o</u> ath they swore.	<b>B</b>
	<b>B</b>	From  the <u>N</u> orth shall [he] come,    <u>n</u> eed shall drive him:	<b>A</b>
	<b>B</b>	he [shall] pass the <u>D</u> oor    to  the <u>P</u> aths of [the] <u>D</u> ead.	<b>B</b>

‘Dark ways, doubtless,’ said Gimli, ‘but no darker than these staves are to me.’  
‘If you would understand them better, then I bid you come with me,’ said Aragorn;  
‘for that way I now shall take. But I do not go gladly; only need drives me. [...] The  
terror of the Sleepless Dead lies about the Hill of Erech [...] But [...] there are none  
living to help me. [...] Come! [...] I seek the Paths of the Dead.’

—*The Lord of the Rings*, 781-2.<sup>535</sup>

These twelve full-lines in alliterative verse after the Old English pattern, from *The Return of the King*, Book V, Chapter II, “The Passing of the Grey Company,”<sup>536</sup> have

<sup>534</sup> Tolkien, “For W. H. A.,” in “A Tribute to Wystan Hugh Auden on his 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday,” *Shenandoah: The Washington and Lee University Review* 18, no. 2 (1967): 96-97, 1. 25, ‘revive the vanished voices of makers [...]’.

<sup>535</sup> Citations of text and pagination refer to J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, single-volume reset 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary rev. ed., with prefatory Notes by Douglas A. Anderson, and Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull (London: HarperCollins, 2005), hereafter cited parenthetically in-text as (*Rings* followed by page-number).

<sup>536</sup> (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955).



been partially recited on the cinema screen,<sup>537</sup> but have to my knowledge been noticed critically only twice hitherto, by Phelpstead, and Shippey.<sup>538</sup> In Shippey's assessment the alliterative poems in Tolkien's prose 'heroic romance',<sup>539</sup> written 1936-49,<sup>540</sup> constitute the culmination of the professor's long development as eventually prominent twentieth-century 'bard to Anglo-Saxon'.<sup>541</sup>

J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973), Reader in English Language, University of Leeds 1920-25; Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon, Pembroke College, Oxford 1925-1945, Merton Professor of English Language and Literature 1945-1959,<sup>542</sup> best known as the author of *The Hobbit*,<sup>543</sup> *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*<sup>544</sup>—composed, from the 1920s to the 1950s, a very substantial body of poetry in alliterative versifications imitative of Old English and Norse—including some 5,000 full-lines in the Old English style—most of which remained unpublished during the author's lifetime.

Now perceptible as part of a secret history of twentieth-century English poetry, this huge archaic Nordic iceberg of which only tips had broken the surface, began to emerge only since the *end* of the century (1980s); and continues to emerge.

Tolkien's retelling from Old Norse sources (the *Eddas* and the *Völsunga Saga*) of the Volsung-Nibelung legendry—Modern English recreations of the Eddic alliterative versifications *fornyrðislag*, *ljóðahátt*, and *málahátt*—dating from the (early) 1930s,

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<sup>537</sup> Julian Eilmann, "Cinematic Poetry: J. R. R. Tolkien's Poetry in the *Lord of the Rings* Films," in Eilmann and Turner, *Tolkien's Poetry*, 177-203.

<sup>538</sup> Phelpstead, "Auden," 444; Shippey, "Tolkien's Development," 22.

<sup>539</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 210.

<sup>540</sup> Tolkien, Foreword to the Second Edition of *The Lord of the Rings* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966); Scull and Hammond, *Chronology*, indicates December 1937-October 1948.

<sup>541</sup> W. H. Auden, "A Short Ode to a Philologist," l. 45, in Davis and Wrenn, *English and Medieval Studies*, 12.

<sup>542</sup> Scull and Hammond, *Chronology*, 113, 132, 292, 543.

<sup>543</sup> (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937).

<sup>544</sup> ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977).

were published in *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, 2009;<sup>545</sup> *The Fall of Arthur*, upon which Tolkien was occupied from 1931 till at least 1934, appeared in 2013;<sup>546</sup> publication of Tolkien's own translations of *Beowulf*, and his associated writings, impends at time of writing.<sup>547</sup>

The undated (late), untitled 16 lines on the 'Istari' (wizards) were first published in *Unfinished Tales* in 1980.<sup>548</sup> Publication just over a decade posthumously (1985) of *The Lays of Beleriand* included the two unfinished versions, totalling at 3092 full-lines, of "The Lay of the Children of Húrin", c.1918-c.1925;<sup>549</sup> "King Sheave" (Scyld Scēfing) and related material, drafted initially in the mid-late 1930s, was eventually published in *The Lost Road and Other Writings*.<sup>550</sup> Tolkien's 'dramatic dialogue' between 'two fictitious Anglo-Saxons [...]',<sup>551</sup> in the aftermath of the Battle of Maldon, 991 AD,<sup>552</sup> "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son", its compositional history dating back to the early '30s,<sup>553</sup> was published in 1953.<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> Tolkien, *Sigurd*, 5. Shippey, review of *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*; "Writing into the Gap".

<sup>546</sup> Tolkien, *Arthur*, 10-11; Scull and Hammond, *Chronology*, 152, 176.

<sup>547</sup> *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary, together with Sellic Spell* by J. R. R. Tolkien, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, May 22, 2014). For Tolkien's intense engagement with *Beowulf*, see Michael D. C. Drout, *Beowulf and the Critics* by J. R. R. Tolkien (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002).

<sup>548</sup> *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980). Citations refer to London: HarperCollins, 1998.

<sup>549</sup> Tolkien, *Lays*, 6-118; dating: 3-5, 81, 94, 131.

<sup>550</sup> *The Lost Road and Other Writings: Language and Legend before The Lord of the Rings*, vol. 5 of *The History of Middle-earth*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987). Citations refer to London: HarperCollins, 1993.

<sup>551</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 219, cf. 350; Scull and Hammond, *Chronology*, 392.

<sup>552</sup> Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), 143. Tom Shippey, "Boar and Badger: An Old English Heroic Antithesis?" *Leeds Studies in English* 16 (1985): 220-39; "Tolkien and 'The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth,'" in John Rateliff, et al., *Leaves from the Tree: J. R. R. Tolkien's Shorter Fiction* (n.p.: Tolkien Society, 1991), 5-16; Phelpstead, "Auden," 441-42; Thomas Honegger, "'The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth': Philology and the Literary Muse," *Tolkien Studies* 4 (2007), 189-99.

<sup>553</sup> Scull and Hammond, *Reader's Guide*, 407.

<sup>554</sup> *Essays and Studies 1953* (London: John Murray, 1953), 1-18.

I write alliterative verse with pleasure, though I have published little beyond the fragments in *The Lord of the Rings*, except for “The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth” [...] I still hope to finish a long poem on *The Fall of Arthur* in the same measure.<sup>555</sup>

Each of these works merits studies unto themselves, as could Tolkien’s recreative (which again includes metrical) engagement with *Middle* English poetry. The economy and shape of the present chapter enforces limits, and according to Shippey, the alliterative verse in *Rings* represents Tolkien’s supreme accomplishment in the revived form.

Documentation invaluable to study of Tolkien’s versecraft is the resource of the author’s own recorded performances, taped 1952, which include most of the alliterative poetry in *Rings*, declaimed with no inconsiderable bardic panache.<sup>556</sup> George Sayer testifies ‘I then asked him to record what he thought one of the best pieces [...] in [*Rings*] and he recorded part of “The Ride of the Rohirrim” ’.<sup>557</sup>

They are also discriminable from Tolkien’s vast posthumously-published oeuvre in that they were finished and published by their author; inclusion in his principal opus makes them part of a work actually emerging in due course, and one of great cultural impact. ‘Tolkien’s major [...] finest [...] best [...] achievements in alliterative poetry of the Old English type’<sup>558</sup> ‘appear [...] in [*Rings*] [...] very fortunately [...] as [...] Jones says [it] may well contain the most-read poetry of the twentieth-century’: ‘There is a good case to be made [...] that Tolkien is the most popular poet of the twentieth century [...] the verse embedded throughout *The Lord of the Rings* [...] must count as the most widely read poetry of the century.’<sup>559</sup> Phelpsstead makes the point that the

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<sup>555</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 219.

<sup>556</sup> *The Tolkien Audio Collection*, read by J. R. R. Tolkien and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollins AudioBooks HCCD 921, 2002, 4 CDs.

<sup>557</sup> “Tolkien and the Tape Recorder,” *Too Many Books and Never Enough: The Weblog of Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull*, December 31, 2013, <http://wayneandchristina.wordpress.com/2013/12/31/tolkien-and-the-tape-recorder/>

<sup>558</sup> Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 21, 25; “Alliterative Verse by Tolkien,” in *The J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D. C. Drout (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 11.

<sup>559</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 13.

alliterative verse in *Rings* ‘must be the most widely read alliterative poetry of the twentieth century, *if not of any period.*’<sup>560</sup>

Claims Shippey, ‘If anything shows what alliterative poetry can do in modern English, it is the nine examples of it to be found in [*Rings*].’<sup>561</sup>

I find these nine to be, in narrative order:

- 1) Treebeard’s List, 17 full-lines (including Pippin’s suggestion) (*Rings*, 464-65, 586);
- 2) the Rohirric ‘call to arms’, ‘Arise now, arise, Riders of Théoden!’, 3 full-lines (*Rings*, 517);
- 3) the ‘staves’ of Malbeth the Seer, 12 full-lines (*Rings*, 781);
- 4) the ‘song of Rohan’ ‘From dark Dunharrow in the dim morning [...]’, 21 full-lines (*Rings*, 803);
- 5) a variant of 2), Théoden’s, ‘Arise, arise, [...]’ 5 full-lines (*Rings*, 838);
- 6) Éomer’s ‘Mourn not overmuch!’, 3 full-lines (*Rings*, 843);
- 7) Éomer’s ‘staves’, ‘Out of doubt, out of dark [...]’, 4 full-lines (*Rings*, 847);
- 8) the ‘song of the Mounds of Mundburg’, ‘We heard of the horns in the hills ringing, [...]’, 27 full-lines (*Rings*, 849);
- 9) lines at Théoden’s funeral, partly a variant of 7), ‘Out of doubt out of dark [...]’, 5 full-lines (*Rings*, 976).

The pagination above is keyed to the complete text: Tolkien himself did not conceive of his book as a trilogy.<sup>562</sup> As they occur ‘dramatically’ within the prose narrative, they are untitled, hence I shall avail myself of this enumeration as an apparatus of reference.

To 2), 5), 6), 7), 9), heroic battle-cries and ‘epitaphs’<sup>563</sup> or ‘dirges’,<sup>564</sup> of which none exceeds 5-full-lines’ length, might conveniently be applied the Old Norse term *lausavísur* if only in the literal sense of ‘loose verses’.

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<sup>560</sup> Phelpstead, “Auden,” 444. Italics added.

<sup>561</sup> Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 21.

<sup>562</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 221.

<sup>563</sup> Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 25.

<sup>564</sup> Shippey, “Alliterative Verse,” 10.

More substantial are **4** (21 full-lines) and **8** (27 full-lines), which might well be classified generically, in style though not really in *scale*, as heroic-elegiac ‘lays’<sup>565</sup>—purportedly barbarian and oral-formulaic, concerned with warfare and ascribed to the ‘maker[s]’ of Rohan.

Regarding the apportioning in the sections published as volumes, **1**) and **2**) appeared in *The Two Towers*:<sup>566</sup> the rest in *The Return of the King*. This narrative disposition of the alliterative poetry is not insignificant.

There is a good deal of ‘embedded’ verse, of many forms and styles: as Phelpstead observes, ‘Most of the verse in [*Rings*] is not in alliterative metre’<sup>567</sup>—implying Tolkien ordained this form for certain poems not others. That this verse is patterned after Old English models was recognised early, but merely in the most elementary fashion, in the history of Tolkien criticism:<sup>568</sup> hitherto, only Shippey appears to have published *scansion* of any of it, supplying analyses of **3**) lines 1, 3a, 4b, 7,10, 12, **6**), and lines 20-27 of **8**).<sup>569</sup> It is, then, associated within the fictional ‘subcreated’ ‘secondary world’<sup>570</sup> with the Anglo-Saxon (Mercian) -style culture of the ‘Riders of Rohan’,<sup>571</sup> (‘Rohirrim’, ‘Sons of Eorl’):<sup>572</sup> all but **1**) and **3**) are delivered by Eorlings, but all nine actually are *connected* with Rohan: **1**) is spoken by an ‘Ent’ in Fangorn Forest, **3**) is spoken at Helm’s Deep. Thus *all nine* occur in the Rohirric *cultural ambit*.

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<sup>565</sup> Shippey, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), e.g. 233-34 passim.

<sup>566</sup> (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954).

<sup>567</sup> Phelpstead, “Auden,” 444.

<sup>568</sup> Mary Quella Kelly, “The Poetry of Fantasy: Verse in *Lord of the Rings*,” John Tinkler, “Old English in Rohan,” in *Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on J. R. R. Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings*, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 170-200, 164-69.

<sup>569</sup> Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 23-25. NB, my scansion of **3**), Malbeth’s staves disagrees with Shippey’s in several important respects.

<sup>570</sup> See esp. “On Fairy-Stories,” in *The Monsters*, 122ff. (132, 138, 156ff.), and e.g. *Letters*, 154-56 passim.

<sup>571</sup> Shippey, *Road*, 111-15; Phelpstead, “Auden,” 445.

<sup>572</sup> *Rohan* is Elvish (Sindarin)>collective noun *Rohirrim*, thus an Elvish exonym; the endonym, *Eorlingas*, ‘earlings’, descendants of Eorl; earlier endonym *Éothéod*, means, like the Elvish exonyms, ‘horse-people’. The Rohirrim call their realm the *Ridenna-mearc*>*Riddermark*, or *Mark*—calquing *Mercia*.

Verse in this form does *not* occur in Hobbitic, Elvish, or Gondorian contexts. Alliterative verse appears when the narrative moves into Rohan, suggesting that there obtains among the Eorlings a peculiar cultural expectation that poetic utterance is to be enunciated in accentual-alliterative metre, quite consistently with their cultural correspondence to Anglo-Saxondom.

Shippey remarks that, according to the fictional conceit, alliterative verse must be an instance of *stylistic 'translation'*. Tolkien's Modern English adaptation of early medieval Germanic alliterative poetry *represents something equivalent* to it in the secondary world: the Rohirrim are endowed with the trappings of (Mercian) Anglo-Saxons (with linguistically Gothic ancestors),<sup>573</sup> and heroic lays in alliterative verse as a thisworldly equivalent to their stage and style of culture.

As Phelpstead perceives, Tolkien represents Malbeth's prophecy in alliterative verse because the metre is intended as suited to it, as an ancient, vatic, utterance, occult and immemorially-transmitted by the wise<sup>574</sup>—appearing to be remembered only by High Elves Elrond and Galadriel and by the Dúnedain, disinherited remnant of Aragorn's race.<sup>575</sup>

Shippey speculates 'since the prophecy comes from more than a thousand years in Aragorn's past, in the Riders' far prehistory [...] from a culture [...] not theirs, the prophecy must presumably have been rendered into this poetic form by Aragorn', and compares this state of affairs to that specified by Tolkien for Aragorn's recitation of poem spoken by 'a forgotten poet long ago in Rohan'.<sup>576</sup> Amidst the 'high [...] green' barrows 'where the sires of Théoden sleep', recalling the mounds of Sutton Hoo (or earlier tumuli elsewhere in Britain) or Gamla Uppsala or Lejre, he

began to chant softly in a slow tongue [...] there was a strong music in it. 'That, I guess, is the language of the Rohirrim,' said Legolas; 'for it is like to this land itself; rich and rolling in part, and else hard and stern as the mountains. But I cannot guess what it means, save that it is laden with the sadness of Mortal Men.'

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<sup>573</sup> Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales*, 374.

<sup>574</sup> Phelpstead, "Auden," 444.

<sup>575</sup> Galadriel: 503; Elrond, his sons, 775, 781; the Dúnedain: 786, 788, etc.

<sup>576</sup> Shippey, "Tolkien's Development," 22.

Aragorn translates and adapts the chant from ‘the language of the Rohirrim’, (=Old English) ‘into the Common Speech’ (=Modern English), revealing a heroic-elegiac (end-rhymed) lament beginning, ‘Where now the horse and the rider? Where is the horn that was blowing?’ (*Rings*, 507-508), obviously developed from *The Wanderer*’s *ubi sunt*, lines 92-96, *Hwær cwōm mearg? Hwær cwōm mago?* [...].

This begins to token how Tolkien’s writing destabilises, transverts if not subverts, among numerous other received generic distinctions those between ‘translation’ and ‘original’, even between real and invented language, extant and ‘asterisk-’ text. Phelpstead’s caveat that *Beorhtnoth* is ‘not a translation though it includes [translated Old English] lines [...]’ is liable provoke theoretical debate over the definition of the word and concept ‘translation’, including the ‘translations’ of, for example, Pound. Tolkien may hitherto have been a less familiar case, but he presents an extremely provocative one in the context of such discourses.

Amidst the copious ancillary matter with which Christopher Tolkien has contextualised the Volsung poems is “Appendix C”, a version of the first eight stanzas of the Old Norse *Atlakviða* in Old English verse in *Old English*.<sup>577</sup> —A modern translation, by a speaker of Modern English, of a genuine Old Norse poem composed in *málahátt* and *fornyrðislag*, into the Old English of twentieth-century philology and into that discipline’s reconstruction of Old English verse. Shippey’s speculation, among other ‘things we should be thinking about’, that Tolkien ‘wanted to see how *the language itself* affected expression, perhaps *created* expression [...] a question of enormous scope’ is immensely suggestive.<sup>578</sup> The *Lost Road* / “Notion Club” material features fragments of dream-poetry in fictional Atlantean and in several chronologically-calibrated forms of ancient Germanic,<sup>579</sup> including an Old English verse on ‘sea-fever’ adapting lines from *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*.<sup>580</sup>

This—compare Tolkien’s ‘translating’ of his intertextual “Sheave” from Modern English into Old English recalling *Beowulf*—*Hwæt! Wé on géardagum of Gársecge/fyrne gefrignon* [...] (or did he ‘hear’ it in Old English in the first

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<sup>577</sup> 368-73; alludes intertextually to *Beowulf*.

<sup>578</sup> Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 27. Italics added.

<sup>579</sup> Tolkien, *Lost Road*, 84; “The Notion Club Papers,” in *Sauron Defeated*, 243-44.

<sup>580</sup> *Seafarer* lines 36-38, 44-46, 59b, 60a; *Wanderer* line 82a.

place...?)<sup>581</sup>—is furthermore a *typical* Tolkienian procedure, examples of which, identifiable in variant forms of differing degrees of elaboration, could readily be very greatly multiplied. One of the piquant challenges presented by critical commentary on Tolkien's writing is the issue of how one should regard and nominate, conceptually and generically, such productions. 'Translation' or 'original' composition? 'Pastiche'? Hall remarks "Beorhtnoth" "reads as though Tolkien was imagining himself channelling the missing lines from [...] *Maldon*",<sup>582</sup> rather as "Notion Club" suggests some kind of 'visionary' oneiric clairaudience, in 'big dreams', of ancient (including 'invented') languages, accompanied by mythopoeic images, may have been part of Tolkien's creative process.

Shippey, as he has with the linguist's 'calque', has developed the philological concept of 'asterism': the convention of prefixing the glyph to indicate a comparative reconstruction of a word not attested but which must have existed.<sup>583</sup> In his Tolkien criticism Shippey has applied this philological usage to Tolkien's analogously philologically reconstructive *poiesis*, in which pedantic 'asterisk'-reconstruction transcends into poetic (re-/) creation, enabling him to speak not only of 'asterisk-words', but of 'asterisk-poems', 'asterisk-things', indeed 'asterisk-worlds'.<sup>584</sup>

Although Shippey extrapolates this procedure appositely from Tolkien's professional discipline to his activities as writer, a kinship might also be postulated, suggestively if controversially, between what Tolkien is doing and a familiar species of literary mentality and experimentation associated with such Modernists and Postmodernists as Pound (especially the role of translation in his poetry, and his allusive technique of intertissued partial translation or semi-quotation) and Borges; and via Borges, the work of the (medievalist) semiotician, Eco.<sup>585</sup>

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<sup>581</sup> Tolkien, *Sauron Defeated*, 273. (Tolkien prefers the acute to the macron.)

<sup>582</sup> Mark F. Hall, "The Theory and Practice of Tolkien's Alliterative Verse," *Mythlore* 25, 1/2 (Fall/Winter 2006): 47.

<sup>583</sup> Shippey, *Road*, 8, 17, 61, 65, 303-09 *passim*. 'Calque': e.g. 92-93, 209-10 *passim*.

<sup>584</sup> Shippey, "Poems by Tolkien in Other Languages," in *Tolkien Encyclopedia*, 514-15.

<sup>585</sup> Hugh Magennis, "Some Modern Writers and Their *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*," *The Old English Newsletter*, 24/3 (1991): 14-18; Fernando Gálvan, "Rewriting Anglo-Saxon: Notes on the Presence of Old English in Contemporary Literature," *SELIM: Journal of the Spanish Society for Medieval English Language and Literature*, 2 (1992): 70-90; M. J. Toswell, "Jorge Luis Borges and Medieval Germanic Literatures," *Old English Newsletter* 43, no. 1 (2012), accessed as 'on-line' September 7, 2014,



The present chapter will treat the alliterative verse in *Rings* as a triptych, in each of whose three sections Tolkien is presented as reviving, in his poetry in this metre, three metaphorical ‘vanished voices’: the Language of the Dead; the speech of the trees; the heroic lays of mortal men. In this scheme may also be discerned a tentative indication of a generic typology for the Tolkienian alliterative-verse corpus—incomplete because restricted to, but of range even within, *Rings*: correlating in these instances to prophetic, gnomic, and heroic-elegiac modes, which may of course be recognised as answering to original early-medieval alliterative verse genres.

It has proved advantageous and appropriate to this discussion of Tolkien’s writing to engage with and make extensive reference to Shippey’s criticism, as the most substantial, informed and sympathetic, and foremost among the scant philologically and metrically detailed, commentary hitherto published on this poetry; this chapter seeks in part to respond directly to Shippey’s invitations to further work on Tolkien’s verse and versecraft.

Though the hero’s portion is claimed by the Rohirrim this leaves two other items, **3**), Malbeth’s ‘staves’, and **1**), Treebeard’s ‘list’. I noticed supra Phelpstead’s appreciation of how Tolkien differentiates his poetry in *Rings* formally, with the upshot that the choice of the alliterative verse-form is suggestive of formal signal of some apt connexion between form and content: the metre is no effect sans cause.

Phelpstead proceeds, ‘the meter is associated almost exclusively with the Ents and the Riders of Rohan for reasons that suggest that, like Lewis, Tolkien valued the meter’s antiquity [...] its associations with “native” English culture [...] The Ents [...] one of the [*sic*] oldest races on Middle-earth, [...] their poetry appropriately employs the ancient meter of the oldest surviving English poetry’, adding it ‘is also used for the prophecy of Malbeth [...] foreseeing Aragorn’s journey on the Paths of the Dead,

presumably to indicate the antiquity of the prophecy'.<sup>586</sup> In both these cases the metre is used, signally, for verse of gnomic, or vatic, wisdom, originating in the remote past.

Phelpstead's footnote and Shippey's page are the only extant commentary on this poem, designated by both 'the prophecy of Malbeth the seer'.<sup>587</sup> It certainly (in the fiction) is a prophecy, and, given the prophetic and apocalyptic models in Old English and Norse, this generic classification is not insignificant.<sup>588</sup> It could alternatively, as here, be denoted by "The *Staves* of Malbeth the Seer", on the grounds that this is how the character Gimli identifies the lines upon hearing them (*Rings*, 781). Also referred to internally as 'the *words* of the seer' (ibid.), Gimli's term is appealing since it *specifically* recognises the poem as *alliterative* verse, 'staves' being an authentically indigenous, carpentry-culture designation for verse-lines—alluding *pars pro toto* to the alliterative positions (e.g. 'headstave'), and to the inscription of early Germanic poetry in *runestaves*.<sup>589</sup> Alliterative lines written in runes were regarded as particularly magical and vatic.

Malbeth the Seer's prophecy presages, a millennium before the event (*Rings*, 1086-1092), Aragorn's fatefully destined 'errand' to 'summon' (*Rings*, 787) the Dead Men of Dunharrow,<sup>590</sup> finally to honour their broken oath to his distant ancestor Isildur—'The heir of him to whom the oath they swore'—**3**) line 10—to join the Last Alliance against Sauron:

'[...] the oath that they broke was to fight against Sauron, and they must fight therefore, if they are to fulfil it. For at Erech there stands yet a black stone that was brought, it was said, from Númenor by Isildur; and it was set upon a hill, and upon it the King of the Mountains swore allegiance to him in the beginning of the realm of

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<sup>586</sup> Phelpstead, "Auden," 444n43.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid.; Shippey, "Tolkien's Development," 22.

<sup>588</sup> Tolkien was profoundly engaged by the exploration of the themes of prophecy, fate, condign nemesis...and moving forests, in Shakespeare's *Scottish Play*: could 'Malbeth' be an allusive alteration of 'Macbeth'?

<sup>589</sup> Ross, *History*, 19-20, 167.

<sup>590</sup> See for instance Galadriel's lines, *Rings*, 503, Elrond's 'Bid Aragorn remember the words of the seer, and the Paths of the Dead', 781, and Aragorn's own 'for I go on a path appointed', 783.

