

**‘Shadow’
and Paradoxes of Darkness
in Old English and Old Norse Poetic Language**

Filip Missuno

Submitted for the degree of PhD

University of York,
Department of English and Related Literature

July, 2012

ABSTRACT

This thesis confronts, explores, and attempts to meaningfully interpret a surprising nexus of stimulating cruces and paradoxes in Old English poetry and prose and Old Norse skaldic and Eddic poetry. The study focuses on the complex linguistic and literary manifestations of darkness, a complex and long-underestimated phenomenon for which the most appropriate term is ‘shadow’. Rather than operating with modern categories and traditional dichotomies (light/darkness), I attempt to approach the evidence on its own terms, working from the words, their collocations, and narrow contexts up to larger literary assessments. Furthermore, the comparative Old English/Old Norse approach can provide both contextualisation for the findings and control over what we can and cannot infer from them.

Reflecting these methodologies (presented in Chapter 1), the core part of the thesis (Chapters 2-5) unfolds from semantics and style to texts and literary traditions, alternating at both stages between Old English and Old Norse. Chapters 2-3 provide an in-depth examination of the formal and stylistic features and the immediate textual environments of ‘shadow’, enabling the reconstruction of semantic values and associations. In Chapters 4-5, I conduct close readings of the most relevant and revealing Old English and Old Norse texts. My case studies are further contextualised by enlarging the focus of enquiry and correlating the deployment of ‘shadow’ with questions of manuscript context, medium (prose/verse), form (skaldic/Eddic), genre (mythological/heroic/religious), and wider literary-historical links.

Chapter 6 brings together the evidence for the existence, nature, and function of a ‘shadow’ theme, or themes, in Old English and Old Norse poetic language. Evaluating the significance of the parallels between the two traditions as well as within them, I

recontextualise 'shadow' in relation to chronology, history, inheritance, contact and influence, and society and culture. The findings also afford new perspectives that can reshape our understanding of the underlying poetics.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Abbreviations.....	6
Acknowledgments.....	8
Chapter One: Introduction.....	10
1.1 Darkness and shadow in Old English	14
1.2 Primary sources, and Old Norse as a comparative context	16
1.3 Shadow	20
1.4 Historiography	24
1.5 Methodologies	33
1.6 Poetic language, prose and verse, orality and literacy	37
1.7 Shape of the thesis	40
Chapter Two: Old English ‘Shadow’ Words: Semantic and Stylistic Study	43
2.1 ‘Darkness’: a category problem.....	43
2.2 Studies of Old English ‘shadow’ words	47
2.2.1 <i>Scead(u)</i>	47
2.2.2 <i>Scua</i>	57
2.2.3 <i>Genip and (ge)nīpan</i>	65
2.2.4 <i>Wann</i>	72
2.2.5 <i>Blæc/blāc</i>	84
2.2.6 <i>Hār</i>	91
2.2.7 <i>Fāh</i>	97
2.2.8 Conclusion.....	111
Chapter Three: Old Norse ‘Shadow’ Words: Semantic and Stylistic Study	115
3.1 ‘Darkness’ in Old Norse	120
3.2 Studies of Old Norse ‘shadow’ words.....	122
3.2.1 <i>Myrk-</i>	122
3.2.2 <i>Skyggðr</i>	133
3.2.3 <i>Døkk</i>	136
3.2.4 <i>Nifl-</i>	141
3.2.5 <i>Blár</i>	148
3.2.6 <i>Fǫlr</i>	156
3.2.7 <i>Fáðr, fár, fánn, and fránn</i>	164
3.2.7.1 <i>Fáðr/fár/fánn</i>	165

3.2.7.2	<i>Fránn</i>	169
3.2.8	Conclusion	175
Chapter Four: Old English ‘Shadow’ Case Studies.....		178
4.1	The <i>Beowulf</i> Manuscript	178
4.1.1	<i>Beowulf</i>	178
4.1.2	<i>Judith</i>	195
4.1.3	<i>The Passion of Saint Christopher</i>	201
4.1.4	<i>The Wonders of the East</i>	205
4.1.5	<i>The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle</i>	208
4.2	The Guthlac Tradition.....	215
4.2.1	The prose material relating to Guthlac.....	215
4.2.2	The poems on Guthlac	226
Chapter Five: Old Norse ‘Shadow’ Case Studies.....		244
5.1	Eddic Mythological Poems	244
5.1.1	<i>Völuspá</i>	245
5.1.2	<i>Völuspá</i> in the context of the other mythological poems in the Codex Regius	255
5.2	Eddic Heroic Poems of the Codex Regius	262
5.2.1	<i>Atlakviða</i>	263
5.2.2	<i>Atlakviða</i> in the context of the other heroic poems in the Codex Regius	275
5.3	Skaldic Poetry	284
5.3.1	Bragi’s <i>Ragnarsdrápa</i>	285
5.3.2	<i>Ragnarsdrápa</i> in the context of pictorial skaldic poetry.....	295
5.3.3	<i>Ragnarsdrápa</i> in the context of skaldic poetry: questions of chronology and genre	302
Chapter Six: Conclusions		311
Bibliography.....		323

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AeEW</i>	Holthausen, <i>Altenglisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch</i>
<i>AnEW</i>	de Vries, <i>Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch</i>
<i>ANF</i>	<i>Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi</i>
<i>ANQ</i>	<i>American Notes and Queries</i>
<i>ASE</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
<i>ASPR</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records</i>
<i>BT</i>	Bosworth and Toller, <i>An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary</i>
<i>CV</i>	Cleasby and Vigfusson, <i>An Icelandic-English Dictionary</i>
<i>DOE</i>	<i>Dictionary of Old English</i>
<i>EETS</i>	Early English Text Society
<i>ES</i>	<i>English Studies</i>
<i>Gmc</i>	Germanic
<i>Gylf</i>	Faulkes, ed., <i>Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning</i>
<i>Hátt</i>	Faulkes, ed., <i>Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Háttatal</i>
<i>IEW</i>	Jóhannesson, <i>Isländisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch</i>
<i>ÍF</i>	Íslenzk Fornrit
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>Komm</i>	von See <i>et al.</i> , <i>Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda</i>
<i>LP</i>	Finnur Jónsson, <i>Lexicon poeticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis</i>
<i>MÆ</i>	<i>Medium Ævum</i>
<i>MP</i>	<i>Modern Philology</i>
<i>NM</i>	<i>Neuphilologische Mitteilungen</i>
n.s.	new series
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
o.s.	old series

<i>PBA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
<i>PQ</i>	<i>Philological Quarterly</i>
<i>RES</i>	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
<i>SB</i>	<i>Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research</i>
<i>Skj</i>	Finnur Jónsson, ed., <i>Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning</i>
<i>SKP</i>	Clunies Ross <i>et al.</i> , eds., <i>Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages</i>
<i>Skskm</i>	Faulkes, ed., <i>Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Skáldskaparmál</i> . 2 vols.
<i>SN</i>	<i>Studia Neophilologica</i>
<i>SS</i>	<i>Scandinavian Studies</i>
<i>TOE</i>	Roberts and Kay, <i>A Thesaurus of Old English in 2 Volumes</i>
<i>VSG</i>	Colgrave, ed. and tr., <i>Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac</i>
<i>ZfdA</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum</i>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In several years of intense research and writing one runs the risk of feeling the topic of one's study sometimes rubbing off on oneself. The more reason for me to express my gratitude to all those who helped me and my thesis to navigate through shadows and obscurities and back into the light, and who academically and personally illumined my progress in various ways.

My first thanks go to my supervisors, Matthew Townend and Elizabeth Tyler. I am extremely fortunate to have benefited from their rigorous scholarship, inspiring advice, nudges in the right directions, patience, and encouragements without pressure. I am also indebted to the members of my Thesis Advisory Panel, Derek Attridge and Hugh Haughton, who have provided provocative comments and stimulating discussions.

I have enjoyed working in the cheerful and stimulating environment of the Department of English and the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of York. The friendly and helpful staff at the King's Manor Library, The York Minster Library, and the JBM Library also have my thanks.

I also have to thank scholars from other institutions whom I have had the pleasure to meet and converse with, especially Tom Shippey, Ármann Jakobsson, Heather O'Donoghue, Judith Jesch, Sara Pons-Sanz, and Alaric Hall, who have patiently listened to some of my ideas and generously contributed valuable insights and information.

My students have also taught me much, as have participants at various reading groups, conference and research papers, and other seminars. To my medievalist friends I owe many a fascinating conversation, much support, and more. I am grateful to Shamsi Modarai for her inspiring belief in the shadows from the start; to Fernando Guerrero,

Luke Murphy, Hannah Bailey, and Declan Taggart, for their wide-ranging learning and fun; to Ingrid Lyberg for much food for etymological thought and many a (non-linguistic) dinner besides; and to Marie Bønløkke Spejlborg who always makes sure I emerge on the bright side of the shadow.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, who have been wonderfully generous, supportive, and keenly interested all along.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

While the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet of *Christ and Satan*, the last piece in the tenth-century Junius manuscript, has the Devil bewail at length his forced exile in Hell, he simultaneously provides us in passing with rather fascinating vistas of the accursed place, its abyss-like depth beneath the cliffs of the world, its darkness and fire ridden with demons and dragons. The most intriguing vision, however, unfolds at the end of a series of gradually thicker allusions to darkness in Satan's second speech. Hell is so murky, he laments, that (104b-5a):¹

Ne her dæg lyhteð
for scedes sciman, sceppendes leoht.

[Day does not shine here on account of the ?shadow (*sciman*) / ?brightness (*scīman*) of shadow, the Creator's light.]

What kind of shadow is that? Is it dark or bright? We have no objective means of deciding whether the word intended is *scima*, which according to Bosworth and Toller means 'shadow' or 'gloom', or rather *scīma*, which they defined as 'splendour', 'brightness', or 'light';² metrically as well as palaeographically, both solutions are equally possible. Common sense would of course prompt us to read *scima*, and conversance with Old English poetic practice would indeed suggest a linguistic reduplication of the core idea 'shadow' presumably conveying an increased impression of darkness.³ The only direct parallel extant, a phrase in *Solomon and Saturn I* which also has Hell as its referent, could be read in a similar way: *æfter sceaðes sciman*

¹ Unless otherwise stated, Old English poems are quoted from George Philip Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie, eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, 6 vols. (New York, 1931-53) (*ASPR*). All translations are my own.

² *BT*, s.vv. *scima* and *scīma*, respectively.

³ Expressions relying on pleonastically-induced intensification of meaning are not rare in Old English; indeed they are especially frequent in relation to darkness, as illustrated throughout this thesis: compare e.g. *heolstorsceadu* ('darkness-shadow'), *BT*, s.v.

(‘among/under shadow’s *scīma*’, 116a). Indeed we would shrink from both accepting a rather unusual and challenging oxymoron and envisioning Hell in terms of radiance normally applied to Heaven. Unsurprisingly, therefore, modern commentators try to circumvent the problem. Robert Finnegan, the latest editor of *Christ and Satan*, chooses *scīma* but claims that this is ‘an appropriate word for the shadowy character of hell, since, in context, it can connote either “light” or “dark”’.⁴ In this he is in line with both Clark Hall’s *Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* and *The Thesaurus of Old English* which collapse the two words and their meanings into one, namely *scīma*.⁵

However, one is entitled to doubt whether early medieval producers, receivers, and copyists of these texts shared the sort of rationalising and categorising system of thought evidenced by modern critics and lexicographers, or indeed our modern ‘common sense’ in this respect. As I argue below,⁶ there is sound evidence for the existence in Old English of both words, *scīma* and *scīma*, with their distinct (and indeed contrastingly opposed) respective meanings, along the lines of what Bosworth and Toller proposed. *Scīma* has nothing ‘shadowy’ about it, and Finnegan’s statement would be less misleading if directed at *scīma* which is probably the right word in the context. ‘Context’ is at the core of the problem, and Finnegan is ultimately right in pointing to it. A peculiar linguistic context is implicit in the fact that a signifier of ‘shadow’ can exist in the language in semantic contradistinction with a signifier of ‘brightness’ to which it is nonetheless intriguingly proximate morphologically, aurally, and visually.⁷ The deployment of this ‘shadow’ word in place of a more frequent and poetically more

⁴ Robert E. Finnegan, ed., *Christ and Satan* (1977). S.A.J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, 1982), p. 90, translates ‘the haze of shadow’.

⁵ J.R. Clark Hall, ed., *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th edn (Cambridge, 1960), s.v. *scīma*; Jane Roberts and Christian Kay, *A Thesaurus of Old English in 2 Volumes* (London, 1995) (hereafter *TOE*).

⁶ §2.2.1.

⁷ The two words were visually identical in writing and would only differ in the length and perhaps quality of the vowel sound /i/; the phonetic distinction could conceivably have been prone to being emphasised, or *lessened*, in an oral delivery. The two words are, moreover, connected etymologically. For further discussion, see preceding note.

conventional ‘brightness’ word reveals competing contexts of expectation. And a puzzling textual context is apparent in the way in which segments of darkness and brightness imagery are juxtaposed and intertwined, forming a contrastive yet coherent verbal matrix whose nature and textual boundaries are difficult to define.⁸ It is striking that tensions which resist resolution exist at more than one level of language and text/discourse. These tensions challenge our assumptions about visual representations (of hell, darkness, light), the semantic logic of Old English language, and early medieval beliefs. They force us to ask whether the poet, scribe, or audience/readership were aware of such issues, and if so, to what extent and whether they were comfortable with them.

We cannot merely wish these problems away by, for example, vaguely gesturing at the religious image of hell as a place riddled with fire (hence the light?) as well as with darkness.⁹ The shadow of hell in *Christ and Satan* cannot be solely attributed to such an image because it is far from being the only signal of tensions attendant on darkness-related words. The phenomenon is encoded, through various but related manifestations, in a range of texts and contexts in our corpus, both secular and religious; its prominence and complexity in *Beowulf* and in texts associated with St Guthlac, notably, alerts us that we should not be content with *ad hoc* simplifications to explain it away. Rather, we should try and account for the distinctiveness of such linguistic features.

The necessity to collect and consider a larger array of evidence before attempting to solve the darkness/shadow/light quandary is further highlighted by the realisation that a range of Old Norse poetry exemplifies intriguingly proximate features, which afford a useful comparative framework and refreshing re-contextualisation of this

⁸ On the presence and interaction of competing interpretative contexts, see further below.

⁹ This rationalising notion seems to underlie Finnegan’s comment cited above.

phenomenon within a broader, heterogeneous collection of literary genres and formats. Thus in a mythical dialogue with the god Freyr (interestingly, a type of context not available in the Old English material) in *Skírnismál* in the thirteenth-century Codex Regius manuscript of the Poetic Edda, Skírnir the messenger asks (8.1-2):¹⁰

‘Mar gefðu mér þá, þann er mic um myrqvan beri,
vísan vafrloga ...’

[‘Give me that horse which would carry me through the dark (*myrkr*), wise flickering flame ...’]

What is this dark flame, and why is it dark? Only indirect clues from later in the poem and a few partial analogues from elsewhere allow us to infer that it is some defensive flame-wall, here surrounding the abode of a giantess. The bewildering expression *myrqvan ... vísan vafrloga* is repeated word for word in the next stanza; immediately after in the text, in stanza 10, as Skírnir is about to ride through (in stanza 11 he is already on the other side), he adds ‘*Myrct er úti*’ (‘It is dark (*myrkr*) outside/out there’, 10.1). The successive repetition of *myrkr* stands out (it is not found elsewhere in the poem) and arguably gives prominence to its referent, except that, quite as in the case of shadow’s *scīma/scīma*, it is never made clear what the flame really is or how to visualise it. On the contrary, puzzling and paradoxical attributes challenge any attempt at representation. Although the flame-wall motif could ultimately be of continental origin (as is the case with hell-fire), I will argue that its treatment here has more convincing parallels in Old Norse poetry, while further relationships can be detected with Old English, involving more than just the murky fire image. What work the peculiar and distinctive deployment of darkness is meant to do in such cases in both traditions has so far eluded our grasp. But the realisation that evidence from Old Norse can be meaningfully correlated with Old English thematically, but also at the very level

¹⁰ Eddic verse is quoted from Gustav Neckel, ed., *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern: I. Text*, 4th revised edn by Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg, 1962). Translations are my own.

of language, lays out an encouraging framework within which to ask why the language operates by so much indirection and convolution at these junctures of light and shadow.

This thesis confronts the challenges of shadow and darkness as they manifest themselves, or are detectable, in early medieval Old English and Old Norse texts, specifically focusing on a corpus of poetic language (I define what I mean by this below) from the eighth to the eleventh century. It is the first direct and systematic engagement with a set of paradoxes, ambivalences, multivalences, and other problematic structures of utterance which have so far been insufficiently reported. Their systematic investigation, I argue, can contribute an essential dimension to our understanding of the meanings conveyed, in their distinct respective ways, by both traditions; thus I attempt to provide extensive description and interpretation of a range of available linguistic and literary evidence — the ‘shadow’ material — in an interlingual comparative framework.

1.1 DARKNESS AND SHADOW IN OLD ENGLISH

Shadow is a shifty thing, and darkness hardly less elusive. My use of these terms, especially the former, as heuristic tools to apply to the study of early medieval poetic language may seem surprising, and at any rate it is largely unprecedented. Yet an overwhelming and, one suspects, fundamental feature of the surviving literature of the Anglo-Saxons, and of their poems in particular, is a propensity to foreground darkness — in both its narrow sense and its wider realms of meaning, so from blackness to obscurity and from the dismal to the deathly. Our texts abound and, one almost shiveringly senses, delight, in dark things, dark places, and dark ideas. To be sure, such

a statement over-simplifies and somewhat glosses over the variety and complexity of the material, yet as a summarising generalisation it is difficult to deny.

However, the modes in which the ideas which so far I have been collectively referring to as ‘darkness’ are expressed have been regarded as remarkably rich and compelling by generations of scholars, especially insofar as the themes thus fleshed out have been felt to be significant and aesthetically empowering. To illustrate this point, one needs only mention motifs and themes such as exile, the ‘beasts of battle’, the benightedness of heathenism, the concepts of evil, the Devil, hell, and many more whose impact on interpretations of Old English literature has been considerable. In a sense, then, there has in fact been much academic excitement over things that are at bottom utterly dark.

What has not inspired much research, curiously, is darkness itself, in the specific, narrower sense; that is, the words used by authors to express visual darkness, their semantic and symbolic associations, and the ways in which darkness was deployed not only to participate in the expression of well-known themes as for example those alluded to above, but also to create its own, meaningful theme. Darkness seems to have been largely taken for granted in the scholarship as a mere foil to brightness and light, and as a result its significance has been severely underestimated. Yet darkness, if approached on its own terms, can afford new and intellectually engaging insights that, apart from being interesting in themselves, are liable to shift or refresh some of the perspectives with which we operate when dealing with Old English and Old Norse poetic language and literature.

These insights can come not only from the prominence or recurrence of visually dark imagery — although this fact alone would warrant investigation of a more serious scale than heretofore attempted — but also and primarily from the semantically

problematic features of our written evidence for darkness and the thematically and stylistically paradoxical work that it seems to be made to do in its textual contexts. This linguistic and literary indirectness, furthermore, questions the very appropriateness of the category-word ‘darkness’ and shatters a number of natural, simple, binary assumptions through which meaning is sometimes too quickly packaged and classified.

1.2 PRIMARY SOURCES, AND OLD NORSE AS A COMPARATIVE CONTEXT

The kind of remarkable verbal features involving darkness and shadow to which I have drawn attention at the outset of this introduction can be detected in a range of sources, both Old English and Old Norse, across a variety of genres. At the same time, no single text can be held to be representative of the phenomenon in such a way as to make a localised study particularly illuminating. The scattered character of the evidence, which may partly have accounted for the neglect of the topic, calls for a comparative treatment of as wide a range of material as possible so as to foreground the distinctiveness as well as the larger significance of localised instances. The most basic motivation for the comparative approach of this thesis, then, lies in a natural response to the features I perceive in the material.¹¹

My corpus for this study therefore encompasses, on the one hand, all pre-Conquest Old English literary texts, with emphasis on the poetry but, importantly, incorporating several prose texts (I discuss the theoretical implications of this inclusion of prose below); and on the other hand, all Old Norse poetry, that is, both the so-called Eddic and skaldic verse,¹² up to the fourteenth century. However, for the sake of

¹¹ See Michael Lapidge, ‘The Comparative Approach’, in Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, ed., *Reading Old English Texts* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 20-38, at pp. 34-35.

¹² I discuss this varied nature of Old Norse verse below and, more focusedly, in the introduction to Chapter 3.

chronological consistency in this comparative framework, I focus on Old Norse verse that is plausibly dated to no later than the eleventh century, and it is this body of material on which my central interpretations and conclusions are based; evidence from later poems is only mentioned when it can help illuminate meanings and usage patterns or when a richer diachronic perspective can be gained from it. I exclude Old Norse prose since it is a later development and more markedly different from the verse in form and style than Old English prose can be shown to be. As to the runic corpora in both languages, they would stretch the scope of this study beyond manageability without necessarily contributing much relevant evidence; they have had to be excluded.

Thus the core part of my corpus spans a time range of three or four centuries, from the eighth or ninth to the eleventh. Most of the Old English and Old Norse texts, however, are recorded in Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic manuscripts dating from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries. The dating of many texts is of course open to debate, most especially Old English non-historical poems and Old Norse Eddic poems, which are of unknown authorship and provenance. The oral or written composition of the majority of them, nonetheless, can still be ascribed, on internal and comparative grounds, to certain (more or less precise) periods within this eighth/ninth-eleventh century range, and most skaldic verse is more securely datable as well as attributable to known poets and (oral) contexts.¹³ On the whole, then, my corpus is methodologically unproblematic as regards chronology and does allow for some chronological differentiation, thus allowing me to register both continuity and change. In addition, the comparative approach of this thesis can result in new insights on the dating of those texts for which there still is no consensus in this matter (such as *Beowulf*, variously argued to be from any century within the time span of my other sources).

¹³ On skaldic poetry, its contexts of preservation, and the reconstruction of its original contexts, see especially Judith Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 15-32.

Old English and Old Norse literary texts have naturally often fallen under the comparative lens.¹⁴ The validity of such an approach partly rests on the linguistic, literary, and cultural proximity that clearly characterises both traditions especially in the domain of poetry. Poetic vocabulary, diction, and style in both poetries exhibit highly distinctive features which are often at the same time closely cognate with each other; this can be exemplified by shared genetically related poetic synonyms (known in Old Norse as *heiti*), shared formulas encapsulating a recurrent idea in recurrent form, partly comparable alliteration- and rhythm-based metrical structures (notably the Old English long line and the Old Norse *fornyrðislag*), or similar stylistic patterns (variation).¹⁵ Beyond the linguistic and formal levels, thematic and generic expectations are also shared (the ‘beasts of battle’, wisdom poetry).¹⁶ This situation provides one facet of the comparative framework whereby parallels can be interpreted through inheritance from pre-Migration Common Germanic stock.

The other side of the comparative context is of course the renewed contact between Old English and Old Norse language and culture during the Viking Age from the ninth to the eleventh century, a situation which chronologically can potentially impact the greater part of the corpus under study. Within this historical context, with evidence for the presence and activity of Old Norse/Icelandic poets in the Danelaw, scholars have argued over a number of poems for the linguistic and/or literary influence of one poetic tradition on the other (in either direction), although few of these

¹⁴ For overviews of scholarship history in comparing Old English and Old Norse, see Lapidge, ‘Comparative Approach’, pp. 22-9; Robert E. Bjork, ‘Scandinavian Relations’, in Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne, eds., *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 388-99; Richard Dance, ‘North Sea Currents: Old English-Old Norse Relations, Literary and Linguistic’, *Literature Compass* 1 (2004), pp. 1-10.

¹⁵ Lars Lönnroth discusses a formulaic association shared across Old Norse and Old English (and other Germanic languages) on the level of the alliterative long line in his ‘*Iqrð fannz æva né upphiminn*’, in Ursula Dronke *et al.*, eds, *Speculum Norroenum* (Odense, 1985), pp. 310-27. On similarities between Old English and Old Norse variation see Rory McTurk, ‘Variation in *Beowulf* and the Poetic Edda: A Chronological Experiment’, in Colin Chase, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf* (Toronto, 1981), pp. 141-60, esp. at p. 160.

¹⁶ On wisdom poetry see Carolyne Larrington, *A Store of Common Sense: Gnostic Theme and Style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry* (Oxford, 1993).

arguments are entirely convincing and methodological problems have been pointed out.¹⁷ More recent approaches see the specific conditions obtaining in Viking Age England as providing a specific context for composition in both languages that accounts for similarities better than models postulating linguistic/literary exchanges.¹⁸

Thus, in broad terms, this study's expanded comparative corpus partly reflects the expectation that Old English and Old Norse poetic idioms often express comparable concerns, and when they do, they tend to frame them in comparable language; and the closeness of such relations, whether due to common inheritance, contact-induced influence, or shared socio-cultural conditions, would mean that instances found in one tradition can theoretically shed precious light on the other tradition. This is an important potential for this study where the words and expressions investigated, being often rare and cryptic, are difficult to contextualise without recourse to broader comparison.

Despite their similarities, the two corpora remain of course remarkably diverse and heterogeneous, whether considered separately or in relation to each other, in terms of form, style, content, genre, outlook, provenance, date, and other criteria. This variety reflects to some extent that of the distribution of the evidence. This situation has important methodological implications (addressed further below), and precludes any overarching assumption as to the nature and source of the parallels. But its more immediate interest for comparison is that the two corpora are complementary. While both include a range of sources that can be apprehended, for example, on a

¹⁷ *Vǫlundarkviða* for example has been contextually tied to Viking Age England, see John McKinnell, 'The Context of *Vǫlundarkviða*', *SB* 23 (1990), pp. 1-27. Attempts to read Old English influence in *Vǫluspá* are criticised by John Lindow, 'Norse Mythology and Northumbria: Methodological Notes', *SS* 59.3 (1987), pp. 308-24, and McKinnell, 'Norse Mythology and Northumbria: A Response', *SS* 59.3 (1987), pp. 325-37. Skaldic influence and borrowings are often seen in some Old English poems, for a historiography see Roberta Frank, 'Anglo-Scandinavian Poetic Relations', *ANQ* n.s. 3 (1990), pp. 74-9; an example is *eadem*, 'Skaldic Verse and the Date of *Beowulf*', in Colin Chase, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf* (Toronto, 1981), pp. 123-39, but see Matthew Townend, 'Pre-Cnut Praise-Poetry in Viking Age England', *RES* n.s. 203 (2000), pp. 349-370, at pp. 357-9, for a critique.

¹⁸ See Townend, 'Praise-Poetry', pp. 361ff, and the survey of this and other comparative scholarship in Dance, 'North Sea Currents'.

chronological axis (or at least distinguished between ‘rather early’ and ‘rather late’),¹⁹ on an axis from ‘rather secular’ to ‘rather Christian’, and in relation to partly corresponding themes and genres, the Old Norse corpus furnishes types of material not found in Old English or only scantily, such as overtly ekphrastic poems, encomia, or pagan/mythological verse, and the reverse is true for biblical verse.

The eclectic nature of the sources implies that this thesis cannot aim at a homogeneous reconstruction of an underlying prototype, coherent and all-explaining, of the phenomenon studied, unlike, for instance, Lönnroth’s analysis of the *jǫrð/uphiminn* formula. It is closer to, for example, Larrington’s presentation and discussion of Old English and Old Norse wisdom poetry alongside each other.²⁰ But it would in fact best resemble a combination of both these scholarly studies, because the variegated nature of the phenomenon encourages both types of approach (and more), allowing for the foregrounding of mutually illuminating, parallel or contrastive evidence and its comparison at the minute level of words as well as within larger considerations of themes and genres.

1.3 SHADOW

Shadow, or shadows, and more generally darkness, blackness, obscurity, or night, are terms that, in their respective (partly overlapping) nonfigurative senses, denote natural phenomena and visual, empirical perceptions by humans. As it happens, this literal, nonfigurative aspect is also the one that predominates in both the Old English and the Old Norse texts. Remarkably, this prevalence becomes particularly overwhelming in the poetic texts, whereas the extended, figurative, symbolic sense of

¹⁹ The blurry borderline would run somewhere around 950, with the addition of pre-850 as an additional category for (very) early Old English verse.

²⁰ See above, for both studies, notes 17 and 18, respectively.

the type ‘dark thought’ or ‘dark mystery’ is all but absent from our record. Indeed, when Beowulf is suddenly preoccupied by *þeostrum geþoncum, swa him geþywe ne wæs* (‘dark thoughts, as was not usual with him’, *Beowulf* 2332), one could divert the poet’s comment and extend it to our textual evidence in general (and poetic in particular): dark thoughts, or any similarly abstract darkness metaphors, are highly unusual, and the exception just cited confirms the rule. Darkness is often seen externally, but rarely felt internally. Accordingly, since the arguments in this thesis develop from the semantics of the words under scrutiny, it seems logical that my subsequent usage of terms like ‘darkness’ and ‘shadow’ in relation to the evidence should not suggest any figurative meaning, that is, any meaning divorced from empirical visual experience. Nor am I directly concerned with invisible concepts such as holes, exile, silence, sadness, or the cold, which only share with literal darkness the aspect of absence. I do not aim, either, to reconstruct possible beliefs in ‘shadows’ as sentient beings, ghosts, demons, or the like, or magic, or anything we would label as supernatural. Darkness and shadow do appear in the sources in the context of demons and dragons; but, granted the cultural reality of beliefs in such beings in contemporary society, the co-occurrence must *a priori* be regarded as no more supernatural than, for instance, in the dark or shadowy characterisation of ravens.

I shall use the term ‘shadow’ specifically to refer to the subject of this investigation, rather than ‘darkness’.²¹ This choice is, one could say, a philological one; it is in keeping with my attempt to ground argumentation and interpretation in the linguistic layer of the evidence and avoid top-down, artificially categorising approaches.

²¹ Engagement with shadow(s) appears to be an activity especially worthy of pursuit also beyond the field of language and literature. Roy Sorensen, *Seeing Dark Things: The Philosophy of Shadows* (Oxford, 2008) shows shadows to be both refreshingly strange and intellectually useful in helping us counter some preconceptions and make better sense of our visual environment. He does so by combining insights from vision science, physics, and philosophy, realms where the paradoxical phenomenon of shadow, at the periphery of the concepts of darkness, light, colour, and shape, has been underestimated, neglected, misconstrued, or forgotten — a situation not unlike that described in this introduction.

There are two main reasons for my preferring ‘shadow’. The first is that the modern word is a direct reflex of Old English *sceadu* which, alongside its morphologically and semantically proximate form *scead*, is well attested throughout a range of poetic and prose texts of the early medieval period; conversely, the ancestor of the word ‘darkness’, for example, appears to be extremely rare, visibly used only in direct response to Latin, while the underlying adjective, forerunner of ‘dark’, clearly was mainly a poetic term, and therefore its range of associations is liable to show discontinuities with the modern adjective.²² *Sceadu*’s apparent range of meaning, meanwhile, is congruent with the main literal senses of the modern word, notably ‘comparative darkness’, ‘darkness of night’,²³ and the like. Given this general diachronic continuity, and all other things being equal, *sceadu* simply means ‘shadow’,²⁴ and this enables my use of ‘shadow’ to refer metonymically to a semantically continuous array of Old English words of which *sceadu* is a prominent representative. Of course, however, all things are not equal; the textual contexts of *sceadu*, for one thing, present important peculiarities that are not so easily translated.²⁵ But this tension in fact underpins my second reason for using ‘shadow’. A potential for contradiction, ambivalence, and paradox often lurks in the semantics of the modern word ‘shadow’ (much more so than in ‘darkness’), a tension that has much to do with the implicit interaction with, or intrusion of, some shimmering or other aspect of light into the meaning (as betrayed e.g. by the senses ‘image cast by a body intercepting light’, ‘reflected image’, ‘unreal appearance’, ‘foreshadowing’, ‘spectral form’, or ‘shelter from light or heat’).²⁶ If a relative darkness, more or less intense, that tends to play with light to potentially uncanny effects, can be accepted as a valid generalisation

²² *DOE*, s.vv. *deorcnes* (only two attestations, none in verse) and *deorc*, respectively.

²³ *OED*, s.v. *shadow*, senses 1.a and 2, respectively.

²⁴ Unsurprisingly, most translators consistently render *sceadu* by ‘shadow’.

²⁵ See §2.2.1 below.

²⁶ *OED*, s.v. *shadow*, senses 4, 5.a, 6.a, 6.c, 7, and 12, respectively.

for a number of the main senses of ‘shadow’ in modern usage, then the term is as well suited as one could hope to approach the complexity, oddness, and indeterminacy of dark-related verbal structures in Old English and Old Norse. That said, far from ignoring the very imprecision and heterogeneity of meaning of the English word, I mean to use this underlying semantic compositeness as a constant caveat that the subject and its various elements indexed throughout the thesis by that word are likewise likely to escape monolithic codification.

Thus carefully defined and circumscribed, ‘shadow’ can, I hope, act as a hypernym that is not only expedient but also, for the reasons delineated above, apt to reflect the fluidity and multivalence of my linguistic and thematic material. Its applicability is in fact even greater than I have suggested, for, as subsequent chapters will show, some of the ‘shadow’ material in fact occurs in contexts of gloom, absence, evil, reflecting, foreshadowing, or other such aspects that happen to correlate with nuances of meaning of the modern word ‘shadow’. To avoid circularity of argument, however, I will not overly impress these shades of meaning on my interpretations of the evidence; indeed some of the data may well not fit such correspondences and yet be an essential part of ‘shadow’. Neither Old English or Old Norse tradition has left us any commentary on dark-related imagery’s uses in the vernaculars, and so to posit some sort of early medieval cultural/literary shadow-concept would be unwarranted. Consequently, it must be kept in mind that the designation ‘shadow’ remains, in the end, an arbitrary one. Its main virtue should be its flexibility: to allow the texts, their authors, and their language to speak and be heard as freely as possible from ideologically superimposed categorising assumptions.

1.4 HISTORIOGRAPHY

Early scholars were not looking for darkness in Old English and Old Norse, let alone paradox. The nearest they were looking for was colours, a line of research that emerged in the last years of the nineteenth century.²⁷ Their endeavour's relevance to 'shadow' results mainly from the fact that it met from the start with puzzled disappointment, as recorded for example by W.E. Mead concerning Old English verse:²⁸

The remarkable fact about a great number of the Old English words that possibly are to be taken as color-words, is that they are so indefinite in their application as scarcely to permit us to decide whether a color-effect is intended or not.

Colour-searchers found little definite in the way of colour (by which they meant hue); instead, they encountered brightness and darkness.²⁹ It was indeed soon realised that while modern Western societies' colour-system is hue-based, the Anglo-Saxons' was essentially brilliance-based,³⁰ thus implying a different set of aesthetic values and a resulting impossibility to accurately map our corresponding conceptual vocabulary to theirs.

In much more recent years, detailed investigations on dark-related vocabulary have been carried out as part of Carole Biggam's colour research in Old English and Kirsten Wolf's in Old Norse. Biggam's book on the colour 'grey' is a rich and valuable resource for the wide range of associations between the semantics of words for 'grey' and non-colour concepts.³¹ The most interesting of Biggam's greyness words is *hār*

²⁷ W. E. Mead, 'Color in Old English Poetry', *PMLA* 14 (1899), pp. 169-206; F. A. Wood, *Color-Names and their Congeners: A Semasiological Investigation* (Halle, 1902); L. D. Lerner, 'Color Words in Anglo-Saxon', *MLR* 46 (1951), pp. 246-9.

²⁸ Mead, 'Color', p. 170.

²⁹ Mead, 'Color', p. 174; Lerner, 'Color Words', pp. 246-7.

³⁰ A useful summary of previous scholarship, reassessment of the colour/hue/brilliance question, and analysis of Old English colour-related terms is Marion Matschi, 'Color Terms in English Onomasiological and Semasiological Aspects', *Onomasiology Online* 5 (2004), pp. 56-139.

³¹ Carole P. Biggam, *Grey in Old English: An Interdisciplinary Semantic Study* (London, 1998).

which, based on prose as well as verse attestations, she would contextually relate in general to the semantics of ‘ancientness and fearsomeness/cunning’ at least as much as to indications of grey/white colour.³² The underlying multivalence, she suspects, is even more extended in the poetic language:³³

the poetic examples of *har*, in particular, are characterised by the simultaneous stimulation in the reader’s mind of most of the semantic elements in the word’s repertoire. These form a shadowy network of semantic impressions which stand, elusive and shifting, behind a more obvious superficial meaning.

This semantic complexity implies literary critical interpretations that are beyond the scope of Biggam’s colour study; accordingly, she does not develop these hints. But the present thesis, unencumbered by the specificities of a quest for chromatic shades of meaning, is able directly to interrogate precisely these ‘shadowy’, ‘elusive and shifting’ aspects; it addresses them in relation not only to *hār*, but to a range of other words whose basic hue- or brilliance-based meanings are only limiting elements.

Contributions from the field of Old Norse colour semantics started early, with darkness attracting some brief comment.³⁴ But the only investigations that can directly concern ‘shadow’ are Kirsten Wolf’s studies of the colours grey and blue (the latter showing in that language much overlap with the sense ‘dark’). In her discussion of *grár* and *blár* she records ominous connotations of death and the supernatural, most salient in poetry but informing the saga prose as well.³⁵

The usefulness to this thesis of colour-orientated approaches, however, is obviously limited, not least because they are, understandably, driven mainly by the purpose of identifying basic colour terms: since one of the criteria for the latter is frequency of occurrence, relatively rare poetic words tend to disappear from the

³² Biggam, *Grey*, pp. 237-8.

³³ Biggam, *Grey*, p. 224.

³⁴ For instance Arthur Laurenson, *The Colour-Sense in the Edda* (London, 1882).

³⁵ Kirsten Wolf, ‘The Color Grey in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature’, *JEGP* 108.2 (2009), pp. 222-38, see esp. pp. 234-6; and *eadem*, ‘The Color Blue in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature’, *Scripta Islandica* 57 (2006), pp. 55-78, esp. pp. 60-1 and 71-4.

researcher's radar.³⁶ More crucially, this type of approach differs from mine by essentially reflecting the concerns of lexicographers and corpus linguists and aiming at the cataloguing of linguistic material into databases. Dictionaries, concordances, and other linguistic databases are an indispensable starting point for our interpretations of texts and must always underlie literary studies. This truism applies especially to such a study as the present one whose core material is emphatically lexical. In this case the importance of lexicographical information is the more acute as I am concerned with mainly rare and elusive words. Accordingly, I have had ample recourse to such reference tools as *BT*, *CL*, the *DOE* and its online searchable corpus, Kellogg's concordance of Old Norse poetry,³⁷ and the *TOE*, not to mention any relevant word studies (including the colour scholarship addressed above), and I would no doubt have benefited from Andy Orchard's ongoing 'Anglo-Saxon Formulary Project'. I use these resources, however, only as tools; the aim of this thesis lies not in corpus linguistics or formulaic theory, but in literary readings, contextual interpretation of words, texts, and their interrelationships, and an exploration of a new dimension in poetic language.

'Shadow' is much more than a semantic category. Indeed, although the present study is firmly rooted in words, its evidential material is highly contextual and relational as well as purely linguistic. The lexical elements to which it owes its momentum are involved in stylistic effects (such as paronomasia, verbal ambiguity, metrical effects) that problematise the notions of semantic fields and synonymy. The path to the opening up of this new perspective through the lens of 'shadow' leads through the reassessment of many lexicographic meanings and categories that have obscured, or rationalised away

³⁶ Cf. e.g. Wolf, 'Grey', p. 227, and further pp. 222-3 for a brief account of the influential Berlin and Kay model which is deeply ingrained in most colour studies of the recent period.

³⁷ Robert L. Kellogg, *A Concordance to Eddic Poetry* (East Lansing, MI, 1988).

much strangeness and much richness in our early medieval literary records, thus precluding constructive criticism.³⁸

The first and, to date, fullest literary study concerned with darkness and its relation to brightness on a thematic level is Jean Ritzke-Rutherford's monograph *Light and Darkness in Anglo-Saxon Thought and Writing*.³⁹ The title in fact conceals an imbalance, for the author's general concern, it turns out, is the expression and significance in Old English literature of light, especially of the sun, to which darkness appears rather accessory. Darkness does receive occasional treatment, but this typically boils down to highlighting its oppositional aspect in respect to the theme of light, in secular as well as religious contexts. Ritzke-Rutherford writes:⁴⁰

In keeping with the natural psychological and metaphysical associations coupled with light and darkness ..., and firmly anchored in Biblical and homiletic writing, light in Old English poetry is equated with good, and in a wider sense with life, while darkness stands for evil and even death. From the very beginning such thought appears in the formulae, systems, and clusters of the poets, who seldom fail to make use of them at least once or twice in every poem. Most often they occur as polar opposites in descriptions or bald statements.

This type of 'polar opposites' (shining weapons vs darkening night, light of the hall vs darkness of exile, light of creation and Paradise vs dark earth and dark fire of Hell) have indeed been a staple of literary criticism.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the evidence, for example in *Maxims II* and *Beowulf*, that darkness and shadow are associated with evil deeds and unholy creatures in negative contrast to light standing for goodness and salvation,⁴¹ the motif possesses strongly ambiguous aspects such as the occasional intersection or mingling of light with darkness with or without moral or typological motivation. The 'joys of the rising sun' are contradicted by several instances of poetic association of the dawn with attack,

³⁸ See Fred C. Robinson, 'Lexicography and Literary Criticism: A Caveat', in James L. Rosier, ed., *Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature* (The Hague, 1970), pp. 99-110.

³⁹ Jean Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness in Anglo-Saxon Thought and Writing* (Frankfurt a.M.; Bern; Cirencester, 1979).

⁴⁰ Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness*, p. 175.

⁴¹ Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness*, p. 188.

discovery of nightly slaughter, and exile.⁴² One strongly suspects that the meanings of the vernacular words commonly rendered by ‘dawn’, as well as the contexts of the corresponding episodes, are more complex than they look and would repay further enquiry. Commenting on a passage in the poem *Andreas* where night *helmade*, / *brunwann* (‘descended like a helm, ?brown/shining-dark’, 1305b-6a), she remarks that ‘the dusky gleam normally associated with a helmet adds a further dimension to the description’; the notion of ‘gleaming duskiness’, also found in the motif of the ‘beasts of battle’, is certainly a ‘startling combination’.⁴³ Instead of downplaying such strange associations by pushing them to the margins to make way for totalising arguments, we should view and analyze them on their own terms, thus allowing, in Ritzke-Rutherford’s words, a ‘startling’, ‘further dimension’ to appear for us to query and contextualise.

A classic expression of the bright/dark paradigm, and one no less fundamentally antagonistic, is the projection onto early Germanic society of the image, chiefly deriving from interpretations of *Beowulf* and Scandinavian mythological narratives, of humans dwelling within a centre of light (typically symbolised by the hall) surrounded by dark and potentially destructive nature. There is no need here to rehearse the history of this long-standing model, only to note two of the more recent engagements with it. Jennifer Neville’s *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* and Peter Dendle’s *Satan Unbound* cannot ignore the various darkness- and shadow-ridden scenes that inform the Old English configurations of their topics.⁴⁴ When, discussing *Beowulf*, Neville asserts that ‘hall[s] constitute the physical boundaries that divide the human circle of light from the natural world’,⁴⁵ the obvious implication (borne out throughout the book) is that all manifestations of darkness belong to nature, not culture. Scenes in

⁴² Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness*, pp. 184-6.

⁴³ Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness*, pp. 189-90.

⁴⁴ Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1999); Peter Dendle, *Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature* (Toronto, 2001).

⁴⁵ Neville, *Natural World*, p. 68.

which humans are overwhelmed by dark nature signify the loss of society, as in *The Wife's Lament*.⁴⁶ The image of Beowulf's barrow standing in, and as part of, the natural world, as 'a kind of lighthouse to counteract the darkness', may suggest a more ambivalent culture-darkness relationship.⁴⁷ But the general template, it is assumed, is that the fuzzy and fearful dark nature of the unknown, wilderness, nothingness, and evil has to be either utterly transformed into a place of light, or else circumscribed, disambiguated and thus overcome.⁴⁸ Similarly, as Dendle points out, to defeat the Devil often means to disambiguate him, by locating and defining his wild and paradoxical nature, shifting physical forms, and dark environment: in essence, one has to bring him into the light.⁴⁹ One would like to know, therefore, what the significance of the paradoxical darkness or 'shadow' which attaches to him (as in *Christ and Satan*) might be. Does it brand him as an alien, chaotic force? Or does it signal some kind of kinship, true or feigned, with the light?

Light-darkness binary opposition is also the main assumption in the few studies that pay any amount of attention to darkness in Old Norse poetic language. What usually engages scholars most in respect to darkness, however, is the interpretation of the allusions to, and retellings of, myth, not the expression of darkness per se. Darkness and light are abstracted from the narratives and supposed to be one of the archetypal oppositional pairs fundamental in the world's creation and destruction,⁵⁰ solar myths,⁵¹ or representations of religious liminal experiences.⁵² Interpretations involving rational,

⁴⁶ Neville, *Natural World*, p. 87; further equations of nature (negative landscape) with darkness (negative force) occur e.g. at pp. 78, 80, 86.

⁴⁷ Neville, *Natural World*, pp. 137-8, at p. 138.

⁴⁸ Neville, *Natural World*, pp. 58-61 and 78-81.

⁴⁹ Dendle, *Satan Unbound*, pp. 14-17 and 117-19.

⁵⁰ *Völuspá* and *Vafþrúðnismál* from the Poetic Edda are the poems most prone to yield such analyses. See e.g. E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North* (London, 1964), p. 277.

⁵¹ Ursula Dronke, *The Poetic Edda. II: Mythological Poems* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 375-414; *eadem*, 'Art and Tradition in *Skírnismál*' in N. Davis and C. L. Wrenn, eds., *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J.R.R. Tolkien* (London, 1962), pp. 250-68.