Gondor. But when [...] Isildur summoned the Men of the Mountains to fulfil their oath [...] they would not: for they had worshipped Sauron in the Dark Years. Then Isildur said to their king: “Thou shalt be the last king. And if the West prove mightier than thy Black Master, this curse I lay upon thee and thy folk: to rest never until your oath is fulfilled. For this war will last through years uncounted, and ye will be summoned once again ere the end.” And they fled before the wrath of Isildur, and did not dare go forth to war on Sauron’s part; and they hid themselves in secret places in the mountains and [...] slowly dwindled in the barren hills. [...]’ (*Rings*, 781-2)

The Rohirrim, invaders who conquered after the extinction of ‘the Men of the Mountains’,<sup>591</sup> shun the Paths beneath ‘the black Dwimorberg,<sup>592</sup> the Haunted Mountain, in which was the Door of the Dead’ (*Rings*, 785). ‘No man knows’ what lies beyond: according to ‘ancient legend, now seldom spoken’ no man of Rohan has ‘ventured’ the ‘secret way that goes beneath the mountain to some forgotten end’ ‘since Baldor son of Brego passed the Door and was never seen among men again’.<sup>593</sup> ‘Folk say that Dead Men out of the Dark Years guard the way and will suffer no living man to come to their hidden halls [...]’ (*Rings*, 797).

‘It is said’, recounts Théoden further, that when the Rohirrim first took the land Brego was told by a ‘withered’ apparition at the threshold of the Door, in a voice that ‘came [...] as it were out of the ground’ (*De profundis...*): ‘*The way is shut [...] It was made by those who are Dead, and the Dead keep it, until the time comes.* [...] And no other tidings of the ancient dwellers in the mountains have our folk ever learned.’ (*Rings*, 798).<sup>594</sup> The Sleepless Dead of those ‘dark places’ ‘do not suffer the living to pass’ (*Rings*, 783,784,785,796). Aragorn claims ‘They may suffer me’ (*Rings*, 783). Théoden perceives Aragorn, ‘a kingly man of high destiny’, ‘may pass’, for ‘at last the time foretold has come’ (*Rings*, 707, 798)—‘[...]The Dead awaken; / for the hour is come for the oathbreakers’ (3), lines 4b-5.)

‘Dunharrow’, at the feet of the White Mountains, above Harrowdale valley with its hamlet Underharrow, is a traditional folk moot of the Eorlings, a stead for Thing and

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<sup>591</sup> The ethnohistorical stratigraphy of Rohan includes the Dunlanders and the Púkel-men—‘calquing’ the layered invasions and settlements (of which also was Kipling so conscious) of the British Isles.

<sup>592</sup> Old English *gedwimor*, ‘diabolic phantasm, necromantic apparition,’ cf. *Rings*, 437, 841.

<sup>593</sup> Like ‘Théoden’, ‘Thengel’, Old English poetic synonyms for ‘ruler’.

<sup>594</sup> Echoing Hrōðgār, *Beowulf* ll. 1350, 1355-7a.

wapentake (*Rings*, 799). From the text the toponym appears to refer specifically to ‘a looming cliff’ and its summit, ‘a frowning wall, a last outlier of the great roots of the Starkhorn’, traversed by a zigzagging path, ‘Steep as a stair [...] boring its way across the sheer slope of rock’—‘a great work of men’s hands in years beyond the reach of song’—leading through a ‘sharp brink’ to ‘a wide upland’ in ‘the lap of the great mountains’, the Firienfeld. This natural fortification, the *Hold* of Dunharrow’ (*Rings*, 793-4) modified by the crisscrossing road along which ‘no enemy could come [...] if [...] defended from above’, is bordered by the Dimholt (*Rings*, 797) which shrouds the ‘steep slopes’ of the Dwimorberg’ (*Rings*, 795).<sup>595</sup>

The Rohirrim are inheriting and adapting the site (in archaeological *longue durée*) from its former vanished occupiers—those ones ‘beyond the reach of song’ who made the road across the cliff-face: the ancient ‘Men of the Mountains’ who broke troth with Isildur to become the accursed, restless ‘Dead Men’ haunting the region. Their achievements, not limited to ‘the Hold’, strongly associate them with *megaliths*.

‘At each turn of the road there were great standing stones’, eroded effigies called by the Rohirrim ‘Púkel-men’ (*Rings*, 794);<sup>596</sup> across the Firienfeld ‘there marched a double line of unshaped standing stones that dwindled into the dusk and vanished into [...] the darkness beyond’ (*Rings*, 795). Such avenues of obelisks are familiar from Avebury, Carnac; the Dead Men are, further, associated with ‘the black stone’ ‘set upon the hill’ of Erech, upon which their last king (now ‘The King of the Dead’, *Rings*, 876) swore his allegiance to Isildur. Beyond these ‘lines of ancient stones’ stands ‘a single mighty stone like a finger of doom’ indicating ‘the Dark Door’ to the Paths of the Dead: ‘Signs and figures were carved above its wide arch too dim to read’ (*Rings*, 786, 795).

It seems probable Tolkien imagined the Door in a fashion inkeeping-with the megaliths: a dolmen- or cromlech-like portal of the kind appearing in such of his drawings as *The Elvenking’s Gate* or the pylon into the Lonely Mountain,<sup>597</sup> thus

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<sup>595</sup> NB the Old Englishry of all these toponyms.

<sup>596</sup> ‘*Púkel-men*. A Rohan name for the effigies of men of a vanished race. It represents OE *pūcel* (still surviving as *puckle*), one of the many forms of the *pūk-* stem (widespread in England, Wales, Ireland, Norway and Iceland) referring to a devil, or to a minor sprite, e.g. Puck, and often applied to ugly misshapen persons[...], Tolkien, “Nomenclature of *The Lord of the Rings*,” in Hammond and Scull, *Reader’s Companion*, 782.

<sup>597</sup> Scull and Hammond, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), 128 (fig. 121); Tolkien’s iconic 1937 cover-design for *The Hobbit*. The door is to be found on

another representation of ‘the Great Door, shaped like a Greek  $\pi$ ’ in the recurring lucid dreams from a lost antiquity recorded in “Notion Club”.<sup>598</sup> The ‘signs and figures’ recall cup-and-ring marks or other megalithic petroglyphs, *hällristningar*: Tolkien may have been thinking of Newgrange’s entrance-stone, inscribed with triskelions and chevroned lozenges.

Such was the dark Dunharrow, the work of long-forgotten men. Their name was lost and no song or legend remembered it. For what purpose they had made this place, as a town or secret temple or tomb of kings, none in Rohan could say. Here they laboured in the Dark Years, before ever a ship came to the western shores, or Gondor of the Dúnedain was built; and now they had vanished [...] (*Rings*, 795.)

In fact, the complicated terrain of Dunharrow, locus at once of geographical, historico-cultural, and thematic intensity, is not easy to visualise, and Tolkien, wontedly, made at least three sketches of the scene. These clearly depict the stairway zigzagging across the cliff, the bay of the Firienfeld, divided by the double avenue of menhirs, extending into a dark cleft between beetling folds of montane geology, ‘a[n] [...] opening at the mountains’ root’ (*Rings*, 786). Another, linear, view directly down the avenue reveals ‘deep into the glen [...] the Dark Door’ (ibid.) as a  $\pi$ -shaped introitus.<sup>599</sup> The lines of standing-stones ‘march’—that verb used twice (*Rings*, 794, 795) adumbrating the army of the dead Aragorn will resurrect from the Haunted Mountain; Merry perceives them as ‘old [...] hungry teeth’: (*Rings*, 795) the Door ‘gape[s] [...] like [a] mouth’.<sup>600</sup> The Door to the Paths of the Dead is thus a *type* of the ‘Hell-mouth’,<sup>601</sup> while Tolkien’s description and drawings do further suggest negative images of other carnal entrances.

An orifice into the belly of Sheol, that Door is the portal of this chapter,  $\pi$ .

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the spine. Like Newgrange and Stonehenge Tolkien’s dwarven megalithic structures often have astral alignments.

<sup>598</sup> *Sauron Defeated*, 206; ‘the Door  $\pi$  [...] is of the Megalithic’, 221; cf. the ‘towering ominous [...] door’ formed by ‘two huge [...] leaning[...] standing stones’, *Rings*, 138: the Barrow-Downs and their ‘wights’ bear much in common with the landscape, and history, of Dunharrow.

<sup>599</sup> Scull and Hammond, *Artist and Illustrator*, 170-71 (figs. 165-66).

<sup>600</sup> Cf. same simile applied to the Barrow-Downs’ menhirs, 137.

<sup>601</sup> See further Karl Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007).

Its symbolism includes that of an entrance into the *cultural* underworld of repressed collective memory. Diction in these passages constantly emphasises the *darkness* of Dunharrow and all its connexions. Galadriel foretells to Aragorn, ‘*dark* is the path appointed for thee [...]’ (*Rings*, 503); Aragorn declares, whilst the Paths of the Dead have been closed to the living since the advent of the Rohirrim ‘in this *dark* hour the heir of Isildur may use it, if he dare’; and immediately after his recitation of **3**), Gimli quibbles on *dark*’s connotation of the sense ‘(figuratively) obscure, difficult to understand’ implying the occult prophecy is also, in its reference to events yet to come to pass, a kind of *riddle*—a sense apposite to early medieval Germanic conceptions of poetics and hermeneutics: poetry as mantic, gnomic, as enigma, Malbeth’s ‘staves’ as runestaves. As Shippey remarks of the Old English gnomic poems, ‘*dēop, deorc, dygel, dyrne*’.<sup>602</sup>

Dunharrow is ‘*dark* Dunharrow’: combination with the adjective recurs, producing the impression of a formulaic poetic epithet from proverbial idiom, as line 1 of **4**), ‘From dark Dunharrow in the dim morning [...]’. The Door is ‘the Dark Door’ (in the *dim* holt), the Men of Dunharrow are a relic, and victim, of ‘the Dark Years’. The passage by ‘the Grey Company’ along the Paths of the Dead is dreadful for its utter darkness: the Dark Door is ‘like the mouth of night’ from which ‘fear flowed like a grey vapour’. The intensity of the Stygian fuliginousness of the catacomb-necropolis is at once expressively registered and leavened by the comedic touch, that even the racially troglodytic, spelunking dwarf Gimli is almost too terror-stricken to enter. ‘Plung[ing]’ with effort into the ‘gloom’ ‘at once blindness came upon him’; soon even their ‘dim [...] torches’ go out ‘and could not be rekindled’ (*Rings*, 786-7). Of course this darkness of Dunharrow is multitudinously symbolic, an archetypal darkness; a moral darkness; a theological darkness: but also a *historical* darkness—of obliterated cultural memory. Tolkien, indeed, applies the same adjective *to the alliterative metre itself*.<sup>603</sup>

‘Forgotten men’ reiterates a variation on the poem’s ‘forgotten people’ (**3**) line 9b); the Paths, ‘a secret way that goes beneath the mountain to some forgotten end’. The paragraph quoted from page 795 also dwells upon the theme of *immemorial*

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<sup>602</sup> Shippey, *Wisdom*, 4.

<sup>603</sup> Tolkien, *Gawain*, 1-2.

*obliviation*—at least as far as *Merry* and his present *Rohirric* comrades are concerned: the road dates from ‘years beyond the reach of song’ (*Rings*, 794); the wrights, the *waldendwyrhtan*,<sup>604</sup> are namelessly lost and forgotten, the purposes of their awesome works, standing ruinous, is unknowably mysterious: ‘dark’.

One should recall the ‘forgotten poet long ago in Rohan’ whose *ubi sunt* inspired by *The Wanderer*, audibly ‘laden with the sadness of Mortal Men’, lamenting the fleetingness of heroic glory, Aragorn is moved to recite amidst the barrows of Rohan. The *scop*’s name is ‘forgotten’—that word again—but according to Aragorn his song, ‘men still s[i]ng in the evening’. The burial-mounds prompt the contemplation, how ‘Many long lives of men it is since the golden hall was built’: ‘To the Riders [...] it seems so long ago [...] that the raising of this house is but the memory of a song [...] the years before are lost in the mist of time.’ (*Rings*, 507.) Earlier Aragorn describes the Rohirrim as ‘writing no books but singing many songs, after the manner of the children of Men before the Dark Years’ (*Rings*, 430). In Rohan, poetry—epic-heroic alliterative verse, blurring into myth—is History: is *memory*, and it must be noteworthy that the description of the barrows, the scene in which Aragorn recites ‘Where now the horse and the rider’? includes the beautifully gratuitous detail that a kind of flower called *sybelmynë* cover the mounds, ‘grow where *dead men rest*’.

Another symbol of memory, this is Tolkien’s recreation—drawing on his special knowledge and love of English history, landscape, and flora—of the Pasque-flower, a rare wildflower of chalk grassland fond of old barrows and dykes, hence its folkname Dane’s Blood; whilst its other name links it with Easter resurrection; there could also be a glance at the poppies of Flanders.<sup>605</sup> In ‘Common Speech’ the Rohirric *sybelmynë*, which is, consistent with the conceit of ‘translation’, compounded of Old English *sym(b)le+myne*, is called ‘Evermind’ (*Rings*, 507), cf. Forget-me-not, *Vergissmeinnicht*, not to mention Remembrance of the Fallen: Tolkien notes that *myne*

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<sup>604</sup> *The Ruin*, l. 7a: R. F. Leslie, ed., *Three Old English Elegies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), 51.

<sup>605</sup> ‘The name thus resembles “forget-me-not”, but the flower ‘is intended’ to be ‘an imagined variety of [...] the pasque-flower [...] but smaller and white like the wood anemone’, but Tolkien refrains, with characteristic reticence, from *explaining why* he is thinking of the pasque-flower: Tolkien, “Nomenclature”, 780.

‘has the sense ‘memory’’.<sup>606</sup> As Tolkien knew, other now-scarce native wildflowers are—with an uncontrived symbolism, national historico-cultural and ecological, we may term Tolkienian—found on long-undisturbed ancient sites on the chalk downs of Wiltshire, Berkshire-cum-Oxfordshire (Tolkien’s ‘Barrow-Downs’), such as Clustered Bellflower at the Cerne Abbas Giant, and Knapweed Broomrape at Silbury Hill. Harebell, not infrequently white and like *symbelmynë* of aster-like appearance, is also common at these locations.

All this stands in stark manifold contrast to the (apparent) oblivion of the builders of Dunharrow, *genāp under nihthelm swā hēo nō wāere*,<sup>607</sup> into the *darkness* of prehistoric time, a contrast, implicitly symbolised, between opposed kinds of death and legacy: the past that is passed but honoured, and the past that lingers, but, accursed, haunts. The dead kings of Rohan are dead and buried, but, remembered, are at ‘rest’: the Dead Men of Dunharrow, undead, ‘forgotten’, *culturally* ‘buried’, are ‘sleepless’. The collective psyche of Middle-earth is haunted by ‘forgotten’ history, by what it has repressed; accordingly, it is doomed, if abreactively, to *Wiederholungszwang*—the compulsion to repeat.

Fictional exigency logically requires Tolkien’s systematic ‘translation’-conceit, but in a sense disingenuously, as the book does strive to encode a fictionalised version of distinctively *British* history, its *longue durée* layeredness and the temper this legacy begets, linking Tolkien’s work with his Old English exemplars on the one hand, but also on the other with Kipling, and a whole tradition of English meditations on transience and palimpsestuous inheritance:

[*Beowulf*’s] illusion of historical truth and perspective [...] is [...] a product of art. The author has used an instinctive historical sense—a part [...] of the ancient English [...] melancholy temper [...] [and] strong sense of tradition [...] of which *Beowulf* is a supreme expression [...] the real resemblance of the *Aeneid* and *Beowulf* lies in the constant presence of a sense of many-storied antiquity [...] with its natural accompaniment, stern [...] noble melancholy [...]<sup>608</sup>

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<sup>606</sup> *Ibid.*, 780.

<sup>607</sup> *The Wanderer*, 1. 96.

<sup>608</sup> Tolkien, “Monsters,” 7, 23, 46.



If the Riders of the Mark equate to Anglo-Saxons, the Men of Dunharrow, like the unquiet wights of the Barrow-Downs, and like them, but unlike the ‘sires of Théoden’, dead men who do *not* ‘rest’ or ‘sleep’, assume the role of the megalith-builders: their surviving structures suggest a Neolithic-to-Bronze Age provenance; culturally and linguistically remote from us, sundered, their enigmatic, dreadful monuments never positively to be explained.

Tolkien would, I suggest, have felt strongly about these ancestors in the peculiar way that, *unlike* the Anglo-Saxons, the people of the earthworks and megaliths *biforen us weren* remain *beyond contact* not only *linguistically* but also *soteriologically*. The ‘Signs and figures’ carven on the lintel of the Door are ‘too *dim* to read’, but are they simply unintelligible, incommunicative, uninterpretable? In the ‘dread’ful ‘horror’ of the ‘gloom’ ‘there seemed an endless whisper of voices [...], a murmur of words in no tongue [they had] ever heard’. (*Rings*, 788, 787). The ‘forgotten people’ of ‘the grey twilight’ ( **3** ) line 9) have been swallowed up by a kind of purgatorial oubliette. ‘Who shall call them?’ demands line 8b urgently—when they are ‘beyond the reach’ even of philology? Their language, ‘signs’, ‘tongue’, cannot be recovered and understood; no ‘song or legend’ is bequeathed us: even ‘their name was lost’. *How might* they be ‘called’? How might one *remember* them in one’s *prayers*? How might the *perdu* Dead Men, hopelessly lost, be redeemed, into language and story, into memory and history, and ‘the history of Salvation’?<sup>609</sup>

‘For what purpose they had made this place, as a town or secret temple or tomb of kings, none in Rohan could say’: yet the Rohirric name, as rendered by Old English, is intelligible and both lexically, and phonically, significant. ‘Dunharrow’ is:

A modernisation of [...] Rohan *Dūnhærg* ‘the heathen fane on the hillside’, so-called because this refuge of the Rohirrim at the head of *Harrowdale* was on the site of a sacred place of the old inhabitants (now the Dead Men). The element *hærg* can be modernised in E[nglish] because it remains an element in place-names, notably *Harrow (on the Hill)*.<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> Tolkien, *Exodus*, 33, 62.

<sup>610</sup> Tolkien, “Nomenclature,” 769.

The Old English etymology of the toponym discloses that the Rohirric invaders when they took and named the land *had*, initially, appreciated the ‘purpose’ of ‘the long-forgotten men’ who had ‘made this place’: it was recognised, in their (the invaders’) language, as a *hærg*, in Tolkien’s gloss a ‘heathen fane’, cf. ‘secret temple’, ‘a sacred place of [...] the Dead Men’. The place-name, at least, can then be made to speak, can be read, recovered. ‘Dunharrow’ *could* be an English placename, < \**Dūnhærg*: it is an ‘asterisk-place-name’.<sup>611</sup> In Tolkien’s use of the word ‘town’ here one may also catch a nod to the form of his coined onomastics. The element *dun-* being not the adjective but (as above) *dūn*, the Old English etymon, via the vowel-shift, of ‘down’ in the sense of ‘hill’, as in ‘downland’, ‘the Downs’—an English word but one related to *Celtic* vocabulary (*Tintagel*, *Dinas Emrys*) meaning ‘(hill-)fort’, ‘city’; also Old English *tūn*>*town*, ‘an enclosure, a settlement’. This being so, the name ‘Dunharrow’ harks back to an Old English source—which is yet inbuilt-with a still more ancient historico-linguistic stratum.<sup>612</sup>

Thus intelligible historico-linguistic sense can be gleaned, ‘harrowed’ from ‘Harrow’—a kind of philological redemption of the word. However, the place-name ‘Harrow’<Old English *hearg*, ‘heathen fane’ must scrupulously be discriminated from its homophone ‘harrow, -ing’, referring literally or figuratively to the agricultural implement, witness the auctorial caveat ‘The word has no connexion with *harrow* the implement,’ adding the discreetly aggrieved aside ‘the Swedish *Dunharva* may be suspected of having’ done so.<sup>613</sup>

Incontrovertible though it is that its creator intended ‘Dunharrow’ to encode Old English *hearg*, ‘fane’; and indubitable, that this is the *primary* meaning, inscribed in *the toponym in the subcreated world*, in the culture and nomenclature of the fictional narrative, *misinterpretation* had however *already* arisen in the real world, due to ambiguous homophony and, not uninterestingly, in the case of translation into a cognate Germanic language, other shared Germanic lexemes of similar form.

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<sup>611</sup> There *is* in the real England a Harrowden, <OE *hearga-dūn*, ‘hill with heathen temples’—Ekwall, *Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 221: ‘Dunharrow,’ with the elements merely transposed looking-glasswise.

<sup>612</sup> Cf. Kipling’s poem on precisely this *longue-durée* sense of Albionic palimpsestuousness, “Puck’s Song,” ll. 25-28, rhyming ‘downs/towns’.

<sup>613</sup> Tolkien, “Nomenclature,” in Hammond and Scull, *Reader’s Companion*, 769.

Tolkien's 'harrow' could—due merely to the pullulating, polysemous, phonosemantic, sound-associative and meaning-quickening fecundity of language itself, the very matrix husbanded and harvested by the poet—evoke manifold connotations: less the agricultural implement (noun) and its use (verb) perhaps than the emotional or psychological figurative usage (usually as an adjective, of a traumatic experience) developed from it.

And of course another possibility also immediately springs to mind. By association, a third denotation, that expressed by another distinct but homonymic word, and one which *could not* be present *within the narrative* in its subcreated world, but which is, I suggest, extremely likely to be alluded to *by the narrative*, present for the reader 'outside' it in this world. Indeed, it scarcely seems conceivable Tolkien did not intend this part of his story to evoke this third sense, even though he does not appear to have acknowledged it. The royal road to Tolkien's meaning might well be philology.<sup>614</sup> It will be as well to discriminate and examine the three homonyms in question, three in Modern English homographic and homophonic words, and to explicate the origins and affiliations of each.

The first is of course the one Tolkien specifies as the word he intended, 'harrow', the noun, 'heathen fane' (or famous Church of England public school) < Old English *hærg*.

The second is the farming tool (the noun giving of course regular verbal inflexions)—the confusion Tolkien takes pains explicitly to condemn as having 'no connexion,' in "Nomenclature".<sup>615</sup> According to the OED this is, as attested, a Middle English word, *harwe*, its earliest citation from the early fourteenth century *Cursor Mundi*.<sup>616</sup> Reconstructed, 'asterisk-'Old English *\*hearwe*, *\*hearze* can be postulated, but there is Old Norse *hervi*—and cognates in other Germanic tongues, cf. the Swedish *harv* repudiated by Tolkien. The OED cautions 'but the form relations are obscure, and the ulterior origin uncertain'. This 'harrow' bequeaths the hoary but graphic

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<sup>614</sup> I am indebted lexicographically in this account to the OED, Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary*, and T. F. Hoad, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), which are unanimous in their testimony.

<sup>615</sup> 769.

<sup>616</sup> Tolkien's connexion with the OED: Peter Gilliver, et al., *The Ring of Words: Tolkien and the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

English saw ‘the toad under the harrow’, from which, inflected with the in this case adjectival *-ing* suffix derives the figurative expression for a lacerating/crushing experience.

The *third* is the pregnantly significant ‘harrow’ Tolkien *omits* explicitly to adduce, meaning ‘to raid and plunder with an army’ <Old English *herzian*, the verbal form of a common Germanic noun represented by Old English *here*, ‘army, host of warriors’, Old Norse *herr*, cf. German term for the ‘Wild Hunt’, *das Wilde Heer*, the Danes’ ‘great heathen *here*’ of the Chronicle, hence *herepaþ*, a road used by the Anglo-Saxon army—such as the Ridgeway across those Downs in the lap of the island, which at so many points suggest themselves as Tolkien’s model for his *long durée* territories of Albionic cultural palimpsest. The OED’s earliest attestation is Old English, c.1000, from a homily by Ælfric in the form *hergung*, ‘army-raiding’, which produces ‘harrowing’—in the sense strongly associated with Christ’s triumphant descent into and ‘raiding’ of Hell betwixt Crucifixion and Resurrection, liberating ‘souls held captive there since the beginning of the world’.<sup>617</sup> It occurs indeed in Ælfric’s Homily XV, for Easter Sunday: ‘[...] *forðon þe ure Hælend Crīst tōbræc helle-gatu [...] Hell oncnēow Crīst, ðā ðā hēo forlēt hyre hæfilingas ūt, þurh ðæs Hælendes hergunge [...]*’<sup>618</sup> Armies also ‘harrow’ in the OED’s English texts from Old English into Early Modern, but ‘The Harrowing of Hell’ is conspicuous as a specific distinctive idiom; there is also the verb ‘harry’, producing the variant ‘Harrying of Hell’. The two are twin by-forms deriving from *herzian*, the OE *z* developing from an *i/j* represented earlier, and elsewhere—e.g. Old Norse *herja*<Germanic *\*χarjōn, \*χarjaz*, ‘host, army’—undergoing further branching development to produce *y* and *(o)w* terminations in Middle English.

As Tolkien has stated that there is no lexical or etymological connexion (beyond homonymy) between ‘(Dun)harrow’<Old English *hearg* and the agricultural implement<Middle English *harwe*; but are we to accept that other semantic potentialities of Tolkien’s toponym truly have ‘no connexion’ with the narrative he

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<sup>617</sup> “Harrowing of Hell”, *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), 7:143-4; cf. s.v. “Hell”, 7:207-11.

<sup>618</sup> Benjamin Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: The Sermones Catholici or Homilies of Ælfric* (London: Ælfric Society, 1844), 1:226, 228.

attaches to it? Would Tolkien proscribe the innate capacity—*propensity*—of language for paronomasia, even phonetic association?

*Rings* is full of initiatory ordeals in the form of such archetypal ‘descents and returns’: ‘Journeys in the Dark’.<sup>619</sup>— The Fellowship undergoes such in the Mines of Moria, while Frodo and Sam suffer the tunnels of Shelob’s Lair (and, ultimately, the Samnath Naur). Aragorn’s enactment of the archetype, however, is the only one concerned specifically with ‘mortal’ (if undead) ‘men’ and performed by a mortal (if extraordinary) man; and furthermore the only instance in which a group, again composed solely of human beings, is by that personage *delivered from* the ‘dark place’,<sup>620</sup> in which they have been imprisoned. As a consequence, moreover, of the placenames *Dunharrow*, *Harrowdale*, *Underharrow*, the word ‘harrow’ is made to resound through a story in which a long-foretold appointed king comes, at that location, to release a number of his people from an indeterminate, ‘twilight’, ( **3** ) line 9a) Limbo-state of suspension in punishment for their sinful past.<sup>621</sup>

[...] Aragorn dismounted, and standing by the Stone [of Erech] he cried in a great voice:

‘Oathbreakers, why have ye come?’

And a voice was heard out of the night that answered him, as if from far away:

‘To fulfil our oath and have peace.’

Then Aragorn said: ‘The hour has come at last. [...] when all this land is clean of the servants of Sauron, I will hold the oath fulfilled, and ye shall have peace and depart forever. For I am Elessar, Isildur’s heir of Gondor (*Rings*, 789).<sup>622</sup>

I propose it may now readily be perceived that with his ‘Passing of the Grey Company’ and ‘Paths of the Dead’ Tolkien has created a fictional, Middle-earthly (and British-English) *typology* (in the Biblical exegetical sense) of *the Harrowing of Hell*.

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<sup>619</sup> Charles A. Huttar, “Hell and the City: Tolkien and the Traditions of Western Literature,” in *A Tolkien Compass*, ed. Jared Lobdell (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980), 126-55.

<sup>620</sup> Cf. eg. Isa. 9:2, *populus [...] in tenebris [...] regione umbrae mortis [...] etc*; Job 38:17, [...] *numquid apertae tibi sunt portae mortis et ostia tenebrosa vidisti [...]*

<sup>621</sup> Aragorn as a type of Christ: e.g. Deborah C. Rogers, “Everycloud and Everyhero: The Image of Man in Tolkien,” in Lobdell, *Compass*, 73-81.

<sup>622</sup> Cf. his parting benediction to the Dead Men, 876.

The foregoing philological pursuit of ‘harrow’ reveals how Tolkien’s deployment of the word condenses also the concept of Aragorn’s *helreið* as harrowing which *results in a here, and a here of einherjar* which *harries*.

Much more could be said to deepen and ramify this commentary, especially as regards Tolkien’s mythopoeic (and ethical) syncretism of Christian apocalypse with pagan heroic Old English and Norse eschatology. The horn heard by the wakened Dead ‘call [ing] them/from the grey twilight’, 3) lines 7-9, which Aragorn does wind at the Stone of Erech (*Rings*, 789), recalls Doomsday’s Last Trumpet—but also Gjallarhorn, sounded by Heimdallr to herald Ragnarøk(/r) (*Völuspá*, stanza 46).<sup>623</sup> and Alfred the Great’s summoning of the men of Somerset, Wiltshire, and Hampshire at Egbert’s Stone in the seventh week after Easter 878, the final muster before the momentous Battle of Edington,<sup>624</sup> which Tolkien probably first encountered in Sweet’s *Reader*. (The ‘Blowing Stone’ at Blowingstone Hill, Kingston Lisle in the Vale of the White Horse unites horn and stone in one megalithic entity.)

Very numerous other medieval folkloric and literary elements have been inwoven by Tolkien into his “Passing of the Grey Company”, including tales of apparitions gathering ominously at ancient monuments,<sup>625</sup> and especially the spectral-army traditions of ‘The Wild Hunt’.<sup>626</sup> Such exercise in Tolkienian *quellenforschung* for ‘sources and analogues’ proves instructive, but too extensive for inclusion here, as would chasing the call of horns through the enchanted forest of Tolkien’s works, back, perhaps, to his military service as a Signals Officer.

I wish rather to advance, following from my contention that “The Passing of the Grey Company” constitutes a Middle-earthly adumbration of the Harrowing of Hell, a construal of these twelve lines in *Rings* as a modern poem, an oracular invocation, reviving Old English alliterative metre as a trope for ‘The Language of the Dead’—as

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<sup>623</sup> Jónsson, *Eddukvæði*, 1:16; stanza 45, lines 2-12, in Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, 2:19; *Gylfaginning*, 51.

<sup>624</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, Peterborough Chronicle E, MS Laud 636.

<sup>625</sup> Leslie V. Grinsell, *Folklore of Prehistoric Sites in Britain* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1976).

<sup>626</sup> Margaret A. Sinex, “‘Oathbreakers, why have ye come?’: Tolkien’s ‘Passing of the Grey Company’ and the twelfth-century *Exercitus mortuorum*”, in *Tolkien the Medievalist*, ed. Jane Chance (New York: Routledge, 2003), 155-69.

a form of utterance itself ‘harrowed’ from a historico-cultural, lexico-metrical oblivious ‘underworld’, a literary ‘return of the repressed’, a ‘call’ing ‘from the grey twilight’ ( 3) 1.9a) of the archaic, chthonic. —“The Staves of Malbeth the Seer” thus assumes the aspect of a Tolkienian equivalent to Pound’s Canto I.

***Living Lore: Talking Trees.***

[...] of the old alliterative line and its generic character [...] Its origin is quite unknown; but the presence of closely allied forms, in the different Scandinavian and Teutonic languages, assures [...] a natural rise from some speech-[...] or tune-rhythm proper to the race and tongue. [...] no other poetry [...] contains [...] a metrical [...] arrangement more close to the naturally increased, but not denaturalised, emphasis of impassioned utterance, more thoroughly born from the primeval oak and rock.

—Saintsbury, *Historical Manual of English Prosody*.

One should note 1), “Treebeard’s list”, boasts the distinction of being the *first* piece of alliterative verse to be encountered by the reader of *Rings*. This must be significant in several ways. All the foregoing verse is accentual-syllabic and rhyming: alliterative verse in *Rings* debuts with Treebeard. In a majority of cases, one assumes, this must be the first alliterative verse the reader has ever encountered: trespassing bewildered with Merry and Pippin in the ancient enchanted Fangorn Forest bordering Rohan’s *emnett*, the reader encounters accentual-alliterative verse—asccribed to a talking tree.<sup>627</sup>

Tolkien’s intense, Romantic and as we would now see it proto-‘ecological’, love of trees is everywhere registered in his writings and drawings, and is culturally well-recognised of him.<sup>628</sup> Fangorn may be identified as the Tolkienian culmination of a recognisable strain, traceable from antiquity to Romanticism, of Anglo-Germanic tree-worship; but one of the reasons Treebeard and the Ents feel so right, are so loved by readers, is that the ‘tree-man’ seems to archetypally necessary: awe, love, nostalgia and affinity for, trees, a desire for communion with them as ensouled sentient beings, appears to be one of the profound human desires Tolkien’s ‘faerie’ fulfils.<sup>629</sup>

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<sup>627</sup> Cf. Bruce Dickins and Alan. S. C. Cross, eds., *The Dream of the Rood* (London: Methuen, 1934).

<sup>628</sup> Patrick Curry, *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien: Myth and Modernity* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 59-87.

<sup>629</sup> Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories,” 116-17; 145 passim; see further Alison Milbank, *Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians: The Fantasy of the Real* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

The great forest—the *Urwald*, *Teutoburgerwald*, the merry Greenwood—which once overspread most of Britain and Celtic-Teutonic Europe, looms large and tenaciously in the cultural imagination.<sup>630</sup> In the earliest surviving epic, Man’s first book, the first known hero—and ecocide—Gilgamesh confronts, and hubristically defeats, the giant guardian of the forest, Huwawa; the Druids and ancient Germans worshipped in sacred groves, and Tolkien’s philological specialisms yield the prosopopoeic *Rood*, *Qrvar-Oddr* as ‘Bark-man’; the mysterious *Cad Goddeu*, ‘Battle of the Trees’, in medieval Welsh (also a riddle of magical naming); the Norse Adam and Eve *Askr ok Embla* formed from trees, *Líf* and *Lífthrasir* sheltering in nourishing *Yggdrasil*.

Tree-people appear in such pictorial art as paintings by Bosch and Arcimboldo, and in many familiar illustrations. Tolkien’s envisaging of Ents may well have been aided by Rackham’s depictions of trees whose knurled boles, thrawn branches, clawing twigs and groping roots, recall and realise childhood apophenia by presenting wry-crabbed faces, knuckle-fingered limbs;<sup>631</sup> and he would have known the Green Man, ‘Jack-in-the-Green’, ‘wodewoses’, iconographically; from *Gawain*; and as speculated upon anthropologically as ‘vegetation-daemons’ by Frazer *et al.*

Thus by way of grisaille border: present space forbids further exploration of all this, and of the full import of Tolkien’s Ents, but I would further mention *fidchell/gwyddbwyll*,<sup>632</sup> ogham,<sup>633</sup> runic and alliterative-poetic ‘staves’, the etymological derivation of ‘book’ < ‘beech’ (books still have leaves), as additional gestures towards the close connexions between trees and the roots of poetic language and literacy in Celtic and Germanic culture (cf. the Classical Tree-Catalogue), related to the traditions of poetic knowledge and utterance inspired by the southing of wind

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<sup>630</sup> Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), 75-153.

<sup>631</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 261, 312.

<sup>632</sup> Ancient Celtic *tafl* game: the name, ‘wood-sense’, in both Irish and Welsh.

<sup>633</sup> Cf. Kipling’s ‘Oak [F], Ash [F], and Thorn’ [P]. Ogham has been called the ‘Tree-Alphabet’: see esp. the *Auraicept na n-Éces* and *In Lebor Ogaim*, thus ᚛ *Beith*, ‘birch’, runic  $\mathfrak{B}$ , ᚗ *Luis*, ‘herb’, or *caertheand* ‘rowan’, ᚈ *Fearn*, ‘alder’, ᚉ *Sail*, ‘sallow, willow’, cf. Lat. *salix*, ᚋ *Nion*, ‘ash’, and ᚔ *Onn*, ‘ash’, cf. runic  $\mathfrak{F}$ , ᚛ *Dair*, ‘oak’ (<P.I.E. \**doru-*, >‘door’, ‘druid’), cf. runic  $\mathfrak{F}$ , etc. Graves, *White Goddess*, 160-99.



in branches, sortilege using inscribed wands, et cetera. Treebeard himself is portrayed as a kind of philologist, linguistic philosopher, even Adamic poet, and as an oral-formulaic reciter—*þulr*—of traditional gnomic alliterative ‘staves’.

The word ‘ent’ was also of course derived by Tolkien from Old English poetry, wherein *eoten*, *ent*, cognate with Old Norse *jötunn*, denotes some non-specified kind of giant: ents (*eotenas*) appear alliterating with elves (*ylfe*) and orcs in a single full-line in *Beowulf* (112), in prodigious apposition to *untýdras* (monsters) and *gīgantas*, wiped out by the Flood. Hence insofar as the nature of the *eotenas* is specified in Tolkien’s sources they are the malevolent Titans of both Indo-European and Biblical traditions; they are also characterised in Old English poetry by an association with the ruins of Roman architecture witnessed and wondered at by the Anglo-Saxons. The ancient English imagined with awe that these edifices must have been the work of an ancient vanished race of giants—cf. ‘Cyclopean’ stonework, rather as an ettin appears as the builder of a fortification for the gods in *Gylfaginning* (34-35), prompting Wagner’s conception of his *Riesen* as the builders of Valhalla.<sup>634</sup> *Orþanc enta geweorc* appears in the gnomic *Maxims II* (line 2b), qualifying *ceastra* (<Latin *castra*) ‘seen from afar’, whilst (variant formula) *eald enta geweorc* stand idle in the Doomsday vision of *The Wanderer* (line 87).

Hence the *original* ‘ents’ were not benevolent giant tree-shepherds (e.g. *Rings*, 549) of Middle-earth but *builders in stone*, now vanished with their monumental architectural skills, from the earth. Tolkien’s ents are actually an *ironic re-reading* of the Old English formula, taking it to mean that the ents’ ‘handiwork’ was in *causing the ruin* of the stone buildings, not stonemasons but avenging spirits of natural demolition. The narrative concerning the Ents and Isengard, as Saruman’s nemesis, can thus be perceived as a radical reinterpretation of *Maxims II* line 2b, influenced by Tolkien’s personal (including ideological, philosophical) bias of sympathies, and to soothe his disappointment over *Macbeth*’s Birnam coming to Dunsinane: Tolkien rewriting Old English and Shakespeare.<sup>635</sup>

*Maxims II. 2b* also, note, attests collocation of *enta geweorc* with *orþanc*, the name of Saruman’s tower, yielding a prime example of how Tolkien’s philology generated

<sup>634</sup> E.g. *Das Rheingold*, Scene 2 passim; *Die Walküre*, 2:2, *Götterdämmerung*, *Vorspiel*: Spencer, et al., *Wagner’s Ring*, 71, 149, 282.

<sup>635</sup> Tolkien, “Fairy-Stories,” 141, *Letters*, 212.

his mythopoeia, name, character, story, growing out of Old English locutions and lines (in this case the direct textual sources must be *Maxims II*, *The Wanderer*, and *Beowulf*) a cross-quickenings pervasively evident in his scholarly writing on, particularly, *Beowulf* and *Gawain*, although a remarkably concentrated instance is afforded by his glosses and observations on the Old English *Exodus*. These notes were occasioned by ‘a series of lectures delivered to a specialist class in the 1930s and 1940s [...] retouched in the following decade’.<sup>636</sup> Read now, *Rings* is perceptibly active through this commentary, looming shadows cast by it, currents churning under its surface.

*Eoten/ent* does not appear in the lexis of *Exodus* but the very appellation and characterisation (even narrative) of their adversary, the archetypal politician of what Eisenhower termed (six years *after* Tolkien had diagnosed and represented it) ‘the military-industrial complex’, Saruman, seems to appear in Tolkien’s commentary on *Exodus* line 470a (another appearance of *orþanc-*, 359a, as a adverbial usage in the dative plural, having been noted a few pages earlier): ‘470. *searwum asæled*: almost exactly “cleverly caught”. *Searu* applies to anything skilfully contrived: nets, traps, war-gear, [...] ornaments. [...] cf. *Beow.* 2764.’<sup>637</sup> West Saxon *searu-* is altered to *saru-* in accordance with the *Mercian* dialect of ‘the *Mark*’ (Rohan); on *Exodus* line 59a Tolkien explicates ‘*Gūðmyrce*’: as ‘“warlike borderers”. *Myrce* was current in England as the name of the people of Mercia, but its relation to *mearc* “border” was doubtless apprehended.’<sup>638</sup> The verb *searwian* connotes ‘to fabricate, to feign; to act with craft or treachery, to betray’ etc: hence Tolkien’s figure of the fallen traitor-wizard, engineer of machines, and of machinations, the man of craft and craftiness, finally himself betrayed by his own devices.

The gloss on *Exodus* 470a, ‘“cleverly caught”’, recalls Gandalf’s words on his former superior, ‘how [...] Saruman was trapped [...] the biter bit, the hawk under the eagle’s foot, the spider in a steel web!’ (*Rings*, 598). Incidentally Gandalf’s second metaphor here constitutes an overt passing textual allusion to the *Metrical Charm* “Against a Wen”, lines 6-7a, *Under fōt wolues, under ueþer earnes,/under earnes clēa*

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<sup>636</sup> Tolkien, *Exodus*, v.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>638</sup> Cf. note on *þēodmearc*, l. 160, p. 49. NB, I am not proposing *Exodus* as in this case *the source* for ‘the *Mark*’; these citations are adduced rather as explicit auctorial *supporting* evidence.

[...]:<sup>639</sup> it must have seemed appropriate to Tolkien to donate his white wizard a dictional-rhetorical echo of the phrasing of an ancient English magical formula.<sup>640</sup> The *Exodus*-commentary further includes instances of Tolkien's applying 'necromancer, necromancy' to \**Wōðanaz* and his worship,<sup>641</sup> the *Sigelhearwan* Tolkien developed into 'Balrogs',<sup>642</sup> and (in the present context) above all, line 157b *ēored*, an archaic Old English word for a cavalry-regiment resurrected by Tolkien as the Eorlings' term for a division of their mounted troops (*Rings*, 435, 437, 830, 975, etc). Appearing as the understave in line 157 is *oferholt*, which Tolkien annotates and emends: '157. *oferholt*: the leading sense of *holt* was "growing wood, thicket" [instancing *Beowulf* 1834, *gārholt*]. *Ofer-* could refer to the tips of raised spears; but it is probably an error for *eofor-*. [...] the boars in this thicket were boar-crests,<sup>643</sup> and *the forest was moving*.'<sup>644</sup>

If Tolkien's ents ease our desire for communion with trees, they help also to satisfy for us as for Tolkien our desire for retribution on 'the military-industrial complex', the outrage felt by many in response to the violation and desecration of Nature. The torment of trees appeared early in Tolkien's alliterative enterprise, in "Húrin"—composed in the years immediately following the Great War. Tolkien himself stated 'the mythology (and associated languages) first began to take shape during the [...] war [...] the birth of Eärendil was written in hospital [...] after surviving the Battle of

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<sup>639</sup> Unnoticed in Hammond and Scull, *Reader's Companion*.

<sup>640</sup> Metrical Charm 12, Dobbie, *Minor Poems*, 128.

<sup>641</sup> Tolkien, *Exodus*, 50; "Fairy-Stories," 128.

<sup>642</sup> '69. *Sigelwara land*: this E-type pattern is not paralleled in good OE verse [...],' *Exodus*, 42; Shippey, *Road*, 39, 43, 51.

<sup>643</sup> A sly allusion to *Maxims* II l. 19b.

<sup>644</sup> Tolkien, *Exodus*, 49. Italics added.

the Somme [...]’.<sup>645</sup> Work on the ‘alliterative version’ of “Húrin” began ‘c.1918’.<sup>646</sup> ‘I wrote a lot [...] in hospitals before the end of the Great War.’<sup>647</sup>

Looked at in such a light, numerous passages in “Húrin”, ‘the most sustained embodiment of [Tolkien’s] abiding love of the resonance and richness of sound that might be achieved in the ancient English metre’,<sup>648</sup> become suggestive—as does Aragorn’s army of the dead: deserters, their names forgotten, unmemorialised by immortelle-flowers, rallied to fulfil their oath at last, and gain honourable discharge. Lines 935b-943a seek to imitate the effect of such passages in *Beowulf* as Hrōðgār’s Hammer-Horroresque evocation of the Grendelmere (lines 1357b-1376a). Tolkien made drawings illustrating this scene, both titled with *Beowulf* 1364a, ‘wudu wyrtrum fæst’.<sup>649</sup> The *wynlēasne wudu* (1416a) is noticed in Hammond-Scull’s commentary—which also recognises the resemblance to the blasted trees of the Great War’s battlefields. In “Húrin” they appear as unpleasantly dislocated, dismembered, lazar-limbs—a corpse-copse:

935		There black-gaping	C
	A	An  <u>a</u> rchway <u>o</u> pened.    By <u>a</u> ncient trunks	B
	C	it  was <u>f</u> ramed <u>d</u> arkly,    that  in <u>f</u> ar-off <u>d</u> ays	B
	B	the <u>l</u> ightning felled,    now <u>l</u> eaning gaunt	B
	?A/C	their  <u>l</u> ichen- <u>l</u> eprous    <u>l</u> imbs uprooted.	A
940	B	There <u>s</u> hadowy bats    that <u>s</u> hrilled thinly	C
	B	flew <u>i</u> n and flew <u>o</u> ut    the <u>a</u> ir brushing	C
	C	as  they <u>s</u> werved <u>s</u> oundless.    A <u>s</u> woning light	B
	Da	<u>f</u> aint <u>f</u> iltered in,    [...]	

The versification here shows a striking—typographically perceptible—rhythmic-syllabic concision to the half-lines. None is longer than a pentasyllable. 56%—including all the off-verses—of these 16 half-lines are the minimal tetrasyllable.

<sup>645</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 221. See further John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth*, (London: HarperCollins, 2003). The *anti*-heroic “Beorhtnoth” should also be noted.

<sup>646</sup> Tolkien, *Lays*, 3.

<sup>647</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 214-15.

<sup>648</sup> Tolkien, *Lays*, 1.

<sup>649</sup> Scull and Hammond, *Artist*, 53-55 (figs. 50, 51).

Rhythmically it is, as usual in “Húrin”, limited, but the metrical types are mostly deftly achieved, changes are rung within the restricted **A-C** range, with small proportion of anacrusis and resolutions. The **A-B** groundbeat, ‘archway opened’, ‘limbs uprooted’, ‘by ancient trunks’, ‘now leaning gaunt’, ‘A swooning light’, is pleasingly diversified by **C-Types** signalling the sinister threshold and its jostling flittermice, ‘There black-gaping’, ‘it was framed darkly’ (in which the consecutive long stressed vowels seem to burn, bleed, inky holes in the line), ‘the air brushing’, etc. Prosodic problems appear in 937b, where ‘-off’ competes towards subordinate stress and ‘days’ must be accented as it participates in the ‘crossed’ alliteration; marginally in 939a where it is not clear whether ‘lichen-’ should be resolved, giving a **Type C** rather than an **A** with anacrusis; and 943a which appears must be a slightly doubtful **Da**.

The headrhyme schemes however mesh particularly well and boast some accomplished effects: alliteration is alert here, not on autopilot. ‘Full’ (threefold) vocalic initial rhyme across 936 *dilates an entrance*; lintelled, ‘framed’, in 937 with the interlaced consonants of its cross-alliterations *f...d..f...d*, slightly skewed by the hovering accent on the fourth, hyphenated, word. Disgust is induced palpably by our having to *tongue* lingeringly the laterals of the ‘lichen-leprous || limbs’ of the rotting trees: the full-scheme climax of a sequence initiated by the ‘simple’ scheme in the preceding line. But the alliteration gets up to some remarkable business in 940-2 with the introduction of the bats.

The modulation of alliteration in 940 from sibilants *sh-* to *shr-* transitioning to the fourth stave’s voiceless dental fricative conjures by an onomatopœia of articulation a pipistrelle tenuity.<sup>650</sup> 941b, echoing 940 in its ‘brushing’, describing the jittery bats’ shuddery contact with the air, is a somehow rhythmically apt—an evocative contiguity, facilitated by metre, of the stresses ‘air’ and ‘brush-’? Meanwhile Tolkien throws the alliteration *off* the very noun ‘bats’ in 940 and onto the diction evoking their ‘shadowy’ presence and squeakings, and in 941a displaces the predictable alliteration, on the reiterated verb, onto the prepositions—for the scheme in 941 is ‘full’ and *vocalic*, the *hofuðstafr* being ‘air’. Finally, in conclusion to the run, 942a bars the second studdle from participating in the headrhyme (supported instead by the

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<sup>650</sup> Cf. Milton’s effect, *Lycidas*, l. 76.

verb)—the very adjective ‘soundless’ with which the five-hemistich sentence ends. In this way, of course, Tolkien is playing with how, in a technique of sound-media, to express, in sound, soundlessness: the artifice of versecraft exerted to represent the swarm with effects disembodied, aerial, sonically numbed. —It is as though the bats, who might have voiced outcries, have been silenced.

Other passages, e.g. “Húrin” lines 1114-1131, 1193-1202, exhibit remarkable similarities of diction and imagery with Wilfred Owen and episodes in David Jones’ *In Parenthesis*, suggesting this may be No Man’s Land recreated in a 1920s ‘fantasy’ epic couched in medieval alliterative verse.<sup>651</sup> a concept reminding one very closely of Graves’ statement in *Goodbye To All That*—exactly contemporary with “Húrin”—‘Beowulf lying wrapped in a blanket among his platoon of drunken thanes in his Gothland billet [...] *Brunanburgh* [sic] with its bayonet-and-cosh fighting—all this came far closer to most of us [than eighteenth-century poetry]’.<sup>652</sup> Jones’ own creative-therapeutic confession of his combat experience also alludes, in a texture tissue of contextualising and assimilating reference to a range of early-medieval myth and epic, to *Brunanburh*.<sup>653</sup> Indeed it is hard not to read these passages without suspecting Tolkien is, through their action, tone, and imagery, confronting, perhaps exorcising, a veteran’s trauma.<sup>654</sup>

Like the Old English ents Treebeard is a remnant of an ancient race, dying out, of giants, he is indeed ‘*The Ent*’, (*Rings*, 464) being the ‘eldest’ (*Rings*, 981), ‘the oldest of the ents, the oldest living thing that still walks beneath the Sun on this Middle-earth’

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<sup>651</sup> Cf. Tolkien’s Dead Marshes, where ‘dead things’ with ‘dead faces’ look up out of a vast ‘stagnant mere’, a ‘cesspool’ ‘always creeping’ to ‘swallow up the graves’ (*Rings*, 627-28), and the descriptions of Mordor, e.g. 631-32, for which Paul Nash’s *Totes Meer* and *We Are Making a New World!* would make nigh-perfect illustrations. Middle-earth situates, indeed, ‘the Noman-lands’, on its maps.