⁵² Jens Peter Schjødt, *Initiation between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion*. Tr. Victor Hansen (Odense, 2008).

natural causes also occur, for example seeing the darkening sun in *Völuspá* as reflecting an eclipse or volcanic eruption.⁵³ Even though those disparate views may well reflect some truth operative at some compositional stage behind the stark visions embedded in the poems, not enough attention has been devoted to the details (linguistic, stylistic, metrical) that stand at the core of those images and in which one should find suggestions that the contrasts might not go entirely along the light/dark axis.

To summarise the current state of affairs: the complexity inherent in the Old English and Old Norse expression of darkness has been underestimated; the possibility of using either literary tradition as a comparative context for the other has not been seized upon; when light and darkness are addressed in conjunction, the two are conventionally interpreted as diametrically opposed forces excluding one another; light receives more attention, the implicit corollary being that the significance of darkness and its borderline phenomena is low; and commentators have generally shied away from the contradictions, paradoxes, and oddness of ‘shadow’.

My approach, then, is to record and address all major manifestations of strangeness and paradox that appear to fall under my (deliberately flexible) delineation of what ‘shadow’ can be. In engaging with ambivalence and paradoxicality, I am situating my research within a plurality of critical approaches which share a focus and emphasis on unresolved issues and specifically on the interpretative relevance of unresolvedness. A crucial contribution is Fred C. Robinson’s refreshing reading of *Beowulf* through the lens of the poet’s ubiquitous practice of juxtaposing meanings, words, and larger structures. He suggests this practice is for the poet a ‘habit of mind’, and argues:⁵⁴

⁵³ Paul Schach, ‘Some Thoughts on *Völuspá*’, in Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason, eds., *Edda: A Collection of Essays* (Winnipeg, 1983), pp. 86-116, at p. 107.

⁵⁴ Fred C. Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style* (Knoxville, 1985), pp. 79-80.

In *Beowulf*, the signification of ... motifs is conveyed largely through suggestive collocation. ... [M]any of the most important meanings ... must be inferred from juxtapositions and loose associations ...
 Appositions ... bring out by suggestion the complex meanings of events, motifs, and words, ... focusing attention on the homonymic character of Old English poetic diction.

Although Robinson singles out the *Beowulf* poet as the unrivalled master of apposition, surely some of his propositions can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to other artful Old English poems (and perhaps in part, in some specific situations, to Old Norse as well, although that would require substantial adaptation), for example to *Christ and Satan*, specifically the passage quoted earlier: *scīma* and *scīma* would seem to be in apposition, on the one hand, to each other through near-homonymic ambiguity, and on the other to *sced* ('shadow'); the resulting nexus would then be apposable to surrounding shining/dark imagery, creating remarkably entangled mental appositions. If carefully contextualised, the perspectives yielded by the appositive model can lead us to a wealth of new understandings.

The issue of intended and meaningful ambivalence is also tackled frontally (though much less influentially) by Johann Köberl, again in *Beowulf*. One of his most 'shadow'-relevant suggestions is the possibility of 'reflected meaning', that is:⁵⁵

'the meaning which arises in cases of multiple conceptual meaning, when one sense of a word forms part of our response to another sense': if we know that the word *āglāca* frequently refers to monsters, it will leave an aftertaste of the monstrous even when applied to heroes; if we know that it is also applied to heroes, it will humanise for us the monsters it is applied to.

Closely related and equally adaptable is Köberl's model for reinterpreting irony:⁵⁶

not as a contradictory and thus mutually exclusive relationship between two meanings, but to see the literal meaning as still lurking behind the ironic interpretation ... Irony can thus be viewed as an inclusive, differential, and relational process, where the re-interpreted meanings, instead of cancelling the literal meanings, enter into a relationship with them which need not be antithetic but merely different in essential ways. ... Settling for only one of these meanings would mean ignoring a salient structural feature of the text, its indeterminacy at most of its levels.

⁵⁵ Johann Köberl, *The Indeterminacy of Beowulf* (Lanham, 2002), p. 101, quoting Geoffrey Leech, *Semantics: The Study of Meaning*, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth, 1981), p. 16.

⁵⁶ Köberl, *Indeterminacy*, pp. 163-4.

Köberl's 'reflected meaning' and irony/indeterminacy as a 'relational process' can be fruitfully extended beyond *Beowulf*, a poem who has attracted the lion's share of such discussions to the detriment of other texts which do not have this critical tradition.

Indeterminacy and paradox are much more difficult to detect in Old Norse poetry, where the metrical forms available would indeed seem much less apt to bear appositions than classic Old English verse. Opportunities for (quasi-)homonymy in Old Norse also appear to be fewer than in Old English (whatever the reasons may be). When to this is added the fact that 'shadow' words are considerably less frequent in Old Norse, it becomes perhaps unsurprising that there should have been very little sustained research on ambivalence or paradoxicality in that poetic language, and practically nothing that would involve features of strange darkness. A rare engagement with indeterminacy is Hallvard Lie's stylistic study of 'a-naturalistic' images induced by kennings in skaldic verse.⁵⁷ Lie's concept of unnatural kenning aesthetics has recently been revived and developed within a cognitive framework by Bergsveinn Birgisson who finds that bizarre, grotesque, contrast-based mental images ('contrast-tension aesthetics') are created chiefly by the earliest recorded skaldic kennings and proposes that their function had to do with poetic stimulation and memorization (a grotesque image leaves a more lasting impression).⁵⁸ These (relatively isolated) strands of enquiry, while being specific to the nature of the Old Norse material, nonetheless could conceivably be reconciled to some degree with the approaches of Robinson and Köberl, arguably their most proximate analogues. Even though too heterogeneous to constitute a unified model or framework, the range of approaches presented so far and the ways in which they address problematic material in both traditions, suggests the possibility of

⁵⁷ Hallvard Lie, *'Natur' og 'unatur' i skaldekunsten* (Oslo, 1957). Repr. in his *Om sagakunst og skaldskap. Utvalgte avhandlingar* (Oslo, 1982), pp. 201-315.

⁵⁸ Bergsveinn Birgisson, 'What Have We Lost by Writing? Cognitive Archaisms in Skaldic Poetry', in Else Mundal and Jonas Wellendorf, eds., *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing* (Copenhagen, 2008), pp. 163-84.

interpretative paths by which to negotiate the no less heterogeneous entanglement of ‘shadow’ issues.

1.5 METHODOLOGIES

The difficulties inherent in an inquiry into temporally and culturally remote cultures through vestigial remains recorded in now-dead languages are aggravated in the present study by its concern with concepts, images, ideas, and relationships which are, from the start, hard to circumscribe. Unlike concrete entities or facts or familiar beliefs, the strange indirections of darkness and shadow in Old English and Old Norse elude classification into categories generally used in critical discourse. The methodologies applied in this study seek to bring to the foreground precisely the strangeness of these utterances, to which they are a response; they do not seek to resolve and reduce this strangeness into modern preconceived categories. In terms of literary appreciation, this attunement to strangeness agrees with Derek Attridge’s response to otherness and singularity in modern literature:⁵⁹

To read creatively ... is to work against the mind’s tendency to assimilate the other to the same, attending to that which can barely be heard, registering what is unique about the shaping of language, thought, and feeling.

This thesis explores and attempts to interpret strange, paradoxical, and otherwise problematic and elusive verbal structures and meaning — singularities which stand out for the modern interpreter but which, I suggest, would have been also registered as singularities by early medieval audiences.

To engage with and illuminate this strangeness, the present study takes as both its point of departure and core material a series of significant words. This is based on my assumption that, even though we should refrain from positing the existence of a

⁵⁹ Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London, 2004), p. 80.

medieval category first and then trying to reconstruct it with *ad hoc* evidence, we can still reconstruct something from a close scrutiny of words and basic verbal features. We can delineate and partly reconstruct a set, or sets, of associations, habits and patterns of thought, experiences of and attitudes to reality (which may or may not extend beyond the literary or poetic) whose nature, shape, or extent we cannot fully guess at the start of research (especially when the underlying words are problematic and not well-attested). Accordingly, I try to avoid top-down, artificially categorising approaches; instead I work from the word up: words are the centres for description and interpretation, and will be the direct points of reference for any reconstructions and conclusions.⁶⁰

The words and passages around which this study is structured are all to a greater or less extent interpretative cruxes (although most have not been recognised as such). This implies an unknown and involves the basic methodological concern for context. Attention to context is paramount in a semantic study of words, where it can narrow down the possibilities of meaning and enhance the plausibility of interpretations.⁶¹ An important premise of this thesis is that while wider contexts such as cultural, historical, or manuscript context, or literary genre, are helpful guides (and are duly included in my literary interpretations), what should be closely investigated first are the various narrow contexts, internal or external, that can be found for discrete words and utterances. The importance of prioritising narrower contexts over wider ones is stressed by Hirsch in respect to validating an interpretation:⁶²

new, more delimited evidence ... serves to define a much narrower subsuming class of instances, and a judgment based on this narrower class is necessarily more weighty and reliable as a probability judgment than one based on a broader class. ... By narrowing the class, we have, in effect, created a new class far more relevant to our guess ... and this narrower subsuming class always has the power to overturn (or to confirm) the evidence and the guess derived from the broader class.

⁶⁰ A similar approach, although centred around only one word and concerned with (slightly) less elusive meanings, and hence more ambitious in its claim to reconstruction, is that of Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England. Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge, 2007), see esp. pp. 9-14.

⁶¹ Jesch, *Ships and Men*, pp. 8-9 and 33-6.

⁶² E.D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London, 1967), p. 185.

Applying Hirsch's principle to the 'shadow's *scīma/scīma*' crux, we would rule out the evidence of the larger class of instances of the word in Old English, which overwhelmingly points to *scīma* ('brightness'), and accept instead the evidence of the narrower class subsuming the two instances where it collocates with 'shadow' within a half-line: the other instance, *Solomon and Saturn I* 116a, where light plays no role, favours *scīma* ('shadow'). However, one could narrow down to a different class, that of the instances of *scīma/scīma* occurring in contexts of both darkness and light, which would yield the opposite conclusion. While Hirsch is concerned with validating one interpretation among many, his approach can be used to highlight the co-existence of conflicting ones, where no one guess or interpretation is valid exclusively. The multiple validity of competing interpretations and their interplay belongs in the associative semantics of 'shadow' that this study seeks to elucidate.

Relevant to the problem of competing contexts is that of genre, but Hirsch would again narrow it down from 'the extrinsic genre' to 'the intrinsic genre of the utterance' which is 'the essential component of a context', 'that sense of the whole by means of which an interpreter can correctly understand any part in its determinacy'.⁶³ Tom Shippey appeals to Hirsch's intrinsic genre as 'a safer concept than contexts, frameworks, or even "accumulated scholarship"' when one tries to contextualise elusive meanings in Old English poems:⁶⁴

when faced with texts they could not understand, [scholars] tried instead to deal with things that they *could* understand and to subordinate interpretation to that. They brought in the idea of 'genre' from outside because they felt that the 'inside', the poems themselves, was not enough.

'Shadow' is bound up with the recognition of intrinsic genres and narrow classes of evidence. One of the rare critical engagements with darkness in Old English is John M.

⁶³ Hirsch, *Validity*, pp. 86-7.

⁶⁴ Tom A. Shippey, 'Approaches to Truth in Old English Poetry', *University of Leeds Review* 25 (1982), pp. 171-89, at pp. 177-8.

Foley's brief analysis of *Beowulf* 649-51a and 702b-5a where he identifies a recurring 'cluster' of six lexical elements (in bold):⁶⁵

oþ ðe nipende **niht** ofer **ealle**,
scaduhelma gesceapu **scriðan cwoman**
wan under wolcnum

[until the darkening **night** over **all**, the creatures of **shadow**-helms **came gliding dark** under the clouds]

Com on wanre niht
scriðan sceadugenga. Sceotend swæfon,
þa þæt hornreced healdan scoldon,
ealle buton anum

[The **shadow**-walker **came gliding** in the **dark night**. The warriors were sleeping, those who must guard the horn-hall, **all** but one]

Dense repetition of references to darkness most often occurs in the genre of biblical verse narrative where it usually denotes hell; but these *Beowulf* instances form their own intrinsic genre,⁶⁶ and hell is not the most plausible contextual interpretation, but rather the fearful gathering of unknown shadows in the dark. 'When the cluster recurs, the terror that it encodes springs into the narrative'.⁶⁷ The concept of intrinsic genre has the advantage of not necessitating the critical discourse of oral-formulaic theory within which Foley's analysis is inscribed and which it would be methodologically problematic to harness on the diversity of my sources.

Nevertheless some oral-formulaic terminology can prove useful in respect to 'shadow'. The simple concept of cluster just exemplified, a loose linkage of words in whatever order but whose recurrence is striking in effect,⁶⁸ helpfully circumvents too rigid and constraining definitions (and often loaded with oral-formulaic ideology) of the usual descriptive tools such as formulas, formulaic systems, or type-scenes. Much of my formulaic-like evidence, for example, is not restricted to (half-)lines and does not

⁶⁵ John M. Foley, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1991), pp. 32-3; I have slightly adapted his translations.

⁶⁶ See further Chapter 2, sections on *sceadu* and *genip*, (*ge*)*nīpan*.

⁶⁷ Foley, *Immanent Art*, p. 33.

⁶⁸ The cluster is conveniently summarised in Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness*, pp. 158-61.

consistently fall into regular metrical patterns. On the other hand, the cluster can foreground data that would otherwise be treated in terms of loose, and hence non-salient, collocation. While I do speak of formulas when they are integral or tangential to ‘shadow’ and (more often) of collocation, the concept of cluster affords a useful means of highlighting the salience of specific subsets of evidence. Another useful term, if not abused, is that of ‘theme’ as defined by Donald K. Fry:⁶⁹

a recurring concatenation of details and ideas, not restricted to a specific event, verbatim repetition, or certain formulas, which forms an underlying structure for an action or description.

Fry’s oral-formulaic framework has him speak of ‘formulaic themes’, but he also allows for the alternative label ‘image cluster’.⁷⁰ Word clusters, image clusters, and themes can describe Old English ‘shadow’ well, and their flexibility makes them applicable to Old Norse material to some extent as well.

1.6 POETIC LANGUAGE, PROSE AND VERSE, ORALITY AND LITERACY

‘Shadow’ is more easily found and approached in texts commonly agreed to be poetry, unsurprisingly so since many of the words underlying it are clearly archaic. Nevertheless there are many places in prose (which might perhaps be termed poetically-marked prose contexts, or whatever one wishes to call them) where it appears as well, and as I shall argue, this is not just an accidental and statistically anomalous ‘overflow’ of a poetic phenomenon into prose. I use the more embracing term ‘poetic language’ to include such prose ‘shadow’ contexts in the scope of this investigation.

⁶⁹ Donald K. Fry, ‘Old English Formulaic Themes and Type-Scenes,’ *Neophilologus* 52 (1968), pp. 48-54, at p. 53.

⁷⁰ Donald K. Fry, ‘The Cliff of Death in Old English Poetry’, in John M. Foley, ed., *Comparative Research on Oral Traditions: A Memorial for Milman Parry* (Columbus, 1987), pp. 213-34, at p. 212, and note 1, p. 230.

Similarly, I refrain from framing my interpretations in terms of orality and literacy. On account of some of the most striking evidence which appears to be highly poetic, formulaic, and challenging modern rational thought, it would indeed be tempting to assume ‘shadow’ to be ultimately an oral-derived manifestation of early poetry. This, however, would not bear scrutiny: other evidence in rather ostensibly literate contexts suggests that ‘shadow’ and literacy are not mutually exclusive and, even further, that the underlying discourses and forms can be tightly interwoven. It seems more plausible to assume that ‘shadow’ can be an expression of thought patterns at least as much as it is contingent on form — and of thought that does not necessarily depend on orality/literacy and prose/verse distinctions.

Old English prose, like verse, is of course extremely multiform, and the heterogeneity of both modes in terms of form, style, date, or purpose (to name but a few factors) should be in itself a warning against assuming the validity of binary oppositions between two air-tight blocks. And as I argue in this study, the irregularity of distribution of the ‘shadow’ material has often more to do with such factors as type of subject-matter, strand of tradition, or ideological outlook, than with our modern view of sources falling on one side or the other of the prose/verse dichotomy.

Here my approach partly reflects recent reassessments of the prevalent critical discourse that routinely raises the analytical pairs of prose/verse and orality/literacy to paradigmatic status. Thus for example Thomas A. Bredehoft’s model of late Old English verse problematises the prose/verse dichotomy; Tiffany Beechy partly recasts both the prose/verse and (implicitly) the oral/literate binaries in terms of speech patterning; and the relevance of the ‘orality/literacy axis’ is more directly undercut by Alaric Hall who argues that these concepts have been applied ‘far beyond [their] literal

referents of spoken and written communication'.⁷¹ It would be more fruitful to consider Old English textual production as a continuum, using such terms as prose, verse, oral, or literate to indicate tendencies, nuances of form and style rather than sharp delimitations imposed on (collections of) texts.

This is not to suggest that the associated terminology of prose and verse or, for that matter, that of orality and literacy, should be dropped from linguistic and literary discussions. These terms remain useful critical tools, and I shall use them as such in this study. On a more pragmatic level, my usage of the labels 'prose' and 'verse' is also bound to reflect common critical usage, notably the categorisation of the *DOE* corpus, for ease of reference and to avoid confusion. These labels, however, should not encumber interpretation. Within the methodological framework of this thesis, it is not essential to determine where the boundary exactly runs or whether we should assign certain texts to some fuzzy, more or less borderless in-between categories of poetic prose or prosaic verse. My purpose is not to fit 'shadow' into a preconceived map of Old English literature and speak of poetic versus prose 'shadow'. Rather, I aim at drawing a literary map of 'shadow', i.e. one that registers various degrees and nuances in the phenomenon's distribution (in terms of nature, density, effect, function) and correlates them to degrees and nuances in terms of the nature of the sources (presence or absence or amount of poetic structuring, formulaicness, oral features, literary style, genre, subject-matter, date).

⁷¹ Thomas A. Bredehoft, *Authors, Audiences, and Old English Verse* (Toronto, 2009); *idem*, 'Ælfric and Late Old English Verse', *ASE* 33 (2004), pp. 77-107. Tiffany Beechy, *The Poetics of Old English* (Farnham and Burlington, VT, 2010), pp. 30, 43, 51, and *passim*. Alaric Hall, 'The Orality of a Silent Age: The Place of Orality in Medieval Studies', in Marko Lamberg *et al.*, eds., *Methods and the Medievalist: Current Approaches in Medieval Studies* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2008), pp. 270-90, at p. 280.

1.7 SHAPE OF THE THESIS

This thesis relies on a thorough examination of primary evidence; its shape reflects my methodology of working from the words up and naturally follows the progression of research. In broad terms the study falls into three parts. The first, corresponding to Chapters 2-3, is devoted to words: it analyses the linguistic evidence for ‘shadow’ and attempts to reconstruct for each word firmer and subtler semantic values and associations. This relies notably on intensive investigation of formal and stylistic features as well as the words’ immediate textual environments. Chapter 2 tackles the extensive evidence for the Old English linguistic and semantic field of ‘shadow’. After outlining the contours of a paradoxical and otherwise problematic network of terms related to notions of darkness, I proceed to test this initial model against a selection of words, having explained the reasons for my choice. Each word is taken separately and considered on its own terms and within the various contexts of its occurrence. In Chapter 3 I contextualise the Old English material by similarly investigating Old Norse ‘shadow’ words. Before selecting relevant words and analysing them, however, I draw attention to formal, stylistic, generic, and other literary-historical differences between Old Norse and Old English poetic traditions insofar as these affect my comparative presentation of the evidence. These two chapters thus serve to situate each of the two linguistic sets of data in a broader context. More fruitfully, though, they also result in the reconstruction of two distinct, if partly cognate, networks of semantic and stylistic relations, and this in turns supplies a platform for language-informed literary interpretations.

The second part, formed by Chapters 4-5, is essentially dedicated to close readings of sources in both languages; supported by the results of the semantic and

stylistic studies in Chapters 2-3, these readings reassess and consolidate the evidence for ‘shadow’ by grounding it in literary contexts. Old English literary case studies are conducted in Chapter 4, and I choose to focus on *Beowulf* and the two *Guthlac* poems. The better to contextualise the literary evidence, however, I also address in some detail a number of other relevant texts which are significantly related to *Beowulf* and to the figure of St Guthlac by virtue of literary-historical links and/or manuscript context — including, for example, the prose texts in the *Beowulf* manuscript and the Old English translation of Felix of Croyland’s *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*. In the process, fresh insights are gained into the nature of the prose/verse interface which can be integrated into the topical debate on the critical assessment of the distinctiveness of prose in Old English linguistic/literary studies. In Chapter 5, turning again to Old Norse, I take as my case studies *Vǫluspá*, *Atlakviða*, and Bragi’s *Ragnarsdrápa*, thus correlating the deployment of ‘shadow’ with expectations of form (Eddic or skaldic metres) and genre (mythological or heroic), which also leads me to problematise these conventional divisions. Furthermore, I reassess the findings from each case study by, again, extending the comparative context to include evidence from palaeographically and generically related poems.

Thirdly and finally, in Chapter 6 I conclude by bringing together the evidence of earlier chapters for the existence, nature, and function of a ‘shadow’ theme, or themes, running through Old English and Old Norse poetic language. However, while attempting to synthesise the richness of the data into a coherent picture, I also heed the potential importance of any remaining incoherences and loose ends in opening up new questions, and I draw attention to what can be plausibly reconstructed and what cannot. Evaluating the overall strength and significance of the parallels between the two traditions as well as within them, I recontextualise the ‘shadow’ phenomenon in relation

to the questions of chronology, history, inheritance, contact and influence, and society and culture, and discuss what kind of new understanding it can bring into our reading of texts riddled with local 'shadow' obscurities. More broadly, the findings also afford a deeper comprehension of what is distinctive about the poetics of 'shadow' in either tradition and of what 'shadow' reveals about poetic language itself.

CHAPTER TWO:

OLD ENGLISH ‘SHADOW’ WORDS: SEMANTIC AND STYLISTIC STUDY

The present chapter establishes the evidence for ‘shadow’ in Old English based on words and their textual contexts and associations. I begin by proposing a working model of the ‘shadow’ theme relying on such categorisation as is made possible from the assumed meanings of a large array of seemingly relevant words. This model is then tested by a semantic study of a carefully selected subset of these words. Each word is analyzed separately. The first outcome of each word study is the reconstruction of the word’s semantics (or at least a more accurate notion of its semantics than what can be inferred from lexicographic tools) on the basis of linguistic evidence such as glosses, source texts and analogues, cognates, and diachronic change in meaning and usage. Secondly, examination of contextual and stylistic data from a range of texts, contributes to a critically informed evaluation of the word’s patterns of distribution and network of associations. The data and insights thus arrived at are instrumental in the subsequent case studies of entire texts.

2.1 ‘DARKNESS’: A CATEGORY PROBLEM

The expression of darkness in Old English is particularly multifarious and ambivalent. By accounting for this situation and analyzing how and why it is obtained (how lexical and thematic elements contribute to it), it becomes possible to map the poetics of darkness and to explore some of the nature and functions of a poetic language to which ambivalence is also often ascribed. Classifying a poetic theme into categories

made up from modern notions is a dangerous attempt, since one is likely to project one's own linguistically predetermined assumptions on an alien field. However, a point of entry must be proposed. As a compromise, therefore, but also as a useful way to tackle the problem, I offer here a possible analytical breakdown of the theme of darkness from an initially broad and necessarily simplifying viewpoint.¹ This modelisation will expose both the complexity of Old English darkness and some essential limitations to the pertinence of the approach itself: the theme is not rationally reducible to a homogeneous system.

To provide an analytical model of Old English darkness, I consider on the one hand those terms whose apparent dominant meanings can wholly and unambiguously be contained within the literal idea of darkness, and on the other those which, despite often denoting literal darkness, also exhibit an important strand of meaning that is not, or contradicts, literal darkness. Rather than implying clear-cut divisions, however, the following sub-headings should be regarded as discrete abstractions of interconnected and overlapping ideas, forming a modelised view of a continuum.

Literal darkness:

1 – Darkness in the most general sense: *pēostru* ('darkness') and *p̄ystre* ('dark'), *deorc* ('dark'), (*ge-*)*sweorcan* ('darken'), *dimm* ('dark, dim'), *mirce* ('dark, murky'), *wann* ('dark, dusky, livid'), *niht* ('night');

2 – Darkness and shadow: *scead(u)* ('shadow, shade'), *scua* ('shadow'), *scima* ('shadow');

3 – Darkness and blackness: *sweart* ('black'), *blæc* ('black');

¹ Thus the following model obtains primarily from the information that can be synthesized from the *Dictionary of Old English (DOE)*, the other dictionaries (notably *Bosworth-Toller (BT)*), and the *Thesaurus of Old English (TOE)*, i.e., by prioritizing lexicographical and raw semantic data over close examination of the poetic language in its textual and extratextual contexts. The latter examination is the object of the subsequent word-studies and following chapters.

4 – Darkness and greyness or other dark colour: *græg* ('grey'), *hār* ('grey, hoary'), *hasu* ('grey, tawny'), *salu* ('dark, dusky'), *dunn* ('dun'), *brūn* ('dark, brown, gleaming'), *eorp* ('dark, brown').

More ambivalent darkness:

5 – Darkness and mist: *genip* ('darkness, mist') and *(ge-)nīpan* ('grow dark'), *mist* ('mist');

6 – Darkness and concealment or depth: *heolstor* ('darkness, concealment'), *dīgol* ('dark, hidden, secret'), *dyrne* ('dark, secret'), *neowol* ('dark, deep, abysmal');

7 – Darkness and lividity or pallor: *wann*, *fealu* ('pale, yellowish-grey, tawny');

8 – Darkness and whiteness: *hār*;

9 – Darkness and brightness: *brūn*, *fāh* ('?variegated, shining; discoloured, black or pale [as death]; stained; decorated').

The model thus obtained can be problematised in more than one way. We could, for example, take as main classifying criteria the association (in terms of presence/absence) with matter and colour (or hue), and divide darkness words up into two corresponding categories, respectively '(im)materiality' and 'colour(lessness)'. Such an approach would group (1) and (2) together with (5) and (6), and (3) and (4) with (7), (8) and (9), thus mixing literal and ambivalent darkness:

A – (Im)materiality: *pēostru* and *pýstre*, *deorc*, *(ge-)sweorcan*, *dimm*, *mirce*, *wann*, *niht*; *scead(u)*, *scua*, *scima*; *genip* and *(ge-)nīpan*, *mist*; *heolstor*, *dīgol*, *dyrne*, *neowol*;

B – Colour(lessness): *sweart*, *blæc*; *græg*, *hār*, *hasu*, *salu*, *dunn*, *brūn*, *eorp*; *wann*, *fealu*; *fāh*.

These two models highlight the paradoxicality which makes darkness a richer and more complex idea than is usually assumed in Old English literature. It confirms the suggestion that ‘shadow’ is a better term to account for the ‘almost physical’ and ‘almost shining’ aspects of darkness; it also underscores the need for a rigorous study of these challenging words in their textual, traditional and cultural contexts, which will in turn re-examine the validity of this initial breakdown of the ‘shadow’ theme.

To analyze with more precision the theme’s semantics and associations I have chosen seven words to look at in close detail.² This selection addresses the multiformity of the semantic field as outlined above. Therefore I include three words for literal darkness, *scead(u)*, *scua*, and *wann*. I include *scua* as it is interesting to inquire into the function of a word which seems very close in meaning to *sceadu* (I treat the other apparently close synonym, the extremely rare *scima*, in conjunction with *sceadu* for reasons of close collocation). *Wann* provides insights into the poetic force of semantically elusive words that evade attempts at classification, as the above models already evince. *Nīpan* and *genip* exemplify the material/immaterial paradox. The adjectives *blæc* and *hār* illustrate the paradoxical tendencies of blackness and greyness to overlap with brightness and shine. Finally, *fāh* epitomizes both the shining/dark and the material/non-material paradoxes and illustrates how the notion of ‘shadow’ can and should be extended far beyond that of ‘darkness’. This last word, therefore, is treated at more length. Furthermore, most of these words, namely *scua*, *blæc*, *hār*, *nip-* and *fāh*,

² This inquiry is based on frequency data obtained from the *DOE* corpus checked against the *DOE*’s orthographic, statistical, and semantic information, or, when unavailable, such information as can be found in *BT*. When quoting from the prose corpus, the source edition is always specified. Verse quotations are from the *ASPR*, except for the following poems: *Beowulf* is quoted from R.D. Fulk *et al.*, eds., *Klaeber’s Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th ed. (Toronto, 2008), *Guthlac A* and *B* from Jane Roberts, ed., *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book* (Oxford, 1979), and *Exodus* from Peter J. Lucas, ed., *Exodus* (Exeter, 1977 [revised edn 1994]).

have cognates in the Old Norse poetic language, which will be of interest for the comparative analysis.

2.2 STUDIES OF OLD ENGLISH ‘SHADOW’ WORDS

2.2.1 *Scead(u)*

Sceadu, the feminine noun, and its morphological variant form, neuter *scead*, are represented by thirty-one occurrences in Old English poetry — including seven compounds (as the first element in two of them and the second element in five) — and close to seventy in prose. Moreover *sceadu* appears in about a hundred glosses, where it always renders Latin *umbra* (‘shadow’). In fact the entire body of evidence rather unanimously suggests that *scead(u)* is best translated by the word’s modern reflex, ‘shadow’. The feminine form is much more widespread than the neuter which, being rare in prose and never found as a gloss but accounting for about half of the verse occurrences, is probably a poetic variant. There is no indication, however, of any significant difference in meaning or connotation between *sceadu* and *scead*, while in oblique cases even the morphological difference sometimes cannot be detected. Accordingly, for ease of reference I henceforth indiscriminately use *sceadu* to signify either form or both.

While the overall sense of *sceadu* seems clear, its manner and contexts of usage have never been systematically addressed (no doubt as a consequence of apparent semantic clarity). Given that, as I have indicated at the onset of this thesis, there is something definitely mind-challenging about some Old English representations of

shadow, and that the oddness begins at (though is not confined to) the linguistic level, I analyse here with some precision the formal features of *sceadu* in poetic language and its textual environments. The subtler insights thus afforded will in turn inform a better recognition of the type(s) of meaning being conveyed as well as constitute our linguistic gateway into the thematics of ‘shadow’.³

The plurality of *sceadu*’s closest synonyms is noteworthy: two other words, *scima* and *scua* (or three, should one count *scead*), correspond to, broadly, the same idea, at least from a modern perspective (translators consensually use ‘shadow’ for all of them). In a poetic language which naturally encourages the preservation of synonymous words what is remarkable is of course not the number of these (though one notes that *scua* does occur in prose as well), but the fact that they all alliterate with each other. Indeed one rather expects poetic synonyms to begin with different sounds so poets can deploy them in different alliterative contexts. This issue of alliteration is addressed in due course in this section, as well as the case of *scima* which is entangled with *sceadu*, while the more independent *scua* is treated separately in the next section.

In contrast to prose where it frequently appears in a figurative sense, in verse *sceadu* seems most often to carry a very literal meaning, connected primarily to the physical environment, even in overtly religious contexts. The few exceptions can be treated briefly. The ‘shadow of death’ concept, of biblical and Latin origin, mainly concerns *scua* (see next section). The fleetingness and insignificance of earthly life and riches, which in *Instructions for Christians* (a religious poem listing precepts) pass away like *sceaduwa* (‘shadows’, 37b),⁴ is probably dependent on Latin religious prose. And traces of a metaphysical discourse involving a concept of shadow may underlie the references in *Genesis A* to the primeval void and darkness at the time of Creation. The

³ Except in translation contexts when I gloss a vernacular word, my use of the word ‘shadow’ in inverted commas in the context of description or argument refers to the topic of this thesis as a whole.

⁴ *PPs* 143.7 embodies a similar idea.

theme, although stimulated by the biblical account, is greatly expanded by the Anglo-Saxon poet, as in lines 103-6a:⁵

Ne wæs her þa giet nymþe heolstersceado
 wiht geworden ac þes wida grund
 stod deop and dim, drihtne fremde,
 idel and unnyt

[Here except darkness-shadow nothing was yet created but this vast ground stood deep and dark, alien to the Lord, empty and unused]

It is noteworthy that the Latin text of Genesis does not have the word *umbra* ('shadow'); the Anglo-Saxon poet apparently works out from the loose lexical collection of such words as *inanis*, *vacua*, *tenebrae*, *abyssi*, in which he must have sensed a potential for cosmic elaboration (compare further 108b-110a and 117b-19a).⁶ His treatment suggests that his conception of the word *sceadu* encompassed the mysteries and paradoxes of Creation, eternal darkness and nothingness that can yet be half-physical or at least half-visualized.

The rest of the evidence for *sceadu* is much closer to literal meanings, which are commonly negative. *The Phoenix* stands out as the only poem consistently exhibiting a positive meaning, one of secretive protection associated with purity. Thus the *clæne* ('pure', 167b) bird lives *in scade* ('in the shadow/shade, 168b) and *in þam leafsceade* ('in the leaf-shadow/-shade', 205b), a protection which the sun destroys when it *ofer sceadu scineð* ('shines on the shadow', 210a), causing the phoenix to be burnt to ashes, before the bird is re-born and grows again *on sceade* (235a). While this untypically favourable association probably derives from its Mediterranean sources,⁷ the use of this

⁵ See also *Genesis A* 128a and 133b-4.

⁶ Compare Doane, *Genesis A*, whose useful presentation of the vernacular poem with facing relevant excerpts from the Old Testament Latin text is particularly revealing in terms of the poet's usage of *sceadu* and related imagery, turning verbal collocations in his source into a theme in his poem.

⁷ All these citations come from the poem's first part which retells Lactantius' Latin poem *De ave phoenice*.

specific word, however, does not: none of the corresponding passages identified in the Latin sources evidences the semantic field of ‘shade’ or ‘shadow’.⁸

The most frequent context in more traditional verse, however, is simply the darkness of night. *Sceadu* and *niht* (‘night’) actually collocate on five occasions, and in four further passages they are three to seven lines apart. This collocation is part of a wider tendency: in more than half of its poetic appearances (seventeen instances) *sceadu* congregates with other darkness words, many of the corresponding passages being densely-textured in terms of darkness. Possibly one of the earliest extant examples is a compact one, found in *Genesis A* when God, after the first day of Creation, *geseah deorc sceado / sweart swiðrian* (‘saw the dark, black shadow subside’, 133b-4a).⁹ This is in stark contrast to the prose usage of *sceadu*, where collocation with darkness is all but absent; significantly, the only substantial exception, which appears in one of Ælfric’s homilies, comes in fact from the borderline realm of ‘alliterative prose’, and offers moreover a close lexical parallel to the *Genesis A* citation, albeit in less compressed form:¹⁰

Ðæs deofles rest bið on deorcum sceadewum for ðan ðe he slæpp on ðam sweartum ingehydum
þe ðæs geleafan leoht on heora life nabbað

[The devil’s rest is in dark shadows because he sleeps in the black intentions that do not have the light of faith on their life]

The recurrence in the same order of the collocation of *deorc*, *sceadu*, and *sweart* (*deorc* being essentially a poetic word, very rare in normal prose) and its adaptation to a different context and subject matter and a different (though proximate) mode of composition, not only affords an insight into the nature of the formulaic character of

⁸ Fontes Anglo-Saxonici Project, ed., *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register*, accessed from <<http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>>, 29 May 2009.

⁹ *Genesis A* is generally dated to ca. 700; see A. N. Doane, ed., *Genesis A: A New Edition* (Madison, 1978), pp. 25ff, and R.D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Metre* (Philadelphia, 1992), pp. 64, 135, 264, 391-2.

¹⁰ ‘Dominica III in Quadragesima’ in J.C. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, 2 vols., EETS 259, 260 (London, 1967-8), vol. I, pp. 264-80, lines 224ff.

‘shadow’ but also hints at the availability and congeniality of this formulaicness diachronically, possibly across a span of some three hundred years. Chronologically in-between, the poet of *Christ I* calls for effulgent divine radiance to come and shine like the sun on the *deorc deapes sceadu* (‘dark shadow of death’, 118a), the worldly place and condition of sinful mortals, the phrase itself collocating with three other darkness words.

But in most other cases of dense collocation of *sceadu* with darkness and specifically ‘shadow’ words, even though it appears mainly in poems overtly concerned with Christian themes, any implication of moral religious comment is vague at best. In *The Dream of the Rood*, symbolic aspects remain near the surface, but only for the indirect reason of the underlying biblical narrative (52b-5a):

Dystro hæfdon
 bewrigen mid wolcnum wealdendes hræw,
 scirne sciman, sceadu forðeode,
 wann under wolcnum

[Darkness had covered with clouds the Ruler’s corpse, the bright radiance; the shadow advanced, dark under the clouds]

As darkness creeps up in this protracted, repetitive, incremental manner, it is hard to shake off a physical, rather than spiritual, feeling of massive and multiform storm closing round. One could further ask what this shadow actually is; despite the variation and parallelism underscored by both *wolcnum*-phrases and despite the latter being formulaic and therefore not to be dissected for naturalistic meaning, one could suspect the *sceadu* that moves *under* the clouds not to be merely the same thing as the cloud-casting *þystro* (a more frequent and clearly less poetically marked word than *sceadu*). In *Andreas* the pattern seems to highlight an atmospherical phenomenon for dramatic effect, though it may simultaneously hint at the saint’s forthcoming suffering at the hands of the benighted Mermedonians and this sinful people’s eventual conversion (832-8a):

ymb þæt halge hus, heofonlic condel,
 from æfenglome oþþæt eastan cwom
 ofer deop gelad dægredwoma,
 wedertacen wearm

[The radiance of glory shone all night long, the noble [light] on the noble man, clothed in brightness. The shadows (*scadu*) faded away, unloosed under the sky. The radiance of light was about the holy house, the heavenly candle, from even-gloom until from the east came the crack of dawn over the deep expanse, a warm weather-sign.]

Blace stodon
 ofer sceotendum scire leoman;
 scinon scyldhreoðan, sceado swiðredon,
 neowle nihtscuwan neah ne mihton
 heolstor ahydan; heofoncandel barn

[Dark/shining (*blace/blāce*) over the warriors stood the bright lights; shields shone, the shadows (*sceado*) faded away, the abysmal night-shadows (*-scuwan*) could not conceal nearby their dark hiding-places; the heaven-candle burned]

The ways in which *sceadu* is articulated in these patterned passages call for two remarks. First, there is a consistent presentation of shadow, or shadows, as *moving*, whether coming or going away, and one notes that grammatically *sceadu* tends to be the subject. Whether or not this can conjure some such impression as that of a sentient being or wilful force extending its menace, the moving-shadow-in-the-dark image certainly receives striking verbal and syntactical emphasis. More remarkably still, this ominous emphasis is bestowed no less on a *sceadu* that actually retreats. Potentially cheerful passages where we are told shadows are dispelled actually still feel somewhat eerie and sinister because of the shadows' quasi-physical, obstinate verbal lingering.¹¹

The second aspect to be remarked on is that while shadow is being so emphasised, it is simultaneously being linked and intertwined with light. In six cases *sceadu* alliterates with the verb *scīnan* ('shine') or related words,¹² while before and after the alliterating line one tends to find an alternation of more darkness and brightness imagery. These structures can be described in terms of an envelope pattern centered on *sceadu*, or perhaps rather on the *scīnan-sceadu* alliteration, which reinforces

¹¹ Shadows retreat in four of the seven instances discussed: *Andreas* 836b-7a, *Genesis A* 133b-4a, *Guthlac B* 1288b-9a, and *Exodus* 113b-15a.

¹² *Andreas* 836, *Guthlac B* 1288, *The Dream of the Rood* 54, *Exodus* 113 and, without surrounding darkness phraseology, *Christ III* 1088 and *Genesis A* 128a.

the hypothesis that, even when light is said to prevail, the ominous shadow or the dramatised shadow-and-light image is centrally significant. Thus in the *Exodus* example last cited above, the central contrast *scinon scyldhreoðan, sceado swiðredon* — underscored by internal parallelism of sound and metre — is framed by the brightness words *scire leoman* on one side, and *heofoncandel barn* on the other; if one were to look a few lines further up and down, one could actually discern more than one envelope (and the same would hold for the *Guthlac B* passage). Rather than neatly pitching light and darkness against each other, the effect of such a dance of bright and dark images can be bewildering, especially when ambivalent or indeterminate ‘shadow’ words (*blace, nihtscuwan*) come into play.

It is in this context that the problematic collocation of *sceadu* and *scima* (see Introduction) should probably be considered. Since the alliteration and/or collocation of *sceadu* with shining-related words that commonly begin with *scī-*, including *scīma*, would seem to have been relatively familiar (at least for an audience sufficiently steeped in the poetic tradition), the *sceadu*-and-*scima* pairing would have run counter to a context of expectation for brightness.¹³ Yet *scima*, not *scīma*, must be meant in *Christ and Satan* 105a, and the verbal environment there, in light of the previous discussion, is revealing (100-10):

nagan we ðæs heolstres	þæt we us gehydan mægon
in ðissum neowlan genipe.	...
	Feond seondon reðe,
dimme and deorce.	Ne her dæg lyhteð
for scedes sciman,	sceppendes leoht.
...	
	Nu ic feran com
deofla menego	to ðissum dimman ham

[we do not have darkness enough that we might hide ourselves in this abysmal gloom (*genip*). ... The enemies are fierce, dim and dark. Day does not shine here because of the ?shadow/darkness (*sciman*) of shadow (*scedes*), the Creator’s light ... Now I came journeying with a multitude of devils to this dim abode]

¹³ Alliteration of *sceadu* with *scīma* specifically is found in *The Dream of the Rood* 54 and *Genesis A* 128a, and the two further collocate in *Genesis A* 133b-7a and *Guthlac B* 1286b-8b.

It is again an alliterative pairing of *sceadu* with a *sci-* word that is the centre of envelope patterns — one is identified by the framing words *l̥hteð* and *lēoht*, another by *dimme* and *dimman*; but, while familiar patterning, lexical context, and word frequency prompt *scīma* (‘brightness’), the semantic context demands *scima* (‘shadow’). The parallel from *Solomon and Saturn I*, *æfter sceades sciman; sceaða bið gebisigod* (‘along/under shadow’s *scima*; the enemy will be preoccupied’, 116) exhibits no obvious light-and-dark envelope, but one is entitled to be at least intrigued by the neat framing of *scima* with the close-sounding *sceades* and *sceaða*, a framing that resembles that of the similarly close-sounding *l̥hteð* and *lēoht*. *Sceaða* does not of course mean ‘shadow’.¹⁴ Yet an enemy, and particularly this type of *sceaða*, naturally tends to belong in the *sceadu*. The *Beowulf* line about Grendel, *se s[c]ynscaþa under sceadu bregdan* (‘the spectral (*scyn-*) enemy [could not] drag under shadow’, 707), supplies an especially suggestive collocation because the element *scyn-* (if one accepts the common restoration from ms. *syn-*)¹⁵ is aurally and etymologically related to *scīnan* and *scima/scīma*,¹⁶ and this returns us to *Christ and Satan* where hell-demons are described thus (71b-2):

Blace hworfon
scinnan forscepene, sceaðan hwearfedon

[?Dark/shining (*blace/blāce*) spectres (*scinnan*) roamed misshapen, enemies roamed about]

One notes again an etymological paronomastic figure acting as envelope, compare *hworfon/hwearfedon* with *l̥hteð/lēoht*, and a strikingly similar word-sequence being thus framed, compare *scinnan forscepene sceaðan* with *for scedes sciman sceppendes*.

While there are actually more collocations of *sceaða* with ‘shadow’ words, mainly *fāh*,

¹⁴ Even if it did, it would not follow that *scima* should semantically conform to the expectations raised by the alternations in the envelope situations I have been outlining above, for Old English poetry cannot of course be reduced to a word game. Still, this is one of many examples of the sort of intriguing intricacy and paradox that seems to be inherent in the poetics of ‘shadow’.

¹⁵ Grendel belongs with *scinum* (‘spectres’, 939a); however, *synscaðan* (‘sin-enemy’, 801b) is also used of him.

¹⁶ *BT*, s.vv. *scīn* (both entries), *scīn-*, *scinna*; F. Holthausen, *Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1934) (hereafter *AeEW*), s.vv. *scinn*, *scinna*. This semantic development is suggested in the range of meaning for *scīn* (‘brightness, shine; deceptive appearance, spectre’).

as will be seen in due course (§2.2.7 below), the intra- and intertextual comparative context adduced here suffices for now to provide a paradigm for our comprehension of *sceadu*: the associative meaning of *sceadu* involves shadow that moves ominously in an eerily dark/shining context and is conceptually both like the *sceaða*, a ravaging foe prowling in the shadow, and the *sceadu* itself that potentially conceals such enemies. Some such association is active in a number of instances and possibly latent in some others (compare *sceaðan hwearfedon* to the already discussed *sceado swiðredon* formula in *Exodus* and elsewhere). Furthermore, artful verbal patterning encourages mental association of *sceadu* with brightness (of which it is clearly the foe, though) in ways that are so entangled or paradoxical that they suggest more than just binary opposition. The poetics of *sceadu* seem to become in the poets' hands a privileged tool for intimating that there is something more dramatic, more important, or simply more terrifying than either darkness or light in the biblical or legendary events which they recast in terms of enlarged light-dark confrontation.

Perhaps the last word in this entanglement of shadows with light and more shadows should go to the kindred poem *Solomon and Saturn II*, even though it does not feature *sceadu*, only the derived verb *besceadian* ('to overshadow'); otherwise, however, the relevant passage provides a striking parallel to the other *sceadu* clusters. A question from Saturnus about Doomsday triggers an escalation of riddle-like exchanges involving night, light, and shadow (362-9):

Salomon cwæð:

'Hwa deaŕ ðonne dryhtne deman, ðe us of duste geworhte,
neregend of nihtes wunde? Ac sæge me hwæt næren [ð]e wæron.'