<sup>652</sup> Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That: An Autobiography: The Original 1929 Edition* (London: Penguin, 2014), 366; cf. Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 82, 122-23; also noted by Shippey, who proposes Tolkien as one of a group of traumatised veteran writers, *Author of the Century*, xxviii, viii passim.

<sup>653</sup> Anna Johnson, “Wounded Men and Wounded Trees: David Jones and the Anglo-Saxon Culture Tangle,” in Clark and Perkins, *Anglo-Saxon Culture*, 89-109.

<sup>654</sup> Cf. W. H. R. Rivers’ therapy for shellshock, in which he encouraged his patients (famously Sassoon) to abreact their experiences; Tolkien even depicts this psychology within “Húrin”: ll. 1629-65.

(*Rings*, 499;1130-31) whilst, like Huwawa—whose antediluvian Sumerian name seems indeed to be echoed in the ents’ characteristic vocalisation *hoom, hoom*, ‘like a very deep woodwind instrument’ (*Rings*, 463), though this feature Tolkien is said to have borrowed from the booming C. S. Lewis—and the *Kalevala*’s (lichen-bearded, moss-eyebrowed) Tapio, his realm is a vastly-diminished remnant of the primaevaeal greenwood. ‘Treebeard’ translates the eponymous *Fangorn*: ‘Treebeard is Fangorn, the guardian of the forest’ (*Rings*, 499).

This substantiates of course Phelpsstead’s appreciation that it is ‘appropriate’ “Treebeard’s List” should ‘employ [...] the ancient meter of the oldest surviving English poetry’; yet interpretation of Tolkien’s conception of talking tree as alliterative poet invites of being pushed further: here surely is an image in which Tolkien’s emotional response to trees is combined not only with his Thomistic appreciation of the reality, value and significance of external creatures (comparable with that of Hopkins, and compatible with the ecological awareness of which both Tolkien and Hopkins should be identified as pioneers),<sup>655</sup> but with an ideology of organicist traditionalism (endangered, even in Middle-earth).

Hobbits of course are themselves in every way—with their ‘halfling’ stature, large unshod feet, hole-dwelling, and agrarian customs—close to the ‘good [...] earth’ with which they enjoy a ‘close friendship’ (*Rings*,1) and, requiring ‘hardly any government’ (*Rings*, 9-10) are organised in large families running themselves ‘clannish’ly (*Rings*, 7) by traditions: but Treebeard is the very image of Tradition conceived of, as by Burke and Herder, as *rooted*, localised, native and natural; longaevally alive, organically growing, regenerating and regenerative. Treebeard’s eyes are described in terms of ‘well[s]’ ‘filled [...] with ages of memory’ (*Rings*, 463, 464). This Burkean traditionalism of a rich, hallowed continuity rooted in the past need not conflict—in Tolkien they are blended—with a *radicalism* in another acceptance: Tolkien’s myth of trees defeating the machines, of animate Nature finally exacting retribution upon the politicians and industrialists, can claim a long pedigree in a distinctively English pastoralism. —Tolkien as at once Burkean conservative and heir of Blake, Ruskin, Morris, Hopkins, prophetic mythopoet of the ecological movement.

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<sup>655</sup> See further Milbank, *Chesterton*, xv, 37-55, 162-69 passim.

In Middle-earth, a tree really isn't 'only a green thing that stands in the way', but rises up to overthrow the 'dark Satanic Mills'.

As Phelpstead remarks—'like Lewis, Tolkien valued the meter's antiquity and its associations with "native" English culture'—in their writings about alliterative metre Tolkien and Lewis constantly emphasise the ancience, nativeness, and continuity of the form. In these aspects Treebeard—described as resembling an English oak (*Rings*, 480)—is strongly suggestive of a symbol of the Inklings' and Auden's alliterative poetics, their construction of the ideology, myth and mystique of the metre, its Englishry, native, natural, innate, and ancient: the prosodic expression of indigenous cultural and linguistic memory.

In a manuscript headnote on his *Nameless Isle*'s metre Lewis enjoins, 'The reader should read all with its natural accent and avoid the artificial accents of syllabic verse',<sup>656</sup> an injunction elaborated by Tolkien in his seminal account of Old English metre in *On Translating Beowulf*.<sup>657</sup> In 'a novel but defensible procedure' for 'convey[ing] a notion of the metre', exemplifying the six paradigmatic Sieversian hemistich-types by Modern English phrases—which 'brings out the ancestral kinship of the two'—he emphasises 'These are the normal patterns of four elements into which [both Old and Modern English] naturally[...] fall'.<sup>658</sup> 'The ear should not listen for any such thing' as '“iambic” or “trochaic” rhythm': 'the lifts and dips utilised in this metre are those occurring in any given sequence of words in natural (if formal) speech', instructing that a sample passage of metrically-imitative translation from *Beowulf* 'should be read slowly, but naturally: that is, with the stresses and tones required [...] by [...] sense [...] The lines must not be strained to fit any [...] modern verse-rhythm.'<sup>659</sup>

In the pronouncements cited both Inklings are concerned with the naturalness of Old English metre in English; yet whilst in the case of Lewis' statement the professed

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<sup>656</sup> Lewis, *Narrative Poems*, 177.

<sup>657</sup> Tolkien's major exposition of OE versification, written c. early 1940 for the "Prefatory Remarks" to John R. Clark Hall, *Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment: A Translation into Modern English Prose*, rev. ed. by C. L. Wrenn (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1940); see Scull and Hammond, *Chronology*, 181-241.

<sup>658</sup> Cf. 'essential kinship', Tolkien, "Monsters," 33.

<sup>659</sup> Tolkien, "Translating Beowulf," 61-63.



content is prosodic accentuation, this comment witnesses the emergence of Lewis' polemical opposition of the alliterative system to the syllabic. In his public exposition and demonstration of Anglo-Saxon metric "The Alliterative Metre" Lewis calls for 'a return to our own ancient system, the alliterative line', in 'reaction [...] against the long reign of foreign syllabic metres in English',<sup>660</sup> developing the set of antinomies:

- alliterative is to syllabic:
- as anciently resident is to invading and usurping:
- as native is to foreign:
- as natural is to artificial.

Lewis' formulations concerning 'our native metre', resident and latent in the phrases of 'labourers [...] in any English country tap-room'—**Type C** being 'a rhythm of daily occurrence in our speech [...] which has been allowed no metrical recognition for centuries'<sup>661</sup>—with its 'race and resonance',<sup>662</sup> partake of the selfsame Inklingsian ideology of a recovery of the authenticity of the nativeness and ancience of alliterative verse.

Tolkien's *Monsters* lecture deploys not only an opposition between poets (and poetic readers) and *Beowulf's* monstrous critics, but also advances an extensive antithesis between 'ancient English temper' with 'its strong sense of tradition',<sup>663</sup> and the 'Gallic'.<sup>664</sup> *Beowulf* is a 'a poem by an Englishman, using [...] ancient [...] traditional material' 'of many-storied antiquity';<sup>665</sup> it was 'when new [...] already antiquarian, in a good sense [...] its maker [...] telling of things already old [...]',<sup>666</sup> in ' "poetical" ' diction and formulae 'already archaic', 'artificially maintained as an elevated [...] literary language.'<sup>667</sup>

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<sup>660</sup> Lewis, "Alliterative Metre," 15.

<sup>661</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>662</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>663</sup> Tolkien, "Monsters," 7, 23.

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 24.

<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 46.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>667</sup> Tolkien, "Translating Beowulf," 51; 54-55.

Native English tradition and its conservative continuity with the archaic is likewise cherished throughout Tolkien's commentary on the Old English *Exodus*, with its constant interest in adverting to the text's poetic archaisms,<sup>668</sup> its commendation of a 'traditional style [...] in ancient England [...] of fine speech and solemn utterance', a 'native tradition' comparable to 'the formulae of everyday courtesy.'<sup>669</sup> Similarly he lauds alliterative verse as 'a native art',<sup>670</sup> commanding 'a rich vocabulary of poetry-words [...] to a large extent *archaisms* [...] preserved by [...] tradition' in his 1938-1943 lecture-notes connected with his BBC Radio talk "Anglo-Saxon Verse",<sup>671</sup> in which Tolkien also stresses his belief that Middle English alliterative poetry represents a continuity—*despite the Normans*—with the Old English origins: 'It did not [...] stop at 1066! It went on being used for at least four hundred years longer in the North and the West': a reference principally to *Gawain*.<sup>672</sup>

Thus in his 1925 edition of the latter he claims *Gawain*'s metric 'is similar to that of [...] OE. verse, from which it has descended through unbroken oral tradition', referring to lines 31-36 of the poem as 'testimony of the continuity of the alliterative tradition'.<sup>673</sup> 'Deep roots' Aragorn's riddle reminds us, 'are not reached by the frost' (*Rings*, 170). In his W. P. Ker lecture (University of Glasgow, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1953<sup>674</sup>) Tolkien classifies *Gawain* as 'belong[ing] to that literary kind which has deep roots in the past [...] like *Beowulf*, or [...] Shakespeare [...]'. *Gawain*, having 'this flavour [...], atmosphere [...], virtue, which [...] rooted works have', is a 'fairy-story [...] a [...] deep-rooted tale[...]'.<sup>675</sup> Again, writing of *Gawain*'s 'old native metre'—a 'tradition'<sup>676</sup> which 'aimed at quite different effects from those achieved by the

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<sup>668</sup> Tolkien, *Exodus*, e.g. 47, 51, 60, 63, 67, 69.

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, 133; 35.

<sup>670</sup> Tolkien, *Arthur*, 227.

<sup>671</sup> Tolkien, *Arthur*, 229 (Tolkien's italics).

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>673</sup> Tolkien and Gordon, *Gawain*, 118; 80.

<sup>674</sup> "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in *The Monsters*, 72-108.

<sup>675</sup> "Sir Gawain," 72-73.

<sup>676</sup> 'Tradition' appears twice in this passage.

rhymed and syllable-counting metres derived from France and Italy’, Tolkien hails ‘the ancient English measure which had descended from antiquity’— ‘*the ancestral measure of England*’.<sup>677</sup>

If ‘eldest’ Treebeard’s is the voice of an ancient Englishness, his reciting alliterative verse could not be more ‘right and proper’ (*Rings*, 465): but his mannerism of elocution described by Tolkien also looks philologically and metrically significant. His ‘motto’ is ‘Do not be hasty’ (*Rings*, 463-66, etc). He explains ponderously: ‘Old Entish [...] is a lovely language, but it takes a very long time to say anything in it, because we do not say anything in it, unless it is worth taking a long time to say, and to listen to’ (*Rings*, 465). One can perceive how this slowness is appropriate in characterising an ancient race of tree-giants, themselves aged, growing ‘sleepy’ (*Rings*, 468) of great size and enormous lifespan, secluded from the events of the outside world, and in *Rings* ‘do not be hasty’ is played up for endearingly comic effect (e.g. 480-81); but Tolkien’s instruction on reading (*aloud* is evidently intended) Old English poetry as quoted *supra* included the direction that it ‘should be read *slowly*’.

This is by no means the voicing of trivially extrinsic preference it may appear: it hints at a philological poetics, and yet further, seizes upon something crucially intrinsic to the metre—at least according to Sievers’ reconstruction. Through Treebeard Tolkien is tokening to his readers important ideas pertaining to language. As slow savourer of speech and as traditional alliterative poet (the first in the book, and at the entrance to Rohan) Treebeard functions to teach us (‘Learn now the lore...!’) the logical principles Old English versecraft: and these which are all about metrico-semantic *weight*. Because alliterative metre formalises Germanic stress-timed languages, prosody is a matter of disposing elements of at once lexical and rhythmic substance: accentuation, hence metrical pattern, corresponds to verbal significance, and significance, substance, is *heavy*. The more meaningful a syllable, the weightier it is: the *slower* it goes.

Tolkien (like Lewis) customarily employs a (Sieversian) terminology of ‘weight’, weightiness, ‘solid’ity, ‘heavy’; also of ‘compactness’, ‘compression’: and, combining phonetic articulation with an architectonic metaphor, ‘force’. The

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<sup>677</sup> Tolkien, *Gawain*, 2; 149.

accentual-alliterative line is ‘essentially a *balance* of two equivalent blocks’ of equal metrical *weight*’: ‘the effect of loudness (combined with length and voice-pitch)’, i.e. *prosodic* accent, ‘as judged by the ear in conjunction with emotional and logical *significance*’, i.e. *rhetorical* emphasis, of ‘*force* and *significance* together’.<sup>678</sup> ‘Force was renewed and [...] tone raised at the beginning of the line (as a rule) and there the strongest and heaviest words [...] [t]he more significant elements [...] were placed’.<sup>679</sup>

Germanic metre avails itself dictionally of the compound forms favoured by the languages because they afford ‘compression’, a ‘force’ ‘packing’ substance ‘tight’ in the metre,<sup>680</sup> ‘a weighty packing of the language in sense and form’<sup>681</sup>—one of Tolkien’s metrical-stylistic formulations irresistibly recalling those of *Pound*, especially the latter’s slogan DICHTEN=CONDENSARE.

‘*Beowulf* itself is like a line of its own verse writ large, a balance of two great blocks’<sup>682</sup>—‘it is undeniably weighty’,<sup>683</sup> in which phrase it is to be discerned how ‘weight’ of significance pertains at once to form (prosody) and to traditional diction and inherited content: the language of *Beowulf* is ‘weighted [...] by long use [...] old and associations’,<sup>684</sup> the ‘achievement’ of a ‘rich [...] tradition’ of ‘poetic language’ ‘filled with the memory of good and evil’.<sup>685</sup>

This amounts to an ambitious defence of poetic archaism, and as in the very significant 1955 letter to Hugh Brogan wherein he condemns modern English idiom as ‘slack and frivolous’,<sup>686</sup> Tolkien pursues an opposition between modern and ancient language (and the ancient verse-form exploiting this linguistic character). Old English

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<sup>678</sup> Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 62-63; 67. (All Tolkien’s italics).

<sup>679</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71

<sup>680</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>681</sup> Tolkien, *Sigurd*, 7.

<sup>682</sup> Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 71.

<sup>683</sup> Tolkien, “Monsters,” 9.

<sup>684</sup> Tolkien, “Translating *Beowulf*,” 56.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>686</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 225-26, Letter 171. Cf. Phelpstead, “Auden,” 446.

and Norse are ‘weighty’, ‘compact’<sup>687</sup> ‘concentrated’<sup>688</sup> ‘terse’<sup>689</sup> ‘forceful’,<sup>690</sup> whereas modern idiom is ‘slack’,<sup>691</sup> and ‘loose’.<sup>692</sup> Moreover he develops this antithesis to associate the ancient language and its traditional poetry with ‘weight’ of meaning, with solidity<sup>693</sup> and endurance,<sup>694</sup> nobility,<sup>695</sup> beauty, and dignity.<sup>696</sup> ‘[S]erious [...] moving [...] full of “high sentence”, ’ it is, by the same token, ‘freed from trivial associations’—for, according to Tolkien’s stylistic dichotomy, in diametric opposition to the ancient poetics the ‘trivial’ consorts with ‘the current’ and the ‘frivolous’, the ‘colloquial’ with the ‘ephemeral’: we must ourselves cultivate ‘patience and solidity to endure [their] solemn temper.’<sup>697</sup> (Another reason ‘it takes a very long time to say anything’ in Old *English* verse is because of the verse-rhetoric of variation and parallelism.)

Accordingly the ancient poetry is one of ‘a slow sonorous metre’.<sup>698</sup> ‘Slow, sonorous’ becomes Tolkien’s verbal *leitmotif* for his Entish conception of Old English prosody, as in the utterly Treebeardy conclusion to his radio talk, in which he claims ‘people are perilously slack [...] in the full appreciation of words [...] nowadays’:

Our language now has become quick-moving (in syllables), and may be very supple and nimble, but is rather thin in sound and in sense too often diffuse and vague. The

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<sup>687</sup> Tolkien, “Translating Beowulf,” 50.

<sup>688</sup> Tolkien, “Monsters,” 33.

<sup>689</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 225-26.

<sup>690</sup> Tolkien, “Translating Beowulf,” 52, 67, 70; *Sigurd*, 17, 18, 22, 34.

<sup>691</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 225; *Arthur*, 231.

<sup>692</sup> Tolkien, “Translating Beowulf,” 50.

<sup>693</sup> Tolkien, “Monsters,” 9, 28; “Translating Beowulf,” 55.

<sup>694</sup> Tolkien, “Monsters,” 28; “Translating Beowulf,” 71.

<sup>695</sup> Tolkien, “Translating Beowulf,” 55.

<sup>696</sup> Tolkien, “Monsters,” e.g. 13, 14.

<sup>697</sup> Tolkien, “Translating Beowulf,” 55-56.

<sup>698</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

language of our forefathers, especially in verse, was slow, not very nimble, but very sonorous, and was intensely packed and concentrated.<sup>699</sup>

The favourite adjectives ‘slow, sonorous’ can be tracked from *On Translating Beowulf* through “Notion Club”, in which Lowdham reports of his clairaudience of Old English in time-travelling true dreams:

Compared with us urban chirrupers the farmers and mariners of the past [...] savoured words like meat and wine and honey on their tongues. Especially when declaiming. They made a scrap of verse majestically sonorous: like thunder moving on a slow wind, or the tramp of mourners at the funeral of a king. We [...] gabble the stuff.<sup>700</sup>

—And into the descriptions of the speech of Rohan in *Rings*. Legolas hears in it a semblance to the land itself, ‘rich and rolling’, which recalls Tolkien’s comment that Scandinavian verse-forms developed ‘with the deliberate object of utilizing to the full the [...] rolling beat of the Old Norse tongue’,<sup>701</sup> while perceiving that it is ‘laden with the sadness of Mortal Men’, like the ‘weighted’ness of *Beowulf* (*Rings*, 508). According to Tolkien’s fictional conceit in *Rings*, Modern English renders Middle-earth ‘Common Speech’, hence the language of the Eorlings is approximated by Old English; but in Middle-earth the language of the Shire stands in a comparable relation to the language of the Mark. (It may thus be seen that the spatial journey eastwards is simultaneously a temporal journey backwards). Hence Tolkien has Merry overhearing ‘the slow sonorous speech of Rohan [...] in which there seemed to be many words he knew, though spoken more richly and strongly than in the Shire’ (*Rings*, 792).<sup>702</sup>

Thus Treebeard’s Old Entish-Rohirric prosody assumes the appearance of a quasi-comical, pointful exaggeration of Tolkien’s notion of Old English prosody (in both senses of the term): Treebeard is the *spokesman* for Tolkien’s ideal of ancient and traditional poetic language.

The common leitmotif of *memory*, moreover—ancient poetic diction is ‘weighted’ with it, Treebeard’s eyes are ‘wells’ of it—is entirely congruent with this; cultural

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<sup>699</sup> Tolkien, *Arthur*, 231.

<sup>700</sup> Tolkien, *Sauron Defeated*, 242; cf. the description of *Beowulf* in “Monsters,” ‘the echo of an ancient dirge,’ 33.

<sup>701</sup> Tolkien, *Sigurd*, 34.

<sup>702</sup> Cf. Tolkien, *Letters*, 254.

memory is inherited, conserved and transmitted by lexico-metrically traditional *poesis*, and the bard, the scop or skald, is of course the figure who performs this, remembering and bespeaking Kipling's 'Tale of the Tribe'.

It is therefore appropriate that Treebeard should initially be presented to us as a *pulr* reciting traditional wisdom-poetry in mnemonic form. One of the primordial functions of versification, indeed, is mnemotechnic, and among the earliest kinds of alliterative verse may have been the gnomic *pulur*, formulaic rigmaroles cataloguing and concatenating oral knowledge: hence Treebeard's List of Lore (1). Tolkien is announcing through a talking tree, and with an astonishing *apparent* simplicity (the encounter with Treebeard is one of the most delightfully limpid, children's fairytale-like episodes in the book) an *ars poetica*; his Saxonising alliterative principles and purpose of poetry and poets; and also a theory of language of profound metaphysical, for Tolkien theological, implications.

The job done by this 'long', 'old' list' the Ent 'learned when [he] was young [...] a long, long time ago' (*Rings*, 464, 481, 586) is *to name things*, epitomise their nature, and to situate them in their proper place and order in the world. The archetypal poem is thus an act of naming, an ethnography and bestiary, a taxonomy and a *microcosmos*: a *summa* of what things are called and what and where they are. Naming is the fundamental function of language, and in our world language is the fundamental distinguishing attribute of Man;<sup>703</sup> hence Adam's naming in Eden. The primal task of the poet, too, is *to call things by their names* (cf. Pound's Confucius),<sup>704</sup> thus isomorphically mapping in language a corresponding *imago mundi*.

This primitive poetic project, with its affinities one the one hand with magic (the magician, like the patient in psychoanalysis, must find and deploy a thing's true name to wield power over it), and on the other implicated in Nominalism/Realism,<sup>705</sup> Saussurean semiotics, and subsequent philosophies of language, accurately describes

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<sup>703</sup> Cf. Middle-earthly *Quendi*, 'speakers', the elves' autonym.

<sup>704</sup> 'Call things by the names', Canto LII, l. 150; cf. Heidegger on the essentially poetic nature and function of Language: Steiner, *Martin Heidegger*, 24, 52, 144-45 passim.

<sup>705</sup> Tolkien, "Fairy-Stories," 146-151; cf. Milbank, *Chesterton*, xv, 37-55, 162-69 passim.

the Old English gnomic poems now termed (Sweet titled them “Gnomic Verses”)<sup>706</sup> the ‘*Maxims*’,<sup>707</sup> and both Phelpstead and Shippey have observed that Old English gnomes constitute Tolkien’s model in the case of Treebeard’s List: “Treebeard’s gnomic “List” imitates well [...] echo[es]...the similar list in the Old English poem *Maxims II*”; ‘In both subject matter and style, the poem is clearly modelled on Old English gnomic poetry’, adducing in a footnote with *Maxims I* and *II*, and the gnomic-didactic, riddling, hence generically and stylistically akin Old English *Rune Poem*.<sup>708</sup>

Shippey’s *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* provides commentary on the Old English ‘gnomic’ corpus, introducing this ‘group of some fifteen to twenty poems’ culled from several of the extant codices ‘which aim primarily neither at narrative nor at self-expression’ which have been classified as ‘gnomic’ in Anglo-Saxon scholarship since Conybeare in 1826, and which appear to be compendia of traditional ‘wisdom’, proverbially-formulated observations, generalisations, and homiletic precepts.<sup>709</sup> The nature of the material and its manner of statement is variable; and the parameters of the genre and corpus debatable since closely-similar elements appear conspicuously elsewhere in Old English, for instance in *Beowulf* and in the so-called Elegies, while there are connexions also with list- or ‘catalogue-poems’ (*pulur*) such as *Widsið*, the *Riddles*, and as noted the Old English and Norse *Rune Poems*.<sup>710</sup> Such prescriptive and sententious pronouncements of lore commonly attach to a didactic wise old man persona, who might be said to culminate in the great Jewish king appearing in the Old English *Salomon and Saturnus*; the kindred Norse material is commonly associated with Óðinn, patron of wisdom, magic, verse, and

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<sup>706</sup> I.e. *Maxims II*; Sweet, *Reader*, text XXVIII, 168-70. Tolkien owned at least two copies, the 1908 ed., his ‘extensively annotated’ copy, Bodleian, Tolkien E16/40, and the 1922 ed., Tolkien E16/41.

<sup>707</sup> Paul Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999); Carolynne Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense: Gnomic Theme and Style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>708</sup> Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 21; “Alliterative Verse,” 11; *Wisdom*, 15; Phelpstead, “Auden,” 444.

<sup>709</sup> Shippey, *Wisdom*, 12.

<sup>710</sup> R.W. Chambers, *Widsið: A Study in Old English Heroic Legend* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), dedicated to W. P. Ker; Kemp Malone, *Widsið* (London: Methuen, 1936).



enigma, ‘the great *pulr*’ (*fimbulkpulr*, *Havamal*, stanza 80 line 4).<sup>711</sup> As Shippey notes, the poet of *Judgement Day I*’s announcement,  *Ic ā wille lēode lēran*, is applicable to most Anglo-Saxon poets, and goes so far as to claim the gnomic-didactic ‘perhaps the commonest type of poem in Old English’.<sup>712</sup>

As for the specifically-titled *Maxims*, ‘One gnomic poem might be a quirk; two suggest a taste. [...] we in fact have four’,<sup>713</sup> labelled *Maxims* IA, IB IC, and *Maxims* II. ‘Sayings’ might afford a more neutral and vernacular designation, and also because the ‘proverb’ and the ‘maxim’ have been contradistinguished:<sup>714</sup> as so often Old English poetry is resistant to imported generic categorisation.

The *Maxims* with ‘their barely imaginable purpose and their undeniable charm’ ‘bear witness to a strong liking for [stating wisdom] in direct and incontrovertible form,’ and ‘aim at definitive, even quasi-legal tone. Earlier scholars went on to think in terms of folkmoths and lawspeakers’.<sup>715</sup> Their generalised observations about the natural world and human society characteristically adopt the form ‘*x sceal...*’, ‘shall’ in Old English implying ‘should’ and ‘always does’; the formula is usually ‘*x sceal on y*, followed by a half-line [or more] expounding *x*’, or ‘*x biþ ...*’, etc.

Thus the *Maxims* set forth how all things are, where they are, what they do, not only ‘A place for everything and everything in its place’, but an essential nature and order for every thing, and concomitant behaviour, function, purpose— extending from the natural realm of elements, seasons, flora and fauna, to mankind, his society, arts, and commonweal. The *Maxims* ‘state [...] what is permanent and eternal’, the laws of nature in ‘the physical world’ and the cultural and ethical ideals and norms of the human ‘social order’.<sup>716</sup> Barley writes of ‘paradigms’ and ‘*pensée sauvage*’,<sup>717</sup> and Levi-Strauss’ian structural anthropology was once an inviting strategy for

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<sup>711</sup> Jónsson, *Eddukvæði*, 1:43; Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, 3:18.

<sup>712</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>713</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>714</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>715</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*, 13, citing J. K. Bollard, “The Cotton Maxims,” *Neophilologus* 57 (1973): 179-87.

<sup>717</sup> Shippey, *Wisdom*, 15, citing N. Barley, “A Structural Approach to the Proverb and Maxim,” *Proverbiun* 20 (1972): 737-50.

understanding the *Maxims*' enigmatic collocations of material.<sup>718</sup> Similarly P.B. Taylor (as in Auden's *Edda*) speaks of 'rituals of men' and 'rituals of nature'.<sup>719</sup>

Thus *Maxims* IB commences (lines 1-2) 'with a series of elemental and seasonal oppositions'—indeed, with a momentous *coincidentia oppositorum* of those two primaeval Northern first elements, Frost and Fire:<sup>720</sup> *Forst sceal frēosan, fȳr wudu meltan,/eorþe grōwan, īs brycgian*[...] Frost shall freeze; fire shall 'melt' wood, the earth grow, ice [make a] 'bridge': these are platitudes in that they are *truisms*, they declare verities, defining with bright pristine naivety, primal certitude, the essential nature of the constituents of world-as-κόσμος. Thus we find also *Sceal wīf ond wer on woruld cennan/bearn mid gebyrdum*; and in balance to man and wife, begetting and birth, there is death; the nature of the doomed is to die: *fāge sweltan*.<sup>721</sup> *The blind man shall suffer from his eyes: Blind sceal his ēagna þolian*; the ill man shall to a doctor;<sup>722</sup> 'sick shall he be who seldom eateth'(!)<sup>723</sup> is scarcely 'wisdom', but others such as 'Weary shall he be who with [against] the wind roweth' bespeak a wry cannyiness, and is in alliterative idiom as well as proverbial pith strongly reminiscent of familiar English saws recorded later.<sup>724</sup>

The commonweal includes political order: *Cyning sceal rīce healdan*;<sup>725</sup> and King needs Queen: *Cyning sceal mid cēap cwēne gebicgan*,<sup>726</sup> who has her own place and prescribed (and proscribed) duties in a functioning social order meshed with Nature:

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<sup>718</sup> Shippey, *Wisdom*, 17.

<sup>719</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, citing P. B. Taylor, "Heroic Ritual in the O. E. Maxims," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 70 (1969): 387-407; *The Elder Edda, A Selection*, Translated from the Icelandic by Paul B. Taylor and W. H. Auden (London: Faber, 1969), dedicated to Tolkien.

<sup>720</sup> Shippey, *Wisdom*, 17.

<sup>721</sup> *Maxims* IA, lines 25-26; 27b.

<sup>722</sup> *Ibid.*, 39b; 45a.

<sup>723</sup> *Maxims* IB, l. 52a.

<sup>724</sup> *Maxims* IC, 51a.

<sup>725</sup> *Maxims* II, 1.

<sup>726</sup> *Maxims* IB, 11.

*Wif sceal wiþ wer wære gehealdan.*<sup>727</sup> Likewise it is the nature of the ship to be clinkered, and of the shield to be bound,<sup>728</sup> but those *Maxims* most obviously imitated in “Treebeard’s List”, very clearly Tolkien’s direct model, are the extensive catalogues of *beastlore*.

Here are hawk, wolf, boar, fish, bear, and bird; the bestiary is interrupted by the lord of the rings in his hall, the army, the river, and by the fabulous (to us) dragon, wise, gloating over treasure in the mound:

[...] *Hafuc sceal on glōfe,*  
*wilde gewunian. Wulf sceal on bearowe,*  
*earm ānhaga. Eofor sceal on holte,*  
*tōðmægenes trum. [...]*  
 [...] *Draca sceal on hlæwe,*  
*frōd, frætsum wanc. Fisc sceal on wætere*  
*cynren cennan. Cyning sceal on healle*  
*bēagas dælan. Bera sceal on hæðe,*  
*eald and egesfull. Ēa ofdūne sceal*  
*flōdgræg fēran. Fyrd sceal ætsomne*  
*tīrfæstra getrum. [...]*  
*Fugel uppe sceal*  
*lācan on lyfte. Leax sceal on wæle*  
*mid scēote scrīðan. [...]*<sup>729</sup>

The parallels are also discernible, predicated on the concept of *knowledge*, with the *Riddles*, a genre the North made very much its own and to which Tolkien also exhibited not-inconspicuous attention.<sup>730</sup> Riddles are another kind of *naming*: the name of the game being to crack the enigma in order to identify what it is (*saga/frige hwæt ich hātte!*) A poem must also be *read*, unriddled, and Northern poetry foregrounds this hermeneutics: cf. Old Norse poetic synonyms and *kenningar*. The gnomes are in many ways like riddles, the *Maxims* are, even, altogether enigmatic, but as Shippey adverts they include elements of a typical trope of wisdom-dialogue or riddle-contest. *Maxims* IA declares *Frige mec frōdum wordum*, offering to trade *min dyrne* in return for *þinne hygecræft*: let not *þæt þu dēopost cunne* remain *dēgol*:

<sup>727</sup> *Ibid.*, 14b-22; 30.

<sup>728</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>729</sup> *Maxims* II, 17b-40a.

<sup>730</sup> Adam Roberts, *The Riddles of The Hobbit* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 2013.

*Glēawe men sceolon* [that word again] *gieddum wrixlan*.<sup>731</sup> Similarly *Maxims IC* prescribes *Wæra gehwylcum wislicu word gerīsað*;<sup>732</sup> *Ræd sceal mon secgan, rūne wrītan,/lēoþ gesingan*.<sup>733</sup>

Thus *Maxims IC* line 1 alliterates *ræd* with *rūne*: Phelpstead suggests the *Rune Poem* as one source for “Treebeard’s List”, and the Old English and Old Norse *Rune Poems* contain just this kind of *Maxims*-like gnomic-didactic statement to define and represent, and probably as imagistic *aide memoire*, the magical rune-names. Shippey categorises, assimilates, and discusses the *Maxims* and *Rune Poem* together:<sup>734</sup> ‘the definitions [of the runes] are very much in form of gnomic assertions: there is little difference between any one of them’ and lines from, e.g., *Maxims II*; the runes of course are the very embodiment of knowledge, of esoteric wisdom: Shippey cites Schneider on the *Rune Poems*’ mythological and cultic suggestiveness, and L. Musset on them as ‘*formule mnémotechnique*’.<sup>735</sup>

Of such catalogues of beastlore as *Maxims II*. 17b-40a quoted above Shippey observes, ‘Many of the ranks and beasts and objects listed are stock images of Old English poetry, set down here in their most useful aspects [...] The gnomic poet seems to write them down [...] because he likes them for themselves, and because (like Treebeard [...] in Professor Tolkien’s affectionate recreation [...]) he likes the idea of fitness, wholeness’.<sup>736</sup> Such a concept of the Old English *Maxims* strongly suggests the Old Norse *nafnapulur* of skaldic *kenningar* and *heiti*. Shippey refers further to Taylor’s (somewhat different) contention that the gnomes could be ‘“a text *on* the art of poetry” (a recondite one, to be sure)’.<sup>737</sup>

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<sup>731</sup> *Maxims IA*, 1-4.

<sup>732</sup> *Maxims IC*, 29.

<sup>733</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>734</sup> Shippey, *Wisdom*, 12-20.

<sup>735</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>736</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>737</sup> *Ibid.*

Whilst Scull and Hammond omit Old English sources for “Treebeard’s List”, they do refer to the *pulur* of poetic diction, *the nafnapulur*, in Snorri’s *Skáldskaparmál*,<sup>738</sup> as an analogue; e.g. *Skáldskaparmál* 57-60, 75, list men, fish, bear, hart, eagle, ox, hog, with their names, often based on their attributes, and all the concepts in play converge in Old Norse tradition in which lore, naming and lists of names, runes, riddles and the riddle-contest are strongly correlated. The riddle-contest for knowledge featuring metrical lists, *pulur* of archaic poetic names and synonyms is prominent in *Alvíssmál*, *Baldurs draumar*, *Grímnismál*, *Gylfaginning*, *Rígsþula*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Völuspá*; another particularly famous example is the pseudo-Gestumblindi’s (Óðinn’s) riddles in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks/Saga Heiðreks konúngs ens vitra*, a source for Tolkien’s *Hobbit* “Riddles in the Dark”,<sup>739</sup> translated, originally for his B. Litt. thesis at Trinity College Oxford (1953-4) by Christopher Tolkien, as *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*.<sup>740</sup> A prominent Old English example, *Salomon and Saturnus*, has already been mentioned.

The occult (often religious, mythic-cosmogonical, or prophetic) knowledge, sacred secrets, paraded and weaponised in the riddle-contest (in the literature usually between ancient heroes, gods, or magical beings) is presented in the form of alliterative-metrical lists, designed to be memorised and recited, of archaic-poetic names and diction, *kenningar* and synonyms: special, formulaic and formalised poetical (circum)locutions conceivably originating as *tabu* epithets and euphemisms in an early pagan tradition of magical-cultic speech, perhaps orated, incanted, by the *pulr*. Cast as metrical *pulur* by and for the skalds these lists *conserved and transmitted* (remaining the source till today) lexical archaisms and pre-Christian mythology as poetic tradition.<sup>741</sup> Similarly, *pulur* consisting of catalogues of the names of kings and their clans and tribes preserved in mnemonic form ancient dynastic and tribal

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<sup>738</sup> Hammond and Scull, *Reader’s Companion*, 383.

<sup>739</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, rev., expanded and annotated ed. Douglas A. Anderson (London: HarperCollins, 2003), 120-28. The riddle-contest also appears in *The Hobbit* in Bilbo’s conversation with Smaug, 279-80, modelled directly on *Fáfnismál*, and was recreated by Wagner in several scenes in *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*: Spencer, Millington, et al., *Wagner’s Ring*, 207-215, 241-42, 254-64, 280-84.

<sup>740</sup> (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1960).

<sup>741</sup> Cf. the *roscada* of Irish epic tradition.

traditions retained and performed by the minstrels and heralds, such as in Old English *Widsið*, to which the Old Norse term *þula* was applied by Heusler; as Tolkien writes:

‘A great body of oral verse dealing with ancient days in the northern lands was known to minstrels in England, though little has survived beyond one long verse catalogue [*Widsið*] of the subject of heroic and legendary song: a list of now forgotten or almost forgotten kings and heroes.’<sup>742</sup>

The genre of the *þula* extends in Tolkien’s *œuvre* back into “Húrin”, wherein Beleg lists (lines 1203-1218) a catalogue of legendary blades as part of a spell of sharpening magically to whet the ‘eager edge’ of his knife, ‘There wondrous wove he words of sharpness, / and *the names of knives* [...]’ compared by Tolkien *films* to Luthien’s ‘lengthening spell’, addressed to her tresses, hybridising *Kalevala* and Rapunzel,<sup>743</sup> to “Sheave”, one of whose sources and intertexts is *Widsið*, and whose last sixteen lines (138-49) include a list of the Germanic tribes begat by Sheave;<sup>744</sup> to the cenotaphic roster memorialising in verse the names of the Fallen in the heroic lays of the Eorlings in *Rings*, fulfilling in poetry Éomer’s tribute on the battlefield, ‘and he looked at the slain, recalling their names’, **8**):

But many [...] were [...] maimed or dead upon the field. The axes hewed Forlong as he fought alone and unhorsed; and both Duilin [...] and his brother were trampled to death [...] Neither Hirluin the fair would return [...] nor Grimbald [...] nor Halbarad [...] No few had fallen, renowned or nameless, captain or soldier; for it was a great battle and the full count of it no tale has told. So long afterward a maker in Rohan said in his song of the Mounds of the Mundberg:

5	<b>Db</b>	[...] <u>T</u> here <u>T</u> héoden fell,    <u>T</u> hengling mighty,	<b>A</b>
	<b>B</b>	to   his golden <u>h</u> alls    and green pastures	<b>C</b>
	<b>B</b>	in  the <u>n</u> orthern <u>f</u> ields    <u>n</u> ever returning,	<b>A</b>
	<b>E</b>	<u>h</u> igh lord of the <u>h</u> ost.    <u>H</u> arding and Guthláf,	<b>A+</b>
	<b>A+</b>	<u>D</u> únhere and <u>D</u> éorwine,    <u>d</u> oughty Grimbald,	<b>A</b>
10	<b>A+</b>	<u>H</u> erefara and <u>H</u> erubrand,    <u>H</u> orn and Fastred,	<b>A</b>
	<b>A</b>	<u>f</u> ought and <u>f</u> ell there    in  a <u>f</u> ar country:	<b>C</b>
	<b>A</b>	in the  <u>M</u> ounds of <u>M</u> undburg    und er <u>m</u> ould they lie	<b>B</b>
	<b>C</b>	with  their <u>l</u> eague-fellows,    <u>l</u> ords of Gondor,	<b>A</b>
	<b>B</b>	Neith er <u>H</u> irluin the Fair    to  the <u>h</u> ills by [the] sea,	<b>B</b>
15	<b>B</b>	nor <u>F</u> orlong the old    to  the <u>f</u> lowering vales	<b>B</b>
	<b>A</b>	ever, [to] <u>A</u> rnach,    to  his <u>o</u> wn country	<b>C</b>

<sup>742</sup> Tolkien, *Arthur*, 227

<sup>743</sup> Tolkien, *Lays*, 54.

<sup>744</sup> *Lost Road*, 90-91.

**B** returned in triumph || [...]

Tolkien is remembering here the similar emphasis on the names of the combatants recorded in *Maldon*, one of whom, the poem preserves, was named Dūnhere (line 255a).

Sweet comments in his headnote on the ‘Gnomic Verses’ (*Maxims II*), ‘The so-called gnomic verses show poetry in its earliest form, and are no doubt of great antiquity [...] abrupt and disconnected, they are yet full of picturesqueness[...].’<sup>745</sup> Hence with “Treebeard’s List” Tolkien is giving to his ‘eldest’ being not merely the oldest form of English verse but, according to the scholarship of his day, the oldest form of that poetry, even of all poetry. Sweet’s comment that the *Maxims* appear ‘abrupt and disconnected’ may refer both to the content—the alliteration itself seeming to supply the only connective element—and their preponderant *Zeilenstil* (remarked by Phelpsstead): again, early Anglo-Saxon scholarship tended to postulate *Zeilenstil* as the *earliest* alliterative-verse style.<sup>746</sup> Thus we can perceive again how with the figure of Treebeard and his ‘list’ Tolkien is encoding and embodying a cultural, linguistic, and metrical genealogy of poetry, alliterative verse symbolised as cultural memory and regenerative organic vitality, tenacity, persistence.

That junior Inkling, Auden, could almost be speaking precisely about Treebeard and Tolkienian poetics—in fact Auden mentions Tolkien and Ker and his revelatory first encounter with medieval English poetry in the context of the following pronouncements—when he discusses in his 1956 Inaugural Lecture as Oxford Professor of Poetry, “Making, Knowing, and Judging”,<sup>747</sup> how for him in childhood ‘a word was [...] not simply an indicative sign; it was the Proper Name of a Sacred Being’, hence the poet is Adamic, Adam himself being the proto-poet.<sup>748</sup> Accordingly Auden’s ensuing catechism, to which ‘If a critic could truthfully answer “yes” [...] I should trust his judgment implicitly on all literary matters’ stages the leading

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<sup>745</sup> Sweet, *Reader*, 168.

<sup>746</sup> R. D. Fulk, et al., *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, clxi-clxii.

<sup>747</sup> W. H. Auden, *The Dyer’s Hand* (New York: Random House, 1962), 41-42.

<sup>748</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

questions:

Do you like, and by like I really mean like, not approve of on principle

- 1) Long lists of proper names such as the Old Testament genealogies or the Catalogue of ships in the Iliad?
- 2) Riddles and all other ways of not calling a spade a spade?
- 3) Complicated verse forms of great technical difficulty, such as Englyns, Drott-Kvaetts [sic], Sestinas [...]?<sup>749</sup>

It is because of the significance and magical potency of names, of naming things, of words, that Treebeard, in a manner at once of the poet-magician, the philologist, and the philosopher, is so concerned by, and with, them:

Pippin, though still amazed, no longer felt afraid. Under those eyes he felt a curious suspense, but not fear. ‘Please,’ he said, ‘who are you? And what are you?’ A queer look came into the old eyes, a kind of wariness; the[ir] deep wells were covered over. ‘Hrum, now,’ answered the voice; ‘well [...]’ (*Rings*, 464).

Upon his being informed that Hobbits are ‘hole-dwellers’ (in Tolkien’s constructed etymology Shire ‘hobbit’ is a worn-down derivation from ‘a word preserved [...] in Rohan’, OE < \**holbytla*, ‘hole-builder’, *Rings*, 1130.) Treebeard approves, perceiving an etymological or phono-semantic fitness:<sup>750</sup> ‘“So you live in holes eh? That sounds very right and proper” ’— only to grow concerned regarding the authority of the appellation, ‘“Who calls you hobbits though? That does not sound Elvish to me. Elves made all old words: they began it” ’, and to be shocked when Pippin blithely answers ‘“ [...] we call ourselves that” ’: ‘“Come now! Not so hasty! You call *yourselves* hobbits? But you should not go telling just anybody. You’ll be letting out your own right names if you’re not careful” ’—which of course they proceed to do. Treebeard however declines to reveal his true, Entish name, adding ‘“For one thing it would take a long while: my name is growing all the time, and I’ve lived a very long, long time; so *my* name is like a story [...]’, concluding philologically ‘“Real names tell the story of the things they belong to [...]” ’ (*Rings* 465). This idea is recapitulated later:

‘Let us leave this — what did you say you call it?’  
 ‘Hill?’ suggested Pippin. ‘Shelf? Step?’ suggested Merry.

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<sup>749</sup> Ibid., 47–48.

<sup>750</sup> Ross Smith, *Inside Language: Linguistic and Aesthetic Theory in Tolkien* (Zürich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 2007).



Treebeard repeated the words thoughtfully. ‘*Hill*. Yes, that was it. But it is a hasty word for a thing that has stood here ever since this part of the world was shaped.’ (*Rings*, 466).

Treebeard’s recollection and recitation of the list is occasioned, in narrative pretext, by his very inability to *name and ‘place’* the hobbits because their genus is alien to his catalogue: “‘What are *you*, I wonder? I cannot place you. You do not seem to come in the old lists [...] you do not seem to fit in anywhere!’” Pippin volunteers a new line, suggesting that, as Hobbits are the Little People, it should be inserted close to Man (line 6) along with the other ‘Free Peoples’ (line 2) in lines 1-6, (*Rings*, 464) and later Treebeard and the Ents agree to include them: “‘I shall not forget [the hobbits]. I have put their names into the Long Lists. Ents will remember it ” ’—Treebeard’s words again emphasising the concept of *þula* as oral-formulaic mnemonic of traditional lore. (*Rings*, 481, 586). In this respect “Treebeard’s List” serves to demonstrate ‘Maxims’ *in action*, analogously to Tolkien’s representation of *heroic* alliterative call to arms, elegy, and lay performed in the context of the Riders’ military culture: he is (re-) imagining how this ancient Germanic genre of *gnomic* verse might have actually worked ‘in real life’ and ‘in real time’—depicting its recollection, performance, function, also organic modification, its adaptive assimilation, retention and transmission of new knowledge.

This tradition is, like Treebeard himself, longaevally alive, living lore encapsulated by a mnemotechnic and renewably versatile verse-form; the opening lines of the list state the chief concepts: the learning of *lore*; and the *naming* of Creation:

1	<b>E</b> <u>L</u> earn now the <u>l</u> ore    of <u>l</u> iving creatures!	<b>C</b>
	<b>E</b> <u>F</u> irst name the <u>f</u> our,    the <u>f</u> ree peoples:	<b>C</b>
	<b>E</b> <u>E</u> ldest of <u>a</u> ll,    the <u>e</u> lf-children;	<b>C</b>
	<b>A</b> <u>D</u> warf the <u>d</u> elver,    <u>d</u> ark are his houses;	<b>A</b>
5	<b>A</b> <u>E</u> nt the <u>e</u> arthborn,    <u>o</u> ld as mountains;	<b>A</b>
	<b>A</b> <u>M</u> an the <u>m</u> ortal,    <u>m</u> aster of horses:	<b>A</b>
[...]		
	<b>A</b> <u>B</u> eaver the <u>b</u> uilder,    <u>B</u> uck the leaper,	<b>A</b>
	<b>Da</b> <u>B</u> ear <u>b</u> ee-hunter,    <u>b</u> oar the fighter;	<b>A</b>
	<b>A</b> <u>H</u> ound is <u>h</u> ungry,    <u>h</u> are is fearful...	<b>A</b>
[...]		
10	<b>A</b> <u>E</u> agle in <u>e</u> yrrie,    <u>o</u> x in pasture	<b>A</b>
	<b>Da</b> <u>H</u> art <u>h</u> orn-crownéd;    <u>h</u> awk is swiftest.	<b>A</b>
	<b>A</b> <u>S</u> wan the whitest,    <u>s</u> erpent coldest...	<b>A</b>

The verses are presented in three initial sections (*Rings*, 464) formed by Treebeard's pauses, 'hm, hm, hm', as he clears his throat and searches his memory, unlocking his wordhoard; as Shippey points out, the Ent is 'giving excerpts' from a purported longer poem.<sup>751</sup> Pippin proposes a new line (*Rings*, 465):

A+ Half-grown hobbits, || the hole-dwellers. C

which Treebeard seems prepared to tolerate—'Hm! Not bad [...] that would do[...] ', but as Shippey remarks he appears to reject this in, eventually, adding three new lines following a very slightly adapted (with no metrical change) variant of line 5, the first amplifying it parallelistically (*Rings*, 586):<sup>752</sup>

	<b>A</b>	Ents the <u>e</u> arthborn,    <u>o</u> ld as mountains,	<b>A</b>
	<b>C</b>	the <u>w</u> ide- <u>w</u> alkers,    <u>w</u> ater drinking:	<b>A</b>
15	<b>A</b>	and  <u>h</u> ungry as <u>h</u> unters,    the <u>H</u> obbit children	<b>C</b>
	<b>B</b>	the <u>l</u> aughing-folk,    the <u>l</u> ittle people,	<b>C</b>

yielding us a total of sixteen alliterative full-lines occasioned by "Treebeard's List" for consideration.

It may immediately be noticed from the page, regarding typographical presentation, that the medial caesurae are not conspicuously marked, at most—if indeed they may be discerned as and said to be indicated at all: this is uniformly so in *Rings*.<sup>753</sup> The printing of "Treebeard's List" appears to *differ* from that which seems to be Tolkien's custom in his alliterative verse (his end-rhymed verse as printed evinces inconsistency in this respect) in that the initial letter of each new line is capitalised. Tolkien *never* seems to do this, in any of his other alliterative poetry. This initial capitalisation is anomalous, attested uniquely on page 464-5. Line 1 naturally begins with a capital L, likewise Pippin's new line (though this could have been avoided with a colon), and because 1b ends with an exclamation mark, 2a's 'First' is again capitalised.

<sup>751</sup> Shippey, "Tolkien's Development," 24.

<sup>752</sup> Shippey, "Alliterative Verse," 10.

<sup>753</sup> Tolkien's alliterative poetry exhibits considerable range in its metrical handling of the caesura, but its *typographical* representation moreover invites review adducing published texts and MS evidence: see the MS facsimiles printed as frontispiece to *Arthur* and *Sigurd* (which latter case is complicated by the poem's being in *fornyrðislag*), the MS pages from "Húrin" printed in *Lays*, 15, and Christopher's editorial note on this matter, *Lays*, 5.

Thereafter the situation is dubious. Possibly the capitalisation of ‘eldest’ in apposition to ‘elf’ reflects idiosyncratic auctorial preference,<sup>754</sup> and yet why capitalise the adjective but not the noun? The emerging hypothesis, that every line after 3 begins with a capitalised initial because all these lines begin with a *noun* looks initially attractive, understood as tokening the importance of *naming* in the poem, and as such remains notable and significant—yet insofar as it might have justified the capitalisations is invalidated by the fact (which, again, supports the naming idea) that all the *off*-verses of last six lines of the initial batch of excerpts *also* begin with nouns, *none* of which is capitalised. The four lines added on page 586 seem to conform to Tolkien’s normal preference, but here ‘Hobbit’ (the *hofuðstafr* of the third line) *does* have a capitalised initial.