Saturnus cwæð:

'Ac forhwon ne mot seo sunne side gesceaft
scire geondscinan? Forhwam besceadeð heo
muntas and moras and monige ec
weste stowa? Hu geweorðeð ðæt?'

[Solomon said:

'Who will then dare to judge the Lord, the Saviour, who made us from dust, from the wound of night? But tell me what [?things] were not that were.'

Saturn said:

‘But why cannot the sun brightly shine through the wide creation? Why does it shade/overshadow (*besceadeð*) mountains and moors and also many wastelands? How does that happen?’]

Whatever the ‘night’s wound’ signifies, it is noteworthy that the poet places it in a hypermetrical line and further highlights it with the ornament of cross-alliteration. As to *besceadeð*, whose alliteration with ‘shining’ words mirrors that of *sceadu* elsewhere (see above), he then proceeds to underscore this (in context) surprising verb by placing it at the end of a complex pattern including alliteration on *sc-* and assonance on *s(c)ī-*... *scea-*, both carried over from the preceding line.¹⁷ While detecting extra ornamentation helps little in solving the enigmatic meaning here,¹⁸ it does consolidate the suggestion of the other, more conventional texts that at least some Anglo-Saxons were interested in the potential of *sceadu* (and its poetic associations) for paradox and even found it important.

2.2.2 *Scua*

Although commonly translated ‘shadow’ as well, the noun *scua* is in many respects a highly peculiar word, distinct from *sceadu* (with which it is etymologically unrelated); with nineteen occurrences in verse and only five in prose, it is significantly rarer and belongs primarily to the poetic register. *Scua* is nonetheless deployed as a gloss some thirty times in the extant record, all of them being for Latin *umbra*, which *sceadu* also habitually glosses. There is no doubt, therefore, that the basic denotations of *scua* and *sceadu* overlap to a great extent. The *TOE* assigns both terms to the same

¹⁷ Should the moors and wasteland be seen as balancing off the night’s wound and non-being, one could even detect a dark-related envelope pattern centering on the shining/overshadowing issue.

¹⁸ For further discussion, see Robert J. Menner, ed., *The Poetical Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* (New York, 1941), pp. 133-4, and Daniel Anlezark, ed. and tr., *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 127-9.

categories: ‘Shade, darkness’, ‘A shadow’, ‘Shadow (as opposed to substance)’, and ‘Protection, safekeeping’.¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, these semantic categories actually reflect the contexts of *scua* in glosses and prose, contexts which are virtually restricted to the close rendering from Latin of three religious metaphors, namely, transience (life passing as a shadow), protection (in the shade of God’s wings), and the soul’s earthly journey beset by fears and evils (*umbra mortis*, ‘shadow of death’). Many of *sceadu*’s prose and gloss occurrences correspond to exactly the same contexts. Calling these two terms synonyms, however, would amount to flattening the historical and contextual dimensions of the semantic evidence. *Scua* and *sceadu* both appear in psalter interlinear glosses, but *scua* is mostly found in the mid-ninth-century Vespasian Psalter, with eleven instances to the exclusion of *sceadu*, while in all the other psalter glosses, which are much later, *sceadu* predominates overwhelmingly. The two glossing words compete only in the chronologically intermediate, early-tenth-century Junius Psalter gloss (7x *scua*, 2x *sceadu*), and in the early-eleventh-century Bosworth Psalter gloss where the lemma *umbra* is glossed by the doublet ‘*scua* and *sceadu*’,²⁰ possibly to explicate the more obscure term *scua*.²¹ The obvious implication is that *scua* is an archaic word going out of usage in the later period, whereas *sceadu* remains current — and this correlates well with the word’s prose/verse distribution.

A further indication of *scua*’s poetic associations is that Bede’s poetic quote, in his account of the Vision of Drythelm, of Virgil’s hypallage *sola sub nocte per umbras* (‘in the lonely night through shadows’, *HE* V.12, cf. *Aeneid* VI.268) becomes in the vernacular translation *under ðæm scuan þære ðeostran nihte* (‘under the shadow of the

¹⁹ *TOE*, s.v. *scua* and *sceadu*. These categories are 03.01.13.03/01, 03.01.13.03/02.01, 05.07/04.01, and 11.10.01, respectively.

²⁰ Uno L. Lindelöf, ‘Die altenglischen Glossen im Bosworth-Psalter’, *Mémoires de la société neophilologique de Helsingfors* 5 (1909), pp. 137-230, ps. 101.12.

²¹ For the dating of these psalter glosses, see D.H. Wright, *The Vespasian Psalter*, EEMF 14 (Copenhagen, 1967); Mechthild Gretsch, ‘The Junius Psalter Gloss: Its Historical and Cultural Context’, *ASE* 29 (2000), pp. 85-121, at p. 85; P.M. Korhammer, ‘The Origin of the Bosworth Psalter’, *ASE* 2 (1973), pp. 173-87, at p. 173.

dark night’).²² This unique use of *scua* in Alfredian prose (instead of *sceadu*)²³ possibly endows the phrase with a poetic ring despite the prosaic syntax of the Old English rendering.²⁴ It may also owe its presence, however, to the religious context of Bede’s Virgilian quote in his story, a visionary guided journey through hellish and paradisiac/heavenly places; associations with the psalmic ‘shadow of death’ image, which is glossed *on midle scuan deaðes* up to the early tenth century, would have been natural.

The evidence from prose and glosses provides an interesting external context for the interpretation of *scua* in verse. The seven occurrences in the Metrical Psalms of the Paris Psalter directly reflect the interlinear glosses; in three cases, it is the ‘shadow of death’ that is poeticised: *deorc þeostru and deaþes scua* (‘dark obscurity and death’s *scua*’, *PPs* 87.7). Darkness imagery is augmented by the addition to the underlying gloss of the poetic, alliterating *deorc. Scua*, however, is excluded from the alliterating positions; it actually never alliterates in the Metrical Psalms, nor indeed in any other poem: a remarkable fact to which I return below. Of the three psalmic thematic contexts of *scua*, only the most sinister one, the ‘shadow of death’, is clearly paralleled in non-psalmic poems. Lexically and thematically closest is the characterisation of Hell in *Christ and Satan* as a *dimne and deorcne deaðes scuwan* (‘dim and dark death’s *scua*’, 453). The notion of ‘shadow of death’ as a place perhaps underlies the moment in *Guthlac B* when the saint is approached by death *under dimscuan* (‘under the dim-*scua*’, 998a), and in *Andreas* the same phrase locates the Devil’s deadly teachings

²² Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, eds. and trs., *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969) (hereafter *HE*). Thomas Miller, ed. and tr., *The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 4 vols., EETS o.s. 95, 96, 110, 111 (London, 1890-8), p. 426, l. 12.

²³ Alfred’s *Boethius* and his translation of the *Pastoral Care* have between themselves four instances of *sceadu* but none of *scua*.

²⁴ Neither *scua* nor *sceadu* occur in Ælfric’s translation of Bede’s Vision of Drythelm, which has instead at that point *on þam þeostrum middum* (‘in the middle of the darkness’): Malcolm Godden, ed., *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, EETS s.s. 5 (London, 1979), ‘Alia visio’, pp. 199-203, at p. 200, l. 38.

(141). The ambiguity in *Juliana* of *under hlinscuan helwarena cyning* ('under the prison-*scua* the king of hell-denizens', 544) where *hlinscua* can mean either Juliana's cell, or Hell, is comparable to the use in *Andreas* of *under hlinscuwan* (1071a) and *under heolstorscuwan / ... searopancum beseted* ('under darkness-*scua* ... oppressed by cunning thoughts', 1253b-5a). One of the narrow contexts of *scua* in verse, then, is confinement and oppression in Hell, or by hellish foes and/or death drawing near, and this may partly derive from extended interpretations of the biblical 'shadow of death'.

Another narrow context, and one also at least partly related to the 'shadow of death', is well exemplified by the characterisation of Grendel in *Beowulf* as one of *helrunan* ('hell-whisperers', 163a) and a *deorc deapscua* ('dark death-*scua*', 160a), which 'is anything but a precise description', as Michael Lapidge remarks; rather it contributes, in a stroke of horrifying, nightmare-like half-visualization and incomprehensibility, to a vision (or feeling) of 'death on the march'.²⁵ A personified or otherwise uncannily animated *scua* of death is on the march in several other places. In *Christ I* 'the accursed wolf' (256a), i.e. Satan, is a *deor daedscua* ('fierce deed-*scua*', 257a), which may belong to a loose formulaic system somewhere between *deorc deapscua* and another reference to Grendel, *dior daedfruma* ('fierce deed-performer', *Beowulf* 2090a). In *Exodus*, *scua* occurs embedded in the same syntactical-metrical pattern (alliterating adjective + noun-*scua* compound; Sievers type D) (113b-15a):

sceado swiðredon,
neowle nihtscuwan neah ne mihton
heolstor ahydan

[the shadows (*sceado*) faded away, the abysmal night-shadows (*-scuwan*) could not conceal nearby their dark hiding-places]

²⁵ Lapidge, 'Psychology of Terror', p. 380; citing Arthur G. Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960), p. 90, at p. 384.

These *scuwan* march away not forth, but the verbal lingering of darkness suggests they do so somewhat reluctantly and perhaps even ominously.²⁶ This passage is furthermore remarkable by evidencing the only collocation of *scua* and *sceadu* in poetry, although it is noteworthy that there is no attempt here or anywhere else at making these two words alliterate (unless one would count the secondary stress in *nihtscuwan* as subtly alliterating across the line with *sceado*). Nevertheless, *scuwan* and *sceado* seem linked by variation, and the two verses, *sceado swiðredon* and *neowle nihtscuwan*, are alike metrically (albeit not syntactically). That *scuwan* and *sceado* share the same referent(s), however, is not evident. *Sceado* can be no more than the darkness of night being dispelled, or perhaps something more; *scuwan* is almost certainly something more, things that creep and seek to hide (if read literally; figuratively, both can of course refer merely to night). Even if we should decide that both are the same thing (whatever it is), they signify it differently. Unlike *sceado*, *scuwan* does not alliterate nor closely collocate with references to light (a difference that concerns all occurrences of *scua*). The low-lurking, perhaps very dark (confusion of *neowol* with *nifol*)²⁷ *scuwan* scurrying away to skulk beyond the reach of the light are reminiscent of other murky threats left unexplained which, the *Exodus* poet hints, haunt the borderlands of the Israelites' paths,²⁸ such as the *guðmyrce* ('war-dark ones' or 'warlike border-dwellers', 59a), the *brune leode* ('dark/gleaming people', 70b) of the *Sigelwara* ('?Ethiopians/Sun-dwellers', 69b < *Sigelhearwan* 'Sun-coal-black'), or the *har hæðbroga* ('hoary heath-horror', 118a).²⁹ Closest to *neowle nihtscuwan*, however, is a *niwe nihtweard* ('new night-guardian', 116a). This guardian is actually the fire-pillar that chases away the

²⁶ See the discussion of this passage and some parallels in the study of *sceadu* above.

²⁷ *BT*, s.v. *neowol*, *OED*, s.v. *nuel*, *AeEW*, s.vv. *niowol*, *nifol*.

²⁸ See Denis Ferhatović, 'Burh and Beam, Burning Bright: A Study in the Poetic Imagination of the Old English *Exodus*', *Neophilologus* 94 (2010), pp. 509-22.

²⁹ On *guðmyrce* see J.R. Hall, 'Two Dark Old English Compounds: *ælmyrcan* (*Andreas* 432a) and *guðmyrce* (*Exodus* 59a)', *Journal of English Linguistics* 20 (1987), pp. 38-47 *contra* Lucas, *Exodus*, p. 84. On *Sigelhearwan* see J. R. R. Tolkien, '*Sigelwara land*', *MÆ* 1 (1932), pp. 183-96, and *MÆ* 3 (1934), pp. 95-111. On *har hæðbroga* see §2.2.6 below.

shadows, but with its enigmatic and terrifyingly dark description, what is most striking is the uncanny resemblance between the *nihtweard* and the *nihtscuwan*, highlighted by the metrical and syntactical identity and sound links between the two verses.

Finally, a seemingly distinct and minor pattern of use is that of *nihtscua* apparently referring to winter weather, without allusion to death or Hell. *The Seafarer* shares the three alliterating words in the line *Nap nihtscua, norþan sniwde* ('The night-scua ?darkened, it snowed from the north', 31), in the same order, with *The Wanderer* 104. Each line participates in a cluster of darkness and winter imagery, with many lexical parallels shared by both clusters. Another striking parallel is *Beowulf* 547, but with *niht* not *nihtscua*. On the other hand, it may be significant (if not due only to stock descriptions of hell) that the Old English translation of the Vision of Drythelm, where *scua* appears as discussed above, contains a description of a hellish place filled with hail and cold. The *scua* passage in that text is followed by the description of demons who drag souls down into a chasm to torment them, then oppress Drythelm, but cannot touch him, and he is able to continue his journey. The journey through oppressing cold and other hostile forces where death is faced or experienced is a theme also found, in various forms, as a context in the three parallels adduced above,³⁰ and to some extent it also characterises the *scua* contexts of *Andreas*.

It is difficult to say whether all the verbal and thematic parallels discussed bear witness to the 'naturalisation' of the *umbra mortis* motif and its biblical associations in traditional vernacular poetry, as could be suggested by e.g. the appearance of the poetic compound *deaðscua* or the establishment of an alliterative pattern with *deorc* ('dark').³¹ If ominous compounds such as *nihtscua* were traditional, well integrated into formulaic

³⁰ For this theme in *The Seafarer*, for example, see Ida L. Gordon, ed., *The Seafarer* (London, 1960), pp. 3-12.

³¹ *Christ and Satan* 453, *Paris Psalter* 87.7, 106.10 and 106.14, *Beowulf* 160a and possibly *Christ I* 257a (*deor* instead of *deorc*).

patterns and conventional themes, as they appear to be, they and their special contexts may well have provided a fertile ground for the biblical phrase to develop in poetic usage and give rise to such analogous compounds as *deaðscua*. In any case, an important part of *scua*'s semantics and effects, oral or literary, probably lies in the word's hybridity and indeterminate relations.

Scua never appears on its own, unsupported by such contextualising elements as 'death' or 'night'; it is virtually restricted to the second element of compounds and death's-*scua* phrases; and it never alliterates. Consequently, its semantic as well as poetic weight must somewhat dissolve, be subsumed into, or blend with, the meaning of the first element. Just as *hlinscua* in *Andreas* means essentially the same as *hlinræced* in the same poem: 'prison-*scua*, -building' > 'prison',³² so *nihtscua* must be close to meaning 'night'; and in *deaðes scuwa* what really counts is death, of which the phrase is an imagistic expression. These observations are balanced, however, by two considerations. The first is that, to look at the other side of the coin, the above means that *scua* is the base-word of all compounds and phrases where it occurs. From this viewpoint, a word like *nihtscua* is not merely night; much more dangerously, it is a *scua* of or in the night; and when the word is grammatically a subject, it is *scua*, not night, that is the agent. The effect is that attention can be taken away from the first element, a familiar quantity, to the second element, *scua*, a rare, archaic, unknown quantity. What is more striking in a *scua* of death is that it is *scua* that is supposed to denote the thing, and the prominence inherent in its syntactical position as base-word may be further increased by the salience of its ancientness and rarity — and, paradoxically, perhaps by its semantic elusiveness, too. Secondly, whatever it 'really' means, *scua* tends to connote death, as evidenced by most examples in verse, prose, and glosses. The association with death and torment seems to intensify in time, as the word passes from

³² More precisely, *hlin* probably denotes a prison cell's grated door.

rarity to extinction. When warriors march to battle *under nihtscuan* in *Genesis A* 2060b, the motivation seems to be the association of warfare with night rather than that of *scua* with death. But near the end of the Old English period, *in tenebris et in umbra mortis* is simply glossed *in ðeostrum scuan* ('in the dark *scua*'),³³ while another glossator supplies *on deape † on deaðscufan* where his original reads simply *in morte*.³⁴ If *scufan* represents *-scuwan* here,³⁵ then it suggests not only a privileged connection between *scua* and death, but a possible confusion of the vestigial word with the unrelated *scūfan* ('to thrust').³⁶ Interestingly, all five verse occurrences of *scūfan* refer to torment, death, and damnation; most suggestive for the hypothetical connection with *scua* are the following collocations: *under scæd sconde scufan motan* ('shamefully thrust under the shadow (*scæd* = *scead(u)*'), *Guthlac A* 675), and *in þæt sceaðena scræf, scufað to grunde* ('into the oppressors' (*sceaðena*) pit, will thrust into the abyss', *Christ and Satan* 631).³⁷

Scua, therefore, is a particularly ghostly 'shadow' term, so to speak: its denotations and connotations appear to be much more intangible than *sceadu*'s. While paradox, ambivalence, and conceptual blending depend rather on the presence of *sceadu* in the poems rather than *scua*, the presence of the latter in the poetry, and indeed often in the same poems, introduces an additional, darker undertone of oppression and death, the more unsettling as the word is more elusive. The presence of at least three distinct terms all of which we translate 'shadow' — *sceadu*, the disquietingly odder *scima*, and the ominously older *scua* — and their differing alliterative relations, narrow contexts, and external links, all reveal some of the complex semantic layering of 'shadow'.

³³ Julius Zupitza, 'Mercisches aus der HS. Royal 2 A 20 im Britischen Museum', *ZfDA* 33 (1889), pp. 47-66, at pp. 59-66, folio 14, ll. 136ff.

³⁴ Uno L. Lindelöf, *Der Lambeth-Psalter*, Acta societatis scientiarum Fennicae 35, i and 43, iii (Helsinki, 1909-14), pp. 1-234, psalm 6, verse 6.

³⁵ *DOE*, s.v. *dēapscua*.

³⁶ Compare e.g. the confusion, mentioned above, between *niwol* (a form of *neowol*) with probably unrelated *nifol*.

³⁷ See §2.2.1 above for the paronomasia involving *sceaða*.

2.2.3 *Genip and (ge)nīpan*

The noun *genip* occurs twelve times in verse and thirty-eight times in prose. The related verb *(ge)nīpan* is strictly confined to poetry, with six occurrences. *Genip* exclusively glosses the Latin *nubes* and *nebula* (in over a hundred glosses). The literal meaning of these lemmata is ‘cloud’, although a wider range of meaning (‘sky’, ‘mist’, ‘obscurity’, ‘concealment’) sometimes seems possible. Ælfric uses *genip* to refer to God’s column of cloud in his translation of the Old Testament.³⁸ He also employs the phrase *on miste and on genipe* (‘in mist and in *genip*’) in one of his homilies,³⁹ semantically, the generally tautological character of such rhetorical doublets, typical of hortatory prose, suggests that *genip* could be synonymous with *mist*. Other homilies also seem to use the word in the primary sense ‘cloud’ or ‘mist’. An anonymous homily on Christ’s transfiguration has God speak from a *swiðe beorht genip* (‘very bright *genip*’);⁴⁰ the word is glossed by *mist* in the manuscript, perhaps suggesting it has grown into semantic obscurity or indeterminacy. Blickling homily XVI has two occurrences of *þystrogenipu* (‘darkness-*genipu*’ [plural]), the only recorded compounded form of *genip*, referring first to a storm-cloud over a mountain, then to darkness lying about a rock and a frozen grove in a visionary account of hell that draws on a version of the *Visio Pauli*.⁴¹

³⁸ S.J. Crawford, ed., *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch*, EETS o.s. 160 (London, 1922), ‘Exodus’ p. 263, ch. 20 verse 21 and ‘Deuteronomy’ p. 336, ch. 1 verse 33.

³⁹ Peter Clemoes, ed., *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The First Series, Text*, EETS s.s. 17 (Oxford, 1997), ‘Second Sunday after Easter’, pp. 536 (l. 24) and 541 (ll. 187 and 197).

⁴⁰ Susan Irvine, ed., *Old English Homilies from MS. Bodley 343*, EETS o.s. 302 (London, 1993): ‘The Transfiguration of Christ’, pp. 166-7 (ll. 20-1).

⁴¹ Richard Morris, ed., *The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century*, EETS os 58, 63, 73 (London, 1874-80, reprinted as one volume, 1967), pp. 203 l. 8 and 209 l. 33. Blickling XVI is Morris’ XVII. On *þystrogenipu* as a compound see Rowland L. Collins, ‘Six Words in the Blickling Homilies’, in James L. Rosier, ed., *Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature in Honour of Herbert Dean Meritt* (The Hague, 1970), pp. 137-41, at p. 141, who argues it means ‘dark mist’.

In poetry, there is no instance where context would indicate that *genip* stands for ‘cloud’ or ‘mist’; nor is there syntactical evidence for that, since the word is never paralleled by terms for ‘cloud’, ‘mist’ and the like. Rather, as textual context suggests in each instance, *genip* in verse seems to signify the darkness of night, or of hell, or of unfathomable depths. Whereas in prose usage *genip* is never associated with *niht* ‘night’, there are five such collocations in verse. The phrase *nihta genipu* in *The Rune Poem* (50a) clearly denotes the ‘darkness of night’, while in *Genesis A* the first day of Creation is followed by *bystre genip* (‘dark *genip*’, 139a) which, as we are told in the following line (140a), God called *niht*.⁴² The relationship with night is further strengthened when it comes to the verb *(ge)nīpan*, which alliterates with *niht* in all but one of its occurrences.⁴³ Before turning to the verb, however, we can note that connotations other than of night also relate *genip* with darkness rather than cloud or mist. The word refers to the Christian hell in three explicit instances, all in *Christ and Satan*, embedded in the phrase *in þis neowle genip* (‘in this dark/abysmal *genip*’).⁴⁴ The remainder of the occurrences can be ascribed to the notion of ‘unknown depth’. In the poem *The Order of the World*, for instance, no living man knows *hu geond grund færeð goldtorht sunne / in þæt wonne genip under wætra geþring* (‘how the gold-bright sun travels beyond the earth into the dark *genip* under the throng of waters’, 78-9). There is some resemblance in the description of the land inhabited by the monsters in *Beowulf*, *ðær fyrgenstream / under næssa genipu niþer gewiteð, / flod under foldan* (‘where the mountain-stream flows down under the *genipu* of cliffs, the current under the earth’, 1359b-61a). This last instance is an example of the theme of darkness, danger, steepness

⁴² Cf. also *Guthlac A* 350a, *Guthlac B* 970a and *Judgment Day II* 110.

⁴³ Alliteration occurs in *The Wanderer* 96a, *The Seafarer* 31a, *Beowulf* 547a and 649a; not so only in *Exodus* 455b-6a.

⁴⁴ The phrase occurs, with little variation, at ll. 101a, 179a and 444a.

and death which Donald K. Fry calls the ‘Cliff of Death’.⁴⁵ As these two examples suggest, furthermore, when *genip* connotes the dark-and-unknown the element ‘water’ seems in fact at least as important as ‘depth’. The same idea probably underlies the mention of dark waters later in *Beowulf* in a passage at first sight not concerned with the whole theme of darkness or shadow. The dying Beowulf commands that his barrow *heah hlifian on Hrones Næsse* (‘tower high above Whale’s Cliff’, 2805) so as to guide sailors come from afar, *ða ðe brentingas / ofer floda genipu feorran drifað* (‘those who drive from afar their ships over the *genipu* [plural] of the currents’, 2807b-8). Almost imperceptibly, the passage intertwines traditional connotations of *genip*: the darkness and (thus implied) depth of the sea; the sea as unknown and dangerous space (from the foreign sailors’ standpoint); and the sea being deep down beneath the towering cliff. This view agrees with and gives added strength to Jennifer Neville’s point that Beowulf has become a ‘lighthouse to counteract the darkness’ of the dangerous natural world;⁴⁶ but the poetic value of his barrow is twofold, then: it is both a bright beacon serving as a lighthouse and a dark cliff serving the theme of the steep and deep and dark identified by Fry.

The verb (*ge*)*nīpan* is usually assumed to mean ‘to grow dark’,⁴⁷ probably because in most instances (four out of six) its grammatical subject (real or implied) is night.⁴⁸ Indeed alliterative phrases like *nipende niht* (‘?darkening night’) and *nap nihtscua* (‘the night-shadow ?grew dark’),⁴⁹ with their conventional ring and the absence of object to the verb, suggest that *nīpan* primarily is just ‘what night does’.

However, close observation of the parallelism in structures of poetic variation conveys a

⁴⁵ See Fry, ‘The Cliff of Death’.

⁴⁶ Neville, *Natural World*, p. 138.

⁴⁷ *BT*, s.vv. *nīpan*, *genīpan*. So Fulk *et al.*, *Beowulf*, ‘Glossary’, s.v. *nīpan*.

⁴⁸ Thus in *Beowulf* 547a and 649, *The Wanderer* 104a and *The Seafarer* 31a. *The Wanderer* 96a (*genap under nihthelm*) inverts the pattern but could be argued to imply that something (here, the time that is gone with all its memory of glorious things) ‘grew dark under the helm of night’ because night grew dark over it.

⁴⁹ Respectively in *Beowulf* 547a and *The Seafarer* 31a.

much more active and tangible connotation than mere darkening. The following passage from *The Seafarer* closely associates the coming of night with that of the winter weather which is not just cold, but painfully falls and binds (31-3a):

Nap nihtscua, norþan sniwde,
 hrim hrusan bond, hægl feol on eorþan,
 corna caldast

[The night-shadow *nap*, [it] snowed from the north, frost bound the soil, hail fell on the earth, coldest of grains]

Nīpan as the violent action being performed by night is even more tightly intertwined with the fierce assaults of natural elements in *Beowulf* (545b-8):

 op þæt unc flod todraf,
 wado weallende, wedera cealdost,
 nipende niht, ond norþan wind
 heaðogrim ondhwearf; hreo wæron yþa.

[until the current drove us asunder, the surging waters, the coldest of storms, the *nipende* night, and the northerly wind turned against [us] battle-grim; fierce/troubled were the waves.]

The other *nipende niht* in *Beowulf* is cast as a parallel phrase to ‘the creatures of the night-helms’ with which it apparently shares the same verb, ‘came gliding’ (resp. 649, 650a and 650b), hinting that the earlier action *nīpan* (whose subject in this participial phrase is night) is much like gliding or creeping and blurring any possible distinction between the natural and inanimate night and the monstrous beings prowling under its cover.⁵⁰ When (*ge*)*nīpan* is thus seen as the violent onrush of dark natural forces, its only instance which does not appear in conjunction with night still makes good sense. In the poem *Exodus*, the walls of the parted Red Sea, at the moment of their collapsing over the Egyptians, grow bloody and then *genap* (‘?grew dark’, 455b). But the latter verb, in fact, must be the cause of the army’s destruction, since there is none other in the whole passage which might account for the following statement that ‘no one from the army came home, but fate from behind shut [them] in with the wave’ (456b-8a). Thus in

⁵⁰ Cf. Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness*, p. 188.

context *Him ongen genap / atol yða gewealc* must be understood as ‘The horrible rolling of the waves *darkly fell down* [*genap*] against them’ (455b-6a).⁵¹ Against the backdrop of all the instances discussed above, the lament in *The Wanderer* ‘How that time departed, *genap* under the helm of night, as if it never was!’ (95b-6) participates in a coherent poetic notion embodied by *(ge)nīpan*: namely, that winter, night, and time are all forces of nature that are just as dark and tangible and paradoxically insubstantial as shadow, forces that come *down* on people like a shadow, or like a crushing army.

The points made so far on semantic grounds (and within a rather literary perspective) can be complemented by an analysis of recurring (and hence presumably traditional) verbal structures (from a more oral, or oral-literate viewpoint). This approach has the advantage of grouping together the two words, *genip* and *(ge)nīpan*, hitherto treated separately, and of not being dependent on their precise shades of meaning (a question which ultimately is quite speculative, although the discussion above may have reduced the uncertainty). Instead of vainly seeking a definitive, stable meaning, it will thus be possible to explore how poets and their poetic language create meaning through the manipulation of the *-nip-* element. In his analysis of traditional clusters of word roots, John M. Foley takes the example of the advance of the shadow of (the monstrous creatures of) night in *Beowulf*.⁵² From two short passages, ll. 649-51 and 702b-5a (which will be quoted below), he identifies a recurring cluster made up of six elements: *niht* (‘night’), *wan-* (‘dark’), *ealle* (‘all’), *sceadu* (‘shadow’), *scriðan* (‘stalk, glide’) and *c(w)om-* (‘came’). He then concludes:⁵³

this traditional structure resonates with a meaning beyond its semantic, formulaic, and literary-critical content: when the cluster recurs, the terror that it encodes springs into the narrative. The referential meaning of this group of words is much greater than the sum of

⁵¹ Cf. also *BT*’s doubled translation (s.v. *genīpan*): ‘the terrible rolling of the waves rose as a cloud against them [came suddenly upon them]’. Lucas, *Exodus*, p. 132, does not discuss these lines; his glossary has ‘grow dark’ for *genīpan*.

⁵² Foley, *Immanent Art*, pp. 32-3. For discussion on clusters as different from formulaic systems, see also Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness*, pp. 158-61.

⁵³ Foley, *Immanent Art*, p. 33.

their individual denotations and connotations, and it enriches each instance with a greater than situational impact.

Since only one of the passages contains the morph *-nip-*, Foley cannot include the latter in the structure as being meaningful. And as he restricts his point to *Beowulf*, he can only rely on these two examples. However, a comparative analysis across the poetic corpus yields a similar cluster recurring with even greater ‘impact’, a powerful verbal structure that encodes an aspect of the ‘shadow’ theme and in which *nip-* does figure as a key element. The comparative material is presented in the following quotations; the recurring words which form the cluster are highlighted by boldface, those among them which belong to the ‘shadow’ theme being also underlined.

Beowulf 649-51a:

op ðe **nipende** **niht** ofer ealle,
scaduhelma gesceapu **scriðan cwoman**
wan under wolcnum

[until the **nīpende** [present participle] **night** over all, the creatures of **shadow-helms** came **gliding dark** under the clouds]

Beowulf 702b-3a:

Com on **wanre niht**
scriðan sceadugenga

[Came in the **dark night** the **shadow**-goer **gliding**]

The Wanderer 95b-6a:

Hu seo þrag **gewat**,
genap under **nihthelm**

[How that time **departed**, **genūp** [past tense] under the **helm** of **night**]

The Wanderer 103b-4a:

þonne **won** cymeð,
nipeð nihtscua

[when **dark** it comes, the **night-shadow nīpeð** [present tense]]

The Seafarer 31a:

Nap nihtscua

[The **night-shadow nāp**]

Guthlac A 350:

purh **nihta genipu** neosan **cwoman**

[through the **genipu** [plural] of **nights** came seeking]

Guthlac B 969b-70a:

Dagas forð **scridun**,
nihthelma genipu

[The days **glided** forth, the **genipu** of **night-helms**]

The structure underlying all these examples is composed of the following six elements: the alliteration of (1) *niht* and (2) *nip-*; (3) *sceadu* or *scua*; (4) *wann*; (5) *helm* (notion of covering and concealment); and (6) the expression of the ominous coming of the shadow with the verb *cuman*, *gewītan* or *scrīðan*. Only one quotation contains all six elements, but all the other possess at least three of them. Even when *-nip-* is absent, the flexibility of the structure probably means that meaning is not substantially altered. So in the second quotation, the five out of six elements of the cluster no doubt strongly imply that both the darkness of night and the shadow-Grendel are *nipende* over the men in the hall.

Now this is surely not the only meaningful cluster that can be abstracted from the collocations involving the morph *nip-*. Another structure, for example, could represent the association of *nip-* with darkness, depth, and steepness (it would include the key adjective *neowol* ‘dark, abysmal’). A further pattern would be the collocation with the idea ‘water’, particularly ‘sea-storms’; however, this would hardly form a cluster of word-roots since the latter idea can involve different terms. There would

inevitably be some overlapping between such structures, just as the different connotations brought forward above also overlap. As the complexity of these interrelations suggests, *genip* and *(ge)nīpan* form a central element of the shadow theme, and they inform this theme not so much with their semantic value (in poetry they do not seem to have a precise one) but rather with the particular networks of collocations in which they tend to appear. These interrelated networks are:

- (1) natural or monstrous shadow darkly gliding down, connected with the motif of the helm/cover/concealment;⁵⁴
- (2) shadow associated with the darkness of waters and mists, especially sea-storms;⁵⁵
- (3) shadow of Christian or pre-Christian hell, darkness associated with depth (*neowol*), confinement, malice (*nīð*), torment and death.⁵⁶

From this perspective, even such a short phrase as *Nap nihtscua* quoted above from *The Seafarer* is much richer in ominous implications than any translation could render, as it summons with the force of each of its three elements the larger concept of the shadow of night looming as an indeterminate yet physical menace, inseparable from the terror of natural and preternatural forces and of the unknown dark.

2.2.4 *Wann*

The adjective *wann* and its compounds, together with a few derivatives, occur forty-one times in verse, seventeen times in prose and sixteen times in glosses. Of the

⁵⁴ Cf. the passages discussed above in relation to the *nip*- cluster.

⁵⁵ *Exodus* 455b-6a, *Azarias* 105, *The Order of the World* 79, *Beowulf* 546-8, 1359b-61a and 2808a.

⁵⁶ *Christ and Satan* 99-101a, 179 and 444, *Beowulf* 1359b-61a and 2805-8. Cf. Fry, 'The Cliff of Death', and Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness*, p. 202.

prose instances three concern border markers in charters, and seven appear in charms. Religious prose thus contains only seven occurrences of *wann* — three of which are in fact forms of the verbs *wannian* and *awannian* (‘to become *wann*’) which I include only because they provide more semantic information about the adjective they derive from; these verbs are not used in verse. This distribution gives a first notion that the register of *wann* is primarily poetic.

Early glosses link *wann* with Latin *pallidus* (‘pale, pallid, colourless’),⁵⁷ *caerulus* (‘blue, dark blue, dark, gloomy’),⁵⁸ and *lividus* (‘blue, black and blue, livid, deadly’).⁵⁹ In both medicinal and biblical prose *wann* generally describes a person’s face or appearance with negative associations: the death-like diseased state and the moral taint of evil, respectively. One of the Vercelli homilies has this interesting set of collocations: *Hwilum he bið swiðe laðlicum men gelic, þonne wannað he & doxaþ; oðre hwile he bið blæc & æhiwe; hwilum he bið collsweart* (‘Sometimes he is similar to the very repulsive man, when he turns *wann* and dark [dusky]; at other times [or the next moment] he is black and colourless; sometimes [or then] he is coal-black’).⁶⁰ From this typically homiletic way of pairing synonymous statements one can infer that to become *wann* is to become dark or dusky, and that blackness and colourlessness are related though perhaps distinguishable states; there might be a gradation implied: from *wann* to black to pitch-black. Another noteworthy collocation is to be found in the translation of Gregory’s *Dialogues*: *oð þæt eall his andwlita wearð toswollen & awannod* (‘until his entire face was swollen and had become *wann*’), a clause which occurs again in a varied

⁵⁷ Arthur S. Napier, ed., *Old English Glosses* (Oxford, 1900), p. 192 (gloss 23.34).

⁵⁸ Napier, *Glosses*, p. 122 (gloss 1.4758).

⁵⁹ J.H. Hessels, ed., *An Eighth-Century Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary: Preserved in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (ms. no.144)* (Cambridge, 1890), p. 73 (gloss L.170).

⁶⁰ Donald Scragg, ed., *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS o.s. 300 (Oxford, 1992), ‘Homily IV’, pp. 101-2, ll. 290-2.

form later in the same text.⁶¹ The pairing of *wann* with swelling reminds one of the description of a disease symptom in the *Leechbook* of Bald: *gif se muþ sie woh opþe won* ('if the mouth be twisted or *wann*').⁶² The evidence from glosses and prose suggests that *wann* expresses the unhealthy darkening of flesh, blending together the corresponding perceptions of colour and shape; darkness and bleakness coalesce with deformity, thus making the adjective appropriate in religious contexts of moral-visual associations.

The connection with shape can be traced in poetry as well. An apparently formulaic pattern spanning the entire line occurs in *Andreas* 1169, where it describes the devil: *wann ond wliteleas, hæfde weriges hiw* ('*wann* and ugly [*lit.* beautiful or formless], he had the aspect [*or* colour] of one accursed'); and in *Christ III* 1564 on the unworthy man at the Last Judgment: *won ond wliteleas hafað weriges bleo* ('*wann* and ugly [*lit.* formless] he has the aspect [*or* colour] of one accursed'). But this connotative system dark/crooked/formless/diseased/sinful does not prevail in verse. More widespread and certainly more traditional in poetry are the patterned associations of *wann* with advancing darkness, waves, fire and the raven.

The pattern which prevails in the surviving poetic records (with nine instances), one which by contrast is absent from prose, is the formulaic system which can be schematized as follows:

darkness (shadows, night) + came/moved/darkened + *wann* (*under wolcnum*)

A typical example is in *The Dream of the Rood* 54b-55a: *sceadu forðeode, / wann under wolcnum* ('the shadow went forth, *wann* under the clouds').⁶³ The reverse event

⁶¹ H. Hecht, ed., *Bischof Waerferths von Worcester Uebersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, Bib. ags. Prosa 5 (Leipzig and Hamburg, 1900-7 [repr. Darmstadt, 1965]), pp. 11, 14-90, ch. 2 at p. 20, l. 27.

⁶² T.O. Cockayne, ed., *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England*, Rolls Series 35, 3 vols. (London, 1864-6 [repr. Wiesbaden, 1965]), vol. 2, Book III, item 47, p. 338.

⁶³ For parallels see *Guthlac B* 1279b-80a, *Beowulf* 649-51a, *The Wanderer* 103b-4a and *Andreas* 1305b-6a.

of night yielding to the light of day nonetheless follows the same elaborate pattern, as though the intensity of the dark image were hard to shake off; thus in *Andreas* 836b-7a: *Sceadu sweðerodon, / wonn under wolcnum* ('The shadows faded away, *wann* under the clouds').⁶⁴ Here also belongs Grendel's approach in *Beowulf*, in a context of intentionally blurred distinctions between shadow and denizens of shadow:⁶⁵ *Com on wanre niht / scriðan sceadugenga* ('Came in the *wann* night the shadow-goer gliding', 702b-3a). Finally, the poetic elaboration in *Genesis A* on the theme of the void and darkness before Creation exemplifies a similar pattern (108b-10a):

deorc gesweorc
semian sinnihte sweart under roderum,
wonn and weste

[the dark darkness hovering in perpetual night black under the firmament, *wann* and empty]

This quotation has a structural and semantic parallel in *Beowulf* 649-51a:

oþ ðe nipende niht ofer ealle,
scaduhelma gesceapu scriðan cwoman
wan under wolcnum

[until the darkening night over all, the creatures of shadow-helms came gliding *wann* under the clouds]

The common pattern can roughly be summarized thus:

dark darkness + came gliding/hovering + in darkness/shadow + *wann* [within a formula]

In this pattern *wann* seems to function as a powerful concluding statement, a stressed marker of the pervasive shadow. In the *Genesis A* passage, furthermore, *wonn and weste* is a reflection or an extended variation of the earlier alliterative pairs *deop and dim* ('deep and dark', 105a) and *idel and unnyt* ('empty and unused', 106a), all of them addressing more or less directly the famous phrase *inanis et vacua* of verse 1.2 of the biblical Genesis. The medieval interpretation of this verse, as A.N. Doane remarks,

⁶⁴ The other example is *The Phoenix* 98b-9a.

⁶⁵ See §2.2.1 above.

linked the emptiness and void of the dark abyss to the spiritually dark and formless state of ‘those uninstructed in the faith’,⁶⁶ a referential multivalence which might account for the poetically rich and many-sided circumlocutory approach of the theme by the *Genesis* poet, and the use of *wann* twice in treating this theme.⁶⁷ This point also indirectly recalls the dark/crooked/formless/diseased/sinful associations discussed above.

This treatment of the primeval void in *Genesis A* provides a transition to the next set of associations of *wann* in order of frequency, namely with water and waves. The *Genesis A* poet eventually relates his theme of darkness to the primeval waters (117b-19a):

	garsecg þeahte
sweart sinnihte	side and wide,
wonne wægas	

[black perpetual night covered the ocean far and wide, the *wann* waves]

Again, a self-alliterating verse based on *wann* serves as a concluding marker of darkness at the start of a new line. More remarkably, in the densely recurring theme of darkness covering the wide expanses, the waters alternate with the earth as the more specific object of the covering. The two key notions here seem to be darkness (*sweart*) and unbounded space (*side and wide*). Slightly earlier, indeed, *sidwæter* is mentioned (‘broad-waters’, 100a), then *heolstorsceadu* (‘darkness-shadow’, 103b) in which *þes wida grund / stod deop and dim* (‘this wide ground stood deep and dark’, 104b-5a). In this context God establishes *þis rume land* (‘this broad land’, 114b) — which in the poem seems to already have been there, but presumably only so in the Word, the divine thought before the creation, as Doane suggests.⁶⁸ Light then shines *ofer rumne grund* (‘over the broad ground’, 123a), so that the Creator *geseah deorc sceado / sweart*

⁶⁶ Doane, *Genesis A*, p. 233.

⁶⁷ The second use of *wann* occurs nine lines later (119a).

⁶⁸ Doane, *Genesis A*, pp. 231-2.

swiðrian geond sidne grund ('saw the dark shadows fade away black over the broad ground', 133b-4). *Wann*, then, seems to articulate the notions of darkness and immensity. But it is noteworthy that *wann* is applied only to the ethereal darkness or void and to the waters; it is never used of the earth or the ground, neither in *Genesis A* nor indeed in the entire poetic corpus. The association with waters occurs in nine instances. In two of them, immensity is marked: emphatically so in *Genesis A* 1429-30: *þa hine on sunde geond sidne grund / wonne yða wide bæron* ('when the *wann* waves had carried him widely on the sea through the wide earth'); and less so in *Riddle 3* 37-8a: *won wægfatu, wide toþringe / lagustreama full* ('I widely drive asunder the *wann* wave-cups full of water-streams [*i.e.* the ocean]'). In most of the other instances wideness is implicitly sensed, such as in the *wonne wæg* over which the bird is sent in search of land in *Genesis A* 1462a (within a passage that stresses the vast expanse of the waters). Otherwise, *wann* waves are emphasized as very dark: *dun* in *Riddle 3* ('dark', 21a), black in *Genesis A*: *sweart wæter, / wonne wælstreamas* ('black water, *wann* slaughter-streams', 1300b-1a). Perhaps it is the darkness of the depths that is suggested when *wann* is used of waves; in *The Order of the World*, the setting sun travels in *þæt wonne genip under wætra geþring* ('in the *wann* darkness under the throng of waters', 79).⁶⁹ In prose, the collocation of *wann* with waters does occur, albeit only twice (one of which is unclear), in religious contexts, where only a vaguely negative connotation is discernible. Touching on Christ's miracle of changing water into wine, the former is *wann* in contrast to the latter which is *mærlic* ('glorious').⁷⁰

A rather distinct manifestation of the *wann*-associated water imagery is *Beowulf* 1373-4a:

⁶⁹ However, this particular phrase can as well be based on the word *genip* and its connotations with depth, rather than on *wann*; cf. above, §2.2.3.

⁷⁰ Godden, *Catholic Homilies*, 'Second Sunday after Epiphany', pp. 29-40, at p. 32, l. 96.

Ɔonon yðgeblond up astigeð
won to wolcnum

[Thence the wave-surging arises *wann* to the clouds]

The rising up to the sky of the waters of the monsters' abode is probably an image for the spray and steam, a phenomenon that does not suggest depth nor any sort of darkness and blackness i.e. the notions to which *wann* seems so far to be related. A comparative phraseological analysis in *Beowulf* reveals that this kind of expression is poetically more appropriate to rising smoke or flames. Lines 1118b-19a have a similar structure:⁷¹

 Guðrec astah,
wand to wolcnum

[War-smoke arose, wound itself up to the clouds]

while lines 3144b-6, also in a context of cremation burial, exhibit a set of parallel elements:

 wudurec astah
sweart ofer swioðole, swogende leg
wope bewunden — windblond gelæg

[wood-smoke arose black over the fire, the roaring flame wound up with weeping — the wind-surging subsided]

And the flame of the latter quotation is itself *wann* when the scene is prefigured in Wiglaf's speech, 3115a: *weaxan wonna leg* ('the *wann* flame [will] rise'). Elsewhere in the corpus, flames are also *wann* in two other poems; the destructive flame of the Judgment in *Christ III* 965-6a is *won fyres wælm ... / se swearta lig* ('*wann* surge of fire ... the black flame'); and in *Christ and Satan* 713b *se wonna leg* ('the *wann* flame') seizes the Devil in hell. In this light, the use of *wann* about the 'wave-surging' in *Beowulf* insinuates some fiery quality into those waters, a quality which they already notoriously possess ('fire in the flood', 1366a).

⁷¹ On the emendation of ms. *-rinc* to *-rec* see Fulk *et al.*, *Beowulf*, p. 186.

Finally, *wann* is applied six times in verse to the raven, one of the ‘beasts of battle’. The recurring expression *se wonna hræfn* (with variants) seems just as formulaic and traditional as *se wonna leg* and *wonne wæg*. It appears thus in *Beowulf* 3024b, *Judith* 206b and *Elene* 52b-3a.⁷² In the remaining instances another word is used in the place of *hræfn* — such as *fugel* (‘bird’) — but the raven is clearly identified by the apposition of another conventional adjective such as ‘dewy-feathered’.⁷³ In three instances *wann* is linked to the notion of slaughter through the alliterative system *wann – wæl*.⁷⁴ *Wann*, however, is not the most frequent adjective applied to the raven in poetry; *sweart* (‘black’) accounts for seven collocations.⁷⁵ It would seem, then, that the common colour word *sweart* is supplemented with a synonym, *wann*, still in the sense ‘black’ but in a more poetic register; thus such traditional formulas as ‘the black raven’ could be varied so that they would preserve their symbolic force (death and destruction in battle, doom etc.). The richness and complexity of *wann* is greater than that, however. The traditional recurrence of formulas which seem to mean essentially ‘the black raven’ and ‘the black flame’ should warn us that the epithets used have a much more complex semantic dimension than modern renderings can suggest, if only because of the double fact that a raven notoriously *is* very black and that a flame is very much *not* so.