Of the shape and fall of the lines, that their cadences are predominantly feminine is also readily apparent. All the *off*-verses end on trochees; only four (1a, 2a, 3a, 16a) of the total thirty-two hemistichs (c.12%) are in rising rhythm. This trochaic prevalence gives the poem a marked singsong lilt which might be perceived as a lyricism, perhaps even a kind of rhythmical end-rhyming effect, abetted by a remarkable (and perhaps quite incidental) cross-texturing of numerous acoustic echoes such as produced merely by the many agentive (4a, 7a and b, 8a and b, 13b, 14a, 15a), and succession of superlative, suffixes (11b-12b), amounting to rhyme in some instances, as between 1a and 2a, 3a and 6a, which also chime assonantly with the agentive suffixes and with a run of the nouns, ‘beaver’, ‘bear’, ‘boar’, ‘hare’. This trochaic rhythm is a marked characteristic of Tolkien’s verse; three (**A**, **C**, **Da**) of the six paradigmatic patterns of alliterative metre are falling, but it is to be wondered whether Tolkien’s ear may also have been affected by the frequently trochaic cadences in Old Norse verse (stipulated in *dróttkvætt*) and of the *Kalevala*’s *Hiawatha*-trochaic tetrameter.

It is noticeable how, as Phelpstead observes, ‘For this poem [...] Tolkien slightly adapts the Old English meter by making a possible alliterative pattern into a norm’,<sup>755</sup> in that in a high degree of regularity all but two of these full-lines exhibit ‘full’ alliteration, with 12, 16 only showing the ‘simple’ scheme. The lyricism of this rhythmic singsong and regular maximal alliterative incidence notwithstanding,

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<sup>754</sup> Scull and Hammond, Note on 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, esp. xx.

<sup>755</sup> Phelpstead, “Auden,” 444-45.

Phelpstead, observing ‘The lines, [...] indeed most of the half-lines, are self-contained’, finds this ‘contriv[es] to give the whole a somewhat prosaic feel’; as observed above however, this *Zeilenstil* has been regarded, according to the historical stylistics of the form, as older and more lyrical than the later, prosier, *Hakenstil*.<sup>756</sup>

Salient too from these lines is a very remarkable degree of syllabic-rhythmic concision. Five hemistichs only out of the thirty-two are longer than the tetrasyllabic minimum, and those five are but pentasyllables; only three disyllables are resolved; and there is merely one—perhaps meaningful—anacrusis. Hence in these lines Tolkien achieves exemplification in their simplest, minimal forms the basic metrical types (**A**, **B**, **C**, **Da**, **E**, leaving only **Db** unrepresented) in Modern English phrases.

Metrically, the four masculine cadences correspond to the three **E-Type** and one **B-Type** lines, 1a-3a, 16a; as Shippey has noted the sequence of three **E-Types** makes for a rhythmically ‘surprising’ opening, with **C-Types** ‘follow[ing] [...] in each case’. This ‘avoids [the] monotony’ threatened by the ‘string of **A-Types**’ from 4, interpreted by Shippey as ‘clearly deliberately metrically repetitive [...] establish[ing] the idea of a repetitive list’ also communicated by the grammatical form ‘*x* the *y*, *x* is *y*, *x* in *y*’:<sup>757</sup> this indeed imitates the stereotyped formulaic rhetoric of the Old English *Maxims*: ‘*x sceal on y*, followed by halflines expounding *x*’,<sup>758</sup> or *x byþ y...*, as does the admirable variegation supplied by inclusion of two **Das** (8a and 11a). In fact therefore Treebeard’s initial dozen lines feature—in finely-achieved manifestations—three **E** and two **D Types**, comparatively a fairly high frequency relative to the number of lines, but only three **Cs**: and no **Bs**.

Are there *metrical* reasons for Treebeard’s rejection of Pippin’s suggested interpolation? Shippey notes it is ‘deft but not quite like’ the List’s standard lines, and he finds it ‘metrically a little doubtful’, questioning whether one can ‘allow *hobb-* to be a long syllable’.<sup>759</sup> I suggest, if the spelling-rules are dismissed as not fitting well to Modern English, it can be at least by rhetorical emphasis in this position. The dance of the phrasal and rhetorical rhythms through the metre is what produces its life and

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<sup>756</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>757</sup> Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 24.

<sup>758</sup> Shippey, *Wisdom*, 12.

<sup>759</sup> Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 24.

music: there is always some negotiative compromise between metrical rule and prosodic reality, between ordinary discourse and poetry's stylised, specially patterned, ritual register of utterance, exerting in concert their forces on the speech-material to heighten it into the tuned tension of the specially artificialised and stylised mode of language we recognise as raised to the status of 'verse'—as pegs are turned to tighten the harpstring. Moreover the ultimate principle in this metric is how it plays in performance. This is especially so in the transference of Old English rule to Modern English adaptation.<sup>760</sup>

Shippey concedes that this makes 13a 'an **A-type**'. What interests me is the fact that the line is evidently *front-heavy*: HALF GROWN HOBB-, but the second word does not participate in the alliterative scheme, commanded by the *h-* headstave of 'hole': hence the two studdles are 'Half' and 'hobb-'. The initially possible **Da** is therefore eliminated. Alliteration and hyphenation suggest that '-grown' must be subordinated: and yet *is* a long-stressed element. It cannot be an **E** because the third syllable 'Hobb-' is clearly stressed and alliterating: it would demand substitution in **E**'s cadence. It produces, that is, a heavy dip, which implies that Shippey's unspecified **A-type** in 13a can be identified more precisely as an *overweighted A*: '*Overweighting* is most frequently seen in pattern A. It consists in replacing the dip by a long (subordinate) stress [...] usually confined to the first half of the line, and [...] regularly provided with double alliteration [...]'<sup>761</sup> This **A+** is hence unlike Treebeard's normal **As**, and Pippin teams it with 'a regular **C**',<sup>762</sup> whereas in his first dozen Treebeard displays a preference for matching **As** with **As** (e.g. 4-6, 7, 9, 10, 12).

Treebeard's eventual incorporation of hobbits into the List, not after line 6 as Pippin submitted but after 7, seems to prompt the alteration of 'Ent' to the plural (perhaps a trivial variant), and the *expansion* represented by the apparently new 14, consisting of a regular **C** mated with another regular **A**. But as Shippey perceives 'Treebeard perhaps concedes the hobbits' individuality [...] by awarding them two regular but by his standards anomalous lines'.<sup>763</sup>

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<sup>760</sup> Shippey, "Tolkien's Development," 17.

<sup>761</sup> Tolkien, "Translating Beowulf," 64-65.

<sup>762</sup> Shippey, "Tolkien's Development," 24.

<sup>763</sup> *Ibid.*

I identify the first anomaly as the metrically and grammatically striking *conjunction* beginning line 15 introducing the hobbits. This is *the first 'and'* in the poem as recited, and it forms *the first anacrusis*. This could be interpreted as a formal recognition signalling that the hobbits are *an addition* to the List. This accords with Shippey's scansion of 15a as **A** with anacrusis, yoked with a **C**, in which 'Treebeard, note, a stricter metrist than Pippin, takes *Hobbit* as two short syllables resolved'.

Unfortunately Shippey's quotation has garbled word-order in line 16—transposing the adjectives, which muddies scansion.<sup>764</sup> 16a is the first and only **B** ('laughing' cannot undergo *auflösung*) in the List as 'quoted'; the best (and entirely persuasive) solution for 16b—whose adjective is 'little'—is **C** with resolution of the first lift, not *pace* Shippey 'another **A** with anacrusis'. Shippey concludes with his own Treebeardism: 'The poetic moral I would draw from this is that variation works best within regularity—as long as one has ears to hear both the regularity and the departures from it.'<sup>765</sup>

Tolkien makes Treebeard helpfully didactic even when verbally inarticulate: after line 12 the Ent appears to forget the wording but continues swaying to the verse-*rhythm* and lapses into his habitual 'woodwind' *vocalise*: 'Hoom, hm; hoom, hm, how did it go? Room tum, room tum, roomty toom tum' (*Rings*, 464.). This looks like merely comedic characterisation: it becomes very clear from Tolkien's own performance however that this is actually a kind of alliterative-verse 'scat-singing' like iambicising in 'di-DUM's. 'Hoom, hm, hoom, hm' mimics the rhythmic shape of the **A-Type** hemistich of such regular incidence in the List, whilst 'roomty toom tum' *might* echo certain variant **D** or **E-Types**<sup>766</sup>—just as Pound resorts to illustrating 'rhythmic monads' by 'Hump, diddywim tum ...Hump, bump, stunt.'<sup>767</sup>

I have noticed already the List's notable instances of two **D** (8a, 11a) and three **E-**(1a, 2a, 3a) **types**; these are in their accommodation of the speech-material to the rhythmic concision and solidity, and correct alliteration, of the metre, admirably accomplished. The second, accentually-*subordinated* syllables of the **E** hemistichs are

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<sup>764</sup> Ibid.

<sup>765</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>766</sup> **D3**?

<sup>767</sup> Pound, *Guide*, 95.

not suffered to participate; in 3a the initial vowel of the preposition is not counted, but the hemistich includes vocalic modulation on the second prop. In the **D** half-lines, both the front-heaviest subtype **Da**, the first two syllables must constitute consecutive full lifts, hence both carry the stave ('Bear bee-', 'Hart-horn-'); whereas the third syllables, being a subordinate accent, do not ('hunt-', 'crown-'). The two **Ds** are particularly interesting dictionally, including in but not restricted to the way the hyphenated compound word-forms 'bee-hunter', 'horn-crowned', and syntactically, as descriptive epithets *following* a preceding noun, co-operate with **D-E types**.

Whereas in 8a the light termination is achieved by the agentive suffix, 11a avails itself of the accentuation of the adjectival *-ed* suffix, a 'poetical' stylistic found in "Sheave" and in "Húrin" but occurring in the (later) *Rings* alliterative verse only here, and perhaps defensible as an archaism in an ancient list. The other dictional interest in 8a and 11a impinges also upon the alliterative dimension.

The List's alliterative rhyming of noun with its characterising adjective or descriptive epithet serves particularly well to suggest how alliteration *functions as an instrument of associative thought*. A bee is busy; king has queen: 'dwarf' elicits 'delver' and therefore 'dark' (4); the treeish Ent evokes 'earth' and 'old' (5); 'mortal man' is idiomatic, as we are distinguished by our consciousness of mortality, and in Middle-earth peculiarly defined by fact of it (the redemptive 'Gift of Iluvatar');<sup>768</sup> similarly it is no great cognitive leap from 'Hobbit' to 'hungry' and thence to the linguistically resident alliterative figure of speech 'as a hunter'(15), or from 'Hobbit' to the 'hole'(13) inscribed in its (Tolkienian) etymology. 'Beaver' fetches 'build'(7a) as 'eagle' 'eerie' and 'hart' 'horns'.

Alliteration finds<sup>769</sup> the 'loyal letters'<sup>770</sup> 'leading from word to word',<sup>771</sup> and spell-binds them,<sup>772</sup> working thereafter as *aide-memoire* sonic-conceptual linkage; but in this genre especially it acquires the quality of appearing to elicit and actualise phono-

<sup>768</sup> Cf. '[...] Mortal Men doomed to die', l. 3 of the 'ringspell', which also echoes the List's 'estates' of Elves, Dwarves, Men.

<sup>769</sup> *Beowulf* ll. 867b-874a. Cf. Romance *trobar, trover > trouvère*, 'troubadour'.

<sup>770</sup> *Gawain* ll. 31-35.

<sup>771</sup> *Hávamál* stanza 141.

<sup>772</sup> *Beowulf* ll. 867b-74a.

semantic connexions apprehended as seeming meaningfully, non-arbitrarily, predestined, resident and latent *within* the language. These patterns of linguistic sound and sense, it is felt, can be found and fulfilled in human language because Man is part of Nature and his language mirrors and maps that Natural order, thus reinforcing the *Maxims'* concept of *kosmos*: it *feels* inevitably right that 'man' should alliterate with 'mortal' and 'hart' with 'horn', phono-semantics corresponding to Natural correlations.

In (disappointing) philological fact, however, 'eagle' and 'eyrie' are *not* etymologically related;<sup>773</sup> just as in line 13 Tolkien quibbles upon his constructed asterisk-etymology for 'Hobbit', the etymological meaning of 'hart' is indeed 'horned (beast)', thus *alliterative phonic* connexion here does fulfil *etymological* relationship. This kind of etymological re-activation is detectable in "Húrin", wherein a weapon is 'wrought by wrights' (1147), boughs bend, a character is 'healed whole' (770a, 730a; 'betrayed/troth', 1149, looks like, yet is not, one such),<sup>774</sup> intimating a form of poetic linguistic restoration realising, as has been said, patterns encoded in the language, frequently involving alliterative associations, which can as here assume the aspect of a sort of self-fulfilling, self-corroborating, *veridically tautegorical* statement.

Tolkien would certainly have been aware of this radical affinity between Germanic \**χerutaz* and I.E.\* *√kerw-* (cf. Lat. *cervus*, and indeed 'Cornwall'), but **1**) 11a probably qualifies as intertextual allusion to traditional lore in Old English and Norse sources. I identify *Skáldskaparmál* 88, in which the hart is horned, antlered: *Hjǫrtr*: [...] *dalarr, dalr* [...], the Old English *Rune Poem* stanza 2 (lines 4-6), which defines **Ū** UR, the aurochs, as an *oferhyrned* [...] *dēor*: and above all *Beowulf* 1369a, *heorot hornum trum*, of which indeed Tolkien's line amounts almost to a translation, although *Beowulf*'s line is **Db** not **Da**. (What Tolkien *omits* to follow, in his very traditional line, from this tradition is the designation, common to all three sources, of the horned beast as *mōrstapa*, *hæðstapa*, *mótroðnir*.)

To carry any such technique further Tolkien would have had to have associated (note that some of these do indeed alliterate) 'elf' with 'albino', 'man' with 'mind', 'swan' with 'song', or 'sound', 'serpent' with 'creeping', and 'beaver' and 'bear' with

<sup>773</sup> The most (especially presently) pleasing etymology for 'eyrie' relates it to 'air'.

<sup>774</sup> Tolkien, *Lays*, 44, 34-35.



‘brown’: which last brings us to back to 1) 8a. The designation ‘bee-hunter’ qualifying ‘bear’ smuggles Beowulf’s very name into “Treebeard’s List”, and, calling upon a profoundly ancient and widely-attested Indo-European lexis of nicknames for the bear, emphasises once more the List’s affiliations with riddling and magical nomination. ‘Bee-hunter’ for ‘bear’ is in fact an apotropaic religious *euphemism*, avoiding utterance of the holy, unspeakable, *tabu*, name of His Beasthood as worshipped across Eurasia since the Ice Age; which is of course the solution to the riddling name *Beowulf*. ‘Bear’ is *itself* just such a euphemism, meaning ‘brown [one]’ (cf. ‘Bruin’), hence the alternative root represented by Graeco-Latin *arct-*, *urs-*, Sanskrit ऋक्ष *ṛkṣa*. (Tolkien’s ‘bee-hunter’ appears hitherto to have been recognised only by Robert Nye in the title for his children’s retelling of *Beowulf*.<sup>775</sup>)

Treebeard’s sequence of terms with the superlative suffix, lines 11b-12, can likewise be traced to a specific Old English source, once again the *Maxims* with their proverbial figure of identifying the superlative forms of things. Thus, while the Ents categorise ‘hawk **is swiftest**’, swan whitest, serpent coldest, the *Maxims* in intriguing conjunction of ‘Fate’ with elements, weathers and seasons, nominate

*Wind byð on lyfte swiftust*  
*þunar byð þrāgum hlūdast [...]*  
*Wyrð byþ swīðost, winter byð cealdost,*  
*lencten hrīmigost, hē byð lengest ceald,*  
*sumor sunwlitegost, swegel byþ hātost,*  
*hærfest hreðēadigost [...]*<sup>776</sup>

Whereas *Maxims* IB adjudges *Dōm bið sēlast*,<sup>777</sup> and, mysteriously sinister—cf. Dunharrow—*dēop dēada weg dyrne bið lengest*.<sup>778</sup>

Alike noteworthy, and most important in the Rohirric context, is line 6. Man is characterised, defined, as mortal (6a) and as ‘master of horses’: cf. ‘Where now the horse and the rider?’ Mindful of the ancience of Tolkien’s ‘bear’-kenning this line

<sup>775</sup> *Bee Hunter: Adventures of Beowulf* (London: Faber, 1968).

<sup>776</sup> *Maxims* II, ll. 3b-4a, 5-11.

<sup>777</sup> *Maxims* IB, 10b.

<sup>778</sup> *Maxims* IB, 9.

prompts recollection that the Indo-Europeans of the Pontic steppe (*emnett*) were the domesticators of the *equus*,<sup>779</sup> hence the tradition of Indo-European horse-names paralleled in ancient Greek, Indic, and Irish, a custom Tolkien donates to his Rohirrim, witness *Éomer*, *Éowyn*, *Éothain*, and their ancient ethnonym *Éothéod*,<sup>780</sup> <eoh, horse, cognate *equus* <P.I.E. \* $\sqrt{ekwos}$ .

But again the source for “Treebeard’s List” can be adduced immediately from Old English gnomic poetry. Since the nineteenth rune in the *futhorc* is E(O)H the *Rune Poem* occurs as the first place to look, and stanza 19 (lines 55-8) proves indeed to define ‘M [EOH] *byþ for eorlum æpelinga wyn* [...]’. The *Rune Poem* defines the fifth rune R RAD also with inevitable reference to a warrior riding a *mēare*,<sup>781</sup> while *Maxims IC* yields *Til mon tiles ond tames mēares/cūþes ond gecostes ond calcrandes*,<sup>782</sup> cf. Tolkien’s Rohirric *Mearas*. *Rune Poem* line 55 affords the seam *eoh*, *eorl* collocated with *wyn*, yet the Rohirric motherlode is struck in *Maxims IA* l.64, *Eorl sceal on ēos boge, ēored sceal getrume rīdan*—wherein *eorl*, *ēos*, and *ēored* (the latter also attested in *Exodus* line 157b), constitute the three alliterative staves in a single line: which brings us to the ‘Eorlings’.

### ‘So the Songs Tell Us...’

Even today (despite the critics) you may find men not ignorant of tragic legend and history, who have heard of heroes and indeed seen them [...]

—Tolkien, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, 16.

My poetry has received little praise [...] I refer to reviews by self-styled literary blokes. Perhaps largely because in the contemporary atmosphere—in which ‘poetry’ must only reflect one’s personal agonies of mind or soul, and exterior things are only valued by one’s own ‘reactions’—it seems hardly ever recognised that the verses in *The L.R.* are all dramatic: they do not express the poor old professor’s soul-searchings, but are fitted in style and contents to the characters in the story that sing or recite them, and to the situations in it.<sup>783</sup>

<sup>779</sup> David W. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 193-224 passim.

<sup>780</sup> *Ēoh*- merely looks as if present in the etymology of *eorl*, *eorlingas*.

<sup>781</sup> *Old English Rune Poem*, ll. 13-15.

<sup>782</sup> *Maxims IC*, ll. 4-5

<sup>783</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 396.

To his German translator Tolkien wrote the verses

are an integral part of the narrative (and of delineation of the characters) and not a separable ‘decoration’. [...] I myself am pleased by metrical devices and verbal skill (now out of fashion), and am amused by representing my imaginary historical period as one in which these arts were delightful to poets and singers, and their audiences. But otherwise the verses are all impersonal; they are [...] dramatic, [...] fitted with care in style and content to the characters and situations in the story [...] <sup>784</sup>

For Shippey to evaluate the Rohirric sub-corpus Tolkien’s ‘finest achievement in alliterative verse’ <sup>785</sup> is suggestive considered in conjunction with its technical aspect, as, noteworthy, Tolkien himself identified it as ‘written in the strictest form of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse’; intending, probably, a contradistinction with the variety assayed in *Beorhtnoth*, a mode of the ‘measure little if at all freer’ than that of *Maldon* ‘though used for dialogue’ <sup>786</sup> hence implying the metric-stylistic model here is ‘classical’ heroic Old English poetry as represented by *Beowulf*—or perhaps, it might be advanced (as being additionally *generically* closer) such ‘lays’ as *Waldere* or the *Finnesburh Fragment*. <sup>787</sup> Tolkien states this designation in a 1956 letter to a ‘fan’, discussing a projected but finally abortive ‘extra’ ‘specialist’ fourth volume to satisfy readers’ ‘demand[s]’ for yet more information concerning Middle-earth, including for ‘metrics and prosodies [...] of the “translated” verses in less familiar modes’. The example he specifies of ‘the strictest form of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse’ is ‘the fragment at the end of “The Battle of the Pelennor [Fields]”, i.e. **8**’ <sup>788</sup> It interests me, that is, that in Shippey’s assessment, poetically ‘finest’ apparently does coincide with technically ‘strictest’.

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<sup>784</sup> Scull and Hammond, *Reader’s Guide*, 768.

<sup>785</sup> Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 25.

<sup>786</sup> “Beorhtnoth,” 124.

<sup>787</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *Finn and Hengest, The Fragment and the Episode*, ed. Alan Bliss (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982). More directly analogous, as full-scale epic narrative, in intention, to *Beowulf* are “Húrin” (and associated fragments, *Lays* 131-42) and *Arthur*.

<sup>788</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 247-48.

Shippey cursorily indicates **5**'s 'echoes in form and content' of the 'Finnsburg Fragment' and 'the "Prophetess' Spell"',<sup>789</sup> —*Völuspá*'s clairvoyant foreboding of *Ragnarǫkr*.

Tall and proud [Théoden] seemed again; and rising in his stirrups he cried in a loud voice, more clear than any there had ever heard a mortal man achieve before:

1	<b>B</b>	Arise, arise,    Riders of Théoden!	<b>A</b>
	<b>Db</b>	Fell deeds awake:    fire and slaughter!	<b>A</b>
	<b>A</b>	Spear shall be shaken,    shield be splintered,	<b>A</b>
	<b>A+a</b>	sword-day, a red day,    ere  the sun rises!	<b>C</b>
5	<b>A+</b>	Ride now, ride now!    Ride to Gondor!	<b>A</b>

With that he seized a horn from Guthláf his banner-bearer, and he blew such a blast upon it that it burst asunder. And straightway all the horns of the host were lifted up in music [...]

Replete as Northern poetry is with this trope of heroic exhortation (cf. in Old Norse the legendary 'hvot' *Bjarkamál hin fornu*) Tolkien's lines do constitute direct, combined textual allusion to these specific sources—amounting indeed to translation, as becomes evident when the material is compared collated. I take it Shippey's first identification may be particularised as c. lines 8b-12 of the Old English poem, with **5** lines 1a and 2a remaking *Finnesburh* 8a *nū āriṣað wēadāda* —cf. **2**'s variant *Arise now* [...]—and 10a *Ac onwacnigeað nū, wīgend mīne*; but also to be adduced, I suggest, is the similar 'whetting' in *Maldon*: Théoden's moving (and alliterative) encouragement to his men not to fear—a sentiment greatly amplified by relocation in Tolkien's eschatological narrative context<sup>790</sup>—recalls strongly the (also-moving) *Maldon* c.lines19-21, *hū hīe sceoldon standan, and þone stede healdan* [...] *ond ne forhtedon nā*.<sup>791</sup>

Though such interpretation is biographical, extrinsic to the text, and whilst it must not be taken as an invitation to translate reductively the meaningfulness of Tolkien's myth into such reference, it adds a dimension to recall, again, that we are reading the work of a veteran of the Somme. Théoden's emotively rhetorical exhortation to his Mercian cavalry before their great charge into the Pelennor acquires cenotaphic

<sup>789</sup> Shippey, "Alliterative Verse," 11.

<sup>790</sup> The Riders face the literal(ised) forces of Darkness: *Rings*, 836, 840.

<sup>791</sup> Inscribed, notably, on Borges' gravestone.

valence. Could not this be Maldon, Brunanburh, Hastings, Agincourt, Balaclava...Flanders? Tolkien's carefully 'moderate[ly] archais[ing]'<sup>792</sup> prose throbs with stirring alliterating stresses on sonorant open vowels and forceful obstruents (*Rings*, 836):

Now is the hour come, Riders of the Mark, sons of Eorl! Foes and fire are before you, and your homes far behind. Yet, though you fight upon an alien field, the glory that you rear there shall be your own for ever. Oaths ye have taken: now fulfil them all, to lord and land and league of friendship! [...] Forth now, and fear no darkness!<sup>793</sup>

'*Rum ram ruf*, as Chaucer's parson mocked it'<sup>794</sup> This gibing cleric has had progeny; it has not been sufficiently appreciated that just as this poetry is addressed to mouth and ear, Tolkien writes as a teller, a bardic, oral prose, a style *proper to* mythopoeic heroic romance rather than to the bourgeois-realist novel, intended for recitation and listening *aloud* (as among the Inklings). Like the verse, it is deliberately impersonal, timeless, stylised, seeking to circumvent modern *belles-lettres*. The attested models include Norse saga prose but also a centrally English tradition of vernacular prose represented by Malory (see or better, hear, taste, the account of Isildur and the Men of the Mountains quoted above), Mandeville, Tyndale, Hoby, Cheke, Cranmer.

Lines 3-4 of Théoden's slogan allude *Völuspá*'s most famous lines, 7-10 of stanza 45, 3b echoing

[...] *skeggjöld, skálmöld*  
*skildir klofnir,*  
*vindöld, vargöld,*  
*áðr veröld steypisk [...]*<sup>795</sup>

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<sup>792</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 225.

<sup>793</sup> The rolling beat—and *rs*—are very notable in the author's palpably emotional recorded performance, delivered at greater decibels than that with which the dynamic range of the tape-recorder could cope without distortion.

<sup>794</sup> Tolkien, *Gawain*, 149.

<sup>795</sup> Jónsson, *Eddukvæði*, 1:15; stanza 44, lines 7-10, in Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, 2:19.

This recollection of the ‘Old Norse Armageddon’<sup>796</sup> accords well with Tolkien’s narrative, and with the heathen heroic spirit of Éomer and his Riders (*Rings*, 844, 847):

[...] A fey mood took him [...] he spurred headlong back to the front of the great host, and blew a horn, and cried aloud for the onset. Over the field rang his clear voice calling ‘Death! Ride, ride to ruin and the world’s ending!’ And with that the host began to move.[...] *Death* they cried with one voice loud and terrible [...] Stern now was Éomer’s mood [...] He let blow the horns to rally all men to his [...] White Horse [...] banner that could come thither; for he thought to make a great shield-wall at the last, and stand, and fight there on foot till all fell, and do deeds of song on the fields of Pelennor, though no man should be left in the West to remember the last King of the Mark [...] the lord of a fell people.

Tolkien’s verbal motifs ‘fey’ and ‘fell’ particularly notable here as signalling the *Ragnarok*-ethos, as also, of course, inter alia line 3a of Éomer’s ‘staves’, **7**), ‘to hope’s end I rode’ (**Db** with anacrusis). Noteworthy metrically is **5**) line 2’s **Db**, announcing the imminence of ‘fell deeds’ (*wēadēda*), the crescendo in metrical heft with 4a, 5a’s ‘overweighted’ **As**—emphasising the ‘day’ is ‘now’—and the special alliterative patterns to mark the momentous day: ‘double’ in 3 and ‘crossed’ in 4.

Shippey’s exposition of **6**), classified by him as ‘at once [...] epitaph and [...] call to arms’, delivered by Éomer over the body of his uncle and lord Théoden King<sup>797</sup> on the battlefield, is exemplary.<sup>798</sup>

But Éomer leaped from the saddle, and grief and dismay fell upon him as he came to the king’s side and stood there in silence.

Then one of the knights took the king’s banner from the hand of Guthláf his banner-bearer who lay dead, and he lifted it up. Slowly Théoden opened his eyes. Seeing the banner he made a sign that it should be given to Éomer.

‘Hail, King of the Mark!’ he said. ‘Ride now to victory! Bid Éowyn farewell!’ And so he died, and knew not that Éowyn lay near him. And those who stood by wept, crying: ‘Théoden King! Théoden King!’

But Éomer said to them:

<b>E</b> <u>M</u> ourn not over <u>m</u> uch!    <u>M</u> ighty was the fallen,	<b>A</b>
<b>A</b> <u>m</u> eat was [his] ending.    When his <u>m</u> ound is raised,	<b>B</b>
<b>E</b> <u>w</u> omen then shall <u>w</u> eep.    <u>W</u> ar now calls us!	<b>A</b>

<sup>796</sup> Shippey, “Alliterative Verse,” 11. Phelpstead, “Auden,” 445 finds **2**), of which **5**) is a variant, ‘vaguely reminiscent’ [in form] of *ljóðahátt*.

<sup>797</sup> Word-order imitating Old English.

<sup>798</sup> Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 23-24.

Yet he himself wept as he spoke. ‘Let his knights remain here,’ he said, ‘and bear his body in honour from the field, lest the battle ride over it! Yea, and all these other of the king’s men that lie here.’ And he looked at the slain, recalling their names. [...]

—Six hemistichs recognised by Shippey as ‘showing what alliterative verse of traditional type can do’. Substantiation of Tolkien’s claim that this is a representation of his ‘strictest’ Anglo-Saxon style, and of Shippey’s contention that this is Tolkien’s best, is again to be found by conducting scansion.

The clear caesurae coincide with full-stops (lines 2,3) and an exclamation-mark (1), demarcating (together with clausal commas) indubitable half-line units, but sense is ‘hooked’ in the enjambements from 1’s off-verse to 2’s on-verse, and likewise from 2b to 3a. Lines 1, 3, show ‘full’ alliteration, 2, ‘simple’. The *hōfuðstafir* strike home in ringing unanimity of sonics and semantics, stressing, in sequence, Théoden’s past ‘might’, his future funeral (‘mound’) then the urgently present exigency of war. The alliteration on *m*- continued from 1’s scheme into 2 affords the effect of extending the semantic (verbal-conceptual) argument, associating in comparison ‘mourning’, ‘mighty’, ‘meet’, and ‘mound’. As Shippey has commented, the lines showcase a ‘close “fit” of sound and sense’, ‘both strong connexion between stressed alliterating words’, as (the additionally pararhymed) ‘might’ and ‘meet’ across 1b-2a, and the ‘strong disjunction’ of ‘weep’[ing] and ‘war’, ‘separated by the caesura, opposed in sense’—exemplifying alliteration’s associative potential to express relation including antithesis, corresponding across the caesura. As in **8**) lines 20-21, ‘The metrical links [...] coexist with strong oppositions between alliterating [...] stresses’—‘death’ : ‘day’, ‘lords’ : ‘lowly’—‘and between lines of identical metre’ (**E**) ‘but opposite sense’— ‘Grey now’ (23a): ‘red then’ (24a).<sup>799</sup>

Shippey highlights ‘the marked metrical variety [...] we see here [...], with **E**, **A**, and **B-types** intermingled’. The metrical types are featly accomplished. In 1a’s **E** an elided disyllabic slack is accommodated in the dip, and alliteration on the second understave points the type’s second full accent, its rising cadence, reinforcing the raise in pitch appropriate to the sense and rhetoric of the exclamation. 1b and 3a feature resolutions of their first lifts; 2a has a disyllabic medial dip and 2b disyllabic anacrusis, while the decisive, incisive, 3b, assisted by rhetorical syntax, combining with

<sup>799</sup> Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 25.

deployment of the caesura, manifests its **Type A** in its simplest and most concise form. The lexico-metrical concision of statement, the (adversative) asyndeton, here witnesses to Tolkien's revival of another 'entirely characteristic [...] feature of Old English poetry', Shippey identifies also in line 1's (causal) parataxis:<sup>800</sup> a laconic ellipsis (in 1 of the implied 'because', in 3 of 'but')—a tightlipped eschewing of wasting wind 'explaining what should be obvious' which 'remains a favourite English rhetorical trope, careful understatement. Alliterative verse is capable not only of great force, but also of great subtlety—though since that subtlety so often depends on understatement, it tends to be missed by modern critics much more in tune with verbosity and hyperbole.'<sup>801</sup>

It may also be observed how the two **E-type** hemistichs parallel each other, apposing rhythm and content: 'the halflines are connected by metre and sense', indeed connect it: 'There is [...] metrical echo of the two **A-type** halflines' (1a, 2a) at the end of the first and [...] start of the second line [...] The metrical clashes of lines 2 and 3 meanwhile'—**A>B, E>A**—'conversely signal strong reversal of sense [...] a complete difference between "then" [...] and "now" [...]: [...] the metrical change reinforces it'; although the selfsame style of contrastive metrical 'grammar' obtains in 1 also, **E>A**. I note last but not least, how further differentiation of content is expressed formally by making, in the two **E-type** hemistichs, the weightier metrical pattern coincide with the heaviness of mournful significance.

For the two much longer of the Ro-heroic lays, here enumerated **4)** and **8)**, Shippey has reserved superlatives: 'the "Lament for Théoden" [**4)**] and the "Song of the Mounds of Mundburg," [**8)**] [...] twenty-one and twenty-seven lines respectively, are perhaps Tolkien's finest expositions of the art of alliteration',<sup>802</sup> 'Tolkien's finest achievement in alliterative verse'.<sup>803</sup>

[...] and so [...] the great ride into the East began with which the songs of Rohan were busy for many long lives of men thereafter.

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<sup>800</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>801</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>802</sup> Shippey, "Alliterative Verse," 10.

<sup>803</sup> Shippey, "Development", 25.



1	<b>Da</b> <sup>804</sup>	From  <u>D</u> ark <u>D</u> unharrow    in  the <u>d</u> im morning	<b>C</b>
	<b>A</b>	with  <u>t</u> hane and captain    rode <u>T</u> hengel's son:	<b>?B/Db</b>
	<b>B</b>	to <u>E</u> doras he came,    the <u>a</u> ncient halls	<b>B</b>
	<b>C</b>	of  the <u>M</u> ark-wardens    <u>m</u> ist-enshrouded;	<b>A</b>
5	<b>A</b>	golden timbers    were  in gloom mantled.	<b>C</b>
	<b>Db</b>	<u>F</u> arewell he bade    to his <u>f</u> ree people,	<b>C</b>
	<b>A+</b>	<u>h</u> earth and <u>h</u> igh-seat,    and  the <u>h</u> allowed places,	<b>A</b>
	<b>A</b>	where  <u>l</u> ong he [had] <u>f</u> easted    ere  the <u>l</u> ight <u>f</u> aded.	<b>C</b>
	<b>Db</b>	<u>F</u> orth rode the king,    <u>f</u> ear behind him	<b>A</b>
10	<b>A</b>	<u>f</u> ate before him.    <u>F</u> ealty kept he;	<b>A</b>
	<b>A</b>	<u>o</u> aths he [had] taken,    <u>a</u> ll fulfilled them.	<b>A</b>
	<b>Da</b>	<u>F</u> orth rode Théoden.    <u>F</u> ive nights and days	<b>Db</b>
	<b>A</b>	<u>e</u> ast and <u>o</u> nward    rode the <u>E</u> orlingas	<b>?C?/A</b>
	<b>A</b>	through  <u>F</u> olde and <u>F</u> enmarch    and  the <u>F</u> irienwood,	<b>B</b>
15	<b>E</b>	<u>s</u> ix thousand <u>s</u> pears    to <u>S</u> unlending	<b>C</b>
	<b>E</b>	<u>M</u> undburg the <u>m</u> ighty    under <u>M</u> indolluin	<b>C</b>
	<b>Da</b>	<u>S</u> ea-king's city    in  the <u>S</u> outh-kingdom	<b>C</b>
	<b>A</b>	<u>f</u> oe-beleaguered,    <u>f</u> ire-encircled.	<b>A</b>
	<b>Db</b>	<u>D</u> oom <u>d</u> rove them on.    <u>D</u> arkness took them,	<b>A</b>
20	<b>A</b>	<u>h</u> orse and <u>h</u> orseman;    <u>h</u> oofbeats afar	<b>E/Db</b>
	<b>A</b>	<u>s</u> ank in[to] <u>s</u> ilence:    so  the <u>s</u> ongs tell us.	<b>C</b>

I included 12½ lines, 5-17a, from **8**), its roster 'record[ing] the [...] many who fell with Théoden King',<sup>805</sup> above in my discussion of **1**), "Treebeard's List", whilst Shippey omits scansion and commentary of **4**) in favour of providing another model reading of **8**) lines 20-7:

So long afterward a maker in Rohan said in his song of the Mounds of Mundburg: [...]

20	<b>A</b>	<u>D</u> eath in [the] morning    and  at <u>d</u> ay's ending	<b>C</b>
	<b>E</b>	<u>l</u> ords took and <u>l</u> owly.    <u>L</u> ong now they sleep	<b>Db</b>
	<b>A</b>	under  <u>g</u> rass in <u>G</u> ondor    by  the <u>G</u> reat River.	<b>C</b>
	<b>E</b>	<u>G</u> rey now as tears,    <u>g</u> leaming silver,	<b>A</b>
	<b>E</b>	<u>r</u> ed then it <u>r</u> olled,    <u>r</u> oaring water:	<b>A</b>
25	<b>Db</b>	<u>f</u> oam dyed with blood    <u>f</u> lamed at sunset;	<b>A</b>
	<b>A</b>	as  <u>b</u> eacons mountains    <u>b</u> urned at evening;	<b>A</b>
	<b>Da</b>	<u>r</u> ed fell the dew    in  <u>R</u> ammas Echor.	<b>A</b>

It is immediately apparent (upon undertaking such complete scansion) the degree of metrical variety, every formal component of the verse interlocking in judicious

<sup>804</sup> Anacrusis being admitted in **D**.

<sup>805</sup> Phelpstead, "Auden," 445.

vicissitude—fulfilling, at this greater extensity, the trend already remarkably conspicuous in the skilful accomplishment exhibited in the foregoing **5**) and **6**)—Tolkien achieved in these culminating (and published) examples of his revival of the art. The full range of all six normal metrical paradigms is represented in **4**), as also in **8**), even in the eight lines (sixteen hemistichs) cited.

Regarding **4**): **A-Types** predominate (at some 80%), consistent with their frequency by typological definition, but I would also advert to the extremely low incidence of **B-types**, in this passage outnumbered not only by **Cs** but even by **Ds** (of which the *b* subtype is *more* numerous here than **Da**), which, interestingly, suggests a deliberate effort to *avoid the ‘iambic’* in favour of the heavily fronted (falling)- or medial (‘clashing’)-stressed rhythmic patterns *distinctive* of alliterative metric. In addition to featuring a notably high proportion of **D-Types** (lines 1a, 2b, 6a, 9a, 12a, 12b, 17a, 19a), this passage also includes one positive, and two possible and likely, **Es**, 15a, 16a, and 20b.

The certainty of **E** in 15a is ensured partly by the ‘full’ *s*-alliteration; the third syllable is, by spelling, ‘heavy’, indeed closed by a consonant-cluster—but short-vowelled, hence must be elided in that environment of juxtaposition to the other syllables. 16a is more problematic; is it an **E** with resolution of the cadential lift, or an **A+** (with overweighted first lift)? I am inclined to prefer the former on grounds of the relative heaviness I find in the second syllable of the toponym, and the retardation of tempo indicated by its medial consonant-cluster. The third case, 20b, could be an **E** or conceivably delivered as a **Db**, but in Tolkien’s recorded performance I hear a slight demotion—consistent with the unhyphenated compound and metrically recognised in consecutive accents—of the second syllable, hence favouring the first option. As Shippey notes of **8**) 21, 23a, 24a, 25a, 27a, allocation of **D** or **E type** is affected by ‘where one chooses to put the secondary stress’, but, as in **4**) 15a in **8**) 24a the alliteration disambiguates that **E** is intended.

A conspicuous metrical *oddity* here, though, is that in 2b and 13b the very word which provides the lines’ verb, which denotes the main idea of the whole passage, and which *should* be, above all, *the headstave* of the two lines—‘*rode*’—goes unstressed! It is not hard to see that neither line alliterates on *r*-. In 2 the headstave, rhyming in a ‘simple’ scheme with the first studdle in the on-verse, is displaced to Théoden’s patronymic, in a hemistich in which that first long syllable really must take accentuation, not least by virtue of sense. Yet in the recording Tolkien skimps it, the

verb, and raises tone and force distinctly on the final noun. This hapless stooge should be inclined to scan 2b as a **Db**, but I am in doubt as to whether Tolkien somehow intends a **B**. Likewise in 13 the ‘full’ alliteration is vocalic, with the headstave (not illogically) on *Eorl-* and Tolkien’s delivery of the off-verse again slurs the *r*-initialled verb and accentuates the ethnonym, its first two long-stressed syllables thus forming the medial ‘clash’ of a **Type C**. I am not arguing that these nouns should not take emphasis, but it seems in every respect (especially in context) extremely odd on both occasions completely to elide ‘rode’ in this way. I confess myself at a loss to account for it.

The length of these two heroic elegies, amongst the almost aphoristic **5**) and **6**) (which latter indeed suggests in the Welsh form *Englyn penfyr*), and the essentially sonnet-sized **1**) (“Treebeard’s List”) and **3**) (“Staves”), affords within *Rings* alliterative poetry on a *scale* in which it is (just) possible to observe *the shaping and carriage of larger passages of rhythm*<sup>806</sup> in every respect—including as a particular, felicitous and characteristic, attribute—vital to this mode: the management of the conduct of the verse over its continuous paragraphing as phrased through the variegation, pacing, and interchange of half-line and full-line units. These more extensive runs of verse, in which the form and style really comes into its own, have a flexing gait of breath and pulse comparable to musical *tempo rubato*. This macrocosmic handling of verse-rhythm is perceptible from an eagle’s-view of the whole, in this case score, of lines, as in the anatomy above, by attention to the perpetual modulation not only of metrical halfline-pattern but also as regulated by the grammar and syntax concerted of line, phrase-length—including reckoning anacrusis and extra syllables in the dip—caesura, enjambment or endstopping; but is harder to define in commentary than the parsing of scansion on the linear and hemistichal levels.

This technique of rhythmic variegation and contrast is conspicuous in **4**) for instance in lines 8-12, where after a sequence of fourteen pretty taut hemistichs a comparatively relaxed line—anacrusis and disyllabic dip in the on-, anacrusis again in the off-verse, and a less marked caesura—occurs, followed by a sequence in rhetorical and metrical

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<sup>806</sup> Familiar in the post-*Beowulf* tradition of English poetry from the blank-verse paragraph even Pound concedes was perfected by Milton; it is also of course evidenced in Pound and Eliot.

‘envelope-pattern’ of some eight half-lines, five **As** (9b-11b) bookended by paralleled **Ds** (9a,12a), whose insistent and concise rhythms are pointed by an extended cross-linear alliterative scheme on *f*- (9, 10,11b, 12). Or again, 17-21 can be adduced as an example of effective rhythmic pivoting, indeed syncopation, of a run of hemistichs by varied caesurae, punctuation, and end-stopping. Note furthermore how changes are continually being rung on that other component in the verse, the alliteration, arranged in patterns shifting from ‘simple’ to ‘full’, to, in *one* instance, ‘crossed’—line 8, the same line noticed as including anacruses, an extra slack syllable, and attenuated caesura: in which form is, thus, deployed to embody content.

A spirited performance of this poetry, like Tolkien’s bravura recording—of which should also be noted, to realise the full effect, his *tremendous* rhotacism, causing the final four lines of **8**) to coalesce into sort of Churchillian bombilation of burring growls—elicits the extraordinary, remarkably exciting, rhythmic insistence and propulsion proper to it. **4**) is a galloping crescendo of momentous charge climaxing, then dying away, in the closing ten lines, in which the thrusting metrical patterns, ‘overstressed’ by hammering, often ‘full’, alliteration, and the effect of syncopation produced by the impetuous ictus of the headstave after the pause of the caesura, suggest an onomatopoeia of the ‘great ride’, *drang nach Osten*. I remarked *supra* the scarcity of ‘iambic’ **B-Types**; the triple (**D, E**), abutted (**C**), and ‘trochaic’ (**A**) beats—registering such rhythmic signatures as ‘ ’ ’, ‘ ’ ’ ’, ‘ ’ ’ ’, ‘ ’ ’ ’, ‘ ’ ’ ’ ’—strike in acoustic mimesis of the rumoured tattoo of hooves (ll.20a-b); and, noticing that Théoden’s cavalry number ‘six thousand’ (l.15) one is inter alia tempted to suspect in all this an element of Tolkienian allusion to the Tennysonian *Light Brigade*’s dactylic six hundred.

Other textual connexions include to Tolkien’s own output of other heroic alliterative verse only recently published. In his poetry he recycled, decadally, specific lines, which thus become like the collective formulae of real bardic traditions. **8**)line 1

**B** We heard of [the] horns || in| the hills ringing **C**

occurs as we have seen even within *Rings*: **3**) line 7. The variant ‘**B** they heard a horn || in| the hills *trembling* **C**’ appears as *Arthur*, I.138, whilst “Hurin” line 1748 affords ‘**C** no horns hooted || in| the hills ringing **C**’. The four modulated versions of the same

line, seen now as recurring in one corpus, may be felt to acquire the quality of an alliterative formula, simulating the nature and effect of those in the early medieval poetries Tolkien studied and emulated, although this is a feature of ancient Germanic poesis no modern reviver has really developed.<sup>807</sup> **8)** 3a, ‘Steeds went striding’ first appears in Tolkien’s published output in *Sigurd*, “Lay of Gudrún” stanza 61. **4)** 9-10a, 12a, 13a, may now be seen to re-use, quasi-formulaically, material from Tolkien’s *Arthur*: I.61, ‘Foes before them, flames behind them’; I.62a, ‘ever east and onward’, I.108a, ‘east rides Arthur!’, IV.13b-14a, ‘The noise of hooves/was lost in silence’.

On which note it might well be remarked, whilst **8)** does indeed make great play of imagery of colour and lustre—the metallic and metonymic sheen of swords, 2a, contrasting in a typically Northern manner with the darkness of 18b-19, ‘dark waters,/ meres [...] under mountains shadows’;<sup>808</sup> the bright clear colours, of ‘golden halls’, ‘green pastures’ (6), culminating in the pathetic ‘grey [...] tears’, (23), gory spume (24-25) of the Great River and ‘red dew’ of blood merging with the ‘flam[ing] sunset’ (25-6, the ‘red nightfall’, **7)** 4b, of the doomsday battle)—the two poems (or excerpts from one lay?), **4)** and **8)**, begin and end with *audition*, of sounds in the distance.

**8)**’s horns and **4)**’s ‘hoofbeats afar’ fading into silence and darkness (19b-21a) emphasise *acoustics*, and indeed the final hemistich of **4)** acknowledges transmission by ‘song’ in the Eorlings’ pre-literate culture. This poem is purported to be a representative and apposite excerpt from the ‘songs of Rohan’ which we are told went on being ‘sung for many long lives of men thereafter’ as their form of oral history. Both details, and **8)** 1a’s wording, of course recall the Old English *wē gefrūnon* epic formula; thus emphasis is placed on audition, on poetry as acoustic, as transmitted tradition, on echoes, on memory. **4)** 21b recurs in *Beorhtnoth* from the lips of the aspiring traditional minstrel and minstrel’s son Torhthelm, his habitual acknowledgement ‘the songs tell us’, ‘as songs tell us’ (37b, 261b) in reference to the inherited Old English poetic corpus.

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<sup>807</sup> Save for Wagner.

<sup>808</sup> Tolkien, “English and Welsh,” in *The Monsters*, 172: ‘*Beowulf* [...] full of dark and twilight [...] laden with sorrow and regret [...] ominous, colourless [...] a *wóma* in the distance’; cf. L. D. Lerner, “Colour Words in Anglo-Saxon,” *Modern Language Review* 46 (1951): 246-49.

This latter is of course also the source for the Rohirric nomenclature prominent in the poem's diction. Just as Théoden's name is an Old English poetical noun, *þēoden*, meaning 'king' (the leader of a *þēod*, people) his father's, 'Thengel', is Old English *þengel* (poetic Old Norse *þengill*), 'prince'; the use of the patronymic, and as a circumlocution in verse, is in in-keeping with Northern tradition, cf. Beowulf referred to as 'bairn of Ecgþēow', etc. In **8**) 5b 'Théoden' is termed in variation 'Thengling', formed by adding a dynastic patronymic suffix to the noun. 'Meduseld' is not nominated, but the name of Rohan's main royal town or *burh* (3a) is Old English *e(o)doras*, 'enclosures, dwellings', cf. *Wanderer* line 77b; that elegy's line 92 *ubi sunt, Hwær cwōm mearg? Hwær cwōm mago?* ('Where now the horse and the rider?') is echoed in **4**) 20a's 'horse and horseman' (NB *Wanderer* 95a's inclusion in lament of the 'majesty of the *þēoden*').

Mention of Théoden's 'hearth' **4**) 7a, suggests the Old English chieftain's *heorþwerod*, the *comitatus* who shared his hearth; the 'hallowed' bonds of the Hall are also invoked in 7a's alliterating 'high-seat', the throne recalling the *þēoden*'s *gifstōl*: an identification verified in Théoden's apprehension of the destruction of Meduseld, 'Fire shall devour the high seat' (*Rings*, 516), an allusion to *Beowulf* 2325b-2327a, [...] *brynewylmum mealt gifstōl Gēata*. 'Folde'(14a)—*monosyllabic* in Tolkien's recorded pronunciation—resonates with Old English/Norse language and Norwegian counties, cf. Rohan's 'Westfold', whilst 'the Firienwood', also known in the book as 'Firienholt', <Old English *fyrigen*, is attested for example in *Beowulf* 1393b, *fyrigenholt*. Old English also accounts for the Eorlings' name for Minas Tirith, 'Mundburg' (16a).

Line 4a's 'Mark-wardens' adroitly combines the Rohirric Mercian calque with the historic English 'Lord Warden of the Marches', and the (asterisk-English, cf. real Fenby, Fenham, Fenstead, Fenton, Fenwick) toponym 'Fenmarch' (14a) includes the same word. Modern (albeit historic) English survival of 'marches' here means that the reader finds such idioms rhythmically transparent, whereas one poetic problem, it might well be alleged, with this verse—critically evaluated *qua* poetry as such—is the extent to which its *diction* does rely upon such fictional (if philologically constructed) onomastics. Of course this is a crucial, distinctive part of Tolkien's enterprise, and, *within the fictional context*, it works.

As has already appeared this is immediately (though provocatively and not finally incurably) a prosodic stumblingblock: interestingly, this difficulty midwives how the

metre depends upon natural accent, normal intonation, hence this faculty is wrongfooted by speech-material to which little or no idiomatic reality can be brought to bear. ‘Dunharrow’, ‘Fenmarch’, even ‘Mundburg’ (still) seem to elicit, intriguingly, an instinctive *Sprachgefühlend* Anglo-Germanic linguistic response, as may ‘Folde’; yet in the latter it might be received as ambiguous whether the *e* of this administrative division of the earth’s bosom is accented, or whether the word is a (more Modern English) monosyllable (although, *metrically*, this would only eke out the dip).