All the referents of *wann* discussed here in fact also collocate elsewhere in verse with *sweart* at least as frequently as with *wann*.⁷⁶ The parallelism in the application of both adjectives to night, shadows, mists as well as ravens encourages one to regard *wann* as meaning something close to ‘black’, and from the perspective of an analysis

⁷² In the latter the two words are in separate verses: *Hrefen uppe gol, / wan ond wælfel* (‘The raven sang above, *wann* and slaughter-greedy’).

⁷³ In *Genesis A* 1983b, *Exodus* 164a and *Riddle* 49 4b.

⁷⁴ *Exodus* 164a, *Elene* 53a, *Judith* 206b-7a. Cf. Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness*, pp. 190-1.

⁷⁵ *Genesis A* 1441b-2a and 1449b, *Soul and Body I* 54b, *Soul and Body II* 51b, *The Fight at Finnsburg* 34b-5a, *The Battle of Brunanburh* 61b and *Riddle* 49 4b-5a.

⁷⁶ *Sweart* is used of night and shadows in *Genesis A* 109b, 118a and 134a, *Genesis B* 391b, *Christ III* 872a, *Guthlac A* 678a, *Beowulf* 167b, *The Metres of Boethius* 4.6b, 5.45b and 23.5b, *Judgment Day II* 104b-5a and 199b; of sea and waves in *Genesis A* 1300b, 1326a, 1374b-5a and 1413b-14a; of fire and flames in *Genesis A* 1926b, 2417a, 2507b, 2543b, 2858b, *Christ III* 966a, 983b, 994a and 1532a.

oriented to colour or hue or perception this is probably essentially correct.⁷⁷ But the even more insistent and traditional way in which both terms attach themselves to waters and flames demands more caution. The broader picture is that of recurring patterns of either redundant tautology or striking oxymoron. It suggests that *wann* is neither primarily about colour nor, as is often proposed, about simple colourlessness or dullness.⁷⁸ It probably has a relationship with the hue-based idea ‘(very) dark’, ‘(very) black’ — which presumably accounts for it never being used of the eagle, the other ‘bird of battle’ — but this relationship must be secondary. Although, as we have seen, all the objects to which *wann* applies also often occur in parallel constructions with *sweart*, the converse is not true. Notably, *wann* never applies to the earth or ground, while there are several expressions such as *on sweartne grund* (‘on the black ground’).⁷⁹ Indeed *wann* seems to be preferred for things that are not firm (like the ground) but rather fluid, flickering or otherwise elusive (like night, waves, flame or a bird that is more omen than animal). The latter notion provides a semantic bridge back to the sense identified at the beginning of this study chiefly from prose evidence, namely *wann* as ‘misshapen’ or ‘shapeless’. Thus the expression in *Andreas*, *wann ond wliteleas* (‘without beauty/form/brightness’) coupled with *weriges hiw* (‘form/colour’) contributes to the plausibility of *wann* spanning the following range of meanings:

black : dark : of a dark and ominously shifting hue and/or shape : misshapen : shapeless

This word, then, fully participates in the paradoxical quality of ‘shadow’.

⁷⁷ In light of the arguments drawn here from the comparison between *wann* and *sweart*, the conclusion reached by Andrew Breeze, ‘Old English *wann* “dark, pallid”: Welsh *gwann* “weak, sad, gloomy”’, *ANQ* 10 (1997), pp. 10-13, at p. 11, that his study should ‘halt the belief that Anglo-Saxon poets could refer to a flame as “black”’ seems exaggerated.

⁷⁸ L.D. Lerner, ‘Colour Words in Anglo-Saxon’, *MLR* 46 (1951), pp. 246-9, at p. 248, rightly remarks that *wann*’s ‘meaning has very little connexion with hue’. But his statement that ‘[i]n so far as it has’ it is ‘closer to the centre, closer to grey than to anything else’ underestimates the consistency of its application to things black and the parallelism with *sweart* noted above. His affirmation that ‘it always refers to a dull colour’ seems not to take into account the association of *wann* with foamy waves (as in *Riddle* 3 19b-21a or even about the *yðgeblond* in the *Beowulf* quotation discussed above) and surging flames.

⁷⁹ As in *Juliana* 555a; cf. also *Solomon and Saturn II* 488b, *Paris Psalter* 142.11a.

A contingent semantic value is that of ‘want, lack, privation’ (as such expressions as *wann ond wliteleas* suggest), not so much lack of hue (dullness) but rather a more oppressive and tragic want of hope and ultimately of life. The connotation of lurking death is indeed strong in most instances. At this point it is tempting to bring in the adjective *wan* (‘deficient, absent’), often used as a prefix expressing privation. Lexicographical and etymological studies distinguish this *wan(-)* from the word under scrutiny, but James W. Earl would see here one and the same word.⁸⁰ His argument is attractive but a fuller investigation would likely encounter a few semantic difficulties. It seems safer to posit two initially distinct words whose congruence of sound would have gradually led to their partial compatibility of meanings being noticed and subtly exploited in poetic composition.⁸¹ Thus *wonsceaft wera* in *Beowulf* 119a can still originally mean something like ‘misery (lack of [good] fate) of men’, but it can at the same time connote ‘dark fate of men’, as Earl directly translates (or ‘black’ or ‘dismal’ etc., i.e. *wann* fate). This stance has the advantage of not conflicting with Andrew Breeze’s claim that the etymologically obscure *wann* (but not *wan(-)*) is an import from Middle Welsh *gwann*, whose semantic range indeed fits with most of the connotations identified for *wann*.⁸² Breeze insists on the meanings ‘sad, gloomy, faint (of light)’ of the Welsh word, so that for him a *wann* flame is one that is ‘pale’, ‘weak’, ‘sickly’.⁸³ This certainly captures much of the associative semantic network, but fails to account for the intensity one senses in such phrases as *won fyres wælm* (‘the *wann* surge of fire’, *Christ III* 965a) and the *wann – sweart* continuum which allows the latter expression to be seen as partly equivalent to the no less intense *fyrsweartha lig* (‘fire-black flame’, *Christ III* 983b) and the like. Holding to the hypothesis of Celtic borrowing, Breeze

⁸⁰ James W. Earl, ‘The Necessity of Evil in *Beowulf*’, *South Atlantic Bulletin* 44 vol. 1 (1979), pp. 81-98, at pp. 87 and 96-8.

⁸¹ This process seems to have been at work with a substantial number of Old English poetic words, most notably and to rich effect with ‘shadow’ words; cf. the sections on *blæc/blāc* and *fāh*.

⁸² Breeze, ‘Old English *wann*’.

⁸³ Breeze, ‘Old English *wann*’, p. 11.

seems to minimize the darker and more intense feel of the Old English word. And in the end, *wann* may well be native, since it is not, in fact, entirely without Germanic cognates.⁸⁴ Either way, from its absence from other Germanic poetic records and relative scarcity in Old English itself (especially in prose) one may suspect that *wann* was a rare and semantically unclear word from the start, which would have contributed to its conveying an eerie impression in usage. Jean Wheelwright is perhaps closer to capturing *wann*'s semantic value and function when she proposes that the underlying ideas are 'unnatural color' and that the darkly portentous and the sinister are key associations.⁸⁵ From there, a further step to take is to consider the possible extent of a moral value in the word. In Christian contexts, *wann* refers to hell and its fire and to Satan and arguably carries obvious associations with evil and torment, as most darkness-related 'shadow' words do. This view, however, cannot be superimposed on other contexts. Given the *Beowulf* poet's deft interweaving of pre-Christian and Christian ethical values, even the *wonna leg* devouring Beowulf's body can hardly be ascertained to be an evil.⁸⁶ Such close scrutiny shows at any rate that *wann* is weighted with more affective value (moral or other) than *sweart*, and functions as the latter's 'darker' side, as it were, adding an abstract dimension: 'dismally and metaphysically black, deadly (evilly so, or not)'.

A brief consideration of the compounds in which *wann* is an element confirms that this adjective is central to the shadow theme. When the night comes *brunwann* (*Andreas* 1306a) the compound may well be assumed to mean 'dark', as the *DOE* says.

⁸⁴ Rolf H. Bremmer, 'The Old Frisian Component in Holthausen's *Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*', *ASE* 17 (1988), pp. 5–13, at p. 11, adduces Old Frisian *wanfelle*, *wanfellig* 'with bruised skin, black and blue'. I am grateful to Alaric Hall for this reference.

⁸⁵ Jean Wheelwright, in an unpublished article (University of California, Santa Barbara, 1976) cited by Breeze, 'Old English *wann*', p. 10. No title given.

⁸⁶ Thus it is difficult to agree with Earl's sweeping statement that '[t]he association of *wan* with evil is borne out throughout *Beowulf*' ('The Necessity of Evil', p. 98).

Yet *brun* usually seems to convey brightness more than darkness,⁸⁷ especially the gleaming of metallic weaponry; a very comparable compound, *brunfah*, is used of a helmet's glow (*Beowulf* 2615a) and according to the *DOE* means 'gleaming'; as it happens, the *brunwann* night in *Andreas* is metaphorically compared precisely with a helmet.⁸⁸ Lerner's suggestion that '[t]he blackness of night sometimes gives, by its very intensity, the impression of brightness'⁸⁹ has at least the merit of pointing at the paradox of the shadow; it could be applied as well to the other noteworthy compound, *wonfah* ('*wann*-coloured, -shining, -dark?').⁹⁰ *Wann* is disquietingly elusive in its shifts from the dark to the bright and from form to the formless, just like shadows. It is appropriate, then, that it should apply to shadows and to things which in the Old English poetic language are markedly *shadow-y* in their instantiation of the corresponding paradoxes: waves, destructive fire, or death flying in the form of a raven.

A working general definition of *wann*, then, could be: 'as dark and as pale and possibly as shining as a shadow (seen visually or metaphysically) can be, and presenting the shadow-like paradoxical issues of presence and absence, form and void, shifting and indefinite boundaries, with all the ensuing connotations of disquieting vastness and waste and death'. This especially holds when one recognizes that Old English poetic epithets often have little descriptive value or function, for constantly 'the eye is taken off the object', as Tom Shippey generalizes after mentioning the problematic *wonna leg*.⁹¹ One might add that the eye is taken off the thing itself, but not far away from it (into some loosely related emotion); it is directed onto the thing's *shadow*. That is to

⁸⁷ Cf. Lerner, 'Colour Words', p. 247.

⁸⁸ *Niht helmade* ('Night "helmed"/descended like a helmet', 1305b).

⁸⁹ Lerner, 'Colour Words', p. 247. Similarly N.F. Barley, 'Old English Colour Classification: Where Do Matters Stand?' *ASE* 3 (1974), pp. 15-28, at p. 24, speaks of the 'variegated surface-reflectivity' of dark things. Interestingly, 'variegated' is a frequent rendering of *fāh*, another paradoxical 'shadow' word which is treated in a further section of this study.

⁹⁰ It is used of a slave in *Riddle* 52 6a. Its interpretation is difficult as it must rest on the elucidation of the semantics of another 'shadow' word, *fāh* (see below).

⁹¹ T.A. Shippey, *Old English Verse* (London, 1972), p. 13.

say, what the poetic language describes is the image that a dramatically introduced ‘thing’ like a raven or a flame imprints in the minds of poet and audience, the shadow that it casts when lighted from the direction of a poetry highly peculiar in its semantic and thematic associations. The poetic language is able to double the originally naturalistic flame, which is bright, by suggesting its ‘shadow’ (the sad and hopeless but also eerie and almost magical or divine destruction of both matter and life with pre-Christian as well as Christian applications, and its apocalyptic undertones) and focusing on it. This ‘shadow’ is greater and darker than the thing itself; it, rather than the flame, is *wann*. The concreteness of Old English metaphors, however, means that the thing and its poetic shadow are never fully separated, hence the instability of perception which ‘shadow’ words reflect and embody.⁹²

2.2.5 *Blæc/blāc*

The sense of *blæc* appears to be unproblematic: ‘black’, or sometimes ‘dark’; secondary associations are thought to include ‘gloom, mourning, or misery’ (especially in verse, it seems) and ‘evil or wickedness, referring to devils, the sinful, and other sinister creatures’.⁹³ There are no more than twelve occurrences of *blæc* in Old English poetry, while its prose count is substantially higher (approximately 130).⁹⁴ However, specifically religious prose accounts for less than thirty instances. Most of the remainder is to be found in charters, a type of situation which will be discussed below in the two last word studies of this chapter. The distribution of *blæc*, then, places it at odds with

⁹² Thus the word *wann* is unstable in both meaning the same thing as *sweart* and, when one pauses to think over the sense, meaning something far removed from it.

⁹³ *DOE*, s.v. *blæc*, sub-senses ‘c.’ and ‘d.’ respectively.

⁹⁴ As can be deduced from the total number of occurrences (‘ca. 150’) given in the *DOE*, s.v. *blæc*.

synonymous *sweart* and *þēostre* which dominate precisely in religious prose (over 150 and over 250 occurrences, respectively). This observation would first suggest that *blæc* might function as a more poetic equivalent of *sweart*, just as *wann* and *deorc* are (statistically) more poetic than *sweart* and *þēostre*, respectively. But *blæc*'s mere twelve verse occurrences, compared to four times as many for *wann* or *þēostre*, cast a doubt on the word's poetic character. Before reassessing this situation and the poetic value of *blæc* with recourse to semantic and metrical considerations, it is appropriate to take an overview of the extant occurrences in context, in both prose and poetry.

Blæc can be said to unambiguously denote the colour 'black' when contrasted with whiteness or brightness or equalled with other terms for 'black'; there are three such cases in poetry and several more in prose,⁹⁵ to which can be added most of the glosses, that is, some ten items in which *niger* and *ater* ('black') appear as the Latin equivalents. No clear pattern emerges from an analysis of the referents and contexts associated with *blæc*, as the word is applied to various objects with little recurrence of usage. Five times in prose and twice in verse it characterizes the devil or his attributes, demons, or morally devilish men,⁹⁶ but such recurrence is far from the abundance of associations between such beings and other 'shadow' words. The most conspicuous data about *blæc* in fact does not concern poetry. The number of its applications to geographical features (hills, ridges, pools, brooks etc.) is close to one hundred in charters, but close to none elsewhere; *sweart*, on the other hand, almost never appears in charters. The reason might partly lie in the fact that landscape is seldom actually black

⁹⁵ For example, *sume reode, sume blace, sume hwite* ('some (of them) red, some *blæc/blāc*, some white', of snakes in *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*, in Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the 'Beowulf'-Manuscript* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 224-52, at p. 236, §17); *blace & swyðe swearte gastas* ('*blæc* and very black spirits', of demons, in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, in Hecht, *Uebersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*; *beorhtra ond blacra* ('bright and *blæc/blāc*', of angels and devils, *Christ III* 896a); *swearte wæran lastas, swaþu swiþe blacu* ('black were the tracks, the traces very *blæc*', of ink, *Riddle 51* 2b-3a).

⁹⁶ The poetic citations are the phrase in *Christ III* (note 3 above) and the devil's weapon, a '*blæc* sling', in *Solomon and Saturn* 27b.

in the colour sense and that *blæc* was more suited than *sweart* to express a vaguer notion of darkness; but further insight into this issue comes from the analysis of *hār* (discussed below).

Most interesting, however, are not the ways in which *blæc* is used but those in which it is *not* used. Given its semantic range, as identified by the *DOE* ('black', 'dark', connoting 'gloom' or 'evil'), the fact that the adjective is not used in poetic patterns similar to those observed with *sweart* and *wann*,⁹⁷ whose semantic ranges largely overlap with that of *blæc*, is somewhat unexpected. In other words, why are devils, destructive flames and death-bringing ravens not *blæc*? One possible reason is metrical. *Blæc* is the only 'shadow' adjective that is composed of a metrically *short* monosyllable. Therefore it cannot occur in a number of common verse patterns that are readily available for metrically longer words, notably 'shadow' epithets, e.g. *sweartan lige* or *se wonna hræfn* (i.e. Sievers' types A and B respectively).⁹⁸

The other reason is both semantic and phonological. The adjective *blāc*, while appearing as an antonym to *blæc*,⁹⁹ should not be excluded in an investigation of the latter's place in the 'shadow' theme. According to the *DOE*, *blāc* can mean either 'bright, shining (mainly in poetry)' or 'pale' ('of the face or skin'), but in poetry it occurs in the same contexts as *wann* (and even *sweart*) and the connotations fit with the 'shadow' theme. Moreover, being a long monosyllable, *blāc* is metrically easier to deploy than *blæc*. Accordingly, *blāc* is mainly a poetic term, with thirty-three out of forty occurrences to be found in verse.¹⁰⁰ On the other side, *blæc* and *blāc* are near-homophones. The phonological proximity would have been increased in most oblique

⁹⁷ See above, §2.2.4.

⁹⁸ Short lifts seem to have been avoided in the first foot of an A- or B- verse; see Fulk *et al.*, *Beowulf*, p. 330 note 1.

⁹⁹ The two words are sharply separated in the *TOE*'s categorial classification ('blackness' vs 'brightness' and 'pallor'). It is argued below that to the contrary their semantic areas largely overlap, at least in poetry.

¹⁰⁰ Including five instances of adjectival compounds.

cases for morphological reasons, and scribal variants hint at even less difference.¹⁰¹ As a result, and adding to the potential confusion, the only methods for distinguishing the two words in manuscripts are considerations of metre and (with less certainty) context; these presumably form the basis of the *DOE*'s figures.¹⁰² The fact that scribes not only never countered the confusion but even contributed to it indicates that the similarity between the two words might well have transferred from the level of orthography and pronunciation into that of semantics. The congruency between *blæc* and *blāc* may reflect their common origin from an Indo-European root **bhleg-* associated with burning as well as brightness,¹⁰³ hence a potential for paradox (from overlap between such notions as bright fire / dark smoke / blackened remains glowing) which appears to have long influenced the metaphorical connotations of both words.

Thus while for metrical reasons **blacan līge* ('(with) *blæc* flame') does not occur, *blācan līge* does. Compare the destructive flame wielded by the angel against the Mermedonians in *Andreas* 1540b-2a:

Him þæt engel forstod,
se ða burh oferbrægd blacan lige,
hatan heaðowælme

[The angel opposed them, who covered the city with *blāc* flame, hot battle-surgings]

with the destructive flame wielded by God against the corrupted cities in *Genesis A* 1924b-6:

On þæt nergend God
for wera synnum wylme gesealde
Sodoman and Gomorran, sweartan lige

¹⁰¹ Acc. sg. *blacne* vs *blācne*, dat. pl. *blacum* vs *blācum* etc. See the scribal variants noted in the *DOE*, s.vv. *blæc* and *blāc*; even in the nom. sg. both words could be spelled alike.

¹⁰² The *DOE*, s.vv. *blæc* and *blāc*, warns that 'the context does not always make it clear which word is involved'.

¹⁰³ Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Leiden, 1977 [first publ. 1961]) (hereafter *AnEW*), s.vv. *blakkr*; J.P. Mallory and D.Q. Adams, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and the Proto-Indo-European World* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 328-9. This aspect of the etymology is usefully summarized in Marion Matschi, 'Color Terms in English: Onomasiological and Semasiological Aspects', *Onomasiology Online* 5 (2004), pp. 56-139, at pp. 113-14.

[On that [land] God the Saviour, because of men's sins, sent on Sodom and Gomorrah
black flame with surging]

The theme of the death- and destruction-bringing flame which is almost always black (*sweart*) or *wann* also exhibits striking similarities to the *Andreas* example in the majority of its other occurrences.¹⁰⁴ Nor is the latter quotation isolated; five other collocations of *blāc* with flame or fire and burning belong to the same theme.¹⁰⁵ There remain four collocations with light; all are ambiguous in such a way that *blāc* is never exempt from associations that actually correspond to darkness and 'shadow' words and notably *blæc*. The most impressive one results from the extraordinary treatment of the fire-pillar in *Exodus*. This protective fire nonetheless *belegesan hweop* ('threatened with fire-terror', 121b) the Israelites, and its fires are *blāc* in the context of shadows and threats (111b, 121a). Later on the Israelites expect death *in blacum reafum* ('in ?black garments', 212b); but doing so they are *wigblac* ('war-?pale', 204a), whereas eventually it is the Egyptians who perish *flodblac* ('flood-?pale', 498b) (and see further below). The *blāc* type of brilliance is the more ominous as it is caught in an echoic network of paleness and darkness.¹⁰⁶ There is also a noteworthy verbal parallel between an expression referring to the Last Judgment fire in *Christ II* 808b-9: *blac ... leg, / ... scripēð* ('*blāc* ... flame, it will glide forth'), and another in *Riddle 3* 51b-2a *blace ... / scripende scin* ('*blæc* spectres gliding forth'); in the latter, the logical immediate context points to black clouds but the larger verbal context (riddling description of a thunderstorm) conjures a vision of apocalyptic conflagration involving fire (and

¹⁰⁴ For such parallels cf. *Genesis A* 2417-18a, 2506-7 and 2643-4, and *Christ III* 965-6a and 984b-5a.

¹⁰⁵ *Daniel* 245, *Christ II* 808b-9a, *Riddle 3* 43b-4a, *Judgment Day I* 55b-6a, and *Alms-Giving* 5-7.

¹⁰⁶ On the mysterious light in the monsters' cave of *Beowulf* 1517a, see §4.1.1. The *blāc* sun in *Guthlac B* 1330b-1a, *Swegl hate scan, / blac ofer burgsalo* ('The sun was hotly shining, *blāc* over the city-dwellings') depends on a context of sorrow following the saint's death; besides, nearly all the poetic instances of *hāt(e)* participate in a painful or gloomy atmosphere. See §4.2.2.

notably, *blāc* flame (44a)) as well as darkness and thus enwraps *blæc* with dark/bright ambivalence.¹⁰⁷

A somewhat parallel situation applies to the theme of evil and the devil. Its scant attestation with *blæc* is supplemented, as it were, by five collocations involving *blāc*. Three of them are found in *Christ and Satan*, a poem where *blāc* is exclusively applied to either the Devil or his fallen angels. Satan, for example is a *blac bealowes gast* ('*blāc* spirit of evil', 718a). Robert Finnegan's edition has the reading *blāc* for all three instances, presumably on metrical grounds, but in his glossary he strains the sense to include 'black' as well as 'pale, livid', presumably because Old English poetry consistently presents such beings in blackness and shadow.¹⁰⁸

Ambiguity is also met with in respect to the famous *hrefn blaca* of *Beowulf* 1801a. It is customarily taken to mean 'black raven' (*blæc*, not *blāc*). The poet is accordingly credited with skilful use of suspense and contrast, thwarting expectations of further carnage since the carrion-bird, it turns out, announces a joyful morning. Kathryn Hume, however, recognizes the double force of the word, noting that despite being 'associated with darkness and evil', the raven can have here the connotation "'bright" or "shiny" (*blāc*), and a shiny raven seems especially appropriate to the poet's picture of this particular dawn'. The effect is that 'by employing a word capable of this connotation, and making the raven reflect physically the characteristics of the morning, the poet gives a traditional image (black raven) a new dimension, and dislocates it from its normal patterns of association.'¹⁰⁹ The use of a word not normally associated with

¹⁰⁷ In either case the reading (*blace* or *blācan*) is metrically secure.

¹⁰⁸ Robert E. Finnegan, ed., *Christ and Satan: A Critical Edition* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1977), p. 126. William E. Mead, 'Color in Old English Poetry', *PMLA* 14 (1899), pp. 169-206, at p. 182, regarded these as instances of *blæc* and blackness. Interestingly S.A.J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, 1982) also renders *blāc* as 'black' in his translation of this poem (pp. 89, 92, and 104), whereas in other poems he uses 'bright', 'glaring' and the like (for instance pp. 73 and 77).

¹⁰⁹ Kathryn Hume, 'The Function of the *hrefn blaca*: *Beowulf* 1801', *MP* 67 (1969), pp. 60-63, at p. 63. See also Michael Lapidge, 'Beowulf and Perception', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 111 (2001), pp. 61-97, at pp. 66-7.

ravens (the usual adjectives, as discussed in the preceding section, are *wann* and *sweart*) in a rather peculiar syntactical pattern (weak adjective in the nominative, following the noun, and without article or demonstrative) reinforces the impression of dissociation from convention. To this may be added that this is one of the very few instances in which either of the two words, i.e. *blaca* or *blāca*, is metrically acceptable.

Multivalence can be claimed on internal grounds also for the phrase *in blacum reafum* ('in *blæc* clothes', *Exodus* 212b) referring to the Israelites despairing and expecting imminent death from the Egyptians. This time *blāc* is metrically excluded.¹¹⁰ Yet this phrase is likely to be paronomastically related to the attackers who, a few lines earlier, are *wigblac* ('war-*blāc*', 204a) and who, subsequently perceiving their own doom, are *flodblac* ('flood-*blāc*', 498b).¹¹¹ In these three expressions, the colour-related perceptions suggested by *blæc* and *blāc*, darkness or paleness or shining or all at once, are only part of the metaphorical process at work.¹¹² The other dimension to it is an imagined coincidence of mood with covering. On the one hand, the structures of poetic variation in which *wigblac*, *in blacum reafum* and *flodblac* are integrated provide cues to read them as alternative ways of saying *anmod* ('resolute', 203b), *orwenan* ('despairing', 211a), and *Sawlum linnon* ('parted from souls', 497b) respectively.¹¹³ These 'moods' — the emotional states associated with war frenzy, despair in the face of impending death, and death actually happening — are supplemented by, and identify with an image that is concrete as well as metaphorical. The Egyptians are *clothed* with war (*wig*), i.e. the war-trappings to which the poem abundantly refers (*gearwe* 193b etc.). The Israelites for their part are literally clothed in garments (*reafum*) which are not

¹¹⁰ Lucas, *Exodus*, p. 107.

¹¹¹ Lucas, *Exodus*, pp. 106 and 204; *DOE*, s.v. *flōdblāc*.

¹¹² This aspect does play its part in the associative processes, though. For example, a few lines before being a war-*blac* *werud* ('*blāc* troop', 204a) the Egyptians were an *eorp werod* ('dark troop', 194a).

¹¹³ The clearest of these variation-created identities is the rhythmical/metrical equivalence between 203b (*Feond wæs anmod*) and 204a (*werud wæs wigblac*).

only symbolic (of their deathly mood),¹¹⁴ but presumably also metallic, alluding to their coats of mail; in poetry such a referent for this phrase is not surprising,¹¹⁵ and besides, its explicit mention follows (218a). Their enemies perished clothed or enwrapped (*befarene* ‘surrounded’ 498a) by *flod*; here again, the metaphorical shaping of words (*flodblac*) does not remove their concrete applicability.¹¹⁶

This use of *blæc/blāc* inviting the hearer/reader to construe it as though it partly *meant* ‘clothed’ signals its belonging to the ‘shadow’ theme in yet another aspect: the fusion of a metaphorically dark (and/or ominously shining) internal quality with a materially dark external circumstance to great increase in intensity of effect.¹¹⁷ A number of the other occurrences of *blæc/blāc* discussed here can be interpreted along similar lines. Sound-based wordplay has the potential to shape semantics;¹¹⁸ its subtle working in the present case enriches the ‘shadow’ theme with even more thematic complexity and artistic appeal.

2.2.6 *Hār*

The adjective *hār* appears thirty times in verse and over a hundred times in charters, but is all but absent from other prose writings (only one secure example in religious prose), which bears some resemblance with the previous word studied; the evidence from charters will be discussed below. *Hār* occurs in only four glosses, where it translates *canus* (‘white’, ‘grey (of hair)’, ‘aged’, ‘hoary’) and *canescens* (‘becoming

¹¹⁴ Lucas, *Exodus*, p. 107 n.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *headoreaf* (‘war-clothing’ i.e. ‘armour’, *Beowulf* 401a) and *græge syrcan* (‘grey shirts’ i.e. ‘coats of mail’, *Beowulf* 334a).

¹¹⁶ Lucas, *Exodus*, p. 139, suggests ‘pale as the flood’ and compares with *flodgræg* (‘flood-grey’, *Maxims II* 31a, of a river).

¹¹⁷ This might be the ‘vigor’ and ‘depth’ which Mead, ‘Color’, p. 173, recognised while simultaneously deploring that true colour was not the main focus in Old English poetry.

¹¹⁸ Frank, ‘Paronomasia’.

canus').¹¹⁹ The semantic range and applications of the Old English word seem indeed to match relatively well those of the Latin word.

In poetic usage *hār* is applied to old warriors (11x), rocks (8x), coats of mail (3x), wolves (2x), hair, and frost (1x each). There remain four instances, to be discussed below, in which the referent is unclear. In the most thorough examination of the word's meaning to date, analyzing all the occurrences of the *hār* word-family in poetry and prose, Carole Biggam reaches a number of conclusions containing insights far beyond her central concern which is colour semantics.¹²⁰ The first diagnosis, however, relates to colour (or hue); her statistical data shows that whiteness and greyness underlie the meaning of *hār* most often. In poetry, this fact accounts for the frequent collocations with warriors, wolves, hair and frost. Old and experienced warrior-kings and battle-leaders, such as Hrothgar in *Beowulf*, Constantine in the *Battle of Brunanburh*, or Byrhtnoth in the *Battle of Maldon* are referred to by variants of the formulaic phrase *har hilderinc* ('*hār* battle-warrior') whose basic motivation seems to be the hoariness of elderly people's hair.¹²¹ The grey fur of wolves, added to their poetic status as scavengers on the battlefield and thus, in a sense, warriors as well, earns them the same epithet. This treatment sometimes occasions the blending of the two possible referents into one; thus the *hare heorawulfas* in *Exodus* 181a seem to be both the attacking Egyptians and the 'beasts of battle' which emerged from the poetic conventions to forebode the attack. In Old English the prevalent association with grey hair and hence experience and cunning in a heroic-military poetic environment links the word to representations of battle. *Hār* forms alliterative collocations with *hild-* ('battle'), *heoðu-* ('battle') or *heoru-* ('sword') on twelve occasions. The pattern extends to metaphorical

¹¹⁹ Search results from *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* (Toronto, 2000), accessed from <<http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/>>, 10 January 2010.

¹²⁰ Biggam, *Grey*.

¹²¹ Full references are given below.

usage interlocking images of threat and struggle. In *Andreas*, the *hare hildstapan* ('*hār* battle-stalkers') are 'rime and frost' (1257-8a), but they conjure other contextually plausible images, namely the heathen warriors who hold Andreas captive, or wolves roaming the winter night.¹²²

Partly overlapping with that collocational system is another one which is not bound by alliteration; a dozen examples show a mutual attraction between *hār* and *rinc* ('warrior') or *byrne*, some of them not dependent on associations with grey hair or old age.¹²³ In *Riddle 94*, the referent of *feaxhar cwene* ('*hār*-haired woman', 1), possibly 'swan', in the next line is said to be 'at the same time' a *rinc* (2). The phrase *hare byrnan* ('*hār* coat of mail') probably reflects the circular relationship of ring-mail to its greyness, of greyness to wolves, of wolves to warriors, of warriors to their being clad in ring-mail; it is supported by the conventional application of both *græg* and *hār* to all the referents involved.¹²⁴ There are no examples, however, of *hār* being applied to a helmet or a sword, even though *græg* is used with the latter and *hwit* with the former. That the alliterative phrase **hare helmas*, for example, is unattested, probably indicates semantic restriction rather than chance survival of the data. Biggam argues that the etymology and cognates of *hār* (which range from 'dark' to 'grey' to 'brown' to 'white', and include non-colour terms like 'skin') point to 'surface coverings, in particular, surface growths' and suggest 'surface appearance' as the shared underlying meaning.¹²⁵ The notion 'coated with grey' indeed fits well with most of the poetic evidence.

¹²² Biggam, *Grey*, pp. 175-6, further suggests a connection with the frost giants as known from Old Norse mythology.

¹²³ *Exodus* 241, *The Battle of Maldon* 169a, *The Battle of Brunanburh* 39a, *Beowulf* 1307a, 1678a, 2153b, 2986b-88a and 3136a, *Judith* 327b, *Waldere B* 17b, *Riddle 74* 1b-2a, *An Exhortation to Christian Living (Rewards for Piety)* 57a.

¹²⁴ Cf. Biggam, *Grey*, pp. 174-5.

¹²⁵ The Indo-European root **kēi-* (>**kēi-ro-* > *hār*) also gives Old Norse *hý* ('complexion'), Swedish *hy* ('skin, skin-colour'), and Faroese *hýggj* ('thin layer of mound'), among others; Biggam, *Grey*, pp. 216-17 with bibliography.

The ‘surface covering’ hypothesis may also account for the abundance of such a poetic word in charters, where the greater part, that is close to a hundred, concerns stones and trees as boundary markers. An example of a typical formulation is *of ðan haran stane on ðonne haran wiðig* (‘From the *hār* stone to the *hār* willow’).¹²⁶ Conceivably boundaries would have been best remembered and recorded in respect to ancient-looking rocks and trees which were part of the traditional landscape, and these would have been covered with greyish and thus possibly *hār* lichen growths.¹²⁷ On the other hand, there are nine instances in poetry where *hār* is applied to stone or rock, seven of them being collocations of *hār* and *stān*. A convincing pattern can be abstracted from only five of them. The rather rigid formula *under/ofere/ymbe harne stan* occurs in *Beowulf* about a rock beyond or beneath which is the lair of man-hating dragons (887b, 2553b, 2744b) and man-eating monsters (1415b) and in *Andreas* about a rock around which lies the city of a man-eating tribe (841b). Here too belongs the exceptional appearance of the formula in Blickling homily XVI about a rock beneath which is dark water filled with soul-eating monsters.¹²⁸ Michael Swisher seems to suggest that the boundary markers in charters are *hār* because beyond them is the ‘other’, ‘foreign’ land where it is risky (illegal) to venture.¹²⁹ The notion of ‘boundary’ or ‘threshold’, however, does not interpret the poetic instances closely enough. The dangerous realm is not so much ‘beyond’ those rocks as it lies *around* them; *ymbe* means ‘around’, while *under* can mean either ‘under’ or ‘behind’, and the demonic landscape of both the vision in the homily and the monsters’ mere in *Beowulf* is deployed in both directions. And thus one is brought back to the image of the covering,

¹²⁶ J.M. Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, English Historical Society (London, 1839-48 [repr. 1964]), no. 703 (vol. 3), p. 313, accessed from <<http://www.heinonline.org/HOL/Index?index=beal/codip&collection=beal>> , 28 October 2009.

¹²⁷ Biggam, *Grey*, pp. 225-31.

¹²⁸ Morris, *Blickling Homilies*, pp. 209-11.

¹²⁹ Michael Swisher, ‘Beyond the Hoar Stone’, *Neophilologus* 86 (2002), pp. 133-6, who speculates that these ‘hoary stones’ signpost the threshold between the human world and the realm of the supernatural.

augmented with the notion of fearsomeness.¹³⁰ The *hār* rock, like the *hār* warrior, wolf, and ring-mail, are covered, wrapped, surrounded by something dark, old, venerable, fearsome and formidable that lends the object its unnatural weight. Realistically this ‘something’ is light and frail, close to nothingness: a grey shade, hair, lichen.

Metaphorically it is heavy with awe and horror and undertones of slaughter and devouring. An analogous idea (or vestigial trace of poetic conventional associations) might underlie the use of this and several other ‘shadow’ epithets to ‘describe’ boundary markers in charters, trees and stones but also brooks and hills. There seems to be little practical sense in using such highly polysemous and indeterminate words to demarcate lands visually, especially in a legal context. These instances might reflect ancient and possibly non-descriptive names given to prominent and somehow evocative landscape features.

In *Exodus*, the *har hæðbroga* (‘*hār* heath-terror’, 118a) that threatens the Israelites is a case in which the epithet’s (im)material paradox and consequently heightened notion of ‘fear of something vaguely dark’ is prominent and functional. The phrase is a variation of *westengryre* (‘desert-horror’, 117b) which it hardly explicates, and earlier apparent analogues are literally no more (or no less) than ‘shadows’ (113b-14a). The image of wolves or warriors is perhaps being conjured but it receives no substantiation at that point in the poem. Yet this *hār* shadow of unknowable things has the power to kill with a sudden clutch (119). The metaphorical shadow is always half way through physical materialization.

The ruined wall in *The Ruin* presents a similar, if less horrific ‘shadow’ aspect (9b-11a):

¹³⁰ Cf. Biggam, *Grey*, pp. 233-7.

Oft þæs wag gebad
 ræghar ond readfah rice æfter oþrum,
 ofstonden under stormum

[Continually this wall endured lichen-*hār* and red-*fāh* one kingdom after another,
 having stood fast under storms]

As this poem's speaking voice swiftly alternates past splendour and joy with present gloom and decay, the ambivalence of these lines stands out: it is unclear to which side of the contrast they belong.¹³¹ The common interpretation of *ræghar ond readfah* is 'lichen-grey and red-stained'.¹³² But connotations of *fāh* include 'shining', 'ornamented' as well as 'blood-dark', 'baleful',¹³³ and its inclusion together with *hār* in this alliterative pair with quasi-repetition of sound and rhythm speaks in favour of the presence of two meanings: (1) 'covered with ancient splendour' as a variation on the first verse of the poem, *Wrætlic is þes wealstan* ('Splendid is this wall-stone', 1a); and (2) 'covered with the shadow of some mighty danger, terror or evil', as a variation on the second verse, *wyrde gebræcon* ('fate(s) broke' or 'broken by fate', 1b), for at this early point in the poem the audience was free to imagine that behind the destructive *wyrd* there might be more than just abstract time. Indeed these two meanings are consistent with the associations of *hār* as analysed so far (venerability and fearsomeness imagined as enwrapped in a dark yet whitish covering). They accord with the view that the poet's successive awe-inspired contrasts of glory and decay all accrue on the hoary wall, forming an imagined complex of simultaneity around it,¹³⁴ where paradoxical

¹³¹ The ambiguity is noted by Alain Renoir, 'The Old English *Ruin*: Contrastive Structure and Affective Impact', in Martin Green, ed., *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research* (Rutherford, NJ and London, 1983), pp. 148-73, at p. 151.

¹³² For example Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal and Kingston, 1992), pp. 210-11 and 439.

¹³³ Cf. §2.2.7 below. Nicholas Howe, 'The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England: Inherited, Invented, Imagined', in John Howe and Michael Wolfe, eds., *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe* (Gainesville, FL, 2002), pp. 91-112, at p. 96, may be right in suggesting that *readfah* refers to the marks left by the rusted metal used to strengthen the stonework, and later in the poem there seems to be a reference to such a bracing structure; but the audience of the poem was unlikely to make such a technical connection.

¹³⁴ Cf. Howe, 'Ruin', pp. 151-3, and Renée R. Trilling, 'Ruins in the Realm of Thoughts: Reading as Constellation in Anglo-Saxon Poetry', *JEGP* 108.2 (2009), pp. 141-67.

energies ‘continually circle around one another’ and ‘[b]eauty and joy prompt recognition of the death that finally destroyed them’.¹³⁵

The exact nature of the associative meanings that *hār* can be argued to invoke is often difficult to ascertain; there may not have been an overall ‘pattern’ but rather a number of vaguely related motifs. Intriguing facts include the presence of water wherever a *hār* rock stands (even in the Latin-based *Metres of Boethius* 5.12ff a stream flows from a ‘*hār* cliff’), and the absence of any *hār* tree in poetry whereas trees thus qualified are even more abundant in charters than *hār* rocks. As to the latter problem, it might be conjectured that the dark and arguably pagan-heroic connotations of *hār* would have clashed with the tendency of a tree in poetry to symbolically evoke the Christian cross. Nevertheless, the indeterminacy regarding the hue, brightness, and materiality of the physical or metaphorical referents seems functional in the poetic language. When Biggam, perceiving the multivalence, writes that ‘the poetic examples of *hār*’ effect a ‘simultaneous stimulation in the reader’s mind of most of the semantic elements in the word’s repertoire’ which then ‘form a shadowy network of semantic impressions which stand, elusive and shifting, behind a more obvious superficial meaning’,¹³⁶ she practically affirms that *hār* participates in the ‘shadow’ paradox.

2.2.7 *Fāh*

In this section I consider the adjective *fāh* with its variant spellings (notably *fāg*) and the prefixed forms and adjectival compounds which contain it, such as *gefāh* or *blōdfāh*. I exclude etymologically related nouns and verbs except as incidental evidence

¹³⁵ Trilling, ‘Ruins’, p. 163.

¹³⁶ Biggam, *Grey*, p. 224.

of illustratory value. The key issue with *fāh* is that strictly speaking it actually represents two words, both occurring overwhelmingly, but not exclusively, in verse. Lexicographers, editors, translators, and most commentators generally attempt to carefully distinguish between two words: *fāh* meaning ‘hostile’, and etymologically unrelated but homonymous *fāh* variously assumed to mean ‘particoloured’, ‘variegated’, ‘stained’, ‘marked’, ‘shining’, ‘discoloured’, ‘black’, ‘pale’, or ‘dusky’.¹³⁷ The watertight categories of the *TOE*, for example, artificially distinguish *fāh* from *fāg* (even though this spelling variation in the manuscripts never correlates with different (shades of) meanings): *fāh* appears in ‘Hostility’, ‘Wicked, evil-doing’, and ‘Guiltiness’, whereas *fāg* is assigned to ‘Brightness, light’, ‘Darkness, obscurity’, and ‘Medley/variety of colours’.¹³⁸ Since, contrary to what the *TOE* implies, the two terms have become perfectly identical morphologically, the validity of the semantic distinction that underlies our choice between these two alternative meanings/words must depend entirely on our notion of the nature of the immediate context. In practice, it too often depends on lexicographers’ unchallenged notions thereof.

The problem is that in most cases, the context appears compatible with *both* ranges of meanings. In other words, the two *fāh*’s have a remarkable tendency to occur in ambiguous contexts, and while this ambivalence is occasionally remarked and commented upon,¹³⁹ its extent is usually underestimated. The *DOE*, which neatly divides the two words and examples into two separate entries, nonetheless warns in the entry for *fāh*¹ (‘hostile’), credited with about forty appearances, that ‘[s]ome of the citations taken here have elsewhere been taken s.v. *fāh*² “particoloured”; in some instances a deliberate ambiguity may have been intended’, while the entry for *fāh*²

¹³⁷ *AeEW*, s.v. *fāh*; *DOE*, s.vv. *fāh*¹ and *fāh*².

¹³⁸ *TOE*, s.vv. *fāh* and *fāg*. These categories are 08.01.03.09.06, 12.08.06.02.03, and 12.08.09, and 03.01.12, 03.01.13, and 03.01.14.11, respectively.

¹³⁹ Robinson, *Appositive Style*, p. 62; Köberl, *Indeterminacy*, p. 145.

(some seventy-five occurrences) incorporates a similar warning in the other direction.¹⁴⁰

Coming from a lexicographic and thus highly compartmentalising project, this is a refreshing admission of uncertainty and even confusion, but it still does not go far enough. There would be more truth in saying that almost all the lexicographic evidence for the sense ‘hostile’ is actually bound up with the associative semantics of *fāh*².

It is significant in this respect that in the thirty or so recorded uses of *fāh* and adjectival derivatives as glosses, none of the Latin lemmata has anywhere near the range of meaning ‘hostile, at enmity’. That *fāh*¹ belongs to the poetic register (and would therefore be unavailable/unsuitable as a gloss word) is an important factor (the *DOE* exemplifies only three instances in prose), but is unlikely to be the only reason: many poetic words do occur as glosses, such as the much rarer *wann* (some ten glosses), or *fāh*² for that matter. Rather, the fact that *fāh* never glosses words for ‘hostile’ probably suggests that this sense is not felt as a prominent aspect of the word’s semantics, and even undermines the lexicographic assumptions that have established *fāh*¹ as a distinct word.

The bulk of the *DOE*’s evidence for *fāh*¹ comes from *Genesis A*, *Beowulf*, and *Andreas*, but an analysis of the supporting instances reveals a striking analogy with the immediate contexts of instances — often taken from the same poems — which the *DOE* classifies under *fāh*². In *Andreas*, it seems specious to discriminate between the characterisation, on the one hand, of the *faa folcsceaðan* (‘*fāh* enemies of the people’ [*DOE fāh*¹: ‘hostile’], 1593a) who perished *under eorþan grund* (‘under earth’s ground’, 1595a), and on the other hand of those *mane faa* (‘*fāh* with crime’ [*DOE fāh*²: ‘stained’], 1599a) who *under grund hruron* (‘fell underground’, 1600b); as suggested by repetition and variation, both belong to the same category of sinners, equally ‘stained/gleaming/marked’ by malice. The *Beowulf* poet’s statement about Cain that *he*

¹⁴⁰ *DOE*, s.vv. *fāh*¹ and *fāh*².

þa fag gewat, / morðre gemearcod ('he then departed *fāh*, marked by murder' [DOE *fāh*¹: 'at enmity'], 1263b-4a), in the explicit double context of blood and crime, is a lexical link furthering Cain's association with Grendel: the monster is *mane fah* ('*fāh* with crime', 978a) and haunts places which, because of him, are *blode fah* ('*fāh* with blood', 934b) — both examples falling under the DOE's entry *fāh*².¹⁴¹ Similar blood- and crime-marking is evidenced in prose. The inclusion of *fāh* in the translation of the biblical phrase *sanguis eius super nos* ('his blood [be] on us', Mt 27.25) in a vernacular homily for Palm Sunday as *sy his blod fah* [*gefah* added in superscript] *ofer us* ('let his blood be (*ge*)*fāh* on us')¹⁴² reveals *fāh*'s connotations of blood. The few instances in legal contexts similarly point to the meaning 'crime-/blood-marked' rather than 'hostile', such as the stipulation in the Laws of Æthelstan, concerning blood-feud, that *gif hwa hine wrecan wille oððe hine fælæce, þonne beo he fah wið ðone cyng and wið ealle his freond* ('if anyone should want to persecute or carry on a feud (be/play *fāh* [cf. DOE, s.v. *fāhlācan*]) against him, then let him be *fāh* against the king and all his friends').¹⁴³ *Fāh*'s associations with serpents also trump the lexicographic dichotomy: the *fah wurm* of *Genesis A* ('*fāh* serpent', 899a) that tempts Eve is 'hostile' by definition, but its closest lexical parallel is the gloss *fahwurm* for 'basilisk' — possibly a reflex of Isidore's *Etymologies* describing a basilisk as a spotted or variegated snake (*fāh*²)¹⁴⁴ but also probably part of wider vernacular tradition associating serpents with the visual connotations of *fāh* (see below). Thus the aggregate indications of glosses, prose, and verse remove most of the evidence that has been thought to vouchsafe a separate word *fāh* with a separate sense 'hostile'. In our records, the pure expression of the etymological sense 'hostile' of *fāh* < Gmc. **faih-* (related to *gefā* whose modern

¹⁴¹ For Grendel's *fāh*-indexed double association with crime and blood, cf. also 1001a, 485a, 1594a, and 1631b.

¹⁴² Transcribed from MS. Bodleian 340, see DOE, s.v. *gefāh*.

¹⁴³ F. Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* (Halle, 1903-16), vol. I, p. 160.

¹⁴⁴ DOE, s.v. *fāhwurm*.

reflex is *foe*) < PIE **peiq-/poiq-*, is vestigial. In most cases this old sense has partly blended with the complex semantics of *fāh* < **faih-* < **poik-* or been subsumed under its range of associations.¹⁴⁵ The result is an even more pronounced ambivalence than in the case of *blæc/blāc*; it is also a more complex one, for it involves not only a shining/pale/dark indeterminacy but also a superimposed association with moral evil potentially introducing insidious undertones to even the more positive connections of *fāh* to brightness and beauty.

Of a total of ca. 160 attestations of *fāh* and its compounds, over a hundred belong to poetry (64%), including twenty-six *X-fāh* compounds. The simplex *fāh* glosses *varius* and *discolor* in about half a dozen distinct sources, and it is this tangible yet somewhat tenuous ground (dubiously reinforced by etymological data) that supports the lexicographic meaning ‘variegated’ and, one suspects, the more or less strained extensions of that meaning designed to accommodate context, such as as ‘shining’ or ‘stained’. Semantic associations with darkness are not much in evidence, but on one occasion *fāh* and *deorc* (‘dark’) rub shoulders in a gloss,¹⁴⁶ and the derived verbs *fāgian* and *fāgettan* can be used to express darkening of weather.¹⁴⁷ In any case, the usual modern translations, however plausible, are liable to be misleading; to retrieve a deeper and more valid understanding of *fāh* one needs to analyse a broad spectrum of internal evidence from the immediate contexts. The poetic occurrences of *fāh* and adjectival compounds are mostly confined to a limited number of very specific contexts, to which at least a third of the thirty prose occurrences can also be related. The collocating referents of *fāh* most frequently occurring in verse are as follows:

¹⁴⁵ For the distinct etymologies see *OED*, s.vv. *foe* and *faw*, respectively.

¹⁴⁶ *Ceruleus .i. glaucus. grene. hæwen. fah. deorc. color est inter album et nigrum. subniger*: R.T. Oliphant, ed., *The Harley Latin-Old English Glossary* (The Hague, 1966), p. 67 (gloss C.698).

¹⁴⁷ *DOE*, s.vv.

- ❖ **moral evil/sins:** twenty-one occurrences (including seven instances of *fāh* as an attribute of the Devil in *Christ and Satan*), e.g. *synnum fah* ‘*fāh* with sins’;¹⁴⁸
- ❖ **gold/treasure/ornamentation:** seventeen occurrences, e.g. *goldfah* ‘gold-*fāh*’;¹⁴⁹
- ❖ **swords:** twelve occurrences, e.g. *fagum mece* ‘with *fāh* sword’;¹⁵⁰
- ❖ **blood:** twelve occurrences, e.g. *blodfag* ‘blood-*fāh*’;¹⁵¹
- ❖ **serpents:** eleven occurrences, e.g. *fah wurm* ‘*fāh* serpent’.¹⁵²

This list gives an idea of the paradoxicality of *fāh*. The fact that most of the occurrences fall within either of just two or three formal patterns (such as the formulaic system ‘dative/instrumental + *fāh*’) which occur with all five types of referents, suggests that the phrases are used by reference to each other (e.g. *synnum fah* referencing *golde fah*, or the other way round), which in turn suggests *fāh* has only one (broad) meaning, not several discrete senses. This hypothetical meaning, however, is elusive because any meaning plausibly underlying most contexts can be challenged by at least one uncooperative type of context: ‘variegated/shining’ would not seem applicable to evil, nor would ‘stained’ fit ornamentation. An essential characteristic of *fāh*, furthermore, is the definite impression that any usage within one of the five referential contexts listed above actually alludes simultaneously to one or more of the other four. *Fāh* tends to reach far beyond its immediate context, and it is this aspect that I will outline in what follows through several prominent examples.

¹⁴⁸ *Homiletic Fragment I* 16a. Also *Christ and Satan* 96b, 109a, 127a, 155b, 179b, 185b, 478a, *Andreas* 1593a, 1599a, *Beowulf* 978a, 1001a, *The Dream of the Rood* 13b, *Elene* 1242b, *Christ III* 1000a, *Juliana* 59a, 571a, 705b, *The Whale* 66b, *Resignation* 65a, *Paris Psalter* 105.29b.

¹⁴⁹ *Beowulf* 308a. Also *Beowulf* 167a, 304b-5a, 320a, 725a, 780a, 927a, 1038, 1615a, 1800a, 2217a, 2811b, *Andreas* 842a, 1236a, *The Ruin* 10a, *The Wanderer* 98, *Maxims II* 22a.

¹⁵⁰ *Judith* 104b. Also *Andreas* 1132b-4a, *Beowulf* 586a, 1286a, 1459, 1614b-15a, 1696b-8a, 2700b-1a, *Judith* 194b, 264b, 302b, *Paris Psalter* 88.37b.

¹⁵¹ *Andreas* 1405a. Also *Beowulf* 420a, 447a, 485a, 934b, 1111a, 1286a, 1594a, 1631b, 2060b, 2974a, *Waldere A* 5a.

¹⁵² *Genesis A* 899a. Also *Genesis A* 904b, 912b-13a, *Andreas* 769b, *Beowulf* 1698a, 2316-17a, 2575b, 2655a, 2669b-71a, 3040b-1a, *The Wanderer* 98b.

Evil and blood

The visual perceptions stimulated by ‘*synnum fah*’ formulas are paradoxical. Contextually we could expect *fāh* to connote darkness here in keeping with the conventional setting for morally charged evil; the poet of *Christ and Satan* alliterates sins with darkness in the line *in þis neowle genip, niðsynnum fah* (‘in this abysmal darkness, *fāh* with malicious sins’, 179), and the denizens of hell are often described with dark or ‘shadow’ words such as *blæc/blāc* or *fāh*. However, since the same heroic/religious poetry also associates *fāh* with shining splendour, the resulting impression is disturbingly double-sided. Just how strong and yet indeterminate the visual connotations of *synnum fah* can be, is exemplified in *The Dream of the Rood* (13-16a, 21b-3):

Syllic wæs se sigebeam,	ond ic synnum fah,
forwunded mid wommum.	Geseah ic wuldres treow,
wædum geweorðode,	wynnum scinan,
gegyred mid golde;	
...	
	Geseah ic þæt fuse beacen
wendan wædum ond bleom;	hwilum hit wæs mid wætan bestemed,
beswyled mid swates gange,	hwilum mid since gegyrwed.

[Wondrous was the tree of victory, and I *fāh* with sins, wounded with evils. I saw the tree of glory, honoured with clothing, shine with joys, adorned with gold; ... I saw the hastening beacon change clothing and colours; at times it was made wet with water, soaked with blood’s flow, at times adorned with treasure.]

The passage is built around the contrast between the splendour of the tree/cross and the moral guilt of the speaker, vividly summed up in the chiasmic structure of the first line quoted. But *fāh* would in fact better summarize the tree — as the poet depicts it — rather than its observer. ‘Adorned with gold’ (16a) as if *golde fah*, the tree shifts its coverings and hues as if ‘variegated’ (22), and is *beswyled mid swates gange* and *mid since gegyrwed* (23) as if *swate fah* and *since fah*. The dreamer’s sin-induced *fāh*-ness seems to interplay with the surrounding and visually intense images that are

alternatively, or simultaneously, shining and dark, splendid and dismal. This play of reflections recalls how in *Christ and Satan* the Devil stands against a backdrop of both intense darkness and intense fire: *fah in fyrnum, fyrleoma stod* ('[Satan] *fāh* in crimes, [hell's] fire-light stood', 127), with alliteration and paronomasia linking sins and fire (*fyr-*, *fȳr-*).

The '*synnum fah*' formula, like most Old English metaphorical representations of abstractions, is grounded in a concrete idea, which in this case is probably blood — specifically, the wounded warrior drenched in blood. In *The Dream of the Rood* the formula is varied with *forwunded mid wommum* ('wounded with evils', 14a), one of several exemplifications of the concept of evil as physical injury which (at least by strong implication) draws blood.¹⁵³ The cannibalistic pagans in *Andreas*, who literally have blood on their hands (and mouths) on account of their past deeds, are *mane faa, morðorscyldige* ('*fāh* with crime, murder-guilty', 1599), a quotation which, significantly, occurs precisely when they are killed themselves. In *Beowulf* Grendel is twice said to be *fāh* with crimes (976b-7a, 1000b-2a) after having shed (his own and his victims') blood. His ancestor in the poem, Cain, *fag gewat, / morþre gemearcod* ('departed, *fāh*, marked with murder', 1263b-4a); the juxtaposition with *gemearcod* intensifies *fāh*'s ambivalence ('guilty/gleaming/branded').¹⁵⁴ Cain is darkly marked by both sin and blood. The ambivalent root *mearc-*, ('borderland', but *mearcian* 'to mark') has connections with blood and death: in *Beowulf* the *mearcstapa* ('borderland-stalker', 103a) *mearcað morhopu* ('marks the moor-retreats', 450a) with the blood of his prey.¹⁵⁵ *Mearc-* is bound up with *myrce*, a rare, poetic adjective, whose assumed meaning,

¹⁵³ Cf. for example *Christ and Satan* 155b-6a.

¹⁵⁴ Robinson, *Appositive Style*, p. 62. See also E.G. Stanley, 'Two Old English Poetic Phrases Insufficiently Understood for Literary Criticism: *þing gehegan* and *seonop gehegan*' in Daniel G. Calder, ed., *Old English Poetry: Essays on Style* (Berkeley, 1979), pp. 67-90, at pp. 68-9.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. §4.1.1.

‘dark’, is based on etymology alone,¹⁵⁶ and whose contexts afford important parallels for a better understanding of *fāh*. In fact *myrce* always collocates with moral evil and death, often alliterating with *mān* (‘crime’).¹⁵⁷ *Myrce* seems to mean ‘dark’ only insofar as it signifies moral branding with evil. Three collocations are especially interesting. In *Exodus*, the threatening *guðmyrce* (‘war-*myrce* ones’, 59a) lurk in *mearchofu* and *mor* (‘borderland-dwellings’, ‘moor/wilderness’, 61a), possibly representing spiritual and/or physical danger on the Israelites’ way to salvation. In *Beowulf*, the accursed monster flees *ofer myrcan mor* (‘through the *myrce* moor’, 1405a), leaving tracks that are ‘widely seen’ (1403b) probably on account of blood dripping from the human prey. In *Andreas*, the clause *þæt ge on fara folc feorh gelæddon* (‘that you would lead your lives amidst the people of the *fāh* ones’, 430) is paralleled, through variation, by *on ælmyrcna eðelrice / sawle gesealdon* (‘[you would] yield your souls amidst the kingdom of the all-*myrce* ones’, 432-3a),¹⁵⁸ implying some connection between *fāh* and *myrce*. Just as *myrce* is paronomastically associated with both the visual aspect of marking/staining (dark like wilderness, like blood) and the moral significance of (dark/dangerous) places being marked, so *fāh*, partly through ‘internal’ paronomasia (*fāh*¹ and *fāh*²), is both the visual manifestation of marking (gleaming like blood) and its spiritual significance (to be evil and hence doomed). In both cases, the vehicles of these associations are blood (tangible) and death or doom or danger (intangible). Moral evil, through *fāh*, is seen to be, metaphorically, like blood that brands or marks in a strongly visual sense, with dark gleaming.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Cf. §3.2.1.

¹⁵⁷ *Andreas* 1218a and 1313, *Christ III* 1279, *The Phoenix* 457a, *Juliana* 505a.

¹⁵⁸ On these *-myrce* compounds see Hall, ‘Dark Old English Compounds’.

¹⁵⁹ It is interesting in this respect that blood was also widely believed to contain the soul; it may be significant, then, that *fāh* sometimes alliterates with *feorh* (‘life/soul’).

Gold, blood, and evil

An extended consequence of the above is that nothing that is *fāh* is immune from ominous associations, not even gold, treasure, or any ornamented human work. The common assumption that *fāh* means ‘shining’ or ‘adorned’ in such contexts needs to be revised accordingly. The hall in *Beowulf* certainly is a *sincfage sel* (‘hall *fāh* with treasure’), but the poet calls it thus precisely when he says that Grendel ‘inhabited Heorot, the *sincfage sel* on black nights’ (166b-7). When the monster invades the hall again, in a great deployment of darkness imagery, he treads *on fagne flor* (725a); the ‘realistic’ aspect of the meaning may be ‘adorned, painted, colourful, shining’,¹⁶⁰ but in all other aspects the floor on that night is *fāh* with accumulated darkness and doom: the dark of the night, of the shadowy creature creeping on this floor, of the blood of previous murders, and of the expectation of more carnage to be perpetrated on this same floor. Marijane Osborn insists on the word’s ‘dramatic implications’ to suggest that the floor, like the entire hall, is “‘stained’” with Grendel’s bloodthirsty raids’.¹⁶¹ By connecting this instance with the ‘stone-*fāh* street’ (320) leading to Heorot, she points to ‘an Anglo-Saxon habit of mind — a habit reinforced by patristic interpretations of the Bible — in which things in the world were seen with a sort of double vision connecting the visible with the invisible’, and argues for a double reading of *fāh* in respect to both “‘physical reality’” and “‘moral-symbolic’” context’.¹⁶² After Grendel’s defeat, the poet collides the gold-*fāh* roof with the monster’s bloody hand, token of his death: *golde fahne, ond Grendles hond* (927). The Danes believe that this roof, ‘*fāh* with bone (antlers?)’, cannot be destroyed, ‘unless the embrace of flame should swallow it’ (781b-2a), and as the audience has been told earlier in a similar dark allusion, destruction by

¹⁶⁰ Or even tessellated, as the place-name Fawler (< *fāh flōr*) suggests, cf. Rosemary Cramp, ‘*Beowulf* and Archaeology’, *Medieval Archaeology* 1 (1957), pp. 57-77.

¹⁶¹ Marijane Osborn, ‘Laying the Roman Ghost of *Beowulf* 320 and 725’, *NM* 70 (1969), pp. 246-54, at p. 253.

¹⁶² Osborn, ‘Roman Ghost’, pp. 253-4.

fire is precisely Heorot's ultimate fate. An analogy could be drawn with *Andreas*: the Mermedonians' city appears *fāh* (842a), conceivably anticipating all the blood and death about to occur there. When such things actually begin to occur (Andreas' torture), the streets appear stone-*fāh* (1236a), and much 'shadow' imagery follows. Gold and blood, decoration and destruction, shimmer alike, through the poetics of *fāh*.¹⁶³

Swords and blood

Perhaps another aspect of the ambivalent role of *fāh* as a marker responsible for both visual highlighting and abstract darkening (like *myrce*) is a curious play of anticipations and replications, involving referential shifts. Since the formula 'with *fāh* sword(s)' always occurs in contexts of slaughtering, the poetic motif of the shining sword is superimposed with, or cancelled by, the grim image of the blades drenched in blood. Sometimes swords seem to be *fāh* even before they strike, conceivably activating both images. In *Judith*, the heroine's *first* attempt to behead Holofernes is described thus: *Sloh ... /... fagum mece* ('She struck with a *fāh* sword', *Judith* 103b-4). Later on, she exhorts her people to (194-5a):

fyllan folctogan **fagum** sweordum,
fæge frumgaras

[kill the chieftains with *fāh* swords, the doomed front-spears (i.e. leading warriors)]

The paronomasia *fāgum* : *fæge*, the alliteration in *f*- crossing the line,¹⁶⁴ and the confusing alternation of warriors (*folctogan*), weapons (*sweordum*), and weapons metonymically denoting warriors (*frumgaras*), have the effect of blurring the semantic

¹⁶³ G. Storms, 'Notes on Old English Poetry', *Neophilologus* 61 (1977), pp. 439-42, interestingly speculates that *wyrmlicum fah* in *The Wanderer*, quoted above, refers not to the wall's beauty but its 'crumbling' and 'decay', and specifically serpent-like 'cracks' in the stone (p. 441). It may well be another case of inclusive ambiguity.

¹⁶⁴ Noted by Mark Griffith, ed., *Judith* (Exeter, 1997), p. 130, as suggestive of wordplay.

gap between *fāh* and *fāge* by suggesting a natural causation or equivalence between the swords' *fāh*-ness and the warriors' doom.

Serpents and evil

Fāh recurs in connection to serpents in both poetry and prose. While this association has a naturalistic plausibility (as that of *wann* with ravens) insofar as snakes often are variegated and gleaming, *fāh*'s metaphorical associations resonate with the wider symbolism of serpents in Old English (and Germanic) tradition.¹⁶⁵ The biblical serpent's deceitful goading of Eve is artfully expressed in *Genesis A*: the half-line *fah wyrm þurh fægir word* ('*fāh* serpent through fair word', 899a) is prominently adorned with cross-alliteration, phonetic figure (*fah w-r- : fæg- w-r-*), and rhythm (*fah wyrm* is metrically equivalent to *fægir word*). The linkage between *fāh* and *fægir* conveys the idea that although the serpent's words are as shiny as the serpent's appearance (*fāh* = *fægir*), their truthfulness is as shifting and illusory as the serpent's hues and movements (*fāh* = 'variegated') and their profound significance is as dark as the serpent's cosmic/religious associations (*fāh* = 'hostile', 'accursed', 'doomed').¹⁶⁶ In *Andreas*, a *fāh* serpent materializes among images describing the pagans' sinful condition (767b-70a):

	Man wridode
geond beorna breost,	brandhata nið
weoll on gewitte,	weorm blædum fag,
attor ælfæle.	

[Evil flourished through the warriors' breasts, hot-burning malice welled in their minds, a serpent *fāh* with ?glory/blasts (*blædum*), all-destructive venom.]

¹⁶⁵ Cognates and semantic equivalents of *fāh* are associated with serpents in Old Norse, on which cf. below, and further §3.2.7. In Old Saxon, the phrase *nadra thiu fêha* ('the *fāh* serpent') — *fêh* is a cognate of *fāh* with similar meaning — occurs in *Heliand* 1878.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Doane, *Genesis A*, p. 243. The figure also contributes to wordplay on *word*: see Frank, 'Paronomasia', pp. 211-15.

This *weorm* is the weapon which inflicts the wounds that burn in the sinners' minds. The *fāh* serpent, as a materialisation of evil (recalling Satan), causes the victims to be 'fāh with sins', just as a *fāh* sword causes them to be 'fāh with blood'. Presumably the serpent acts through fire as well as venom, and Kenneth Brooks accordingly interprets *blædum fag* as 'blazing with blasts of flame'.¹⁶⁷ It is possible, then, that the formula *firendædum fah* ('fāh with crime-deeds') — the main variant of *synnum fah* — intends a paronomastic effect by invoking the adjective *fýren* ('fiery').¹⁶⁸

Serpents and swords

Metaphorically, a sword inflicts poisoned *bites* just as a serpent does — a common image in Germanic poetry.¹⁶⁹ In *Beowulf* the hero is killed not by the dragon's flame but by a *bite* of *biteran* ('bitter, poisonous', 2692a) fangs; nevertheless, this happens within an imagery suggesting fire;¹⁷⁰ and metaphorically, the dragon's flame becomes a sword when called *hildeleoma* ('battle-light', a typical kenning for 'sword').¹⁷¹ The fiery/biting serpent/sword connection works both ways; 'the image of fire as a ravenous devourer is joined with a metaphor of a sword's biting',¹⁷² and the image of the *fāh* serpent underlies both. This nexus is evidenced in prose, too. In one of the texts of the Old English *Life of St Margaret*, a devil appears:¹⁷³

on dračan heowe and eall he wæs nædderfah. And of his toþan leome ofstod, ealswa of hwiten swurde, and of his eagan swilces fyres lyg.

¹⁶⁷ Brooks, *Andreas*, p. 89.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Frank, 'Paronomasia', p. 219. The difference is mainly one of vowel length, *firen* (or *fyren*) 'crime' : *fýren* 'fiery'.

¹⁶⁹ See further §3.2.7.2, and A.T. Hatto, 'Snake-swords and Boar-helms in *Beowulf*', *ES* 38 (1957), pp. 145-60, specifically pp. 149-55. Hatto argues that '*atertanum fah* means something like "gleaming with serpents"' (p. 149), *ater-* metonymically standing for 'serpent'.

¹⁷⁰ *hat* ('hot', 2691a), *ealne ymbefeng* ('entirely enveloped', 2691b) (compare *befangen* used with fire, 2274a and 2321b).

¹⁷¹ 1143b-4a. Compare the 'biting sword' idea in *beadoleoma bitan nolde* ('battle-light would not bite', 1523).

¹⁷² Fred C. Robinson, 'Two Aspects of Variation in Old English Poetry', in Calder, ed., *Old English Poetry*, pp. 127-45, at p. 132.

¹⁷³ Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis, eds., *The Old English Lives of St Margaret*, CSASE 9 (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 152-70, §12 at p. 162.

[in the shape/hue of a dragon and he was entirely serpent-*fāh*. And from his teeth a light stood forth, as if from a shining sword, and from his eyes a fiery flame.]

The most interesting intersection of serpent and sword, however, occurs in the dragon-fight in *Beowulf*. The first blow at the dragon fails, but a peculiar dragon/sword contact is established lexically (2576b-8a):

gryrefahne sloh
incgelafe, þæt sio ecg gewac
brun on bane

[he struck the terror-*fāh* one with the mighty sword, so that the blade failed gleaming (*brūn*) on the bone]

In light of the semantics of *fāh* in its other compounds, *gryrefāh* is unlikely to mean ‘terrible in its variegated coloring’.¹⁷⁴ It must rather mean ‘terror-gleaming’, just as *blōdfāh* means ‘blood-gleaming’, and with the same overtones of being ‘marked’. As if in response, the sword is then *brūn*, conceivably reflecting the enemy’s gleaming *fāh*-ness. But the sword that slays the *fāh* dragon becomes *fāh* itself (2700b-2a):

þæt ðæt sword gedearf
fah ond fæted, þæt ðæt fyr ongon
sweðrian syððan

[so that the sword sank in, *fāh* and ornamented, so that the fire started to recede afterwards]

Precisely as the dragon’s fire and life-spirit are spent, its most prominent verbal attribute seems to be passed on to its killer, the sword, as it is plunged into the beast.

Although, of all the proposed ‘shadow’ words, *fāh* has the thinnest semantic connection to visual darkness, through its intricately articulated network of concepts and associations it is probably the one that best illustrates the strange and paradoxical nature and function of ‘shadow’. This is revealed in *fāh*’s ominous connotations and potential to brand people and things as doomed, and further in its fluid, contagious semantics: humans get blood-*fāh* from shining-*fāh* swords which in turn become blood-

¹⁷⁴ So Fulk *et al.*, *Beowulf*, ‘Glossary’, s.v., and *DOE*, s.v.

fāh, artifacts that are *fāh* with gold are likely to turn *fāh* with blood or burn *fāh* with flames, and *fāh* serpents interlace with evil-*fāh* demons and humans. The network tends to elude or transcend simpler considerations of darkness or brightness, illustrating the fact that ‘shadow’ cannot be reduced to a semantic field. Like *fāh*, ‘shadow’ spreads across semantic categories and yet remains a coherent entity, interpretable in terms of a network rather than as a self-contained pool of meanings.

2.2.8 Conclusion

The vast amount of evidence analysed in this chapter cannot be encompassed or summarised by any single generalisation. However, a number of essential points emerge, and through them we can gain a more refined understanding of what ‘shadow’ is and how it works. I would relate these insights to three ideas: distinctiveness, intersection, and otherness of a monstrous type.

The meanings and associations of all the ‘shadow’ words addressed in this study so far — the seven words analysed in full, *sceadu*, *scua*, *nīpan/genip*, *blæc*, *wann*, *hār*, and *fāh*, and those surveyed more briefly in specific contexts, *scima*, *neowol*, *myrce*, and *brūn* — are revealed to be significantly different not only from their more prosaic would-be equivalents but also from each other. There are practically no reasons to assume synonymity between any of them; at least not if by synonyms one means interchangeable words sharing the same referent. In many and important ways, *sceadu* is not like *scua*, nor is *blæc* like *sweart*; ‘shadow’ is not darkness, and is itself plural and multifarious. This distinctiveness is shown, sometimes, by the evidence of glosses and, always, by the elements of their narrow contexts, such as collocations. These are rare,

highly poetic, old, archaic words, no doubt contributing to a heightened impression of strangeness and ancientness. Crucially, this strange and ancient feel is not only part of our modern response, but must have been discerned by contemporary audiences (and, in most cases, intended by authors); this suggestion often can be retrieved by diachronic methods from tangible data such as glosses.

The texture of the poems, however conventional and archaic, as well as of many prose texts, is not flat and homogenous; there is an uneven layering of archaicness and strangeness in these texts. Some words and their immediate, narrowest contexts, stand out against their larger contexts, and ‘shadow’ words are especially salient in effecting such disruptions. Even the only exception in not being an especially rare, poetic, and archaic term, *sceadu*, somewhat compensates for this by being centrally involved in peculiarly strange collocations, paradoxes, and challenging mental images that startlingly alienate it from that which it might initially be supposed to denote in context, such as darkness or cast shadows. Like *sceadu*, the other ‘shadow’ words are mainly embedded in various patterns of structure and sound (from alliteration to formula to envelope) that lend them formal salience. This prominence is highly artistic and significant because the patterns often are, to various degrees, extraordinary (more remarkable than the immediate textual surrounding, but also more remarkable than most other instances of that pattern type).

Their extraordinary prominence throws into relief what the patterns have in common, and one commonality is darkness. More specifically, it is a constant play with, and interrogation of, darkness. The dark is always only a limiting semantic element; the focus seems to be on that which is tangential on darkness, on the possible significance of the dark, or on the shifting nature of this significance. ‘Shadow’ words cluster with darkness words; they also cluster with each other, which further underscores the validity

of the ‘shadow’ model by confirming that what we are in the presence of is not just a mere semantic field, but rather a dynamic ‘shadow’ theme. These are linguistic-literary spaces where things meet and intersect: one meaning with another, sense with sound, denotations with connotations, content with form. While such intersections are of course far from being peculiar to this particular subject, it remains striking how many of the ‘shadow’ words are caught in paronomastic associations whose effects include not only contrast, but also blending of meaning. Thus we have the pairs *sceadu/sceaða*, *scima/scīma*, *scua/scūfan*, *nifol/neowol*, *wann/wan*, *blæc/blāc*, *fāh/fāg*, *fāh/fæge*, *fāh/fæger*. Significantly, all these pairings are of one of two sorts: ‘shadow’ with something negative and related to death; and ‘shadow’ with (uncanny) brightness. One common denominator of these associations is that their narrative function in context seems to be doom, and the terror of doom.

Both their interdependence with ill-boding or starkly contrasting words and their extraordinary distinctiveness are such that, in the contexts where they appear (which are also extremely specific), ‘shadow’ words can be seen as endowed with an aesthetic function which I would outline as extreme otherness and disquieting monstrosity. ‘Shadow’ is seen as moving ominously; it seems to bring danger, death, oppression, torment, by fleshing out these intangible concepts, becoming a concrete symbol and harbinger that can be seen through its glistening coating, covering, or colouring; yet its appearance is ever-shifting, ambiguous and elusive. ‘Shadow’ words are ambiguous and escape visualisation, or indeed any stable mental representation: as a result they are vague, indeterminate, yet simultaneously strong, carrying a poetic power that punctuates climactic scenes. As such, they are the linguistic embodiment of a monster, specifically the Anglo-Saxon type of monster most fully illustrated by Grendel, the terror-bringing human/inhuman prowler/shadow disrupting time with its symbolic/real antediluvian

essence. While *Beowulfian* monstrous species are in many ways unique, ‘shadow’ words gather to form a ‘monstrous species’ of the poetic language which can be observed prowling in more than one text and in unexpected places and, as with monsters in Old English literature, are of more than marginal significance and deserve more than marginal attention.

CHAPTER THREE:

OLD NORSE ‘SHADOW’ WORDS: SEMANTIC AND STYLISTIC STUDY

The previous chapter has demonstrated the prominence of ambivalent, paradoxical, or otherwise highly peculiar aspects and associations in a range of Old English words related to the notion of ‘darkness’, outlining a variegated yet to some extent internally coherent picture of a ‘shadow’ network and its dynamics. In the present chapter, I apply similar methods to flesh out the evidence for a comparable phenomenon in Old Norse. To investigate representations of strange darkness in Old Norse is to map a sizeable area of relatively uncharted ground, and thus has the virtue of opening up fresh avenues of interpretation into a very allusive material. In addition to being intrinsically interesting, however, there is much more to learn from an assessment of the Old Norse evidence. The extent to which a ‘shadow’ network is extant and active in Old Norse at the linguistic and stylistic levels will provide a valuable comparative frame of reference for this study. The similarities and differences between two cognate traditions will throw into sharper relief both the internal and external connections implied in the results for Old English and the distinctive traits of ‘shadow’ in both languages. The results of the comparative method will in turn helpfully enlarge the perspective when the significance of the phenomenon in literary and cultural terms is evaluated.

Among those Germanic languages which had significant literary output in the period under consideration (broadly, from the eighth century to the eleventh), Old Norse and Old English show the least degree of phonological and morphological divergence, certainly in part a consequence of the relative proximity of the areas settled by the ancestors of the speakers of these languages (before the Migration Age and the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain), most of whom originated in and around modern-day Jutland

within what is now plausibly described as a North-West Germanic linguistic continuum.¹

As has been stressed more recently, furthermore, speakers of both languages seem to have enjoyed considerable mutual intelligibility in the context of their renewed contact in Viking Age England.² This favourable linguistic situation puts in even sharper view the possibility of cross-fertilization between the two literary traditions from the ninth century onwards. On the other hand, the fact of the prolonged recontact between peoples who already shared a common linguistic and cultural inheritance, no doubt including pre-literate poetry, both enriches and complicates a comparative study like the present one, as one must navigate through the lines of the debate on the significance and origin of literary similarities in Old Norse and Old English literature.³

A more pressing problem, however, is of course the comparatively much later recording of the Old Norse sources which must be used in this study. The earliest manuscript records of Eddic poetry are from the late thirteenth century, and their written history cannot be traced further back than around 1200.⁴ Although it is widely believed that at least a fair number of the poems in this corpus have their roots in ninth- or tenth-century oral composition, one must always take into account the inevitable alteration (to an unknowable extent) they must have undergone during this two- or three-century-wide gap.⁵ Similarly, skaldic poems survive mainly in thirteenth- and fourteenth-

¹ See Hans Frede Nielsen, *Old English and the Continental Germanic Languages*, 2nd edn (Innsbruck, 1985), and the review and discussion of the question of the North-West Germanic theory in Matthew Townend, *Language and History in Viking Age England: Linguistic Relations between Speakers of Old Norse and Old English* (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 21-32.

² Townend, *Language and History*.

³ Cf. Dance, 'North Sea Currents'.

⁴ E.G. Pétursson, 'Codex Regius', in Philip Pulsiano *et al.*, eds, *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York, 1993).

⁵ For general presentations and discussions of Eddic poetry, see Joseph Harris, 'Eddic Poetry', in Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, eds, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Ithaca, 1985), pp. 68-156; Terry Gunnell, 'Eddic Poetry', in Rory McTurk, ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 82-100. On the problem of dating Eddic poems, see Bjarne Fidjestøl, *The Dating of Eddic Poetry: A Historical Survey and Methodological Investigation*, ed. Odd Einar Haugen (Copenhagen, 1999).

century manuscripts.⁶ Contrary to Eddic verse, however, they are often ascribed a named author, date, place, and context of composition.⁷ Both their recorded situatedness and the high complexity of their formal features must have ensured their relatively accurate preservation as oral texts over the centuries before they were committed to writing.⁸ In other words, one can be more confident, in general, in using skaldic verse attributed to named poets from the ninth to the eleventh century as a valid source of comparative evidence — although this is more true about panegyrics than about the so-called ‘occasional’ verse (*lausavísur*). Later skaldic poems will be considered when deemed of particular interest to the subject, though due mention will be made of the uncertain weight of their interpretative value. Most of the skaldic stanzas (and a number of Eddic ones as well) actually survive in a prosimetrum context, typically embedded in sagas. Old Norse prose being of post-Viking Age composition, it falls outside the scope of the study. However, in some cases short prose passages may have accompanied corresponding stanzas from early on or indeed may have been composed together with the verses.⁹ In such cases, then, and when it may shed light on the discussion, I mention prose evidence.

In the specific case of linguistic-literary links between Old Norse and Old English, comparatively late evidence from poetry, when carefully assessed, can remain pertinent. Even in later stages of skaldic verse (at least in that still recorded in the traditional metres), major aspects of both form and content still present continuities with earlier poems, even though the influence of secular foreign models and ecclesiastical

⁶ Some skaldic verse is also found in runic inscriptions, notably on the Karlevi stone; cf. Jesch, *Ships and Men*, pp. 1-15.

⁷ On skaldic verse, see Roberta Frank, ‘Skaldic Poetry’, in Clover and Lindow, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, pp. 157-96; Diana Whaley, ‘Skaldic Poetry’, in McTurk, *Companion*, pp. 479-502.

⁸ Judith Jesch, ‘Poetry in the Viking Age’, in Stefan Brink, ed., in collaboration with Neil Price, *The Viking World* (London and New York, 2008), pp. 291-8, at pp. 295-7.

⁹ For discussion of the relationship between Old Norse prose and verse, see for example Heather O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford, 2005); on simultaneous (or not) composition, cf. pp. 3-4 and notes with bibliography.

Latin verse and changes in taste are starting to alter the skaldic register.¹⁰ Icelandic poets seem to have been self-consciously perpetuating an archaic idiom artificially removed from spoken dialects,¹¹ which must have been conducive to at least a partial retention of the system of themes and motifs embedded in traditional phraseology. Thus for example later, post-eleventh-century skaldic praise poems still tend to refer to persons and events well localized in time and space not only in a metre well-preserved from the Viking Age but also in a highly archaic language, a circumlocutory linguistic code whose imagery constantly conjures figures, feats, and motifs which can only be meaningfully located in a distant legendary or mythological past.¹² A similar conservatism of the traditional poetic language and diction, it may be noted, also characterises the Old English corpus, whose remarkably uniform features across several centuries probably point to poets deliberately and purposefully sustaining the vitality of an archaic style.¹³ This is not to say, of course, that authors who deliberately archaized were thereby able to preserve older stages of poetry in some frozen, variation-free state. Nevertheless, this shared conservatism means that there are opportunities to meaningfully compare the two poetic languages.

Another challenge in conducting a comparative approach is the disparity of form and poetic techniques. In contrast to most Old English verse, the form of Old Norse poetry is stanzaic, and the fact that stanzas form distinctive blocks implies different consequences for the flow of meaning. While many Eddic poems are set in *fornyrðislag* which is largely comparable to the standard Old English metrical system, as both directly descend from the Germanic alliterative measure, there are however many departures from this norm in Old Norse verse. Some are slight variations (like the Eddic

¹⁰ Cf. Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 112-40, 206, and 233.

¹¹ Michael Barnes, 'Language', in McTurk, *Companion*, pp. 173-89, at p. 187.

¹² Clunies Ross, *History*, pp. 121ff.

¹³ Elizabeth M. Tyler, *Old English Poetics: The Aesthetics of the Familiar in Anglo-Saxon England* (York, 2006), pp. 3, 5-8, 157-60, and 170-2.

ljóðaháttir), but most Old Norse metres (like the skaldic *dróttkvætt*) are elaborations which go well beyond the shared traditional format.¹⁴ *Dróttkvætt*, the most widespread skaldic metre, is the most problematic for comparison, since its demanding requirements of alliteration, internal rhymes, and syllable count entail that the resulting structure appears very distinct from Old English verse (with the latter's patterns of variation and parallelism and its deployment of rhythmically declined formulaic phrases). Skaldic verse is densely informed by the use of kennings, or semantically specific metaphorical circumlocutions,¹⁵ which are not a distinctive feature of Old English verse; but the tensions at play between the components of a kenning and between signifier and signified can be conceptualised in ways useful to the interpretation of Old English cryptic and riddling 'shadow' phrases. A more fundamental feature of Old Norse poetic language, however, is the deployment of a range of synonymous or proximate poetic terms, or *heiti*; this characteristic is shared with Old English poetic language, along with many cognate *heiti*. Finally, at a larger level of style, Old Norse shares with Old English a number of ways of expressing traditional imagery and themes,¹⁶ which implies that in this comparative study both presence and absence of analogues for particular subthemes of 'shadow' are valuable results apt to be meaningfully interpreted.

¹⁴ For brief accounts of Eddic and skaldic metres, see Russell Poole, 'Metre and Metrics', in McTurk, *Companion*, pp. 265-84. See further Kari Ellen Gade, *The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry* (Ithaca and London, 1995).

¹⁵ Bjarne Fidjestøl, 'The Kenning System. An Attempt at a Linguistic Analysis', in Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal, eds, and Peter Foote, tr., *Bjarne Fidjestøl: Selected Papers* (Odense, 1997), pp. 16-67, esp. pp. 17-21.

¹⁶ Cf. for example the comparative studies by Lars Lönnroth, 'Iqrð fannz æva né upphiminn', in Ursula Dronke *et al.*, eds, *Speculum Norroenum* (Odense, 1985), pp.310-27; Karin Olsen, 'Metaphorical Density in Old English and Old Norse Poetry', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 118 (2002), pp. 171-95.

3.1 'DARKNESS' IN OLD NORSE

Words that can be thought to belong to the most direct and unequivocal part of the semantic field of the 'dark' can be divided into the same four groups as in the case of Old English:

1 – Darkness in the most general sense: *myrkvi* / *myrkr* ('darkness') and *myrkr* ('dark'), *døkk* ('dark') and *døkkva* ('to darken'), *røkr* ('darkness, twilight') and *røkva* or *rekva* ('to grow dark'), *húm* ('darkness, twilight'), *nifl-* ('darkness'), *dimmr* ('dark, dim, dusky'), *ám* ('dark, darkish'), *kám* ('dark, darkish'), *nótt* ('night'), *njól* ('night');

2 – Darkness and shadow: *skyggva* ('to overshadow') and the corresponding past participle *skyggðr* used adjectivally ('?bright, polished');

3 – Darkness and blackness: *svartr* ('black') and *sortna* ('to grow black'), *blakkr* ('black'), *sám* ('swarthy, blackish');

4 – Darkness and greyness or other dark colour: *grár* ('grey'), *hárr* ('hoary, grey-haired'), *blár* ('dark, blue, pale, livid'), *hǫss* ('grey'), *brúnn* ('brown, dark brown, dark red'), *jarpr* ('brown, dark').

Three further groups obtain in which the notion of 'darkness' is compounded with elements that introduce a certain degree of semantic paradoxicality:

5 – Darkness and mist: *myrkvi* ('darkness, fog, mist'), *þoka* ('fog, mist');

6 – Darkness and lividity or pallor: *fǫlr* ('pale, dun, grey'), *blár* ('dark, blue, pale, livid');

7 – Darkness and brightness: *skyggðr* ('?bright, polished' — literally 'overshadowed').

It may be helpful to review the main points of congruency and divergence between this initial picture and the one that had introduced the study of Old English

‘shadow’ words.¹⁷ Ideally, a comparative framework would rest on cognate words and a recognizable parallelism between patterns of meaning distribution in the two languages. Despite the linguistic proximity, however, the situation does not allow such a systematic comparison. Even so, the introductory description just provided already reveals several points of resonance with the Old English evidence; these shall be made fully apparent in the subsections to follow. Regarding the problem of genetic and semantic congruency, three observations can be noted. One concerns the apparent dearth of close Old Norse poetic equivalents for the sense ‘shadow’. Unlike several other Germanic languages, e.g. Gothic, Old Saxon, and, even more remarkably, modern Norwegian, no cognate of Old English *scead(u)* is recorded in Old Norse.¹⁸ The nearest semantic equivalent is *skuggi* (‘shadow, shade’), a cognate of Old English *scua*, but it does not occur in poetry at all. Nevertheless, a rare derivative of *skuggi* does occur in verse, albeit infrequently, namely the verb *skyggva* and its participial/adjectival form *skyggðr* whose recorded meanings, as implied above, suggest the kind of ambivalence that seems indeed to be characteristic of ‘shadow’ words. Conversely, it is not always pertinent to conduct systematically comparative studies of cognates; thus the Old English pair *blæc/blāc* strictly corresponds to the Old Norse *blakkr/bleikr*, but *blakkr* is too rare and too restricted in usage and moreover does not seem engaged in plays of sound and sense with *bleikr*, while such a paronomasia has been shown to be a major factor in the Old English cognates. Finally, lexical evidence does not allow one to posit the existence of a semantic relationship linking ‘darkness’ to Old Norse *fár/fáðr/fáinn* (‘?painted, adorned, shining’) and *fránn* (‘?shining’) even though these words (except *fránn*) are cognates of Old English *fāh*; as the study of the latter has suggested, however, an investigation into the patterns of usage of these Old Norse near-equivalents should be most rewarding for

¹⁷ Cf. §2.1.

¹⁸ *AeEW*, s.v. *sceadu*.

the mapping of the ‘shadow’ theme. Therefore, *fár/fáðr/fánn* and *fránn* can be added to the above list (in the subdivision (7): Darkness and brightness).

In view of that tentative model compounded by the reasons discussed above and similar considerations, it will be most fruitful to focus on the following words (including their word-families when relevant): *myrkr*; *skyggðr*; *døkk*; *nifl-*; *blár*; *fölr*; and *fár* together with *fránn*.

3.2 STUDIES OF OLD NORSE ‘SHADOW’ WORDS

3.2.1 *Myrk-*

The root *myrk-* provides the Old Norse language with its most extensive (and hence surely commonest) part of lexis dedicated to the expression of the notion ‘darkness’. This is indicated first by the number and variety of recorded words built on this stem — more than twenty simplex and compound words, including nouns, adjectives, and verbs — and by the relative frequency of a subset of this lexis, and also by the rather even distribution of these words across both the prose and the poetic corpus.¹⁹ By contrast, all the other words that also seem to have ‘darkness’ as a primary denotation (*døkk* / *døkkva*, *dimmr*, and *røkr* / *røkva*) appear as considerably more restricted in terms of word-formation, usage, and connotations.

¹⁹ This is already apparent when one peruses the entries beginning with *myrk-* in Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd edn by William A. Craigie (Oxford, 1957) (hereafter *CV*) and Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon poeticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis / Ordbog over det Norsk-Islandske Skjaldesprog*, 2nd edn by Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1931) (hereafter *LP*). *CV* contains examples from poetry but tends to focus more on prose, while *LP* is almost exclusively devoted to poetic vocabulary; the entries in both works overlap to a significant extent. For prose, cf. Johann Fritzner, *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*, 2nd edn (Kristiania, 1886–96), s.v. *myrkr* and related forms.

The most frequent of these words, in both prose and verse, are the adjective *myrkr* and the noun *myrkr* (for most purposes the latter may be grouped together with the morphologically and semantically very proximate noun *myrkvi*, which occurs mainly in prose). As regards its distribution and apparent main sense, *myrkr*'s nearest Old English equivalents would be the common terms *þȳstre* and *þēostru* ('dark/darkness'). However, the Old Norse words' cognate in Old English is *myrce*,²⁰ also appearing as both adjective and noun, a rare and ambivalent 'shadow' word.²¹ This opens up a point to explore, namely whether the Old Norse evidence can reveal some subtler and more specific analogy of usage between these cognates.²²

The root *myrk-* is found nineteen times in Eddic verse.²³ While the adjective *myrkr* accounts for seven of them, the simplex noun *myrkr* occurs only once. The remaining eleven are all compound nouns in which *myrk-* is the determining first element (alliterating on all occasions), to the exception of one adjectival compound in which *myrkr* is the base word. This predominance of compounds is striking; such a situation often characterises rare, archaic, and semantically elusive words.²⁴ This distribution contrasts with that of the Old English potential equivalents *þȳstre/þēostru*, a disparity which suggests that in poetry *myrk-* is not as 'unmarked' as could be initially assumed and invites further investigation, which follows.

The network of associations of *myrk-* in Eddic verse can be brought down to three elements, essentially: night, forest, and flame — a remarkably limited variety for a main darkness word. The most natural of these, the darkness of night, is discernible in

²⁰ *AnEW*, s.v. *myrkr*.

²¹ See discussion in §2.2.7.

²² All these questions, however, cannot be fully answered before the end of this chapter and a comprehensive assessment of the Old Norse evidence, even though the present section can offer some insights.

²³ Unless otherwise stated, Eddic poems are quoted from Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, by stanza and line number. Translations are mine.