In the case of ‘Firienwood’ Tolkien has modernised *fyrgen*, (‘mountain wood’, a compounding form) > \*‘firien’, but Anglo-Saxon training is rather a help in scanning the first two syllables as a resolved lift; an Old English version (original?) of the line, with *Fyrgeholt*, could be a **B** sans *auflösung*. Likewise it helps to know how to sound *edoras* to scan the line correctly—again a **B**-hemistich with resolution of the first lift. As with ‘Folde’ however, I admit resort to auctorial parole for ‘Sunlending’ (15b) and above all ‘Mindolluin’. The Germanic morphology of the former combines with the structure of its hemistich to make a **C-Type** extremely probable, but the latter fictional tetrasyllable proffers no prosodic handhold. I confess I was tempted to stress the penult, but Tolkien’s recorded performance evinces, consistently with the spelling and with Germanic onset-stressing, accentuation on the *first two* syllables followed by trailing diminution on the final slurred two, proving the line to be another **C-Type**, with disyllabic first dip. Similarly, Shippey is induced to designate **8**) 22a ‘a rather doubtful **B type**’<sup>809</sup> by taking ‘Gondor’ as a resolved second lift: perhaps this hemistich would be better scanned as **A** with anacrusis.

I am inclined to suggest however that this ‘problem’ is not confined to readers’ quandaries over correct scansion. These poems with their heavy dictional fraughtage of *nomina* are intended to be read *in* their fictional narrative context. The nomenclature is part of the subcreated linguistic texture of the legendarium,<sup>810</sup> and as such renders the poetry consistent with that texture: the names assume the status of purported cultural *allusions*, calquing allusive nomination in the Old English and Norse poetic models.

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<sup>809</sup> Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 25.

<sup>810</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 149, 189 *passim*.

This *dictional* ‘problem’ is only a problem with reference to the poems’ status as poems-as-such; the nomenclature is included, and devised so as, to *work in* the poems’ *accompanying narrative context*: the technical accomplishment of the poems as versecraft remains finally unaffected. The ‘Rider-poems’ assuredly *are*, regarded above all in terms of *technique*, ‘Tolkien’s finest expositions of the art of alliteration’. Just so Shippey also observes, **4**) and **8**) ‘could be used as textbook examples of Old English metrics in modern English’, adding ‘and are yet completely comprehensible.’

*And yet*, rather, they are *not* ‘*completely* comprehensible’, which second thought may have prompted Shippey to continue ‘In context, they give a powerful sense of the sadness at the heart of the Riders’ heroic culture—and Tolkien would have added, at the heart of all pre-Christian heroic cultures[...].’<sup>811</sup> Whilst this is also perfectly true I should wish to amplify the operativeness and application of that opening conditional clause, ‘*In context...*’ One agrees with Shippey ‘there is a fine finality about’ **8**) 27: the ‘red dew’ is effective; but one needs to ‘get’ the reference of ‘Rammas Echor’.

These poems, that is, are devised as fictional cultural artefacts: Tolkien’s reconstruction of the heroic-elegiac lay *in action*, composed and delivered on the battlefield; as part of pagan obsequies; as elaborated, remembered, recited by ‘maker [s] in Rohan’ as oral-formulaic tradition. They *depend* on the fictional narrative context in which Tolkien actually presents them. As Phelpstead observes, ‘the archaic diction of heroic poetry (e.g. “steeds”, “thengling” [...]) is justified by its fictional context’.<sup>812</sup>

I want to argue (*not* overstate) this means that these verses cannot be, and cannot be expected to be, dislocated from that fictional frame. Their nomenclature, content, significance and effect—including their emotional impact—derives from the prose narrative. Formally-stylistically they are Tolkien’s—and therefore in fact *the*—most accomplished Anglo-Saxon style alliterative verse in Modern English, showcasing every technical felicity of effective versecraft: lexis, syntax, and metric cast all of a piece; yet this very accomplishment in unifying form and content results in a kind of triumph, poetically, of form *over* content. *As poems*, they attain almost to examples of

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<sup>811</sup> Shippey, “Alliterative Verse,” 11.

<sup>812</sup> Phelpstead, “Auden”, 445.



pure form—‘aspire to the condition of music’. As such they do ‘show [...] what alliterative poetry can do in modern English’; yet not so much that, as what it *could*.

This is precisely because they are *not*, however, proposed as independent poems in their own right, but rely upon their narrative context, are intended as coherent cultural artefacts in the evocation of a fictional, ‘asterisk-calque’ cultural tradition; and as *the verse-component*, as remarkable variation in narrative technique and texture, in what, in these chapters especially, becomes, as may not have been hitherto fully recognised, a Tolkienian *composite art*. It is precisely because of my belief that what Tolkien is forging here is, like those of Blake or Wagner, a composite art, that I have quoted the poems *in* their prose context.

In these climactic chapters of *Rings* in which the Rohirrim are depicted at war Tolkien is fulfilling in a spectacular fashion the tradition he consciously and explicitly inherited from Morris, of prose romance ‘with chunks of poetry in between’.<sup>813</sup> The original medieval model for both authors is probably the combination in Old Norse sagas and Eddas of quasi-dramatic speech-poems, depicted as uttered by the characters, and presented with framing and linking passages of laconic prose. What Tolkien has developed here however is unparalleled. It is particularly as experienced, as intended, in this context that Shippey’s conclusion ‘it was worth the effort to resurrect this ancient verse form, and Tolkien did in the end do so successfully’ convinces.

The culminating “Battle of the Pelennor Fields” pre-eminently exhibits this remarkable achievement, of representing heroic action, the great apocalyptic battle resonating with Biblical-Miltonic, Old Norse, and Arthurian traditions, in a form of epic stylised narration in which a heightened, archaising prose—strongly reminiscent, as observed, of Malory and Norse saga, a style and carriage of narration palpably close to *oral storytelling*—is combined with passages of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, placed, almost operatically, in the mouths of the tale’s protagonists, to quite astonishing effect and impact, ‘like lightning from a clear sky’.

Lest this appear too antiquarian, there is yet again present a distinct impression of the author’s own Great War transfigured by his mythopoeia: ‘No few had fallen,

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<sup>813</sup> Tolkien, *Letters*, 7.

renowned or nameless, captain or soldier; for it was a great battle and the full count of it no tale has told.’

As is also most striking from the roaring onset and gallop-thundering charge evoked by Tolkien’s bardic performance, these verses phalanx into twentieth-century English poetry a profoundly impressive, unforgettable, archaic-heroic strain as unique as it is compelling—‘its maker [...] expended his art in making keen that touch upon the heart which sorrows have that are both poignant and remote [...] the echo of an ancient dirge, far-off and hopeless, [...] a memory brought over the hills, an echo of an echo.’<sup>814</sup>

I hope I have made Jones’ imputation that Tolkien is not to be ‘includ[ed] among more “serious” poets’, that he requires from Phelpsstead ‘care and sympathy’,<sup>815</sup> look less tenable. Might it be fair, and timely, to ask, in what sense can the poetry we have been reading be called unserious? As Shippey remarks

the trend has been for criticism to become increasingly “stratospheric”, much more concerned with Theory than with practice [...] stresses [...] metre or rhythms. But if there were no rhythm there would be no point writing anything as poetry! I suspect [...] that most modern critics—educated by programmes which, in [...] contradiction to everything Tolkien believed in, made no place for [...] language study—do not have the vocabulary with which to discuss metre, syntax, [...] even semantics. As a result, [...] to repeat Chris Jones [...] the fact that Tolkien may well be the most-read poet of the age is regarded as a[n] anomaly, a freak, a fluke: his deep interest and involvement with [...] poetry, developed lifelong, can have nothing to do with it.<sup>816</sup>

It has been my aim to ‘provide [...] a reading of this remarkable poe[try] with an appreciation as far as possible of the sort which its author may have been supposed to have desired’<sup>817</sup>—for, ‘There is not much poetry in the world like this’.<sup>818</sup>

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<sup>814</sup> Tolkien, “Monsters,” 33.

<sup>815</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 13.

<sup>816</sup> Shippey, “Tolkien’s Development,” 26.

<sup>817</sup> Tolkien and Gordon, *Gawain*, v.

<sup>818</sup> “Monsters,” 33.

### Conclusion: 'From the Grey Twilight'.

The foregoing has explored, and examined in detail, something of the history and accomplishments of an alliterative revival in the twentieth century.

In his 1977 monograph on the *fourteenth*-century alliterative revival, Thorlac Turville-Petre, noting percipiently the way in which 'the rediscovery of alliterative verse [...] is associated particularly with the emergence of English as a [...] university subject', remarked that 'little [...] attention' has been paid by poets to alliterative verse, notwithstanding 'all their metrical experimentation', citing only Hopkins and (relegated to an endnote) Pound, and asserting (with curious inaccuracy) that 'The only poet of this century who has made a serious attempt to adapt the alliterative line as a way of organising accentual verse is W. H. Auden'.<sup>819</sup> He concludes an "Epilogue" on the "Survival" and "Rediscovery of Alliterative Verse" with the peroration:

If there is any future for long narrative verse, modern poets might do worse than to look back to the practices of the poets of the fourteenth-century Revival, for the alliterative line gives the scope and flexibility that many poets search for, and yet contains within them that framework which is so helpful for an easy, long-poem style. It may be time for a second alliterative revival.<sup>820</sup>

But as Phelpstead has observed 'when Turville-Petre suggested [this] [...] such a revival had already been attempted, not by Auden only'.<sup>821</sup>

'Attempted': Phelpstead proceeds to quote Tolkien on the work of the *Gawain*-poet, 'alliterative verse was not in the event revived,' with the implication that the same verdict is to be pronounced on the twentieth-century revival:<sup>822</sup>

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<sup>819</sup> Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1977), 127, 145, 128.

<sup>820</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>821</sup> Phelpstead, "Auden," 437.

<sup>822</sup> Tolkien, *Gawain*, 2.

Although Auden and the Inklings have not paid any consequent penalty of obscurity, it is equally true of their twentieth-century revival that ‘alliterative verse was not in the end revived’. In their different ways, Lewis, Tolkien and Auden did nevertheless demonstrate the possibilities of early English metre as an alternative to both rhyming and free verse, an alternative ideally suited to the nature of the English language, particularly apt for narrative and dramatic poetry [...]

And yet, earlier on the same page, Phelpstead had noted, by Turville-Petre’s book the revival ‘*had in fact taken place*’; only to demur retractingly, ‘To be sure, it was neither long lived nor popular’.<sup>823</sup>

As to the fourteenth-century renaissance itself, not to mention the preceding, twelfth-thirteenth-century *Brut* of Layamon, it might well be countered that it did after all yield, and with the help of medievalist philology bestow, upon us the masterworks *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Piers Plowman*, which have since become canonical; and it is not clear to me, from Phelpstead’s own testimony, in what meaningful sense it can be ‘equally true’ alliterative verse that was *not* ‘in fact’ revived in the twentieth century.

The allegation of unpopularity is again contradicted by Phelpstead himself in the same article; and completely overturned and quashed by Jones’ statements, and indeed book—even though he himself takes pains to insist Old English-inspired alliterative poetry in Modern English must be ‘a shadow tradition’.<sup>824</sup> And yet, earlier in the same book, Jones had noted:

There is a good case to be made [...] that Tolkien is the most popular poet of the twentieth century [...] the verse embedded throughout *The Lord of the Rings* [...] must count as the most widely read poetry of the century.<sup>825</sup>

Jones’ observation is as provocative (to some) as it is incontrovertible, yet, notwithstanding his acknowledgement ‘Phelpstead makes exactly this point’, requires to be distinguished from Phelpstead’s realisation that the alliterative verse in *The Lord of the Rings* ‘must be the most widely read *alliterative* poetry of the twentieth century, *if not of any period*’<sup>826</sup>—the most really remarkable part of which is the second clause,

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<sup>823</sup> Phelpstead, “Auden,” 457.

<sup>824</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 242-43.

<sup>825</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>826</sup> Phelpstead, “Auden,” 444.

recognising that Tolkien's revived, *twentieth-century* alliterative verse must in fact be the most 'widely-read' alliterative verse in history.

*In no other period*, that is, has alliterative verse reached so large an audience; which, as Jones acknowledges, probably does qualify as 'popular'. In the *late twentieth-century* Anglosphere, Germanic-style alliterative verse, in Modern English by an Anglo-Saxonist, was *more* popular than it had been in the early Middle Ages. The obvious cavil, on grounds of the historical incommensurableness of medieval with modern readership, does not quite diminish this astonishing fact. Might, should, not this stimulate a respectably non-partisan and non-disingenuous rewriting of literary history suggesting the extent to which the Modern is a 'Medievalist' (or 'Neo-Medievalist') period: and that, accordingly, among 'the most popular', 'most widely read', most successful, poetry of that period was—alliterative verse?

Both Phelpstead and Jones seek, 'with great care and sympathy', to disqualify Tolkien's alliterative poetry, though 'interesting and accomplished', on grounds of its archaicism, and technical fidelity to the original forms, which, allegedly, render it not ' "serious" '.<sup>827</sup> Although Jones furnishes the adjective with "scare quotes", which may be interpreted as a gesture dissociating himself from this view, it remains true that he ventures no explicit repudiation of, and mounts no argument against, it; and his work to date duly evinces almost no further reference either to Tolkien's writing in, or to his scholarly publications and radio broadcasts on, Old English alliterative metre.

No such qualm, evidently, seems to perturb Tolkien's readers, who will persist in appreciating, in spite of such 'care and sympathy', as have audiences since *Gilgamesh* and the *Mahabharata*, the suitable matching of heroic matter to heroic metre. Of course, archaicism is a stylistic component proper to this after all archaic metrical form. If poets, and their critics, directed by criteria—perhaps better applied to other things intended as novelties designed for obsolescence—of 'the most up-to-date',<sup>828</sup> wish for a form which *does not inherently include and connote* medievalism and archaism, there are plenty to choose from. It may strike one as a curious volunteering

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<sup>827</sup> Jones, *Strange Likeness*, 13; Phelpstead, "Auden," e.g. 456-57.

<sup>828</sup> Phelpstead, "Auden," 454.

to contradiction and incoherence, for those minded to desiderate the contemporary, to choose the ‘essentially medieval’<sup>829</sup> high style of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse.

Such an approach to the twentieth-century alliterative revival might be felt to give the impression that alliterative metre needs to be removed, if not indeed *rescued*, from its somehow embarrassing or objectionable English early-medieval origins, properties, and associations; as though what needs to be purged from ancient Anglo-Saxon versification is its very ancientry and Anglicity, turning this form against itself; and of treating Form as though it bore no unity (only schematically extricable), shared no originating impulse, with Content: as though versification were a mechanistic device and blank vehicle to be detached and extrinsically re-applied, devoid of an intrinsic, and associative, significance organic with its proper nature and provenance.

The rejoinder that in Anglo-Saxon times this same single metre was as far as we know applied to all subjects has little merit: in *modernity* this is *not* the case, *hence revived* Anglo-Saxon alliterative metre *connotes* a distinctively and intrinsically significant mode.

On the testimony of Phelpstead and Jones themselves, can it be maintained that alliterative poetry and poetics are ‘unpopular’, unsuccessful, ‘shadow[y]’? Has Jones’ ‘shadow tradition’ not after all been, rather, ‘*call[ed] [...] from the grey twilight*’ by Tolkien, and (as, surely, Jones himself has laboured to prove) ‘bloody-bever[ed] for soothsay’ by Pound?

The case of Pound is omitted from Phelpstead’s Audentric account of the revival; Jones however, building on work by Robinson and others, makes the crucial case that Old English was revived in Pound’s poetics—a climate of academic opinion amounting by now to critical consensus that Anglo-Saxon is vital to Pound’s achievement: and therefore, via Pound, to twentieth-century free verse.

‘There is something irritatingly odd about all this’.<sup>830</sup> With what intelligibility and coherence can it be entertained that *The Cantos* and *The Lord of the Rings*, two twentieth-century English epics, are ‘to be sure, neither long-lived nor popular’? Two

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<sup>829</sup> Phelpstead, “Auden,” 453.

<sup>830</sup> Tolkien, “Monsters,” 13.

iconic epics of the twentieth century preceded by Wagner's in the nineteenth: all defining modern masterpieces, all involving revived alliterative verse. Both centuries could exhibit a panorama of accentual-alliterative soundscape, not least, in the twentieth, (despite its disunity of form and content) Auden's virtuosic *Age of Anxiety* and, it may be suggested, the later Eliot.<sup>831</sup> These artistic worlds, of Wagner, Hopkins, Pound, Eliot, Tolkien and Auden, can scarcely be said to be cultural shadowlands. These shades of the ancestral metre swarm up multitudinous from the depths, eloquent with the elixir of honey and blood.

'We were talking of dragons, Tolkien and I...' In his "Alliterative Metre" polemic C. S. Lewis sensed, in 1935, a 'propitious moment' for the revival of 'our own ancient system', nominating both Auden and Tolkien — 'soon, I hope [...] ready to publish an alliterative poem'—in his opening paragraph.<sup>832</sup> His own "Planets" is published as practical demonstration with the article; he had completed *The Nameless Isle* in 1930. According to Hooper's footnote 'Professor Tolkien tells me that Lewis was probably referring to [...] *The Fall of Arthur*', also seen in manuscript in 1934 by R. W. Chambers, rather than "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth" which Tolkien 'does not recall showing' to Lewis.<sup>833</sup> A number of other candidates are conceivable: in 1935 Tolkien *could*, possibly, have sought to publish one of the accomplished seasonal interludes (cf. *Gawain*) developed from "Húrin", or the Norse-style *Sigurd and Gudrún* poems, almost certainly already achieved by this date.

Regarding Auden, Hooper cites *Poems*, published five years earlier, which included, among 'numerous examples' "The Wanderer" and "Paid on Both Sides", and *The Orators* (1932); the footnote quotes Howarth's discernment of Auden as one 'figure behind T. S. Eliot', arguing that these poems by Auden 'showed Eliot how powerful the "consonantal rhymes" (so C. L. Wrenn, who tutored Auden, used to call them) and the terse phrases they encourage, speak to the English ear. In 1934, electing the story

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<sup>831</sup> This compelling long poem contains masterly adaptations of alliterative verse, including in imitation of Old Norse skaldic metres. What the work itself it does not contain, in theme, content or purpose, is an apparent rationale for *why* it is written in them. The form is this poem's costume, not its incarnation.

<sup>832</sup> Lewis, "Alliterative Metre," 15

<sup>833</sup> *Ibid.*, 15n2; Tolkien, *Arthur*, 10.

of Becket for his Canterbury play, he acted on Auden's example and went to English alliterative poetry for a medium'.<sup>834</sup> Auden's "Seen when night was silent" debuted with "The Alliterative Metre" in the same issue of *Lysistrata*, 'so it seems likely [Auden] encountered Lewis' article in that venue'.<sup>835</sup>

Perhaps the immediate response now, from certain quarters, would be to dismiss Lewis' foresight as delusory, to conclude his hope cheated him. Initially it might be supposed that, at best, only the publication of Auden's *The Age of Anxiety*—roughly a decade later (and subsequent works, such as *Daniel*, 1958)—could be adduced, as partial, and arguably unsatisfactory, fulfilment, of Lewis' optimism. But was Lewis mistaken; did his 'moment' really fail of its promise? Or was Lewis in sooth a quickening spirit, or at the least alive to the signs of the times? Eliot's revival of accentual metre in his verse-plays was exactly contemporaneous, not least in the medievalist and considerably accentual-alliterative *Murder in the Cathedral* first performed the month after Lewis published his article (and, arguably, exhibiting greater affinity with the work of Williams, Lewis, Barfield and Tolkien than with anything else).

Demonstrably responding to the prosodic impact of (especially) Hopkins, Pound, and Eliot, and arguably also to Tolkien's teaching and the cultural impact of his legendarium, there springs in English poetry from the 1960s a stream of publications exhibiting medievalist, accentual-alliterative affinities (at the least) in form and content, most notably from Ted Hughes, such as *Wodwo* (1967, the title a feat of bold medievalist obscurity constituting a direct, and for those-in-the-know evocative, reference to *Gawain* line 721a—if in the erroneous form of a false singular, derived from the Middle English false plural) and Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns* (1971, with reference to Sweet's *Reader*).

Heaney's engagement with explicitly 'Old-Northern' themes and poetics treads so near their heels as to gall their kibes, from *North* (1975) recurrently throughout his output till his loosely-metrically-imitative, dictionally (and thematically)

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<sup>834</sup> Lewis, "Alliterative Metre," 15n1, quoting Herbert Howarth, *Notes on Some Figures Behind T. S. Eliot* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), 338

<sup>835</sup> W. H. Auden, *The Age of Anxiety*, ed. Alan Jacobs (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 111.



Hibernicising *Beowulf* (1999), dedicated to Hughes' memory.<sup>836</sup> In the wake of Heaney, Hill, and Hughes<sup>837</sup> appears a sequence of imitative translations of Middle English alliterative poetry from Simon Armitage, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (2007) and *The Death of King Arthur* (2012). Simultaneously, Tolkien's epic verse is advancing posthumously like the *einherjar*, from *The Lays of Beleriand* (1985) to *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* (2009) and *The Fall of Arthur* (2013).

Jones' verdict that Tolkien's 'influence on other writers is negligible', questionable as such,<sup>838</sup> is surely overhasty.

Might it not, then, be legitimate to contend, on the evidence of a catalogue which registers (at a conservative census) the names—a *pula* also supplied by Phelpstead and Jones, the fact and content of whose own work also, of course, attests brilliantly to a revival—Kipling, Graves, Eliot, Pound, David Jones, Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Bunting, Auden, Morgan, Thom Gunn, Ted Hughes, Heath-Stubbs, Heaney, Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison, Wilbur, Merwin, Armitage...., that Lewis was right, and maybe even spoke truer than he knew? The list could be extended to include Borges in Spanish; this is a roster comprising the names of most of the century's most important English poets upon many of whom could be written a thesis on their Saxonising metre, diction, and general medievalism.

Taking these facts into consideration, and not forgetting the crucial role of Sievers and Sweet, one might be forgiven for suggesting the twentieth century was verily the century of the modern medievalist revival of alliterative poetry: and that we are still living in that revival,<sup>839</sup> a cultural period when (a succession of) metrically-imitative translations of *Beowulf* and *Gawain* prove to be among the most praised and popular publications of the day; when alliterative verse, published in a heroic romance (outsold only by Dickens) by an academic philologist, is read and enjoyed by millions and

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<sup>836</sup> Heaney acknowledges Tolkien, along with Hopkins, Yeats, and Joyce, in his Introduction, xi-xii, and it is surely arguable that the success, the enthusiastic popular reception, of Heaney's *Beowulf*, as of Armitage's *Gawain*, owes much to Tolkien's cultural influence.

<sup>837</sup> Tony Harrison's 1981 *Oresteia*, deploying the primitivist blood and thunder of accentual-alliterative verse-craft to evoke the hieratic and vendetta-drenched hintertime of archaic Greece, might also be adduced.

<sup>838</sup> It may be demonstrated for two poets upon whom Jones writes, Auden and Heaney.

<sup>839</sup> As also argued in Chris Jones, "New Old English: The Place of Old English in Twentieth- and Twenty-first-Century Poetry," 360, 362-65 *passim*.

resounds in the cinema; when it is possible to publish a book-length study of ‘The Use of Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry’. It has not only been revived, it is current, is being composed now.

‘To be sure, it was neither long-lived, nor popular’. This twentieth-century revival in fact represents a renascent intensification, a flowering, of a longer movement of modern medievalism, unmistakably present in the nineteenth century, stretching back to the beginnings of Romanticism in the late eighteenth.<sup>840</sup>

A longer view might suggest the recognition that the model of ‘revival’ could be replaced by one, as Thorlac Turville-Petre suggests, and as the Inklings believed, of ‘*survival*’, acknowledging the historical prosodic fact that alliterative-accentual versifications (though *not* the ‘classic’ Old Germanic strict form) have actually recurrently resurfaced, periodically, in English poetry since the eleventh century, with the eighteenth century being a possible exception. Alliterative-accentual metres could be advanced as the true tradition, primeval, chthonic, ineradicable, essential, of English verse,<sup>841</sup> and as occupying the centre, like Mímir’s runic bourn purling at the roots of Yggdrasil. ‘This is *Sagetrieb*, this is Tradition’.

Analogously to ancient Germanic versification’s exposure in relief, and metrical formalisation, of the innate rhythmical pattern enduringly resident and latent in the language itself, accentual-alliterative prosody may stand revealed as a shape of continuity throughout the tradition of English verse: a sometimes submerged mainstream, flowing like Kublai’s Alph, from the Anglo-Saxon source to *Lazamon*, emerging again (at least according to literary attestation) in the fourteenth century Revival, welling up in spite of neo-Classicism in the stubborn accentual pulse of Early Modern balladic and blank versifications, resurgent in Coleridge, Tennyson, Browning, Morris and Hopkins: in spate in the twentieth century.

A metrist might find his mind turning to the pattern of **Type E**—as Tolkien styled its rhythmic contour: ‘*fall; and rise*’

|| ‘ ‘ ‘ ||

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<sup>840</sup> See studies by Clark and Phelpstead; Ross; Scragg and Weinberg; Wawn, etc, cited.

<sup>841</sup> But see Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.

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