²⁴ The Old English 'shadow' word *scua* bears some resemblance in this matter: cf. §2.2.2.

no more than four instances, only one of which is an explicit collocation.²⁵ It occurs in the so-called *Hervararkviða* ('The Lay of Hervǫr'), a series of strophes in Eddic metre embedded in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, one of the legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur*), and set in the typically Eddic metre *fornyrðislag*; a shepherd tries to dissuade Hervǫr from proceeding to the burial-mounds of her father and his men, warning her against the burning mounds (discussed further below) but also and firstly, against *myrkvar grímur* ('myrkr masks (i.e. night)', 5.4).²⁶ It is noteworthy that the word *gríma* is used here. This is a not unfrequent metaphorical term for 'night' in poetry,²⁷ but its main literal meaning in prose and verse is 'hood', 'mask', hence (notably in skaldic verse) 'helmet'. If the notion of darkness as a heavy, concealing covering is present here, as it often is in the case of Old English *pýstre/pēostru*, in context it could resonate with the barrows covering the dead; but as far as *myrk-* is concerned, it would be a unique occurrence of such a motif. The plural ('*myrkvar grímur*') in the sense 'by night' or 'into the night' is unusual but compares well with parallel Old English expressions such as *deorcum nihtum* ('in dark nights', *Beowulf* 275b, 2211a) or *nihtelm* ('night-helm', *Beowulf* 1789b, *Andreas* 123b, *Guthlac B* 970a, *Elene* 78b, *The Wanderer* 100a); the effect might be an intensifier of the sensation of fear (vaguely gesturing towards not solely darkness or night itself, but to a host of dark unknown things?). It is therefore suggestive that the Old English cognate *grīma*, which has a very similar semantic range to the Old Norse word, has in addition a recorded sense 'spectre'.²⁸

More than half of the Eddic occurrences of *myrk-*, ten out of nineteen, represent the concept of the 'Dark Forest' or 'Mirkwood' which always involves the collocation of *myrk-* with *viðr* ('wood, forest'), as either the descriptive phrase with the adjective

²⁵ The three remaining ones are *Hávamál* 82.2, *Guðrúnarkviða II* 12.1, and *Skírnismál* 10.1.

²⁶ Andreas Heusler and Wilhelm Ranisch, eds, *Eddica Minora* (Dortmund, 1903), p. 14.

²⁷ It is one of the *heiti* or poetic synonyms for 'night' in the Eddic mythological poem *Alvíssmál* 30.3.

²⁸ *BT*, s.v. *gríma*.

preceding the noun, *myrkr viðr*, or the compound *myrkviðr*, the latter usually being interpreted as a place-name by editors.²⁹ This motif is found across a significant spectrum of the Eddic poetry, in both the mythological and the heroic poems, both the putatively old and those regarded as more recent. The most readily observable quality about the *myrkr* wood is that it is always presented as a boundary between two lands or worlds.³⁰ Beyond this border lies the unknown, dangerous and/or supernatural. In *Lokasenna* 42.3 the ride of fire-giants ‘through *Myrk*-wood’ is one of the signs of Ragnarøk. The beginning of *Völundarkviða* features supernatural swan-maidens who come from the south flying *myrcvið í gognom* (‘across the *myrk*-wood’, 1.1) and eventually return home *á myrqvan við* (‘over the *myrkr* wood’, 3.4). In *Atlakviða*, generally regarded as one of the oldest Eddic poems, *Myrk*-wood appears three times, conceptualized as the ominous boundary between the lands of the Burgundian princes and those of king Atli and his fearsome Huns: its crossing precipitates the tale of deception and murder. Near the end of *Atlakviða* a suggestively similar place-name, *Myrk-heimr* (‘*Myrk*-land or -world’, 42.2), apparently refers to the land of the snake-pit where Gunnarr had been put to death by Atli, and may therefore reflect an association between darkness and serpents.³¹ In addition, however, that same land is also called *heiðr* (‘heath, high land’, 32.4), while in *Hlǫðskviða*, another Eddic piece found in *Hervarar saga*, the place-name *Myrcheiðr* (18.2) seems to share its referent with *Myrcviðr* which appears in a preceding stanza (9.1) and which an intercalated prose passage subsequently explains as ‘the forest that separates the land of the Huns from the

²⁹ The former in *Völundarkviða* 3.4, *Rígsþula* 37.1, *Oddrúnargrátr* 25.2; the latter in *Völundarkviða* 1.1, *Lokasenna* 42.3, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 51.3, *Atlakviða* 3.2, 5.4, 13.2, *Hlǫðskviða* 9.1.

³⁰ See further Klaus von See *et al.*, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*. Vols. 2-6 (Heidelberg, 1997–) (hereafter *Komm* followed by volume), vol. 3, pp. 127-8.

³¹ Ursula Dronke, ed., *The Poetic Edda. I: Heroic Poems* (Oxford, 1969), p. 66.

land of the Goths'.³² In short, there are twelve occurrences in Eddic verse of a concept expressed by *viðr* (sporadically *heiðr* or *heimr*) and qualified by *myrk-*, in which a natural boundary of wilderness is loaded with ominous connotations and expectations as to what happens if it is crossed.

The association with fire has important points of contact with what precedes. The only explicit collocation is found in the mythological poem *Skírnismál*, in which the god Freyr sends Skírnir on a mission to woo Gerðr on his behalf. To do so, Skírnir must reach the world of the giants, and therefore asks for an appropriate steed (8.1-2):

Mar gefðu mér þá, þann er mic um myrqvan beri,
vísan vafrlöga

[‘Give me that horse which would carry me through the *myrkr* (adj.), wise flickering flame ...’]

Freyr’s answer (‘I give you that horse...’, 9.1-2) then repeats almost verbatim the words of the bidding, including *myrqvan ... / vísan vafrlöga*. The flame in question presumably represents the boundary that has to be overcome to get from the abodes of the Æsir to the lands of the giants;³³ once there, Skírnir says that he has crossed *eikinn fúr* (‘the mighty/fierce fire’, 18.3). The qualifiers *myrkr*, *víss*, *vafr-*, and *eikinn* seem to underscore the dangerous, hostile, and uncanny character of the barrier. The motif of an encircling, shielding flame is otherwise best known in Old Norse-Icelandic tradition from the legendary material in prose and verse concerning the hero Sigurðr and involving two versions of the crossing by the hero of such flame-walls which guard a valkyrie or a woman with valkyrie characteristics.³⁴ The concept of a flame as a boundary between worlds exists in classical as well as Christian Latin sources (e.g.

³² Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, II (Reykjavík, 1954), p. 60. It is worth noticing that a variant manuscript reading in *Hlǫðskviða* is *Myrkviðar heiðr* (‘the heath of *Myrk*-wood’) (cf. Heusler, *Eddica*, p. 7).

³³ Though Dronke, *Mythological Poems*, p. 406 and *passim*, sees the flame-wall as surrounding the giantess Gerðr’s hall.

³⁴ The later prose tradition, however, relates only one flame-wall and one crossing. The main prose sources are as follows: *Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 27-29 (Guðni Jónsson, *Sögur*, I, pp. 175ff), and the prose introduction of *Sigrdrífumál*. The poetic sources are *Fáfnismál* 42, 43, and *Helreið Brynhildar* 9, 10.

Isidore's *Etymologies*), and part of this continental tradition was known in medieval Iceland and England, but its manifestations are manifold and diverse and its origin and subsequent evolution are therefore difficult to trace.³⁵ Its recording in Old Norse traditional sources (if it is indeed the same motif) displays specific traits, notably linguistic ones, which make its study more rewarding if it is conducted with a focus on how the motif works within its own Old Norse literary environment (with an eye on possible close verbal analogues in Old English) rather than by reference to its wider and entangled European history.

The notion of a *dark* (and 'flickering') flame-wall, in particular, whatever the ultimate origin of its separate constituents (possibly learned and Latin),³⁶ appears as an original Old Norse association. The only verbal analogue outside Old Norse is a passage in the Old English poem *Daniel*, rich with 'shadow', in which a fire is called *wylm þæs wæfran liges* ('surge of the flickering flame', 240a) and shortly after *bryne blacan fyres* ('burning of black/shining [*blæc/blāc*] fire', 245).³⁷ It has been speculated therefore that *vaf(r)logi* is a loanword from Old English,³⁸ but the lack of contextual connections between the narratives of *Daniel* and *Skírnismál* does not substantiate the claim for such a direct relationship. Furthermore, though **vaf(r)* is not recorded, the root *vaf(r)-* is not uncommon in Old Norse.³⁹ On the other hand, the collocation *myrkr + -logi* is comparable with *svartalogi* ('black flame'), a variant manuscript reading in *Vafþrúðnismál* 51.2, although the preferred one is *Surta logi* (corrected to *Surtar logi* ('Surtr's flame')).⁴⁰

³⁵ For a summary, see *Komm* 2, pp. 80-2.

³⁶ *Komm* 2, p. 83.

³⁷ On the black/shining ambivalence see §2.2.5.

³⁸ Jöran Sahlgren, 'Sagan om Frö och Gärd', *Namn och Bygd* 16 (1928), pp.1-19, at p. 17.

³⁹ Cf. *CV* and *LP*, s.vv. *vefr* ('web'), *vefa* and *vefja* ('weave, twist') and past participle *vafðr*, *vafra* ('wander'). Old English *wæfre* is a cognate. In both languages is evidenced a semantic gradation of the sort 'weave' > 'move quickly' > 'flicker'.

⁴⁰ *Svartalogi* is found in the early-fourteenth-century Codex Upsaliensis, MS. DG 11. *Komm* 2, p. 81, simply dismisses *svartalogi* as inferior. However, such a variant testifies to the fact that associating

The *Skírnismál* poet is not content with repeating the adjective *myrkr* in the first line of two successive stanzas in relation to the flame, but uses it a third time in a prominent position at the onset of the immediately following stanza (10.1-3):

Myrct er úti, mál qveð ec ocr fara
úrig fiöll yfir

[It is *myrkr* outside, I say it is time for both of us to travel through the 'damp mountains ...]

But this stanza reveals a complete change of setting; the messenger is now alone, facing the dreadful crossing. Immediately afterwards, the setting dramatically changes again: rider and horse are already on the other side. Since the account of the actual crossing of the *vafurlogi* is conspicuous by its absence, stanza 10 is the closest an audience could get to it; its dramatic indication of darkness outside and mountains ahead provides the aural or visual link — through repetition of *myrkr* — between the earlier emphatic mention of the flame and its confrontation by Skírnir (who at this point in stanza 10 can perhaps be imagined to be very close to the flaming boundary, perhaps already overwhelmed by its *myrk*-ness).

Another consequence of this view about the progression of the narrative and the role of *myrkr* is an implicit connection in *Skírnismál* between riding through a flame boundary and riding through a mountain boundary. Both are associated with *myrkr* and the logic of the narrative removes the possibility of distinguishing between the two phenomena. In this perspective, Skírnir's ride through murky mountains (*myrkr* and *úrig*, the latter possibly having a connotation of darkness as well⁴¹) which become associated with a flame-wall is analogous to two other types of Eddic riding. One is Sigurðr's crossing(s) of the valkyrie's *vafurlogi*, with recurrence of the following motifs: the special horse, the place on a mountain/hill, the absence of a direct account of the

certain types of flame with darkness could have been perceived as a valid literary motif. And, as von See notes (*ibid.*), the name of the demon *Surtr* itself is etymologically identical with *svartr* ('black').

⁴¹ Cf. Beatrice La Farge and John Tucker, eds, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda Based on Hans Kuhn's Kurzes Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1992), s.v.

crossing itself, the overtones of darkness. As for the last of these, they can be only dimly felt at best in the verses but were apparently understood as such by the author of *Völsunga saga* who fleshes them out in the prose: ‘it was as if he rode in *myrkvi*’.⁴² The other analogue is represented by the crossings of *Myrkviðr* in *Atlakviða* and elsewhere, in which horse-riding and darkness are explicit, and again one never gets to know what really happens *during* the crossing.⁴³ A further verbal parallel with *Skírnismál* is yielded by *Rígsþula* 37.1-2:

Reið hann meirr þaðan myrcan við,
 hélug fiöll, unz at hóllo kom; ...

[And from there he rode through the *myrk* wood, (through) frosty mountains, until he came to a hall; ...]

The collocation ‘*myrk* wood’ + (next line) ‘frosty mountains’ in this poem strengthens the case for there being a tight relationship between the unspecified darkness (*Myrct er úti*) and the ‘damp mountains’ which must be ridden through in *Skírnismál*.

There are several more loosely related instances associating *myrk*- with at least some of the following elements: going/riding through, otherworldly beings, high lands, and boundary flames. One is the crossing, by the swan-maidens in *Völundarkviða*, of the *myrk* wood by means of flying not riding, as seen above. The compound *myrkriður* (‘(female) *myrk*-riders’) in *Hárbarðsljóð* 20.1 apparently denotes witches through the notion of riding in (or through) the dark of night (on dark wolves?). Finally, the setting in the above-mentioned *Hervararkviða* is an island covered with burial-mounds around which, as both the verses and the prose links make clear, flames are raging. The

⁴² Guðni Jónsson, *Sögur*, I, p. 176.

⁴³ In *Atlakviða* the adjective *ókunna* attached to *Myrkviðr* underlines the sense of mystery and unpredictability (compare *vísan*, *vafn-*, and *eikinn* about the *vafnlogi* in *Skírnismál*).

shepherd's warning to Hervör before she proceeds further juxtaposes darkness, flame, and mounds (5):⁴⁴

‘Heimskr þykki mér,
sá er heðra ferr,
maðr einn saman
myrkvar grímur;
hyrr er á sveimun,
haugar opnask,
brenn fold ok fen:
förum harðara!’

[‘Foolish he seems to me, the one who from here goes further, a man all alone to the *myrkr* masks (i.e. night); fire is soaring/flickering, mounds are opening, burns earth and fen: let us go (forth) faster!’]

The structure and wording of this stanza present intriguing parallels with *Skírnismál* 10: first is mentioned darkness, using *myrkr*, then hills, together with the explicit threat of a mighty fire (implicit in *Skírnismál*), and even the urge to go forth is present and expressed with the same verb *fara* as in *Skírnismál* (*ferr*, and compare *förum* with *Skírnismál* (10.1) *mál er ocr fara*).⁴⁵ Incidentally but again interestingly, the prose passage that follows in the saga, just as the prose link in *Völsunga saga* mentioned above, interprets the verse as meaning that that which constitutes the flames is *myrkvi*: ‘She rushed forth (*óð fram*) into these fires as if into *myrkvi* (*sem í myrkva*)’,⁴⁶ i.e. ‘as if they were darkness’ or ‘shadows’ or perhaps ‘fog’, an almost insubstantial curtain.

In short, the distribution and usage of the root *myrk-* provides a verbal as well as conceptual link between a very limited set of otherworldly elements: guarding flame-walls, flames around burial-mounds, and liminal forests or mountains. These are as elusive in substance as they are ominous when mentioned, a characteristic which may have attracted a darkness/‘shadow’ word, as the results garnered from Old English

⁴⁴ Heusler, *Eddica*, p. 14.

⁴⁵ The shepherd's injunction is of course to *fara* back from there, not forward as in *Skírnismál*; the last line of his stanza is slightly ambivalent in this respect, though.

⁴⁶ Guðni Jónsson, *Sögur*, II, p. 15. A variant manuscript reading is *reyk* (‘(into) smoke’) in the place of *myrkva* (cf. Heusler, *Eddica*, p. 15).

evidence would suggest. *Myrk-*, therefore, plays a key part in the ‘shadow’ theme, in a way that indicates that it is semantically more ambivalent than expected for a main darkness word (certainly more so than Old English *þýstre/þēostru*). These associations are more easily gathered from Eddic than from skaldic verse, as the latter’s prolific use of conventional kenning-types often makes it difficult to try and connect the connotations of single verbal elements with the narrative’s themes and structure. Nevertheless, some of the skaldic evidence — most usefully, the earlier part — validates a number of the ‘shadow’-related associations argued for on the basis of Eddic poems as motifs having enjoyed some currency in the early poetic language.

There are close to thirty occurrences of *myrk-* in skaldic verse.⁴⁷ Skalds of the early period seem to have employed it more rarely than later ones; only three instances belong to the ninth and tenth century where, contrary to what obtains in Eddic poetry, *myrk-* is outnumbered by several less darkness-specific words such as the adjective *grár*. The late-tenth-century poem *Vellekla* by the skald Einarr Helgason skálaglamm provides one of the early examples in the kenning *myrk- Hlǫðvinjar -markar* (27.3),⁴⁸ i.e. ‘[king] of the Hlǫðyn (a mythological name of the Earth) of the *myrk*-forest (*myrkmǫrk*)’. Interestingly, *myrkmǫrk* is probably conceptually akin to the *Myrkviðr* of Eddic verse, and the remainder of the stanza where it occurs includes mentions of crossing (from the north) and frost (compare *Skírnismál* and *Rígpula* above).⁴⁹ The collocation of *myrk-* with *mǫrk* also obtains in two eleventh-century poems. Hofgarða-

⁴⁷ When possible, skaldic verse is quoted from the available volumes of the ongoing Skaldic Project, Margaret Clunies Ross *et al.*, eds., *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2007–) (hereafter *SkP* followed by volume). Verse not yet published in *SkP* volumes is quoted from Finnur Jónsson, ed., *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*. Vols. A I, A II (tekst efter håndskrifterne) and B I, BII (rettet tekst) (Copenhagen, 1912-15) (hereafter *Skj* followed by volume). When relevant I quote from the Íslenzk Fornrit editions of sagas and Anthony Faulkes’ edition of *Snorra Edda* if their readings seem superior to Finnur’s. All translations are mine.

⁴⁸ *Skj* B I, p. 122.

⁴⁹ *Myrkviðr* also appears in a verse in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, in the snake-kenning *hringr myrkviðar* (‘ring of the *myrk*-wood’), *Skj* B II, p. 254.

Refr Gestsson uses the kenning *myrkdreki marka ... borðs* ('myrk-dragon of the board of the forests' > 'spear') in his *Kvæði um konungsgjafir* (2.1), while Illugi Bryndælaskáld employs *myrkaurriði markar* ('myrk-trout of the forest' > 'dragon') in his *Kvæði um Harald harðráða* (1.3).⁵⁰ Although this pairing can be explained by the expectation in *dróttkvætt* metre of internal half-rhymes of this type (in odd lines),⁵¹ it is nevertheless noteworthy that in Old English verse a key aspect of the 'shadow' theme is exemplified by the occurrence of *myrce* in half-rhyming collocations with *mōr* and *mearc*,⁵² which are semantically proximate to (and, in the case of the latter, cognate with) Old Norse *mǫrk*.

An association with mountains is perhaps detectable in two kennings for 'cliff' based on *myrkbein* ('myrk-bone'), in the ninth-century poem *Haustlǫng* (16.6) by Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni and in a tenth-century verse by Vǫlu-Steinn.⁵³ Another kenning that also resonates with the Eddic evidence occurs in the twelfth-century *Harmsól* by Gamli kanóki (61.3-4) where *Mistar myrkleygr* ('Mist's myrk-flame' > 'sword', Mist being a valkyrie-name)⁵⁴ is all the more suggestive because *leygr* is related to the second element in *vafrlögi*. In later skaldic verse, when Christian themes gradually replace traditional associations, *myrk-* often takes on a spiritual connotation; one of its four instances in the famous fourteenth-century religious poem *Lilja* by Eysteinn Ásgrímsson⁵⁵ is the nominal expression (or compound) *súta(-)myrkr* ('the *myrkr* of cares, anxiety', 77.8).

⁵⁰ *Skj* B I, pp. 295 and 354, respectively. The second kenning should perhaps be understood, rather, as 'trout of the *myrkr* forest' (cf. Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Skáldskaparmál*. 2 vols. (London, 1998) [hereafter *Skism* followed by volume number], vol. 2, s.v. *myrkaurriði*); if so, it would provide another example of the *myrk*-wood motif.

⁵¹ Cf. e.g. Poole, 'Metre and Metrics', pp. 271-2.

⁵² See further §2.2.7, and §4.1.1.

⁵³ *Skj* B I pp. 17 and 93 respectively.

⁵⁴ *Skj* B I p. 563.

⁵⁵ *Skj* B II pp. 390-416.

3.2.2 *Skyggðr*

Although Old Norse *skuggi*, cognate with Old English *scua* and (in the absence of any cognate of Old English *sceadu*) representing the meaning ‘shadow’, only occurs in prose, forms of the verb *skyggva* do appear in verse (seven instances). This verb is related to *skuggi* and its primary meaning in prose is ‘to overshadow, cast a shadow, darken’.⁵⁶ This sense, however, seems never to make it into poetry, except in the late (fourteenth-century) and anonymous Christian poem *Máriudrápa* which has the expression *þar er aldri skyggir* (‘where it never grows dark’, 18.4).⁵⁷ All other six poetic occurrences apparently correspond to prose sense (3) in Fritzner’s entry for *skyggva*: *polere, gjøre spejlblank* (‘to polish, render as shiny/glossy as a mirror’), used of swords and helmets; they all are, moreover, in the form of the past participle *skyggðr*, which seems to have acquired adjectival status with the meaning ‘bright, polished’ in both prose and verse. A typical example of prose usage is *hjálmr skyggðr sem gler* (‘a helmet as *skyggðr* as glass’).⁵⁸

Two of the poetic occurrences are found in *fornyrðislag*, the typical Eddic metre. In his ninth-century *Poem about Haraldr hárfagri*, Þjóðólfr ór Hvíni concludes a stanza that lists splendid weapons (‘bright mail-coats’, ‘sharp swords’) with *skjolda skyggða / ok skrautbúna* (‘shields *skyggðr* and richly adorned’, 3.7).⁵⁹ The adjective is glossed as ‘resplendent’ in the Skaldic Project database.⁶⁰ In an anonymous *þula* of sword-names which Finnur Jónsson appended to Snorri’s *Skáldskaparmál* and dated to the twelfth century, *skygðir* figures as one of many *heiti* for ‘sword’.⁶¹ Faulkes glosses it

⁵⁶ *AnEW*, s.v. *skyggva*. Fritzner, *Ordbog*, s.v. *skyggva*.

⁵⁷ *Skj B II*, p. 500.

⁵⁸ *CV*, s.v. *skyggðr*.

⁵⁹ *SkP VII.2*, p. 494.

⁶⁰ Presumably by R.D. Fulk who is charged with the edition of that poem in Volume I (forthcoming) of the Skaldic Project.

⁶¹ *Skism 1*, p. 119, verse 455.7.

as ‘highly polished’,⁶² apparently assuming *skygðir* = *skyggðr*; the name may indeed be a version of the past participle of *skyggva* or a form directly derived from it.⁶³ A *skyggðr* sword also features in a *dróttkvætt* stanza attributed by the author of *Kormáks saga* to Steinarr son of Qnundr sjóni (a tenth-century figure, also mentioned in two other sagas and in *Landnámabók*); the first *helmingr* (quatrain) is as follows.⁶⁴

Folk-Sýrar létk fjóra
 (frátt þú þess) ok átta
 skyggs fyr Skrýmis eggju
 skerðendr hliða verða; ...

[I cause four and eight injurers of battle-Freyja’s gates (> shield > warriors) to come upon the edge of *skyggðr* Skrýmir (did you hear about that?)]

Rory McTurk translates ‘of bright-polished Skrymir’ (Skrýmir being the sword’s name).⁶⁵ It is interesting to compare this to the first *helmingr* of stanza 7 in Þórbjörn hornklofi’s *Glymdrápa*, composed around 900.⁶⁶

Ríks (þreifsk reiddra øxa
 rymr; knóttu spjör glymjja)
 svartskyggð bitu seggi
 sverð þjóðkonungs ferðar, ...

[The clatter of brandished axes prevailed; spears rattled. The black-*skyggðr* swords of the host of the powerful king bit the warriors...]

The association in line 3 of a *skyggðr* sword with sharpness and the skothending *-ygg-* / *-egg-* recall line 3 of Steinarr’s stanza quoted just earlier. But what is more striking here is the compound adjective *svartskyggðr*. Although the notion of the darkness of the blade’s metal is not incompatible with that of it being polished to shine, the sudden concatenation of *skyggðr* with ‘black’ nonetheless produces something of an ambivalence. As has been seen, in poetry *skyggðr* is consistently applied to weapons,

⁶² *Skskm* 2, s.v. *skygðir*.

⁶³ The suffix *-ir* usually signals a *nomen agentis* (‘polisher’?), but compare in the same *þula* the sword-name *snyrtir*, surely related to the verb *snyrta* (‘to trim’).

⁶⁴ *Skj* B I, p. 89.

⁶⁵ In Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* (Reykjavík, 1997), vol. 1, p. 201.

⁶⁶ *Skj* B I, p. 21.

especially swords, with apparent reference to the metal's glow. This pattern, therefore, can be integrated into the pervading motif of the sword as light or fire, abundantly evidenced in sword-*heiti* (many of the names in the *þula* mentioned earlier are derived from roots expressing the idea 'light') and sword-kennings.⁶⁷ The prefixed element *svart-* perverts this expected visual image and forces one to envision instead some sort of paradox, such as 'dark light' or 'dark flame', for the aesthetic aspect underlying the sword metaphor. Furthermore, *svartskyggðr* may be a play on the intrinsic ambivalence of *skyggðr* — in context, 'bright', but literally and etymologically '(over)shadowed, darkened' — an ambivalence which in the other instances *seems* to play no part at all, but which may actually be active in more cases than we are aware.⁶⁸ There might be no ambivalence intended in such an example as *fagrskyggðr* ('fair-*skyggðr*') in a markedly Christian poem from the fourteenth century,⁶⁹ despite the parallelism of form between these two compounds. But, even without such hint of darkness as in *svartskyggðr*, the potential for double meaning is difficult to ignore especially when a sword is described, as in *Egils saga* where the famous tenth-century Icelandic poet-adventurer Egill Skalla-Grímsson utters the following stanza (also in *dróttkvætt*):⁷⁰

Höggum hialtvönd, skyggðum,
 hæfum rōnd með brandi,
 reynum randar mána,
 rjóðum sverð í blóði.
 Stýfum Ljót af lífi,
 leikum sárt við bleikan,
 kyrrum kappa errinn,
 komi qrn á hræ, járnum.

[Let us strike the sword, let us hit the shield with the polished (*skyggðum*) blade, let us try the sword, let us redden it with blood. Let us kill Ljótr, let us ill-treat the pallid one, let us make the pugnacious champion quiet with swords, let the eagle have carrion.]

⁶⁷ See Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik* (Bonn, 1921), pp. 150-64.

⁶⁸ Presumably, native Old Norse speakers would mentally associate immediately and naturally *skyggðr* with *skyggva* and (via the expected *i*-mutation) *skuggi*.

⁶⁹ *Guðmundardrápa* 43.2, by Árni Jónsson ábóti; *Skj* B II, p. 451.

⁷⁰ Bjarni Einarsson, ed., *Egils saga* (London, 2003), p. 120, and his translation. Cf. Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga*, ÍF 2 (Reykjavík, 1933), p. 204, and *Skj* A I, p. 56; in his *rettet tekst* (*Skj* B I, p. 49) Finnur Jónsson follows the readings of other mss where *skyggðum* is missing, but this is at the cost of the *skothending* in the first line.

If the *skyggðr* sword participates in the whole set of visual imagery pervading this stanza — sword as moon(light) (*randar mána*), blood-reddened sword, pale victim, and iron (*járnum* is set symmetrically to *skyggðum*) — then its potential glow/shadow ambivalence would harmonise well with these flashes of cold and gloomy death-dealing. In addition it may be noted that swords in general, and Egill's swords in particular, have a tendency to be called 'dark' in poetry, notwithstanding their attending flame-based metaphors.⁷¹

So it appears that, despite interpretative limitations owing to the scarcity of the surviving evidence, the words derived from *skuggi* that occur in poetry do participate in 'shadow' paradoxes.

3.2.3 *Døkk*

There are nineteen occurrences of the adjective *døkk* in Old Norse verse (including two compounds and one prefixed form), to which may be added one instance of the related verb *døkkva*. The word is found only four times in Eddic verse and three times in early skaldic verse. All the other skaldic occurrences come from the twelfth century or later. This suggests that *døkk* was mainly a rare and poetic word in the early period, and gained more popularity in post-Viking Age literature; the fact that it appears to be relatively frequent in prose would substantiate this scenario.⁷² A somewhat parallel evolution was that of Old English *deorc* ('dark') (rare and poetic in Old

⁷¹ Swords are often *blár*, an adjective whose connotations include darkness and (death-related) paleness, and indeed Egill calls his sword *blár* (Nordal, *Egils saga*, pp. 142 and 210); see §3.2.5 below.

⁷² See entries in Helle Degnbol *et al.*, *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (Copenhagen, 1989–), vol. 3, pp. 442-6.

English, gradually more common in later stages of the language). The two words, however, are not cognates.⁷³

Three Eddic instances provide three salient patterns of usage or themes to which many of the remaining instances can be compared. Evidence from both Eddic and skaldic verse, therefore, will be considered together. The prominent themes are constituted by *døkk*'s association with rocks and mountains, brightness, and ravens.

The crossing of dark, high places, as has been seen, was one of the main contexts for the deployment of *myrkr*.⁷⁴ An instance of *døkk* figures in a similar narrative situation in the Eddic poem *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* (47):

Þeir af ríki renna léto
Svipuð oc Sveggiuð, Sólheima til,
dala dōggóttá, dōccvar hlíðir;
scalf Mistar marr, hvars megir fóro.

[They let Svipuðr and Sveggiuðr run fast to Sun-lands, through dewy valleys, *døkk* slopes; the sea of Mist (> air) trembled where the kinsmen journeyed.]

Riding through dark and apparently dangerous landscapes that causes trembling recalls especially *Atlakviða* 13 (the ride through *Myrkviðr*), while the alliterative collocation of *døkk* with *dalr* ('valley') also occurs in a prose passage with poetic resonance in Snorri's *Gylfaginning*: Hermóðr on his *ride* to Hel traverses *døkkva dala ok djúpa* ('*døkk* and deep valleys').⁷⁵ In the latter example *døkk* replaces *dōgg* as the alliterating determinant of *dala*. From a comparison of these examples to another phrase from the Poetic Edda, *dōgg í djúpa dali* ('dew in the deep valley', *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* 28.6) — also involving horses — emerges a particular pattern. The context of crossing a

⁷³ Cf. *AnEW*, s.v. *døkk*; *AeEW*, s.v. *deorc*.

⁷⁴ See §3.2.1.

⁷⁵ Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (London, 1988) (hereafter *Gylf*), p. 47.

land-barrier seems connected to a kind of formulaic utterance formed out of three alliterating words:

dalr + *døkk* + *dogg*
 or + {either *døkk* or *dogg*} + *djúpr*

Døkk seems interchangeable with *dogg*, a fact which might be related to the phonetic proximity between these two words. This in turn could lead one to speculate on a possible congruency of connotations between *døkk* and *dogg*, as is perhaps also suggested by the adjective *úrigr* ('damp, ?dark'),⁷⁶ which qualifies mountains in *Skírnismál* 10.3 in a 'shadow' context.⁷⁷ On the other hand, *døkk* is not only applied to valleys and mountain slopes as here, but also to ominous rocks and caves in the expressions *í dökkum helli draugs* ('in the undead's *døkk* cave', Rognvaldr jarl kali Kolsson (12th century), *lausavísa* 3.3), *dökkva hamra* ('of *døkk* rocks', variant reading in *Bergbúa þátt*, verse 1.6), and *í firna dökkum ... / haugi* ('in the (undead's) extremely *døkk* mound', *Grettis saga*, verse 18.1-2).⁷⁸

The most interesting application of *døkk* to ravens is the ambivalent indication by Hnikarr (Óðinn in disguise) of a raven as a good omen in *Reginismál* (20.3-4):

dyggia fylgio hygg ec ins dœcqva vera
 at hrottameiði hrafns

[I think the *døkk* raven to be a worthy companion for the battle-tree (> warrior)]

Although this amounts to the somewhat surprisingly favourable statement that 'a dark raven is a good omen', the convoluted syntax obscures this meaning, rendering it more

⁷⁶ Cf. §3.2.1 above.

⁷⁷ See preceding note.

⁷⁸ Respectively *Skj* B I, p. 479; Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Harðar saga*, ÍF 13 (Reykjavík, 1991), p. 443; Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga*, ÍF 7 (Reykjavík, 1936).

disquieting than it purports to be.⁷⁹ Since *hrafns* is relegated to the very end of the sentence, one is first struck by the association (through alliteration and some degree of assonance) of *døkk* with *dyggr* in a line which can translate as ‘of good company I think is the dark...’ Dark things seldom make good companions in Old Norse culture. In addition, the word *fylgja* is at least potentially ambiguous since it often appears in another sense in prose, that of ‘fetch (portending death)’.⁸⁰ Within the logic of Old Norse battle symbolism, this omen is in fact double-edged. Presumably the raven is a good portent to one warrior because it portends the death of his opponent. One wonders whether the semantically misleading syntactic placement of *døkk* had a function (or at least a subliminal effect), since *døkkva vera* in isolation would translate as ‘of *døkk* men’, and the usage of the ‘shadow’ near-synonyms *fǫlr* and *blár* (see relevant sections in this chapter) would suggest the meaning ‘of dead men’. *Døkk* is associated with ravens on three more occasions. In one of them, *døkk* and *hrafn* are separated by one line and a half (Þjóðólfr Arnórsson’s eleventh-century *Sexstefja* 16.2-4).⁸¹ In the other two, the epithet is also separated from its referent, not so much or not only through syntax but by the imagery of the kennings. So in the expressions *hamdøkk Hlakkar haukr* (‘coat-*døkk* hawk of Hlökk (a valkyrie)’, *Háttatal* 5.5-6) and *døkkvalir dolgbrands* (‘*døkk*-falcons of the battle-sword’ Glúmr Geirason’s *lausavísa* from the tenth century),⁸² the raven is indirectly denoted by the paradoxical/unnatural association of *døkk* with not-very-dark birds.

Døkk is active in these circuitous structures essentially by way of the play on the poetic language’s conventional associations. Thus most of the remaining

⁷⁹ One could actually apply to these lines the remarks usually made about the twisted syntax of *dróttkvætt* metre, as for example by Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The dróttkvætt Stanza* (Ithaca and London, 1978), pp. 49-50.

⁸⁰ Fritzner, *Ordbog*, s.v. *fylgja*.

⁸¹ *SkP* II.1, p. 129.

⁸² Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Háttatal* (London, 1999) (hereafter *Hátt*), p. 6, and *Skj* B I, p. 68, respectively.

occurrences, even when they appear as isolated within a discussion of *døkk* only, reflect parts of the network of connections activated by the ‘shadow’ words examined in this chapter.

The connection of ‘shadow’ words with serpents (see §3.2.7.2, also §3.2.1) is operative in the case of *døkk* as well. Einarr Skúlason uses *døkk hrøkkviseiðr lyngs* (‘*døkk* coiling coalfish of the heath’, *Geisli* 16.2-3, 12th century) as a kenning for ‘snake’. An anonymous stanza dated by Finnur Jónsson to c. 999⁸³ includes two intercalated clauses; the first one (ll. 2-3) describes Óláfr Tryggvason’s famous ship *Ormr inn langi*: *Ormr brunar døkk at nökkva / hár* (‘the high, dark Ormr (=Serpent) glides towards the boat’); the second one takes up the same image and restates it (l. 7): *snákr skríðr, þars brim blíkir* (‘the snake crawls, while the sea shines’), and seems to confirm that *døkk* is used for the sake of the ship’s name, not because the referent is a ship.⁸⁴ Given the somewhat parallel syntactic structure of these clauses, the sea-gleaming seems to counterpoint the ship/serpent’s darkness. Expectations for such a contrast might have gone the other way too, however. In Old Norse poetry serpents are often ‘shining’ (see however §3.2.7.2 for the ambivalence of the imagery), while the sea rather tends to be ‘dark’; the expression *døkk marr* (‘*døkk* sea’) is employed by Arnórr Þórðarson jarlaskáld (eleventh century) in a way which recalls the opposition *døkk/blíkir* in the previous citation, but with partial inversion of syntax and sense:⁸⁵

Bjǫrt verðr sól at svartri,
søkk fold i mar døkkvan

[The bright sun grows black, the earth sinks into the *døkk* sea]

⁸³ *Skj* B I, p. 169.

⁸⁴ The kenning *døkk róma* (‘*døkk* battle’) in the thirteenth-century *Ormsþáttur Stórolfssonar* IV 4.5 (*Skj* B II, p. 366) also collocates with the name Ormr. Note however *døkk drómundr* (‘*døkk* war-ship’), Rognvaldr jarl kali Kolsson’s *lausavísa* 26.1.

⁸⁵ *Skskm* 1, p. 33, 106.1-2.

This imagery clearly draws on a Ragnarøk-related motif, although in *Völuspá* the sea is not characterised as dark.

Døkk also characterises blood, on one occasion directly (*døkk* *dreyri*, ‘*døkk* blood’, Arnórr Þórðarson jarlaskáld’s *Þórfinnsdrápa* 21.5-6)⁸⁶, and on another through immediate context: *inar dökku konur* (‘the *døkk* women’) in *Sólarljóð* 58.2 are so characterised in relation to ‘bloody rocks’ (with alliterative link) and ‘bloody hearts’ in the same stanza, in a gruesome vision of perdition including both Christian and pre-Christian elements.⁸⁷ A proximate Christian imagery (though without mention of blood) is found in the fourteenth-century *Lilja* 84.5, where *døkkvir flokkur* (‘*døkk* hosts’) are followers of the devil; but this type of context is more developed and gives rise to much more darkness imagery in Old English (see previous chapter) than in Old Norse.

3.2.4 *Nifl-*

There are no more than sixteen instances of the element *nifl-* in Old Norse poetry, always as the first element of compounds or other prefixed forms. All but one are in verse of Eddic type. The absence of simplices in the surviving corpus presents serious difficulties for the task of circumscribing *nifl-* semantically. This problem is further compounded by the fact that two thirds of this already limited evidence (eleven words) in fact represent a single personal/tribal name, *Niflungar*, whose historicity precludes its having been coined and/or inserted by poets for its semantic associations alone; in theory, then, the first element of the name may well have been meaningless wherever it occurred (but this is discussed below). Another compound, *Niflhel*, is also

⁸⁶ *Skj* B I, p. 320.

⁸⁷ *SkP* VII, p. 337

commonly treated as a (mythological) proper name. In prose the heroic name *Niflungar* and the mythological names *Niflhel* and *Niflheimr* ('Nifl-world') appear in sources which depend on Eddic poems that contain those names (as discussed below). No simplices are recorded in prose either.⁸⁸

Notwithstanding these difficulties, *nifl-* is commonly understood as meaning 'mist' and/or 'darkness',⁸⁹ so that *Niflhel* and *Niflungar* are sometimes translated 'Fog-hell' and 'Men of Darkness', respectively.⁹⁰ This interpretation, however, relies solely on indirect etymological evidence. The cognates of Old Norse *nifl-* include Old English *nifol*, OS *nebal*, OHG *nebul*, and further Latin *nebula* beside a number of other Indo-European relations, most of which mean 'fog, mist, cloud, darkness', which is the assumed sense of the root underlying these terms.⁹¹ But the rarity of the Old Norse words, their quasi-absence from prose, and the fact that the simplex term had apparently disappeared at an earlier stage, indicate that *nifl-* is a vestigial element in Old Norse, so that its semantic value might have undergone some alteration between the remote time when it probably meant much the same as its close cognates and the moments of composition and recording of the poems; a vestigial word tends to be less and less understood, or understood differently, by different poets, and made to interact in different ways with its contexts.

Some such process is actually illustrated by the closest cognate, Old English *nifol*. The assumption shared by most dictionaries,⁹² that it means 'dark', is not borne out by the evidence. Its only two occurrences, in the phrases *under niflan næs* ('under the *nifol* cliff', *Andreas* 1305a) and *nifle nædran cynn* ('*nifol* breed of snakes', *Paris*

⁸⁸ Bjarni Einarsson, *Egils saga*, lists a noun '*nifl*' in his glossary p. 250, but this seems to be a ghost-word; it does not appear in his text nor in Nordal, *Egils saga*.

⁸⁹ CV, s.vv. *nifl*, *niflfarinn*; LP, s.vv. *niflifarinn*, *niflgóðr*, *niflhel*, *niflvegr*.

⁹⁰ For example in John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford, 2001), p. 240, and Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, p. 25, respectively.

⁹¹ Alexander Jóhannesson, *Isländisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Bern, 1956) (hereafter *IEW*), p. 61.

⁹² *IEW*, p. 61; *AeEW*, s.v.; J.R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. 4th edn (Cambridge, 1960), s.v.

Psalter 148.25a), show that it was confused with, and subsumed under the senses of (etymologically distinct) *neowol* ('prostrate, deep, steep, abysmal') into the complex formed by associations between darkness, serpents, steepness, and depth, a theme which is marked by, among other features, alliterations with such words as *niht* ('night'), *niðer* ('down, below').⁹³ 'Dark' is the probable etymological meaning of Old Norse *nifl-* and Old English *nifol*, but is not necessarily the same as the meaning intended in recorded usage.

The Old English word's behaviour puts some uses of Old Norse *nifl-* into sharper view. The giant's assertion in *Vafþrúðnismál*, *nío kom ec heima fyr Niflhel neðan, / hinig deyia ór helio halir* ('I went through nine worlds down below Nifl-Hel, thither men die out of Hel', 43.4-5) emphasises the 'nethermost' character (*neðan*) of the *nifl-*world where some sort of second, worse death is conceptualised. Óðinn, in *Baldrs draumar*, travels to the world of the dead *niðr þaðan Niflheliar til* ('downwards from there to Nifl-Hel', 2.3-4) and meets a hound *ór helio* ('out of Hel', 2.4); downward movement and Hel similarly gravitate around *nifl-*. The latter, therefore, is one of several key intensifiers of the notion of the dark realm of death deep down below, a notion whose poetic mode of expression is conceivably cognate to that found in Old English texts (where *niðer* alliterates with *nifol* and *neowol*). Probably, then, *nifl-* means or connotes both darkness (or mist) and depth (or the state of being down on the ground or underground), in a way parallel to that of *nifol* and *neowol*. Snorri draws on this alliterative conceptual complex (though with slightly different phrasing and sense) when he states in his exposition of mythology that *vándir menn fara til Heljar ok þaðan í Niflhel, þat er niðr í inn níunda heim* ('evil men go to Hel and from there to Nifl-Hel, which is down below in the ninth world').⁹⁴

⁹³ Cf. e.g. *Elene* 831.

⁹⁴ *Gylf*, p. 9.

Three other *nifl*- compounds may hint at such associations (Hel, depth, darkness). Egill Skalla-Grímsson, in his poem lamenting the death of his sons, complains about the dearth of faithful men (*Sonatorrek* 15.5-8):⁹⁵

... þvít niflgóðr
niðja steypir
bróður hrør
við baugum selr.

[... because the *nifl*-good overthrower of descendants brings about the fall of a brother in exchange for rings.]

One could interpret *niflgóðr* as suggesting that the slayer is morally associated with *Niflhel*, an idea which, like Snorri's conception of *Niflhel* as the ultimate destination of 'evil men' (see above), may or may not have been tinged by Christianity. In any case, one can detect in these lines echoes of the general sense in the alliterative patterns that obtain with *Niflhel*, if not the patterns themselves. Although the alliteration involves *niðja* (nominative singular *niðr*) which never has the potentially sinister connotations of *niðr* ('down'), both words are still related semantically ('descendant') as well genetically. The immediately following terms *steypir* and *hrør* more directly express the idea 'falling down dead'.

Grógaldr, a poem in *ljóðahátt*, contains the line *nótt á niflvegi* ('night on the *nifl*-way', 13.3).⁹⁶ This work, only recorded in seventeenth-century paper manuscripts, is considered to be of late composition, so that the alliteration may only reflect the older *Niflhel* concept in a dead metaphor for 'dark road'. The stanza where it occurs, however, may well have some ancestry; it refers to a spell against the harm (curse?) caused by a 'Christian dead woman' (13.6), thus seemingly presenting an image of heathen practice still competing against the incoming new religion. In this context, *nifl*- may have its more sinister associations still active.

⁹⁵ Nordal, *Egils saga*, p. 252. This is the only skaldic instance of *nifl*-, occurring in a poem whose verse-form, *kviðuhátt*, is in fact reminiscent of the Eddic *fornyrðislag*.

⁹⁶ Gúðni Jónsson, ed., *Eddukvæði (Sæmundar Edda)* (Akureyri, 1954), p. 518.

Nifl- is surely used for sinister effect in *Atlakviða* 33:

Út gecc þá Guðrún, Atla í gogn,
með gyltom kálki, at reifa giold rognis:
‘Þiggia knáttu, þengill, í þinni hǫllo
gláðr at Guðrúno gnadda niflfarna.’

[Guðrún then went out to meet Atli, with a golden goblet, to delight the ruler with his recompense/requital: ‘You may receive, prince, in your hall rejoicing, from Guðrún the *nifl*-gone boys/young ones.’]

Guðrún is announcing, in cryptic terms, her vengeance upon Atli; having murdered the children she had with him, she is now about to offer their blood and flesh for him to consume in the form of sweetmeats. The narrative hinges on the ambiguity of *gnadda niflfarna*, an expression which must have been vague or obscure, for Atli does not take the hint and eats the treats. Presumably then, he understands it as referring to either Guðrún’s brothers (whom he has killed) or animals killed for the feast,⁹⁷ with *nifl-* metaphorically connoting death. The true referents, Guðrún’s offspring, are concealed by a probable pun on *nifl-* meant to evoke the traditional name of Guðrún’s kin, the *Niflungar*.⁹⁸

Wordplay is all the more probable since *Atlakviða* mentions the name *Niflungar* strikingly often (five times),⁹⁹ referring to Guðrún’s brothers Gunnarr and Hǫgni; the suffix *-ungar* indicates descent, as in *Gjúkungar* (‘descendants of Gjúki’). Contrary to *Niflhel*, however, *Niflungar* cannot have had dark mythological associations originally. The name is documented historically as belonging to a Burgundian family line since at least the eighth century. It is associated with Gunnarr/Guntharius/Gunther, king of the Burgundians in the fifth century, and appears outside the Old Norse tradition notably in

⁹⁷ Björn M. Ólsen, ‘Smá bidrag til tolknigen af Eddasangene’, *ANF* 9 (1893), pp. 223-35, at pp. 232-4, and Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, pp. 68-9.

⁹⁸ Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, p. 69.

⁹⁹ 11.1, 17.1, 25.1, 26.4, and 27.4. The remaining occurrences are *Atlamá* 47.3 and 52.3, *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* 16.5, and *Bjarkamá* in *fornu* 6.6 (*Skskm* 1, p. 61).

the Latin *Waltharius* (as *Nivilones*) and in the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*.¹⁰⁰ *Nibilungos*, formed from the root meaning ‘darkness, cloud’, apparently was a typical Burgundian name: others include *Wulkingos* (‘Cloud-people’) and *Sauilingos* (‘Sun-people’).¹⁰¹ It has been speculated that the name later acquired connotations with the origin of the legendary hoard of the *Niflungar/Nibelungen* in a dark underwater place guarded by a dwarf,¹⁰² but this is unlikely to have played a part in the Eddic poems, which are not concerned with the treasure’s origins. The pun in *niflfarna*, however, indicates that the meaning and associations of the root element in the name were understood and could be reactivated. In regard of this it is remarkable that the name practically never alliterates. The only possible exception is the line *hodd Niflunga: lifira nú Hǫgni* (‘hoard of the *Niflungar*: dead now is Hǫgni’, *Atlakviða* 26.4), where it would alliterate with *nú*; but since the latter word carries little semantic weight,¹⁰³ this alliteration seems to be eclipsed by the secondary one, *hodd : Hǫgni*. It would appear, therefore, that alliteration on *Niflungar* was carefully avoided, while alliteration on other Eddic names was generally achieved, including for example *Gjúkungar* which is otherwise interchangeable with *Niflungar*.¹⁰⁴ A possible explanation would be the need to avoid explicit connection to death or other negative ideas; if the patterns seen above, whereby *nifl-* entwines with *niðr* and Hel, are traditional, as they seem to be, then it is just possible that it was the only alliterative pattern for *nifl-* and that poets, at least oral poets, could not successfully integrate the name *Niflungar* without triggering the whole verbal complex, and therefore moved it to the last position in the line, where it is alliteration-free (and later poets might simply have not invented new alliterative patterns for it). However that may be, *niflfarna* shows that such dark hints could still be achieved

¹⁰⁰ See further Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, pp. 38-40.

¹⁰¹ Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, p. 37, with bibliography.

¹⁰² Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, pp. 36-7.

¹⁰³ *Nú* very rarely alliterates elsewhere.

¹⁰⁴ As can be seen by checking Robert Kjellogg, *A Concordance to Eddic Poetry* (Woodbridge, 1988).

outside alliterative patterns, and at least once were strived for. Thus it may be significant that all five mentions of the name in *Atlakviða* occur at heightened moments concerned with the doom or death of the name's bearers. The first one corresponds to the first explicit prophecy of destruction (11):

‘Úlfr mun ráða arfi Niflunga,
gamlir granverðir, ef Gunnars missir,
birnir blacfiallir bíta þreftönnom,
gamna greystóði, ef Gunnarr né kǫmrað.’

[‘The wolf will rule over the inheritance of the *Niflungar*, old grey guardians, if Gunnarr is lost, black-coated bears will bite with fangs, bring sport to the dog-packs, if Gunnarr does not return.’]

That the invocation of dark beasts plays on the name is likely, especially since the words for ‘grey’ and ‘black’ are the first elements of compounds in the plural (*granverðir*,¹⁰⁵ *blacfiallir*), a structure that seems to mirror *Niflungar*. Three images may be conjured: 1) the gold will perish among wild beasts, 2) the swarthy *Niflungar* will have to defend themselves as beasts, and 3) they will be killed by the Huns and torn by wild beasts.¹⁰⁶ The name reappears after Guðrún exposes the deadly trap, when Gunnarr fatalistically answers, ‘Too late it is now, sister, to gather the *Niflungar*’ (17.1-2); when Gunnarr is presented with his brother’s heart cut out (25.1); when he grimly relishes dying with the secret, ‘under me alone is now hidden all the hoard of the *Niflungar*: Högni is now dead’ (26.3-4); and when, just before being executed, he says that the inheritance of the *Niflungar* shall perish (27.3-5). Each of these is either uttered by or directly concerning Gunnarr, who is at the centre of the *Niflungar*’s doom in *Atlakviða*, and three times it is actually the cursed treasure which is referred to (11.1, 26.4, 27.4).

¹⁰⁵ More correctly *gránverðir*, probably.

¹⁰⁶ Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, pp. 24-6, argues for an extended word-play and multiple dark forebodings along similar lines.

Given the scarcity of occurrences of *nifl*- and the interpretative problems discussed, it is impossible to advance firm semantic conclusions. But the force of the association with the world of the dead in the evidence of the *Niflhel* type appears not so irrelevant when considering the *Niflungar*. The old mythological connotations of darkness and death (and perhaps, of sinking down, too) seem to have been revived in subtle ways by the poets of the heroic poems and made to hover over the narrative and interact with the plot.

3.2.5 *Blár*

In contrast to the other words studied in this chapter, *blár* is a relatively common adjective in verse with seventy occurrences (twenty Eddic and fifty skaldic). Nearly half of them are compounds. Both simplices and compounds also frequently occur in prose.¹⁰⁷ The usual translations are ‘blue’, ‘dark blue’, or ‘(blue-)black’. Even in prose, as acknowledged by the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*, ‘the distinction between the two [senses ‘blue’ and ‘black’] can often not be drawn’.¹⁰⁸ Kirsten Wolf convincingly argues that in early use *blár* means ‘dark’ rather than ‘blue’.¹⁰⁹ Old English cognates include *blāwen* (‘(dark?) blue’) and the first element of *blāhāwen* (‘dark blue’) which seems to bear the modifying sense ‘dark’.¹¹⁰ However, *blár* probably evolved from a root expressing brilliance (which underlies e.g. *bál* (‘fire’)).¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Degnbol *et al.*, *Ordbog*, vol. 2, pp. 416ff.

¹⁰⁸ Degnbol, *Ordbog*, p. 416.

¹⁰⁹ Kirsten Wolf, ‘The Color Blue in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature’, *Scripta Islandica* 57 (2006), pp. 55-78.

¹¹⁰ *Blāwen* and *blāhāwen* are restricted to dye and textiles and absent from poetry; see Carole Biggam, *Blue in Old English: An Interdisciplinary Semantic Study* (Amsterdam, 1997), pp. 98-9 and 240.

¹¹¹ *AnEW*, s.v. *blár*.

The word's history, then, interestingly recalls that of the Old English 'shadow' words *blæc* and *blāc*.¹¹²

Practically all the referents of *blár* in poetry can be grouped into four categories, namely waves, ships, war-gear, and ravens.¹¹³ Waves are modified by *blár* on nine occasions. In most of them, the waves are envisioned as a destructive, deadly force associated with warlike fierceness. In *Sigrdrífumál* 10.5 *brattr breki* ('steep breaker') alliterates with *blár unnir* ('*blár* waves'), the idea being that 'however *blár* the waves, you will survive'. High, dangerously crashing waves are also *blár* in an early eleventh-century verse by Gunnlaugr ormstunga.¹¹⁴ In the anonymous *Hákonardrápa* the king's 'shuddering beasts' (ships) attack his enemies on the *blárǫst ára* ('*blár* trail of the oars (> sea)') and the base-word of the kenning for the ensuing battle is '(snow-)storm'.¹¹⁵ In reference to the sea, *blár* underscores extreme danger and hostility, which compares to the application of 'shadow'/darkness words to waves in Old English. It is consistent with descriptions of the sea as 'grey' and howling,¹¹⁶ whereby billows are pictured in terms of dark beasts struggling with ships. Accordingly, the latter also appear as *blár* beasts.

Blár is applied to ships (or parts thereof) nine times. The ship is conceived of as a dangerous *blár* animal, with emphasis on darkness. Examples include *brimdýr blásvort* ('*blár*-black sea-beasts', *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 50.4), *myrkblár tjalda drasill* ('*myrkr*-(dark-)*blár* steed of the awnings', in a verse by Sigvatr Þórðarson),¹¹⁷

¹¹² See §2.2.5.

¹¹³ Based mainly on the numerous prose evidence, Wolf is led to emphasise the categories 'fabrics and clothing', 'bruised flesh', and 'metallic objects' ('Blue', pp. 59-63).

¹¹⁴ Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Borgfirðinga sögur*, ÍF 3 (Reykjavík, 1938), p. 77, verse 9.8.

¹¹⁵ Tenth century, *Hákonardrápa* 1.1-4, in Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, ed., *Heimskringla*, ÍF 26-8 (Reykjavík, 1941-51), vol. 26, verse 62, pp. 157-8. *Bláland* (*blár*-land) is another typical base-word of a sea-kenning in early verse (in Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Vatnsdæla saga*, ÍF 8 (Reykjavík, 1939), verse 56, pp. 269-70). But in later verse (from the eleventh century onwards) it represented 'Africa', the land of the *blámenn* ('*blár* men'), as in *Drápa um Harald harðráða* 5.4, *Skj B I*, p. 356.

¹¹⁶ Jesch, *Ships and Men*, p. 176.

¹¹⁷ Eleventh century, in Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, *Heimskringla*, vol. 27, verse 34.2, pp. 54-5.

and *blásvartir byrvargar* ('blár-black storm-wolves', in Þórarinn stutfeldr's *Stutfeldardrápa* 4.3-4).¹¹⁸ The remaining instances, however, involve non-theriomorphic masts and sails, which are qualified by *blár* too. But comparison between the association with *bqrð* ('prow') and the ship-kenning *barða bláskíð* ('blár-ski of prows')¹¹⁹ suggests that metonymy might account for associations of parts of ships with *blár*, one of the underlying concepts being the dangerous beast. Although Viking Age ships were famously called after animals such as 'serpent' or 'bison' and their prows (and other parts) sometimes adorned with carved heads of such beasts,¹²⁰ the concept of the *blár* ship/mast/sail does not appear solely dependent on such realia. There is no explicit evidence for *blár* serpents (or other prow-adorning beasts);¹²¹ the animals behind the concept are rather wolves, horses, ravens, and possibly bears, which tend to be dark and associated with savagery and/or warfare.¹²² If a *blár* part of a terrible beast, *blájaxl* ('blár-molar'), can stand for 'bear', a *blár* ship's part could surely belong to the association of ships or their planking as dark beasts violently harrying the (also dark and beast-like) waves.¹²³ Associations with ships and waves are restricted to poetry,¹²⁴ which supports such metaphorical interpretations.

Swords, spears, shields and mail-coats account for as many as sixteen uses of *blár*. The mention of *blár* edges is often juxtaposed with that of the injury or death they cause. In the early eleventh-century skald Þórðr Kolbeinsson's *Eiríksdrápa* 11.7-8 *ýglig*

¹¹⁸ Twelfth century, *SkP* II, p. 476.

¹¹⁹ Sigvatr Þórðarson, in Bjarni Einarsson, ed., *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum. Fagrskinna*, ÍF 29 (Reykjavík, 1983), verse 130.3, p. 175; and *Hátt*, verse 79.3, p. 33, respectively. See also Jesch, *Ships and Men*, p. 144.

¹²⁰ Jesch, *Ships and Men*, p. 137.

¹²¹ Apart from the biting serpent/sword concept, discussed below.

¹²² *Hrafn* ('raven') could represent a black horse and be used as base-word for ship-kennings, see Jesch, *Ships and Men*, p. 170. The *brimdýr blásvort* seen above could conceivably evoke ravens or wolves, *blásvartr* determining both animals elsewhere. Wolves and bears, which are used as base-words for ships (and 'bear-cubs' designate ships' parts (Jesch, *Ships and Men*, pp. 160-2)), frequently receive darkness-related modifiers. Esp. for bears, see *Skskm* 2, pp. 74-6 and 87-8.

¹²³ Jesch, *Ships and Men*, p. 177, supplies examples of such phraseology (carving or tearing asunder the sea).

¹²⁴ Cf. Wolf, 'Blue', p. 63.

hogg, þars eggjar, / Ulfkell, bláar skulfu ('Ulfkell [got] a frightful blow where the *blár* edges were brandished), the epithet *bláar* applies to a blade (*eggjar*) which is linked by double internal half-rhyme with the ghastly blow and wound it delivers (*yglig hogg*). Elsewhere in *Eiríksdrápa* (5.2 and 5.6),¹²⁵ the evocation of 'bloody shields' in the second part of the stanza's first *helmingr*'s second line is echoed in the same position in the second *helmingr* by *blóum hjörvi* ('with a *blár* sword') which itself collocates with 'the warrior's blood'. In a verse from *Njáls saga*, the rise of a champion *blára brodda* ('of *blár* edges') is in apposition with the resulting *seggja sveita-dogg* ('blood-dew of warriors').¹²⁶ The recurring phrase (*með*) *blóum hjörvi* ('with a *blár* sword', in verses by Þórðr Kolbeinsson above and Gísl Illugason)¹²⁷ resemble the Old English type *fagum sweorde* ('with a *fāh* sword'), especially given the Old English epithet's multivalent connotations of brilliance, blood, destruction, and darkness.¹²⁸ This set of examples indicates that the associations of *blár* can reach beyond the immediate referent it modifies. Thus, even when it qualifies a mail-coat, *blár* interacts with its surrounding context of baleful blows in the following phrase from Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa* (ninth century): *bláserkjar birkis / bōlfōgr ... / ennihogg ok eggjar* ('evilly fair forehead-blows and edges of the birches of *blár*-shirts (warriors)').¹²⁹ The association of *blár* with *serkr* ('shirt') is also found elsewhere,¹³⁰ and ensures that, in context, a mail-coat is meant. Shields can be *blár* too, and the *bláar randar* ('*blár* shields') in Egill's tenth-century *Höfuðlausn* 7.8¹³¹ also interact with a context marked by wounds in a deadly battle

¹²⁵ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, vol. 26, stanza 162, p. 364.

¹²⁶ *Lausavísa* attributed to the twelfth century, in Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ÍF 12 (Reykjavík, 1954), verse 16, p. 348.

¹²⁷ The latter is in the early twelfth-century *Erfikvæði um Magnús Berfætt* 1.8 (*Skj* B I, p. 409).

¹²⁸ §2.2.7.

¹²⁹ *Ragnarsdrápa* 6.5, in *Skism* 1, verse 157, p. 51.

¹³⁰ In a verse by Gísli Súrsson, attributed to the tenth century, in Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Vestfirðinga sögur*, ÍF 6 (Reykjavík, 1943) verse 15.5, p. 168.

¹³¹ Nordal, *Egils saga*, p. 187.

while two nearly adjacent shield-*heiti* in one of Snorri's lists,¹³² *heiðr* ('the bright one') and *fagrbláinn* ('the fair-*blár*') show that *blár* is compatible with brightness and splendour as well as with darkness and destruction. That this ambivalence is functional is further suggested by the intricate poetic association between dark/shining biting serpents and sharp weapons found in the Old English evidence (further discussed in §3.2.7.2 below). The only collocation with serpents, *blóum Naðri* ('with the *blár* (sword named) Snake', in one of Egill's verses)¹³³ can be explained by the *blár* sword concept, but three instances of *blár* swords or spears that 'bite' can be added, with alliteration linking *blár* to *bíta* (or *beita* 'cause to bite').¹³⁴ As in the case of ships, *blár* seems to often be an essential, sometimes disambiguating complement of kennings; thus *blár megináss Þunns* ('Þunnr's (Óðinn's) *blár* powerful god')¹³⁵ designates a spear more by virtue of *blár*'s conventional associations than through the rather indeterminate verbal clues.

Blár is associated with ravens on eight occasions. None of them is found in Eddic poetry, even though ravens do appear there some fifteen times. There is only one direct collocation, *blóum hrafni* ('to the *blár* raven') in Arnórr Þórðarson's *Magnúsdrápa* 18.6 (eleventh century); its occurrence is preceded by blood imagery in the same stanza: *rauð* ('reddened', 18.1), *hringserks lituðr* ('stainer of the mail-shirt', 18.4).¹³⁶ In a stanza from *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (thirteenth century?),¹³⁷ *blár* occurs alone, but relates back to an earlier *hrafn* with, again, abundant images of bloody flesh-ripping which set the scene for the adjective to appear in a self-explaining situation (lines 5-8):

¹³² *Skism* 1, verse 471.3, p. 123.

¹³³ Nordal, *Egils saga*, verse 18.4, p. 142.

¹³⁴ Nordal, *Egils saga*, verse 42.2, p. 210; *Krákumál* 10.5, *Skj B I*, p. 651; *Hátt*, verse 33.7, p. 18.

¹³⁵ Eleventh century, in Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Helgisaga Óláfs konungs Haraldssonar*, *Konunga sögur* 1 (Reykjavík, 1957), verse 6.6, p. 221.

¹³⁶ *SkP* II.1, p. 227.

¹³⁷ Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*. 4 vols. (Reykjavík, 1954), Vol. 1, pp. 249-50.

(...) til dögurðar hrafni;
mun blóði þá bráðir
ok brátt yfir gjalla
bræðra beggja slíta
blár, þótt illa launi.

[(...) as sustenance for the raven; then will tear at both brothers' corpses and soon shriek over the blood the *blár* one, though it be evil retribution.]

The remaining instances are raven-kennings involving the foregrounding of blood, as in

Óttarr svarti's *Höfuðlausn* 15.1 (eleventh century): *blágjóða ... bræðir / bengjalfrs* ('feeder of the *blár*-ospreys of the wound-sea (> blood > ravens > warrior)').¹³⁸

Conversely, when ravens are not qualified by *blár*, blood is less explicitly mentioned or not at all. For instance, the second *helmingr* of the stanza containing the example just quoted boasts a formally parallel kenning (*Þróttar / þings mógrennir* 'feeder of the seagull of the meeting of Óðinn (> battle > raven > warrior)'); but there is no blood either in the kenning or in its vicinity. In a markedly different situation, Bragi uses *hrafnblár* in *Ragnarsdrápa* 3:¹³⁹

Knátti eðr við illan
Jǫrmunrekkur at vakna
með dreyrfár dróttir
draum í sverða flaumi.
Rósta varð í ranni
Randvés höfuðniðja,
þá er hrafnbláir hefndu
harma Erps of barmar.

[And Jǫrmunrekkur awoke with blood-*fár* troops to an evil dream in the stream of swords. There grew an uproar in the hall of Randvér's chief kinsmen when Erpr's raven-*blár* brothers avenged their injuries.]

The common interpretation, that *hrafnbláir* refers to the appearance (hair?) of the brothers Hamðir and Sǫrli, possibly with a pun on their family name *Niflungar* (see §3.2.4 above), does not go far enough. In light of the preceding examples, the collocation of *hrafn* with *blár* in a context of copious bloodshed (*dreyrfár*, *sverða*

¹³⁸ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, vol. 27, verse 32, p. 37.

¹³⁹ *Skskm* 1, verse 154, p. 50. See §3.2.7.1 below.

flaumi) evokes the typical and probably expected blood raven. Despite much carnage and blood in *Ragnarsdrápa*, no carrion-bird appears as such until stanza 10. In a way, the subliminal image in *hrafnbláir* compensates for that. Conceivably, the appearance of both these elements rich in ghastly connotations in *bláserkjar* (6.5, discussed above) and in the uncanny name of the poem's addressee in the very first line of the poem, *Hrafnketill* ('Raven-cauldron'), also participates in creating an insubstantial *blár* raven hovering over the lines.

The examples analysed suggest that *blár* strongly connotes danger, blood, and death. This connection is found in prose: wearing *blár* garments can betoken a killing expedition, while dead people and especially revenants are 'as *blár* as death/Hel'. *Blár* seems to apply to the aspect of bruised flesh, but in fifteen instances the phrase used is *blár ok blóðugr*.¹⁴⁰ In poetry, blood and death often revolve around *blár*. In a verse by Rognvaldr kali, the phrase *bolr fellr blár* ('the *blár* corpse falls') relates to the action in the following line, *blóði vópn at rjóða* ('[we managed] to redden weapons in blood'),¹⁴¹ with alliteration linking *blár* to *blóði*.

Blár entertains a paradoxical relationship with both darkness and brightness, especially in verse of the Eddic type. A struggle between dragons involves *blár* fire, and 'blár flame' occurs elsewhere.¹⁴² The context is not religious, any more than such Old English phrases as *wonna leg* ('wann flame', *Beowulf* 3115a) describe hellish fire; *blár* seems incompatible with the Christian hell, about which *svartr* is used.¹⁴³ In a stanza attributed to Haraldr harðráði, *blár eggjar* ('blár edges') is directly juxtaposed with *Hjalmar skína* ('Helmets shine'),¹⁴⁴ while in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 50.4 the *blár*

¹⁴⁰ Wolf, 'Blue', pp. 60-1 and 71.

¹⁴¹ Twelfth century, *SkP* II.2, p. 603, 26.7-8.

¹⁴² Thirteenth century, Gunnlaugr Leifsson's *Merlínússpá II* 16.8, and anonymous *Lausavísa* 28.3 in *Friðþjófs saga frækna*, *Skj* B II, pp. 27 and 298 respectively.

¹⁴³ Wolf, 'Blue', p. 72.

¹⁴⁴ Eleventh century, in Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, vol. 28, verse 155.4-5, p. 187.

ship is linked to a glittering image: *brimdýr blásvort oc búin gulli* ('wave-beasts *blár*-black and adorned with gold'). The shield-names *fagrbláinn* and *heiðr* (see above) constitute another example. One should pause, therefore, at such images as in *Guðrúnarhvot* 4.4-5 and *Hamðismál* 7.1-3, where Guðrún is being bitterly reminded of the slaying of her husband Sigurðr:

(...) bocr vóro þínar, inar bláhvító,
roðnar í vers dreyra, fólgnar í valblóði.

[(...) your sheets, the *blár*-white ones, were reddened in your husband's blood, drenched in slaughter-blood.]

Bocr vóro þínar, inar bláhvító,
ofnar vǫlondom, fluto í vers dreyra.
Svalt þá Sigurðr, saztu yfir dauðom (...)

[Your sheets, the *blár*-white ones, woven by skilled craftsmen (*or*: in slaughter-wounds), floated in your husband's blood. Sigurðr died then, you sat over the dead one (...)]

Presumably the effect is not only one of tragic contrast in the beautiful sheets being drenched in blood. The notion of gory destruction may be already hinted at in the uncanny association of *blár*, connoting darkness and death, with *hvítr*.¹⁴⁵ Reviewing prose and poetry, Wolf observes that '*blár* is rarely used about material things';¹⁴⁶ *a fortiori* in poetry, then, symbolic levels of understanding are always likely to be valid. There is no reason, therefore, to assume that in poetry a *blár* sky is simply a blue sky. *Vindbláinn* and *Víðbláinn* ('the Wind-' and 'the Wide-*blár* one') appear in a list of *heiti* for 'sky'.¹⁴⁷ But *Vindbláinn* is the *nethermost* of *nine* heavens (recalling the associations of *nifl*-) and is likely to be no brighter a sky than its neighbours in the list, *Hregg-Mímir* ('Storm-Mímir'), *Hrjóðr* ('Coverer' or 'Streamer'), or *Vet-Mímir* ('Winter-Mímir').¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ The passage, also in *Guðrúnarhvot*, which dwells on how 'white', 'black', 'grey' horses trampled to death Guðrún's daughter (2.5-6), whom other stanzas present as a 'ray of the sun' with 'white (blond) hair' (15.4, 16.4), is another case of sinister alternation of darkness with brightness.

¹⁴⁶ Wolf, 'Blue', p. 63.

¹⁴⁷ *Skskm* 1, verse 516, p. 133.

¹⁴⁸ There are furthermore two instances of the simplex *Bláinn*, and both are connected to dwarves: one is a dwarf-name in *þula IV (Dverga heiti)*, *Skj B I*, p. 672, the other is another name of the giant Ymir out of

Thus when Þjóðólfr ór Hvini concludes *Ynglingatal* by praising his ruler's name, *bazt / und blóum himni* ('best under the *blár* sky'), after having devoted all his poem to the *deaths* of that king's ancestors, he may mean more than just 'blue sky'. An Old English analogue is *wrætlic under wolcnum* ('marvellous under the *clouds*', *Andreas* 93a) whereby the voice of God is praised with a formulaic utterance whose more common instantiation is the dark phrase *wonn under wolcnum* ('*wann* (~dark) under the clouds', e.g. *Andreas* 837a).¹⁴⁹ But it is in a hell-like prison in a context of darkness and death threats that the divine voice resounds. Similarly, and in the light of the foregoing analysis, the glorious connections of Þjóðólfr's *blár* sky cannot be dissociated from the rest of his poem's internal context which is, repeatedly and emphatically, death.

3.2.6 *Fǫlr*

There are sixteen occurrences of the adjective *fǫlr*, including five compounds, evenly divided between Eddic and skaldic types of verse, plus five related nominal and verbal forms. Prose occurrences are about as few, and show the simplex word being rarer than its compounds. Such a distribution indicates that this element is significantly rarer and more related to poetic usage than *blár*, without however being a vestigial survival like *nifl-*. *Fölur* survives in Modern Icelandic in the meaning 'pale'. This is also the usual rendering in translations of Old Norse poetry (or 'pale yellow', 'pale grey'). Indeed these senses seem valid in most of the evidence from prose and late poetry. It should be added that even in these late sources *fǫlr* is contextually restricted,

which dwarves were made (*Völuspá* 9.4), and also (from his skull) the sky. On dwarves' associations with the underground, the dark, and death, see *Gylf*, p. 12, and below, §3.2.7.1.

¹⁴⁹ See §2.2.4.

typically to grief, sickness, or imminent death. Examples include the apparently synonymous uses of *fǫlr*, *bleikr* ('pale'), and *litlauss* ('colourless') in *Fóstbræðra saga* about a man's complexion caused by fatal wounds,¹⁵⁰ and of the verb *fǫlna* ('to grow *fǫlr*') in a religious context about the dying Christ's skin.¹⁵¹ The expression *fǫlr sem aska* ('as ashes') and the nouns *fǫlnan* ('withering') and *fǫlski* ('white ash spread over burning embers'), the latter also appearing in verse as a proper name,¹⁵² show that *fǫlr* has more direct associations with whiteness than, for example, *blár*, but they also reveal a connection to the notion of fading away, losing substance, being ruined. Indo-European cognates point to a root **pel-* encompassing the meanings 'pale', 'motley', but also 'grey' and 'blackish';¹⁵³ associations with both paleness and greyness/darkness may have passed into Proto-Germanic **falwaz* with the resulting ambivalence. A study of *fǫlr*, therefore, must pay attention to *blár* with its ambivalent connotations, and also to the Old English cognate *fealu* (also a fairly rare and rather poetic word).

In poetic usage *fǫlr* is restricted to contexts of death, weapons, waves, and horses. In the first three contexts, *fǫlr* evinces semantic associations that strikingly resemble those of *blár*. Even in prose, *fǫlr* can be the colour of death; *fǫlr sem nár* ('as a corpse') echoes *blár sem Hel*.¹⁵⁴ In the Poetic Edda there are three collocations with *nár*. Þórr asks the dwarf in *Alvíssmál* 2.1-2: '*hví ert svá fǫlr um nasar, / vartu í nótt með ná?*' ('why are you so *fǫlr* about the nose, have you been with a corpse in the night?'). Guðrún's wish that the Huns could be slain by her brothers and become *nái nauðfǫlva*

¹⁵⁰ Björn Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, *Vestfirðinga sögur*, pp. 274-5.

¹⁵¹ Fourteenth century, *Lilja* 58.5, *SkP* VII, p. 628.

¹⁵² Sigvatr Sturluson, 13th, *Lausavísa* 2.4, *Skj* B II, p. 54.

¹⁵³ *IEW*, p. 556.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *stundum var hann rauðr sem blóð en stundum bleikr sem bast eðr blár sem Hel eðr fǫlr sem nár* ('at times he was red as blood and at times pale as bast or *blár* as Hel or *fǫlr* as a corpse'), in *Tóka þáttur Tókasonar* (Guðni Jónsson, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, p. 139).

(‘corpses forcedly *fǫlr*’, *Atlakviða* 16.4) receives an echo when she later serves the same

Huns morsels of her slain children to eat (35.1-3):

Scævaði þá in scírleita, veigar þeim at bera,
afkár dís, iofrom, oc ǫlkrásir valði,
nauðug, neffǫlom (...)

[Then the bright-faced woman hastened to bring drinks, the terrible lady, to the princes,
and chose ale-dainties, the reluctant one, for the nose-*fǫlr* ones (...)]

The nose-*fǫlr* men are not the ones that are *nauðug*, nor are corpses mentioned, but the context is brimming with the same idea of ‘corpses forcedly *fǫlr*’: *dead* people are eaten by those about to be *killed* by the *fey* woman. In one of the doom-and-death visions of Ragnarøk, *slítr nái neffǫlr* (‘the beak-*fǫlr* [eagle] tears corpses apart’, *Vǫluspá* 50.4).¹⁵⁵ All four examples discussed in this paragraph are framed by a nexus of words and ideas, perhaps looser than a formulaic system but nonetheless unmistakable in the recurrence of similar patterning, whereby *fǫlr* interacts with two of the following three elements: corpse (*nár*), face (*nǫs*, *nef-*), and constraint (*nauð-*). Although the internal relationships between the elements vary according to the demands of the narrative, the connotations clearly set *fǫlr* at the centre of the idea ‘death’. Outside of this formulaic context, Arnórr Þórðarson’s phrase *Hel klauf hausa fǫlva* (‘Hel clove the *fǫlr* skulls’) is still directly relevant.¹⁵⁶ A common element in these citations is that *fǫlr* relates not so much to the direct effect of death as to the more abstract intimation of death, and is close to the sense ‘doomed’. For example, in *Atlakviða* those who are called *fǫlr* indeed die, but only at the end of the poem; so does the dwarf of *Alvíssmál*, since the wisdom contest

¹⁵⁵ Three mss. of Snorri’s *Edda*, which also transmits this stanza, have the variant form *niðfǫlr* (‘?darkness-*fǫlr*’).

¹⁵⁶ Eleventh century, *Magnússdrápa* 10.7, *SkP* II.1, p. 219.

with Þórr leaves him petrified when dawn eventually comes.¹⁵⁷ A further related example of doom being very possibly expressed by *fǫlr* is the verse that Egill utters when a feast is about to end in a killing:¹⁵⁸

Qlvar mik, þvítt Qlvi
 ql gerir nú fǫlvan,
 atgeira lætk ýrar
 ýring of grǫn skýra;
 qllungis kannt illa,
 oddskýs, fyr þér nýsa,
 rigna getr at regni,
 regnbjóðr, Hávars þegna.

[I am getting drunk, while ale is now making Qlvir *fǫlr*, I let the liquid of the aurochs' spears (> beer) flow on my beard; you can hardly look around yourself, offerer of the edge-cloud's rain (shield > blood > warrior), it is raining with the rain of the servants of Óðinn (> poetry).]

The kenning for poetry in the second *helmingr* is indeterminate enough to be interpreted as meaning 'battle'. The fluid building up of the tension, in this stanza, from growing *fǫlr* with ale to a hint of strife, as the image of flowing/raining drink develops connotations of raining weapons or flowing blood, is reflected in the surrounding narrative: the treacherous host Bárðr has been trying to overwhelm Egill and Qlvir with alcohol (poison being eventually added); immediately after reciting the verse Egill kills Bárðr; simultaneously, Qlvir falls, as if dead too; blood flows from the former, but the latter actually lies in a pool of his own vomit.¹⁵⁹

Three associations with weapons, in *fǫlvar oddar* ('*fǫlr* edges', *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 53.2), *ímunfǫlr randa íss* ('battle-*fǫlr* ice of rims (> shield)', *Haustlǫng* 17.2-3),¹⁶⁰ and the sword-name *Fǫlvir* in one of Snorri's *þulur*,¹⁶¹ recall similar

¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, given the evidence for some relationship of dwarves with darkness and death (see above in this section, and §3.2.7.1), the use of *fǫlr* about him might conceivably be linked to such associations as well.

¹⁵⁸ Nordal, *Egils saga*, stanza 10, p. 110.

¹⁵⁹ The line linking through *aðalhending* the fateful ale to *fǫlr* in Egill's verse is closely paralleled by Hallbjörn Oddsson's *bǫl gerir mik fǫlvan* ('evil/misfortune makes me *fǫlr*') in Jakob Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, ÍF 1. 2 vols. (Reykjavík, 1968), Vol. 1, verse 7.6, p. 193; the context is tragic, even though death is not mentioned.

¹⁶⁰ Ninth century, in *Skskm* 1, verse 68.2-4, p. 23.

examples involving *blár*.¹⁶² Furthermore, some degree of ambivalence seems at play between the dark/shining characterization of the weapon (as with *blár*) and the pale/doomed complexion/status of its victim. While the sword-name *Fǫlvir* may indeed mean ‘the *fǫlr* one’,¹⁶³ morphologically it looks like an agent noun derived from a verb **fǫlva*, a likely variant of *fǫlna*, and therefore meaning ‘the *fǫlr*-maker’, the sword that makes its victim *fǫlr* (with blood, or with doom). The giant who leaps on his battle-*fǫlr* shield in *Haustlǫng* can conceivably be ‘battle-pale’ himself since he fears Þórr’s blows; ‘battle-doomed’ would also apply to him, since Þórr indeed kills him (in the following stanza). In the stanza *ímunfǫlr* is separated from the base-word *íss*, and this skaldic poem’s intricate syntax does encourage such multiple associations. Here as well as in some of the previous examples, *fǫlr* is characterised by double referentiality: when applied to a weapon, it could at least as well suit a doomed person present in the context, and vice-versa.

There is only one extant association with the sea. A verse quoted in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* presents a ship being precipitated (*brunar*) on *fǫlvar* ... *meginbórrur* (‘*fǫlr* mighty waves’).¹⁶⁴ This example not only suggests that *fǫlr* connotes darkness, rather than paleness, just as *blár* does in parallel instances (see above); it also neatly inserts itself in the relationship of *fǫlr* with danger and deadliness, a theme

¹⁶¹ *Skism* 1, verse 459.1, p. 120.

¹⁶² For example *blárna brodda*, *bláferill odds* (‘*blár* way of the edge (> shield)’, *Hátt*, verse 31.5, p. 17), and *fagrbláinn* (see above).

¹⁶³ As assumed in *Skism* 2, s.v. *fǫlvir*: ‘pale one’ (referring to gold hilts?), who was perhaps inspired by Old English *fealohilte swurd* (‘*fealu*-hilted sword’, *The Battle of Maldon* 166b). The sword-name *fylvingr* (in the same *pula*, *Skism* 1, verse 457.1, p. 120), possibly also related to *fǫlr* (*IEW*, p. 556), is defined by Faulkes as “‘pale-maker”, one who makes men go pale?” (*Skáldskaparmál*, vol. 2, s.v.), an interpretation which would be more plausibly applied to *fǫlvir*.

¹⁶⁴ *Skj* B I, p. 599, verse 25.

similarly evidenced by *blár* as well notably in relation to waves and probably germane with the application of Old English *fealu* to the sea and waves.¹⁶⁵

The unique example of an association with horses probably belongs to the wider traditional colour-based references to horses in Germanic poetry, the closest example being the Old English *fealwe mearas* ('*fealu* (fallow, or glinting?) horses', *Beowulf* 865b).¹⁶⁶ A closer look at the relevant Eddic passage and comparable material from the Old English poem, however, reveals more complex connections:

(*Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 49.1-2)

Mál er mér at ríða roðnar brautir,
láta fólvan ió flugstíg troða; (...)

[It is time for me to ride the reddened ways, let the *fólvr* horse tread the flight-path; (...)]

(*Beowulf* 864-6)

Hwílum heaþorofe hleapan leton,
on geflit faran fealwe mearas,
ðær him foldwegas fægere þuhton, (...)

[Sometimes the battle-brave ones let gallop, lead in competition the *fealu* horses, where the earth-ways seemed fair to them, (...)]

(*Beowulf* 916-17a)

Hwílum flitende fealwe stræte
mearum mæton.

[Sometimes competing they measured the *fealu* paths with their horses.]

The two Old English quotations form a unified motif (functioning as an envelope pattern); it shares with the Old Norse lines not only two cognates (*fólvan* : *fealwe*, and *láta* : *lēton*) but also the way in which the semantic elements of the key idea are varied: 'to ride' (*ríða*, *troða* : *hlēapan*, *faran*, *mæton*) 'horse(s)' (*ió* : *mēaras*) on 'paths'

¹⁶⁵ For examples, see *Beowulf* 1950a, *Andreas* 412a, 1538a, and 1589b, and *Brunanburh* 36a.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. also *æppelfealuwe* ('apple-*fealu*') qualifying horses in *Beowulf* 2165a. See Jennifer Neville, 'Hrothgar's Horses: Feral or Thoroughbred?', *ASE* 35 (2006), pp. 131-57.

(*brautir, flugstíg : foldwegas, stræte*). Attempts at ascribing to the epithets a particular horse-colour are of little relevance here. *Fealwe* switches from the horses to the paths, while *fǫlvan íó* answers *roðnar brautir* within the chiasmic arrangement of the lines and, in light of the suggestiveness of the collocations discussed so far, *fǫlr* and ‘(blood-) reddened’ are likely to have their connotations criss-crossing here. In other words, the fact that Helgi’s horse is *fǫlr* must resonate with the setting (a burial mound), the condition of the rider (he is dead), that of his (flying) horse (dead or supernatural), and the destination (*Valhǫll*, the abode of the warriors slain in battle).¹⁶⁷ All these elements have a claim to be *fǫlr* in poetry; the adjective is in a situation of multiple referentiality. The riders in *Beowulf* are not dead, but despite the apparent joyfulness in the ride back from the lair of the defeated Grendel, it may be significant that the paths they ride also are reddened, stained by the doomed monster’s blood.¹⁶⁸

Finally, the occurrence of *fǫlr* most elusive to interpretation is found in

Sigrdrífumál 1.1-2:

‘Hvat beit brynio, hví brá ec svefni?
hverr feldi af mér fǫlvar nauðir?’

[What bit the mail-coat, why did I shake off sleep? Who felled from me the *fǫlr* constraints?]

The valkyrie who asks this has just been awoken by Sigurðr from a sleep imposed on her by Óðinn; Sigurðr has crossed her wall of flames and cut her coat of mail. Her *fǫlvar nauðir*, therefore, may refer to both the coat of mail and the sleeping curse. The former would be within the range of associations of *fǫlr*, but it is likely that especially the latter is alluded to here, since it is the supernatural sleep which is the actual

¹⁶⁷ When *grár* (‘~grey’), which in poetry mainly applies to war-gear and wolves, is used to refer to horses, similar ominous connotations are triggered; see Wolf, ‘The Color Grey in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature’, *JEGP* 108.2 (2009), pp. 222-38, at pp. 234-6.

¹⁶⁸ The poet implies this slightly earlier (*Beowulf* 841a and 846b).

punishment set on her, not the imprisonment in a tight mail-shirt.¹⁶⁹ Possibly, cutting the mail-shirt is the physical act symbolizing the breaking of the curse, and it is equally plausible that *fqlr* qualifies the complexion of one wounded (since Sigrdrífa has been *stabbed* by a ‘sleep-thorn’),¹⁷⁰ or the death-like aspect of her resulting state. *Fqlr*, then, seems to be applied here to something that has no material form: a curse, a sleep, a coercion.¹⁷¹ The situation is comparable to that of Weland in the Old English poem *Deor*, who has been hamstrung (5-6):

(...) siþþan hine Niðhad on nede legde,
swoncre seonobende on syllan monn.

[since Niðhad laid constraints on him, supple sinew-bonds on the better man.]

The coercion here is expressed by *nēde*, cognate with *nauðir* and apparently used in the same sense of ‘bonds’ since it is in apposition with *seonobende*. But in ‘reality’ of course no actual ‘bonds’ are put on Weland since, on the contrary, his ‘sinew-bonds’ are severed. *Swoncre*, therefore, applies to no material referent;¹⁷² its use here parallels that of *fqlr* about the valkyrie’s immaterial bonds. The double referentiality aspect may also be present here; the immediate answer to the valkyrie’s question ‘Who has cut my *fqlvar nauðir?*’ is given in the rest of the stanza (1.3-4): ‘Sigurðr’s sword, which a short time ago cut the raven’s corpse-grove (> dead flesh)’.¹⁷³ This strangely elaborated answer provides two objects, the sword and the corpse, which could have been expected to attract, in line with conventional poetic language, the epithet *fqlr*.

Fqlr shares much of its connotative force with *blár*, although some of its uses and the fact it has no association with ravens sets it closer to the ‘pale’ end of the

¹⁶⁹ As a prose passage inserted into the poem makes clear (Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, p. 190 lines 7-8).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Nauðir* is translated as ‘coercion’ by Carolynne Larrington, tr., *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford, 1996), p. 166.

¹⁷² On this paradox see T.A. Shippey, ‘Approaches to Truth in Old English Poetry’, *University of Leeds Review* 25 (1982), pp. 171-89, at pp. 183-4.

¹⁷³ This could be an allusion to the previous slaying of Reginn or the dragon, or both.

darkness spectrum. Most occurrences evince a relationship with death and doom, sometimes through a connection with blood, as is the case with *blár*. The paradoxical aspects of such themes, which involve the question of (in)substantiality, may be brought to the fore when *fǫlr* is used. *Fǫlr* shares with *blár* the fact that although it applies to thrusting weapons, it does not seem to have a connection with serpents, a distribution which can be contrasted with the evidence discussed in the following section.

3.2.7 *Fáðr, fár, fánn, and fránn*

The Old Norse adjective *fár* (variant form *fánn*) is a direct cognate of Old English *fāh*; *fáðr*, originally the past participle of the rare verb *fá* ('to paint')¹⁷⁴ but sometimes used as an adjective, is related to *fár/fánn*. More specifically the Old English cognate is what lexicographers distinguish as *fāh* 'variegated, shining, stained' (*DOE fāh*²), the underlying Proto-Germanic root being **fai haz*, not with *fāh* 'hostile' (*DOE fāh*¹) which has no direct cognate in Old Norse.¹⁷⁵ One does not expect, therefore, the same type of ambiguity present in Old English *fāh*; that said, the occurrence, often in similar contexts and with apparently related meanings, of the etymologically distinct but morphologically strangely proximate adjective *fránn* (variant form *frár*) potentially creates a relevant analogue to the situation of *fāh*. I discuss *fránn* in the second part of this section.

¹⁷⁴ Not to be confused with the much more common *fá* ('to get').

¹⁷⁵ *AnEW*, s.v. *fár*.

3.2.7.1 *Fáðr/fár/fánn*

There are twenty-five occurrences of *fáðr/fár/fánn*, including ten *X-fáðr/fár/fánn* compounds and a few non-participial verbal forms, nineteen of which are in Eddic verse. Etymology posits earlier meanings in the semantic area of painting and inscribing.¹⁷⁶

In compounds, *fáðr* seems interchangeable with *fár* and *fánn*. Usages of the verb *fá* are different, but the fact that *fáðr* also functions as the past participle of that verb provides a link between verbal and adjectival forms; it is useful, therefore, to review the contexts of *fá*. Finite forms of the verb are only found in *Hávamál*, in stanzas attributed to Óðinn, and refer to the painting of carved runes in a context of heathen practices.¹⁷⁷ This activity is presented as secret knowledge reserved to the initiated or perhaps to the god alone, with dramatic emphasis (142):¹⁷⁸

Rúnar munt þú finna
oc ráðna stafi,
mioc stóra stafi,
mioc stinna stafi,
er fáði fimbulþulr
oc gørdø ginregin
oc reist hroptr rognna.

[Runes you shall find and the readable staves, very great staves, very strong staves, which the mighty sage painted (*fáði*) and the divine powers made and the lord of the gods carved.]

In an enumeration of ritual-related activities in stanza 144 *fá* appears with seven other verbs, and there seems to be some progression of ideas from carving (*rísta*) to *fá* to killing, sacrificing, and immolating (*senda*, *blóta* and *sóa*).¹⁷⁹ The verb is also used when Óðinn paints carved runes to resuscitate a corpse (157). The arcane power over life and death suggested by the way *fá* is used in *Hávamál* recalls the episode in *Egils*

¹⁷⁶ Cf. §2.2.7.

¹⁷⁷ Since the earlier form of the verb was **fága*, it is not impossible that the noun *fágan* ('worship') is related (etymologically, or at least by association).

¹⁷⁸ Cf. also *Hávamál* 80.

¹⁷⁹ The precise meanings are unclear, but *sóa* is probably related to a term for 'blood' (*IEW*, pp. 764-5).

saga when Egill applies his blood into the runes he has carved on a goblet (a poison test).¹⁸⁰ These examples strengthen the probability that *fá* involves smearing with blood or at least symbolically painting in red. In Bragi's ekphrastic *Ragnarsdrápa* the statement 'this is *fátt* on the shield' (4.7-8) concludes precisely that stanza which most heavily focuses on gushing gore (4.1, 3, 5), probably lending to the word *fátt* (neuter of *fáðr*) a darker/redder meaning than just 'depicted'. Such associations are mostly in evidence in the earliest verse.¹⁸¹ Significantly, in Christian contexts *fá* is associated with evil and Hell, as in the phrase *fáðar feiknstofum* ('painted (*fáðar*) with baleful/portentous staves/runes', *Sólarljóð* 60.6) referring to underground 'heathen stars' (60.4). It is difficult to interpret the dwarf-names *Fáinn* and *Fár*,¹⁸² but the meaning 'the shining one' (*Lexicon Poeticum*, s.v. *Fárr*) is unlikely. Dwarf-names are not associated with brightness but rather with underground-related ideas such as death, darkness, glowing: compare the doublet *Náinn* and *Nár* ('corpse'), and further *Bláinn* (see above), *Hárr* ('hoary'), *Glóinn* ('glowing').¹⁸³

Most of the remaining poetic occurrences are adjectives or past participles qualifying swords and serpents; these specific patterns of usage actually make these two categories overlap, notably by way of association with blood and venom. Swords and other sharp weapons are concerned in six instances. A name for a blade in a *pula* is *hoggfáðr* ('blow-*fáðr*'), and Faulkes's definition, 'blow-coloured or -polished',¹⁸⁴ reflects an indeterminacy which also affects *skyggðr*.¹⁸⁵ *Málfár* ('mark-*fár*') similarly causes speculation as to the precise nature and aspect of the 'marks'.¹⁸⁶ Patterns of

¹⁸⁰ Nordal, *Egils saga*, p. 109.

¹⁸¹ See also *Haustlǫng* 13.7 and 21.7, in *Skism* 1, verses 104.7, p. 33, and 71.7, p. 24 respectively.

¹⁸² *Pula IV (Dverga heiti)* 5.1, Viðbótarþulur úr A (748) & B (757), *Skj* B I, p. 672.

¹⁸³ *Gylf*, p. 16.

¹⁸⁴ *Skism* 1, verse 462.5, p. 121, and *Skism* 2, s.v.

¹⁸⁵ See §3.2.2 above.

¹⁸⁶ Beatrice LaFarge and John Tucker, eds, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda Edda Based on Hans Kuhn's Kurzes Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1992), s.v., propose 'colourful with inlaid ornaments, decorated with

usage, however, suggest that such details are less relevant than the connotative power of *-fár/-fáðr* and the impression produced. When Skírnir brandishes his sword and twice says *Sér þú þenna mæki mæ, mióvan, málfán ...?* ('Do you see this sword, girl, slender, mark-fár ...?', *Skírnismál* 23.1, 25.1), it is not for Gerðr to admire its decoration but to fear its stroke — it could *hǫfuð hoggva* ('cut off [her] head', 23.3) — and perhaps its magic too.¹⁸⁷ The audience, however, could appreciate both the power and the patterns, responding to the linguistic-contextual suggestion that the latter symbolise the former. The sword-name *hoggfáðr* seems meant to convey a similar impression. The *mæki málfán* of *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 4.2 is in the context unthreatening, but this highly poetic formula probably focuses on the fact, tragically crucial in the legend, that Sigurðr did not betray Gunnarr as he slept separated from Brynhildr by this drawn sword. Alluding to the same event, *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* also lays great stress on the sword (19.3-4):

eldi vóro eggia útan gorvar,
enn eitrdropom innan fáðar.

[its outer edges were forged in fire, but the inner ones were *fáðr* with poison-drops.]

The examples of *fá* perhaps suggest etched lines magically painted/filled with poison, or blood.¹⁸⁸ A remarkable analogue of *eggia ... eitrdropom ... fáðar* is the lexically cognate Old English phrase *ecg ... atertanum fah* ('edge ... *fāh* with poison-twigs', *Beowulf* 1459), also about a sword.¹⁸⁹ The relationship between *fá* and blood is put into relief by three occurrences of *dreyrfáðr* ('blood-*fáðr*'). In Gunnlaugr Leifsson's *Merlínússpá*, the spears are *dreyrfáið* while in the air, before they reach *folk í dreyra* ('the host in

inlaid figures or (magic) signs'. The possibility that reference is made to pattern-welding is advanced by Hilda Ellis Davidson, *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 126-7.

¹⁸⁷ This line's remarkable four-stave alliteration starts off a series of threats of magical curses involving chant-like phonetic effects.

¹⁸⁸ Davidson, *The Sword*, p. 123, provides other Old Norse examples of an imagistic connection between blood and the blade's patterns of lines.

¹⁸⁹ See §2.2.7, especially on the sword/blood connection.

blood’);¹⁹⁰ this could be one more case of either double referentiality or doom-marking conveyed through a ‘shadow’ word (spears are blood-covered because they *will* hit blood-covered warriors). *Ragnarsdrápa* 3.1-4 also participates in such patterns since these lines give the impression that the *dreyrfár dróttir* (‘blood-*fár* troops’, 3.3) are part of a nightmare which reflects (or announces?) the massacre alluded to in the second *helmingr*.¹⁹¹

Swords and serpents intermingle in the context of the third occurrence of this compound: *liggr með eggio ormr dreyrfáðr* (‘a blood-*fáðr* serpent lies along the edge’, *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* 9.3). The image of a serpent on a blade resonates with the associative network linking sharp weapons to snakes/dragons (witness the numerous kennings for swords and spears).¹⁹² In this quotation *dreyrfáðr* is not prompted by either alliteration or immediate context; it might have sprung from associations with blades as seen above, and be related to *eggio* through double referentiality. But there is evidence for equally strong associations of *fár/fánn/fáðr* with serpents. *Fánn* is a serpent-name in a *pula* starting with *Skalk eitrfáa / orma telja* (‘I shall number the poison-*fár* serpents’).¹⁹³ The same collocation designates the World-serpent when Þórr fishes for the *orm eitrfán* (‘poison-*fár* serpent’, *Hymiskviða* 23.2). Thus the adjectives can apply to both blades and serpents, and either of these referents can be so qualified in respect to blood or poison. This suggests a significant overlap on a symbolic level between blades and serpents and between blood and poison. The convergence seems articulated around *fár/fánn/fáðr*, paralleling the intersections between referents of Old English *fāh*.

Old Norse and Old English patterns of usage share not only the referents but also the ways in which connections are made. The Old English ‘*fāh* with gold’ formulas

¹⁹⁰ *Merlínússpá II* 66.3-4 and 6, *Skj B II*, p. 37.

¹⁹¹ See further §5.3.1.

¹⁹² Meissner, *Kennningar*, pp. 146 and 153-4.

¹⁹³ *Pula IV (Orma heiti)* 2.1 and 1.1-2, Viðbótarþulur úr A (748) & B (757), *Skj B I*, p. 675.

find only one analogue in Old Norse verse, namely *gingum golli fáðir* in the anonymous twelfth-century *Krákumál* ('we went *fáðr* with gold', 7.5),¹⁹⁴ but the phrase is literally surrounded with death and blood (7.4, 6, 7, and 9), recalling the insistingly sinister associations of corresponding Old English expressions. The overall picture, therefore, indicates that the full semantic value of *fár/fánn/fáðr* is at the same time less specific and more dramatic than the usual renderings ('painted', 'stained', 'polished', etc) make it appear; it seems to involve 'deadly sharp', 'blood-dark/-gleaming', 'magically dangerous', at the intersection of the notions of beautifully polished metal, biting sword, biting snake, and dreadfully lurid blood.

3.2.7.2 *Fránn*

The adjective *fránn* (rare variant form *frár*) shares most of these associations. There are some fifty occurrences of this adjective, including twenty-two compounds. The majority is found in skaldic verse (80%), a proportion that is the reverse of that of *fár/fánn/fáðr*. *Fránn* derives from a Proto-Germanic root **far(g)wa-* whose closest Scandinavian reflexes mean 'colour' or 'paint'; the underlying meaning probably was in the range of 'variegated/spotted/gleaming'.¹⁹⁵ The earlier histories of *fár* and *fránn* thus seem to have made them into semantic neighbours. Modern cognates have chiefly retained the sense 'spotted': dialectal Norwegian *frantarormen* is a kind of snake with yellow marks, while Shetlandic *fronet* is a white cow with black spots.¹⁹⁶ However, since *fránn* is only recorded in Old Norse poetry in very specific contexts, evidence from cognates and later prose is of little help, and one should also be wary as to the

¹⁹⁴ *Skj* B I, p. 650. But the collocation with gold also occurs in three prose passages, cf. Fritzner, *Ordbog*, s.v. *fá* (2).

¹⁹⁵ *AnEW*, s.v. *fránn*; *IEW*, p. 553.

¹⁹⁶ *AnEW*, *ibid.*

validity of the usual translation ‘gleaming, shining’. That some darker connotations are at work can be first suspected from, again, a dwarf-name, *Frár*.¹⁹⁷

The overwhelming majority of the occurrences directly relate to swords and serpents; the rest is usually used by reference to that double association. Thus *fránn* is restricted to the same objects to which *fár/fánn/fáðr* typically applies. More remarkably still, the same ideas seem to underlie this association. Sharp weapons, mostly swords, are characterized as *fránn* thirteen times. Eddic poetry has only two examples; both are exceptional swords: one *fránn mæki* is Völundr’s work (*Völundarkviða* 18.4), the other is the sword that slays Fáfñir (*Fáfñismál* 1.3). In skaldic verse the association with *egg* (‘edge, blade’) is typical. Three different skalds of the eleventh and twelfth centuries use the formula *frón egg* in four instances.¹⁹⁸ Both elements also combine to form the adjectives *fráneggr* and *eggfránn* which qualify swords in three further instances from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries; the phrases *fráneggjum ... sverðum* (‘with *fránn*-edged swords’) and *eggfránum hjör* (‘with edge-*fránn* sword’) recall the Old English pattern ‘with *fah* sword(s)’.¹⁹⁹ *Fránn* closely fits the trope of the biting weapon; in early skaldic verse *fránn leggbiti* (‘*fránn* leg-biter’) is a kenning for sword, and note *frón víkinga mána / lind beit* (‘the *fránn* linden (> spear) bit the vikings’ moon (> shield)’).²⁰⁰ *Fránn*, like other ‘shadow’ adjectives (*skyggðr*, *myrkr*, *blár*, *fólr*), produces the idea of ‘darkly gleaming’ and of death-portending weapons, but it also has a marked

¹⁹⁷ *AnEW*, s.v. *frár*. In some cases *frár* is thought to mean ‘swift’ and be etymologically distinct from *fránn*; but such a meaning does not seem to fit into the common patterns for dwarves’ names (see above).

¹⁹⁸ Arnórr Þórðarson, *Þórfinnsdrápa* 9.4, *SkP* II.1, p. 240, and his *Erfidrápa um Harald harðráða* 1.3, *ibid.* p. 261; Einarr Skúlason, *Geisli* 29.6, *Skj* B I, p. 434; Gísl Illugason, *Erfikvæði um Magnús berfætt* 17.8, *SkP* II.1, p. 428.

¹⁹⁹ Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Bersögglisvísur* 1.6, *Skj* B I, p. 234 (Flateyjarbók reading); but *SkP* II.1, pp. 14-15, prefers the reading from AM 66 fol. *fráneygjum* (‘*fránn*-eyed’) to go with *grönnum vargi* (‘grey wolf’) — see below on associations with eyes; Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Fornaldar sögur*, Vol. 2, p. 130, 2nd verse, line 6. Cf. §2.2.7.

²⁰⁰ Halldórr Ókristni, *Eiríksflokkur* 4.6, Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, vol. 26, verse 159, p. 360, and Þórarinn svartí, in Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, ÍF 4 (Reykjavík, 1935), verse 15.6-7, p. 47, respectively.

connotation ‘sharp, biting’. The essential ingredient of the trope, as in the case of Old English *fāh*, is the intersection with the serpent image.

When the adjective is used as a noun in *sóknar fránn* (‘the *fránn* one of battle’),²⁰¹ in context it must be a sword (or a spear). But a kenning’s base-word (here *fránn*) cannot directly signify the referent; *fránn*, therefore, can only mean ‘serpent’, as ‘serpent of battle’ belongs to a classic type of sword- and spear-kennings.²⁰² This example, one of twenty poetic associations of *fránn* with serpents, shows how familiar the connection must have become. Indeed *fránn* by itself already conjures up the serpent (as an always latent metaphor for a thrusting weapon).²⁰³ In the serpent-kenning *fránhvítigr*, the second element means ‘something (?a fish) white or gleaming’, yet the first element is needed to confer the meaning ‘serpent’;²⁰⁴ this suggests that *fránn* means much more than ‘gleaming’; it enwraps things with ‘serpentness’, endows them with a serpent’s shape. And since one can detect the idea ‘serpent’ behind most uses of *fránn* about weapons, one suspects the association with serpents is the earlier and more fundamental one. If this is the case, it would follow that explicit expressions like ‘*fránn* serpent’ are emphatic. And indeed such formulas chiefly refer to the most notorious dragons of Old Norse myth and legend: the World-serpent (as in *Húsdrápa* 6.6),²⁰⁵ *Níðhogg* (*Völuspá* 66.2), and *Fáfnir* (as in *Grípisspá* 11.1). Admittedly the adjective can also qualify any snake or dragon, for example in *Guðrúnarhvot* 17.4 the *fránir ormar* (‘*fránn* serpents’) which killed Gunnarr in the snake-pit, or in *Skírnismál* 27.4 *inn fráni ormr* (‘the *fránn* serpent’) which is so ‘loathsome’ (27.3) to men. Still, these cases involve comparisons which imply that a *fránn* serpent is the worst thing imaginable, as

²⁰¹ In the twelfth-century anonymous *Plácítusdrápa* 45.7, *Skj* B I, p. 618.

²⁰² Meissner, *Kenningar*, pp. 153-4.

²⁰³ *Fránn* alone in Gunnlaugr Leifsson’s *Merlínússpá* II 17.2 (*Skj* B II, p. 27) means ‘serpent’. *Fræning* (formed on *fránn*) by itself means ‘spear’ in a verse by Þórarinn svarti (Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, verse 19.4, p. 56).

²⁰⁴ Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga*, ÍF 7 (Reykjavík, 1936), verse 6.2, p. 27; the word is in the plural, articulated with ‘shield’ to signify ‘swords’.

²⁰⁵ Ulfr Uggason, *Húsdrápa* 6.6, in *Skskm* 1, verse 56.2, p. 17.

though the epithet had some superlative value. The semantic force observed here, as with other ‘shadow’ words, is probably related to the paradoxical engagement of *fránn* with notions of gleam and darkness simultaneously (a poetic dramatisation of the earlier sense ‘variegated’?). Associations with metallic weapons, compounded with the etymological data, strongly indicate that the meaning ‘gleaming’ is always present. At the same time, serpents tend to attract markers of darkness. These can reflect the dual nature implied in the sword-kennings whose base-words are serpents, for example, *grálinnr* (‘grey-dragon’) and *myrkdreki* (‘myrkr-dragon’).²⁰⁶ But darkness also qualifies serpents that are not embedded in this trope. *Myrkaurriði markar* (‘myrkr-trout of the forest’) is the base-word of a kenning for the dragon Fáfñir,²⁰⁷ and so is the remarkably parallel *merkr fráñqlunn* (‘fráñn-fish of the forest’).²⁰⁸ Finally, the mythological dragon Níðhogg is both dark and *fránn* in the dramatic last stanza of *Völuspá* (66):²⁰⁹

Þar kǫmr inn dimmi dreki fljúgandi,
naðr fráñn, neðan frá Niðafiollom;
berr sér í fíoðrom — flýgr vǫll yfir —,
Níðhogg, náí — nú mun hon sǫcqvaz.

[There comes the dark dragon flying, the *fráñn* serpent, from below out of Niðafjöll (‘Mountains of ?Darkness’); Níðhogg (‘Evil-/Dark-striker’) carries a corpse in its wing, it flies over the plain — now she will sink.]

This stanza, furthermore, is rich in imagery to which other ‘shadow’ words have been shown to closely relate: not only darkness (*dimmi*, and possibly *Niðafiollom*), but also evil (*Níð-*), blows (*-hogg*), corpses (*nái*), and the netherworld (*neðan* highlighted by alliteration, and *sǫcqvaz*).

²⁰⁶ Cf. Meissner, *Kenningar*, p. 154.

²⁰⁷ Cf. §3.2.1 above.

²⁰⁸ Eleventh century, Þórmóðr Kolbrúnarskáld, in Björn Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, *Vestfirðinga sögur*, verse 1.4, p. 283. *Merkr* could also be the genitive of *mǫrk* ‘mark, i.e. eight ounces’; in either case *fráñqlunn* clearly signifies Fáfñir (in reference to his treasure).

²⁰⁹ On the name Níðhogg’s possible meaning and further associations, see §5.1.1, where I discuss this stanza further.

Finally, there are eleven cases where *fránn* qualifies eyes. There is more to *fránn* eyes than just ‘keen eyes’ (the usual translation). In fact this usage seems to depend on the serpent connection; twice in early verse, eyes are *ormfránn* (‘serpent-*fránn*’).²¹⁰ A good example is *Arinbjarnarkviða* 5:²¹¹

Vasa þat tunglskin
tryggt at líta
né ógnlaust
Eiríks bráa,
þás ormfránn
ennimáni
skein allvalds
ægigeislum.

[That moonshine of Eirík’s eyelashes (> eye) was not safe to look at nor without terror, when the ruler’s serpent-*fránn* forehead’s moon (> eye) shone with terror-rays.]

The combination of *fránn* with *ægigeislum* and other imagery of gleaming and terror forms a lexical cluster that echoes the use of the Fáfñir-suggesting word *ægishjálmr* in the preceding stanza (‘terror-helmet’, 4.2). *Arinbjarnarkviða* could therefore be read in close connection with the Sigurðr-Fáfñir legend (Egill as Sigurðr, Eiríkr as Fáfñir?).

In the Eddic poem *Fáfñismál*, Sigurðr converses with the dragon mortally wounded by him, Fáfñir, twice called ‘*fránn* serpent’ in the poem (19.1, 26.3).²¹² But, for the first time in the Eddic material related to Sigurðr, *fránn* is also detached from the dragon: Fáfñir, while wondering at Sigurðr’s lack of fear, calls him *inn fráneygi sveinn* (‘the *fránn*-eyed boy’, 5.3) and his sword *inn frána mæki* (‘the *fránn* sword’, 1.3), as though deliberately mirroring the formula that defines his own self, *inn fráni ormr* (1):

‘Sveinn oc sveinn, hveriom ertu sveini borinn,
hverra ertu manna mögr?
er þú á Fáfni rautt þinn inn frána mæki:
stöndomc til hiarta hiorr.’

²¹⁰ *Arinbjarnarkviða* 5.5, in Nordal, *Egils saga*, p. 259, and Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Erfidrápa Óláfs Helga* 13.8, in Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, vol. 27, verse 151, p. 380.

²¹¹ See also *Erfidrápa Óláfs Helga* 13, *op.cit.*, esp. the alliteration *ógurligr, / í augu ormfrón* (‘terrible, in the serpent-*fránn* eyes’, 13.7-8).

²¹² Also in *Grípisspá* 11.1.

[‘A boy, a boy, of what boy were you born, whose men’s son are you? that you should redden on Fáfñir your *fránn* sword: the blade stands in my heart.’]

In other words, Sigurðr seems to have inherited Fáfñir’s *fránn*-ness as a result of his overcoming his own fear and the terror that the dragon radiated upon all men. If the dragon was *fránn* because on some semantic level he was, say, ‘shining’, then his shining hide appears to be much the same sort of covering as his (also twice repeated) *ægishiálm* (‘terror-helm’, 16.1, 17.1): a covering conceptualized as ‘made’ of terror. The helmet seems immaterial, a metaphor for the fear he inspires (16.1-2), but the image is so tangible that Sigurðr picks the helmet up in the end.²¹³ Sigurðr eats the dragon’s heart, which is *fránn* too (32.4); and when he is eventually murdered himself, his ‘*fránar* eyes grow dim’ (*Guðrúnarkviða I* 14.3) amid ‘running blood’ (14.2). This referential shift around *fránn* recalls the verbal replications of *fāh* in the dragon-fight in *Beowulf*, affording a remarkable and heretofore unnoticed analogue; the connection is the more compelling as the *Beowulfian* dragon’s terror is also thrown into sharp relief, notably through *gryrefāh*, a compound as peculiar and suggestive as *ægishiálm*. This comparative material is tantalisingly suggestive of more deep-running links between the two traditions.²¹⁴

The ambiguities of *fáðr/fár/fánn* and *fránn*, then, are on at least two levels.

Concerning aspect, both darkness and gleam are active connotations; they possibly mingle when associated with blood. Concerning substance, on the one side there are

²¹³ In the prose conclusion of the poem (Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, p. 188). However close or remote this addition may be to the poetic tradition, it seems deliberate rather than a blundering misunderstanding of the metaphor (which occasionally appeared elsewhere and even survived to the modern period). For further parallels and a review of possible Indo-European cognates of the terror-helmet motif, see *Komm* 5, pp. 442-4.

²¹⁴ The transfer of the terror-related quality *fránn* would fit along the lines of the argument in Ármann Jakobsson, ‘Fathers and Monsters: Sigurðr Fáfñisbani Talks to a Dragon’, paper presented at the Viking Society Student Conference (Hull, 2009); he sees Sigurðr’s victory as the youth’s overcoming of fear, embodied by Fáfñir, and ascribes to the dragon a symbolically paternal role of ushering his son into the tragic world of adult heroes. Specifically on fear and the nature and function of the terror-helm, see his ‘Why Be Afraid? On the Practical Use of Legends’, *Preprint Papers of the 14th International Saga Conference, Uppsala, 9th-15th August 2009*. Vol. 1 (Uppsala, 2009), pp. 35-42, esp. pp. 39ff.

strong suggestions of sharpness (weapons' points and edges, serpents' fangs) and of dreadful, deadly surface (evil or bloody marks on blades, supernatural terror-inspiring covering of dragons); on the other, *fránn* does not seem to refer to anything material, is a vague (if terrible) quality inherent in serpents and swords, and can contaminate other entities (multiple referentiality and marking of doom). When considered together, *fár/fánn/fáðr/fránn* and Old English *fāh* present a strikingly coherent image of shared conceptualisations.

3.2.8 Conclusion

The Old Norse 'shadow' words, like the Old English ones, are characterised by both remarkable distinctiveness and surprising overlapping. None of them is a synonym to another. *Myrkr*, *skyggðr*, *nifl-*, *døkk*, *blár*, *fǫlr*, *fár*, and *fránn* are not interchangeable, nor are they subtly different shades of colour, at least in poetry. Each of them, whether frequent or rare, occurs with a specific, very limited range of referents, in a small number of collocation types, in highly peculiar contexts. On the other hand, although no two words share all the main contextual elements identified (doom, death, danger, blood, fire, swords, serpents, crossing, liminality, paradox), yet any two 'shadow' words do share a significant subset of them. This is not a loose overlap, but rather a tightly interlinked chain of distinct yet significantly proximate terms.

Although some words are found predominantly in either Eddic or skaldic verse-types, the global picture suggests that the Eddic/skaldic dividing line is not very relevant in respect to Old Norse 'shadow'. More significant aspects are the age of the poems and their subject-matter. There is a sense that the earlier material, in either

metrical form, is richer in ‘shadow’ moments that are both more arresting and more echoic in their context than in later, post-eleventh-century texts. To some extent this aspect is correlated to issues of genre and subject-matter, for two major corpora of Old Norse verse of the middle and later period, namely panegyrics (together with the largely overlapping genre of war poetry) and Christian-themed poems, only yield scattered, isolated evidence for ‘shadow’, whose total number is unimpressive in relation to the great number of such sources; this rather amounts to negative evidence, comparable with the absence of ‘shadow’ from Old English battle/historical verse. As to praise-poetry, the ekphrastic poems (chiefly *Haustlǫng* and *Ragnarsdrápa*) are exceptional in being comparatively rich in ‘shadow’, though what is also interesting is that these are of course very early texts.²¹⁵ Christian verse stands out in contrast to Old English biblical literature in being largely immune to ‘shadow’.

Even more relevant to ‘shadow’ words’ meanings and distribution than genre, however, are these words’ narrow contexts and relationships with some prominent details of the subject-matter. This is a viewpoint that highlights some partial yet impressive parallels with Old English. By their tendency to cling to a few poetically prominent things such as flames, swords, or serpents, ‘shadow’ adjectives form verbal/mental motifs that are meaningful in themselves or within the larger nexus of ‘shadow’ associations; they stop meaning ‘dark’, ‘pale’, or ‘glittering’, exposing the weakness of our lexicographic meanings and transcending them.²¹⁶ The most pervading aspect, as in Old English, is the intimation of doom and an oblique perspective on tragic death or deadly danger. But there are more subtle similarities; double referentiality and its attendant impression of both indirection and bi-direction, the way doom-marking words seem to point not only to their apparent referents but also to other contextual

²¹⁵ I analyse the evidence from ekphrastic verse at length in Chapter 5.

²¹⁶ It would indeed be more meaningful in a way, despite the semantic circularity, to view e.g. *nifl-* as signifying ‘Hel- or death-like’ and *fránn* as ‘dragon-like’.

elements, indicates a deep interrelationship with textual context in Old Norse as well as in Old English — despite the sparser deployment of ‘shadow’ words in Old Norse, a fact that invites restraint on assessments of analogy.

It is noteworthy in that respect that any correlation between Old Norse and Old English ‘shadow’ cognates is at best very partial. The most compelling parallels between the two traditions involve non-cognates (e.g. *fránn* and *fāh*). This fact, compounded by the demonstrably early and/or traditional roots of most of the underlying motifs, seems to preclude such explanations as Viking Age contact or literary influence; the relationship must be more complex, possibly involving independent development of partly cognate world-views and beliefs as well as kinship between linguistic systems and poetic traditions. At any rate, in both traditions ‘shadow’ reveals a desire to map and signpost the liminal, otherworldly, supernatural, or monstrous landscape of story and discourse, and to make humans’ (and gods’) close encounters with this landscape stand out.

CHAPTER FOUR:

OLD ENGLISH ‘SHADOW’ CASE STUDIES

4.1 THE *BEOWULF* MANUSCRIPT

4.1.1 *Beowulf*

Loss, death, or more generally evil, is a major concern of the *Beowulf*-poet. The theme of darkness is ever-present not only as a backdrop to, but also as an agent of evil. This is probably not very surprising given the well-known contrastiveness of Old English verse, in this case the ubiquitous opposition light/darkness, a conceptual pair whose readiness for allegorical symbolism is most easily observable in the verse composed in decidedly Christian mode.¹ What is more striking in the case of *Beowulf*, though, is the poet’s keenness for developing this theme in relation to predominantly secular concerns without foregrounding any consistent religious allegory, and his interesting and complex deployment of the theme which therefore cannot be reduced to a superficial light/dark contrast. In other words, what we get in this poem is ‘shadow’ in all its richness, ambivalence, and purposefulness.

‘Shadow’ in *Beowulf* is most easily observed where Grendel is introduced in the poem. He is first glimpsed in his element, *in bystrum* (‘in darkness’, 87b), then amid *mearc* and *moras* (‘marches’, ‘moors’, 103), his first attack in the poem is announced by the first of the poem’s grimly *n*-alliterating lines,² *Gewat ða neosian, syþðan niht becom* (‘Then he set out seeking, after night came’, 115), and the resulting carnage is discovered *on uhtan mid ærdæge* (‘late in the night at pre-dawn’, 126). The poet’s craft

¹ Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness*.

² Of *Beowulf*’s forty-six *n*-alliterating lines, thirty-four (74%) express grief, evil, death, darkness or like forms of oppression. For an Old Norse parallel see §3.2.4.

in building up a sense of suspense and dread so effectively largely depends on his blurring the distinction between these framing ‘shadow’ components and the evil-minded enemy being thus framed. Admittedly, a number of epithets applied to the monster do not have any obvious connection to ‘shadow’, apart from being beclouded in haziness. This semantic fog is of course instrumental in the poet’s design of an ambience of dread.³ Thus Grendel is first a *gæst* (‘spirit’ or ‘guest’, 86a, 102a), then a *feond* (‘enemy’, 101b), a *wiht* (‘creature’, 120b), and an *aglæca* (‘?assailant’, 159a). But soon a more elaborate and salient, if still highly cryptic, designation is given him, whereby he is completely commingled with his tenebrous territory (159-2a):

ac se æglæca ehtende wæs,
 deorc deapscua, duguþe ond geogoðe,
 seomade ond syrede; sinnihte heold,
 mistige moras

[but the assailant was persecuting, a dark death-shadow, the old retainers and the young, hovered and plotted; he held perpetual night, misty moors]

As a verbal idea, a ‘dark death-shadow’ blends in well with the other surrounding signifiers of night, particularly the likewise emphatic *sinnihte*, or a few lines later *swærtum nihtum* (‘on dark nights’, 167b), from which phrases it is only distinguished by the addition of *deap-* suggesting some agency at work. The ambivalence attending the dark *scua* anticipates later referencing of both the creature and its nightly environment with *sceadu*. In the first of these passages *sceadu* is somewhat indeterminately applied to the dark surroundings, while other determiners of darkness in turn qualify both the night and the *wan* creatures that prowl under its cover (649-51a):

oþ ðe nipende niht ofer ealle,
 scaduhelma gesceapu scriðan cwoman
 wan under wolcnum

[until darkening night over all, creatures of shadow-helms came gliding murky under the clouds.]

³ Michael Lapidge, ‘*Beowulf* and the Psychology of Terror’, in Helen Damico and John Leyerle, eds., *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period* (Kalamazoo, 1993), pp. 373-402; *idem*, ‘*Beowulf* and Perception’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 111 (2001), pp. 61-97.

The blending is also artfully effected by the way in which the ominous coming of night is suspended in mid-air while the creatures syntactically take over the verb and the action of approaching, while at the same time the fluidity of the syntax, encompassing both in stealthiness and darkness, leaves the impression that the night and the creatures are, as it were, one and the same thing. The onset of Grendel's famous approach closely follows in what is linguistically a twin passage of the one just quoted, with repetition and rearrangement of most of the 'shadow' material; notably, the determiners of darkness and its creature, *sceadu-* and *wan*, get switched around, and a gradual process of partial resolution of the ambiguities is thus begun (702b-3a):

Com on wanre niht
scriðan sceadugenga

[Came on dark (*wan*) night gliding the shadow-stalker]

Grendel is no more confused with shadow, but the two remain in close syntactical apposition (707):

se s[c]ynscaþa under sceadu bregdan

[that demonic enemy under shadow drag [them]]

This time *sceadu* refers again to the monster's confines, but the creature itself is a *sceaða*, an 'enemy, harmer'. Grendel has been called that before, and amid similarly 'shadow'-ridden diction (274b-5):

sceaðona ic nat hwylc,
deogol dædhata deorcum nihtum

[I know not what enemy, mysterious persecutor on dark nights]

Just as *sceadu* is repeated after a few lines (703a, 707b), so is *sceaða* (707a, 712a). In the latter occurrence Grendel the *mānscaða* ('crime-enemy') is contrastively juxtaposed to *manna cynnes* ('of the race of men', 712b), in a line that is also surrounded by 'shadow' vocabulary. The rhyming soundplay *mān/man*, which the poet can be

suspected of occasionally recycling later,⁴ alerts one to the tendency in Old English verse, and in *Beowulf* in particular, for semantically purposeful soundplay. Likewise, the ambiguity resulting from the similarity between *gǣst* ('demon') and *giest* ('guest') points to a poet who is interested in highlighting the intersection of concepts by intersections of sound. It is not too rash to suppose, therefore, that he intended the two words *sceadu* and *sceaða* to chime (they form a nearly perfect internal rhyme), the aural link being a reflection of a conceptual or imagistic connection. Furthermore, *gǣst/giest* and *sceaða* have a marked tendency to be used near or within 'shadow' clusters.⁵

This is interesting inasmuch as it not only defines the boundaries of the 'shadow' nexus — as it has been modelled and observed so far — with respect to other themes that also thrive on ambiguity, but also potentially redefines 'shadow' — as it functions in *Beowulf* — as an expanded theme now incorporating those ambivalences which are tangential to it. In this poem the nature and doings of a *sceaða* make it an instance of a *sceadu*, and guests as well as demons haunt the same dark places within the same verbal environment of 'shadow'. This notion of shifting boundaries comes reinforced by the verbal interweaving of the concept of *moving* evil with that of *moving* surroundings. Grendel's depredations are indexed by references to the moving boundary between light and darkness. He emerges 'after night came' (115b) and his killings are discovered 'at dawn before day-break' (126),⁶ and his final attack is similarly signalled by the edge of night (648-51a).⁷

Thus 'shadow' blurs the distinction between Grendel and the darkness and shadows that surround him, a process which contributes fundamentally to the terror his

⁴ The collocation recurs l. 2281, and compare ll. 735b with 737b, and 1055a with 1057a.

⁵ *fah feondscaða* ('fāh people-enemy', 554a), cf. 547 *nipende niht*; *synscaðan* ('sin-enemy', 801b), cf. *ellorgast* (807b), *fag wið God* (811b); the *sceadu/sceaða* soundplay perhaps reappears later in the poem (again within a 'shadow' cluster), if one follows most editors' reconstructions — e.g. Fulk *et al.*, *Beowulf*, p. 61: *Ða com beorht [leoma / ofer sceadwa] scacan; scapan onetton* ('Then a bright light came hastening over the shadows; the enemies/warriors hurried', 1802b-3).

⁶ Cf. also ll. 413-14.

⁷ Cf. also ll. 604b-6, 1077, 1802b-3a.

characterisation, or rather non-characterisation, inspires; other factors, such as the lack of resolution as to his nature (man or giant) and origin (fens or hell), are also important, but do not function at such a rich level of lexis or form. By a somewhat similar process the dragon to some extent also merges with his environment, which is both darkness and fire; just as Grendel is a *sceadugenga* that merges with *nipende niht* the dragon is an *uhtfloga* that is *fyre befongen* and *fyrwylmum fah* ('*fāh* with fire-surges', 2671a).⁸

It is first and foremost in relation to the monsters and their attacks, then, that the poet uses 'shadow' phraseology. More precisely, however, he does not apply it so much to the actual three fights, but rather to the stages preceding and following the fights, that is, to the creatures' former ravages, approaches, and visible aftermath of their visits (e.g. Grendel's earlier characterisation, march to the hall, and tracks discovered the following morning). This alerts to the proleptic and analeptic effect of 'shadow'; indeed it can frequently be observed in this poem (and in Old English verse at large too, as exemplified in the other case studies) that a heavy deployment of 'shadow' often corresponds to prefigurations and afterimages of the assaults of evil forces.

Thus the darkening night and moving shapes (649-51a) must already sound portentous to first-time listeners, since the poet has by then clearly connected upcoming night with marauding monsters more than once.⁹ Sure enough, fifty lines later the portent comes true (702b-3a) (both passages quoted above), though not without delaying the identity of the attacker for further ten lines (until 711a) which are little more than a string of the most nebulous and almost exclusively 'shadow'-related vocabulary (notably *on wanre niht*, *scriðan*, *sceadugenga*, *scynscaða*, *of more*, *under misthleopum*), by means of which a very puzzling and disquieting scene is conjured.¹⁰ What happens next, of course, is the attack proper and its ensuing carnage and combat,

⁸ On the occasional conflation of the notions of dragon and fire into one see §2.2.7.

⁹ Ll. 87b, 115, 135a, 193, 275, 527b-8, 547a with 549ff.

¹⁰ Cf. Foley, *Immanent Art*, pp. 32-3.

on which no more ‘shadow’ is lavished — with the notable exception of no less than three references to the splendour of the hall by means of *fāh*.

After the terrifying, ‘shadow’-effected conjunction of Grendel with its natural environment, a more startling and disturbing interconnection in turn gains prominence, that of the blood-staining monster with the gold-shining hall. Although the Geats’ first sight of Heorot is one of shining splendour as they tread the *stanfah* (‘stone-*fāh*’, 320a) path to the *goldfah* (‘gold-*fāh*’, 308a) hall where *lixte se leoma ofer landa fela* (‘the radiance shone over many lands’, 311), this phraseology is then redeployed in the dark context of Grendel’s nightly assault. In an odd parallel to the Geats’ arrival, the monster *goldsele gumena gearwost wisse, / fætum fahne* (‘recognised the gold-hall of men, *fāh* with decorations’, 715-16a), and *on fagne flor feond treddode* (‘on the *fāh* floor the enemy trod’, 725). The bloody fight then ravages the *banfag* (‘bone-*fāh*’, 780a) hall. These troubling appositions reactivate the earlier hints that Heorot is as glorious as it is doomed: the allusion to final destruction by fire, first inserted (82b-3a) right between the account of Heorot’s completion and splendour and the first mention of the lurking monster, is rekindled at the mention of the *banfag* hall (781b-2a). More prominently in terms of phraseology, the hall’s accentuated *fāh*-ness during Grendel’s visit reanimates and confirms the earlier disquieting juxtaposition when the fiend is said to haunt *sinçfage sel sweartum nihtum* (‘the treasure-*fāh* hall on black nights’, 167). One result of Grendel’s collision with the gold-hall is the lastingly unstable, and therefore ominous, image conjured each time *fāh* is used; indeed the hall is ‘*fāh* with gold’ and ‘with blood’ (927a, 934b). The aftermath of the fight furnishes a graphic materialisation of these ‘shadow’ ambiguities and referential instabilities: Grendel’s gory arm adorning the golden roof. Thrice-repeated, the image is each time impressed upon the audience through artfully apposed half-lines, most startingly when Hrothgar *geseah steapne hrof /*

golde fahne, ond Grendles hond ('beheld the steep roof *fāh* with gold, and Grendel's hand', 926b-7a; cf. 836, 983). Echoes of this image, as critics have commented, occur widely throughout the text.¹¹ Furthermore, all these gold/blood glints and shifts are framed by statements that Grendel is morally *fāh* against God (811b, 978a, 1001a).

Grendel stains the hall, contaminates it with every connotation of *fāh*. Being himself a personification of lexical 'shadow', he engulfs Heorot in it. Heorot may be cleansed from Grendel, but neither the hall nor the poem is cleansed from the contamination of 'shadow'. After the victory [*g*]oldfag scinon / web æfter wagum, *wundorsiona fela* ('gold-*fāh* tapestries shone on the walls, many wonder-sights', 994b-5), but the image is tainted by the ambiguity of *fāh*, especially so as it immediately follows the uncanny remark that Heorot has been *folmum gefrætwod* ('decorated by hands', 992a): the poet means refurbishment but probably still has the monster's roof-adorning/blood-staining hand in mind. This in turn echoes Grendel's description as a *feond on frætewum* ('enemy in ?decorations', 962a), a puzzling and so far ill-explained expression,¹² but in this context of 'shadow' networks one that neatly fits the conceptual intersections of darkness, brightness, sin, gold, hall, hand, blood, and doom. Critics often expound on the blurring of distinctions between monster and hero,¹³ but a study of 'shadow' underscores verbal/conceptual exchanges and blendings between monster and hall, whose evidence is no less compelling and whose significance for the poet and audience may well have been no less important.

Through verbal echoes and, especially, the conspicuously frequent recurrence of *fāh*, this most multi-edged of 'shadow' words, the extraordinary glow of the hall

¹¹ Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to 'Beowulf'* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 194.

¹² Cf. Fulk *et al.*, *Beowulf*, p. 174, note to l. 962. Just possibly, the poet might also be playing on the paronomasia involving *frætwan* ('adorn') and *fretan* ('devour'), an association of Grendel with the latter verb being of course apposite (and *fretan* is used of him in the poem, l. 1581b); there is no other evidence supporting this wordplay, yet it would be an attractive parallel to the grim/glorious ambivalence of *fāh*.

¹³ Most prominently Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 37, 167-8, and *idem*, *Companion*, pp. 195-7 and (in respect to the dragon) 233-7.

lexically and symbolically mingles with the surreal flow of blood that drenches it and the biblical/mythological guilt/hostility of the enemy that stains it. This dance of extremes heightens both the dramatic and the supernatural effect, and the disturbing tensions and associations thus set in motion resonate with a significance that far outreaches the blood-spattered floor and rafters. The meaning and import reaches forth to the dragon episode and to many themes, traditional and personal, which the poet concerns himself with.

A more modest but partly similar framework of ‘shadow’-ridden prefigurations and echoes attends Grendel’s mother’s attack. The phraseology is partly different, but the effect of the sequence composed of banquet, treasure-giving, sleep, and ‘shadow’, to which the audience is by then attuned, is therefore no less foreboding. *Æfen*, *rest*, and *gāst*, which have occurred in the previous context of Grendel, become the signalling words when his mother invades Heorot. Here too *fāh* comes to prominence (used twice) but not in relation to the hall. Alliteration on *goldsele*, however, links the splendour of Heorot to Grendel’s name (1253).

It follows that when the third banquet, following Beowulf’s definitive victory over the Grendelkin, leads to a sudden comment on the darkening night that closely echoes verbally, semantically, and syntactically earlier harbingers, the audience is forced to fear that things will go, as the poet has indeed just prompted, *eft swa ær* (‘again as before’, 1787a). It is especially lines 649-51 (see above) that are recalled by this abrupt interruption of the feast (1789b-90a):

Nihthelm geswearc
deorc ofer dryhtgumum.

[The night-helm blackened dark over the retainers.]

And things do appear to happen as before, since what soon follows is a recasting of some of the phraseology that attended the earlier monster approaches (1799-1803):

Reste hine þa rumheort; reced hliuade
 geap ond goldfah; gæst inne swæf,
 oþ þæt hrefn blaca heofones wynne
 bliðheort bodode. Ða com beorht [leoma]
 [ofer sceadwa] scacan; scaþan onetton

[Then the noble-hearted rested; the hall towered curved and gold-*fāh*; the guest was sleeping inside, until the *blæc/blāc* raven, blithe-hearted, announced heaven's joy. Then a bright light came hastening over the shadows; the enemies/warriors hurried]

The words, if not entirely the sense, fulfil all expectations of another monster attack, while again as before, for some lines the indeterminacy of such words as *gæst* and *scaþan* conjures a ghost image of previous horribly indistinct hostilities. The eerie ambiguity of the *hrefn blaca* seems to dissipate, but in fact the image is made to linger.¹⁴ The proleptic force of 'shadow' has gained such momentum at this stage of the poem that it seems reasonable to suspect that the audience may have remained under the spell and waited for some dark evil to emerge for the 400 virtually 'shadow'-less lines that follow this passage.¹⁵ And eventually the dragon comes, and 'shadow' re-emerges. Perhaps significantly, a 'shadow' raven is glimpsed again in the increasingly doom-laden context of the dragon episode. In one of the flashbacks Beowulf kills one *Dæghrefn* ('Day-raven', 2501b); this name has an authentic ring to it (an attested Francian name), but an odd ring too: it cannot but recall the day-greeting, dark/shining raven. *Dæghrefn* pays for the life of king Hygelac, so the context is death on both sides, and by this killing Beowulf possibly acquires the sword with which he goes to fight the dragon.¹⁶ This is admittedly a very faint and incomplete prefiguration of the dragon tragedy, but the fatal consequences of the latter are nonetheless underscored by a third and this time explicitly ill-boding avatar of the troubling bird when *se wanna hrefn* ('the wann raven', 3024b) wakes the warriors (3024a) to a morning (3022a) of carnage.

¹⁴ See §2.2.5.

¹⁵ The best part of these lines are actually concerned with monsters and doom (Beowulf retells his monster-fights and outlines more tales of disaster). There is no real respite from these themes.

¹⁶ Caroline Brady, 'Weapons in *Beowulf*: An Analysis of the Nominal Compounds and an Evaluation of the Poet's Use of Them', *ASE* 8 (1979), pp. 79-141, at pp. 106-7.

Furthermore, the *hrefn blaca* incident is accompanied by the reactivation of the association of ‘shadow’ with treasure/hall/splendour through the ominous marker *fāh* (*reced hliuade / gear ond goldfah*). This suspiciously recalls 81b-3a, 167, and many other collocations, with the result that attentive listeners would be reminded (a last time before the first part of the poem ends) that the royal residence is doomed to fiery destruction and its gold somehow cursed (blood-stained, doomed, monster-connected?) by ‘shadow’.

The former catastrophe does not exist in the poem beyond such dark hints; eventually, however, fire does destroy a hall in the poem: Beowulf’s hall is burned down by the dragon whose gold, marked by ‘shadow’ and cursed, is at the root of this feud. The ‘shadow’ raven, therefore, does perform its expected role of ominous portent,¹⁷ and furthermore it supplies a transition to the poem’s second part, notably to the theme of ill-fated treasure. The poet has been thinking about the ill-fatedness of treasure from the start, and something about his outlook can be reconstructed from the ambivalences of *fāh*.

The ways in which ‘shadow’ imagery recurs provides an occasion to look closer at the chain of correlations linking concepts of splendour, treasure, destruction, and death. In this, the deployment of *fāh* throughout the poem is instrumental, as has been seen,¹⁸ but other less ambiguous ‘shadow’ words, revolving more narrowly around darkness, also come into play; to the attentive reader/hearer, ‘shadow’ insinuates itself into the poem’s contexts for treasure in such a markedly patterned way that it becomes part of these contexts, perhaps even the most important context for treasure in the poet’s mind and design. There are enough indications throughout the text, furthermore, to

¹⁷ Pace Kathryn Hume, ‘The Function of the *hrefn blaca*: *Beowulf* 1801’, *Modern Philology* 67 (1969), pp. 60-3. See Marijane Osborn, ‘Domesticating the Dayraven in *Beowulf* 1801’ in Helen Damico and John Leyerle, eds., *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period. Studies in honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.* (Kalamazoo, 1993), pp. 313-30.

¹⁸ See above, and §2.2.7.

believe that the foundations of the poet's complex view of treasure, as it is foregrounded in the last part of his work, are being built up almost right from the poem's beginning.

In the dragon episode (2200-3182), the theme of treasure looms larger and larger as one of the recurrent symbols of the final catastrophic events with which the poet appears by then to be fully occupied, and the dragon's hoard (along with the precious cup stolen from it) is of course the material centre of this major concern. The poet introduces the fateful treasure and cup in a passage that is highly echoic in several respects, but here it is the 'shadow' echoes, which have not been much scrutinised, that are essential (2210b-17a):

	oð ðæt an ongan
deorcum nihtum	draca ricsian,
se ðe on heaum hofe	hord beweotode,
stanbeorh stearcne;	stig under læg
eldum uncuð.	Þær on innan giong
niðða nathwylc,	se ðe neh geþrong
hæðnum horde ;	hond eðe gefeng
[searo] ¹⁹ since fah	

[until one began to rule, a dragon on dark nights, he who watched treasure in a high hall, a strong stone-barrow; a path lay underneath, unknown to men. Therein went I know not what man, he who got near the heathen hoard; the hand easily grasped the precious artifact *fāh* with treasure.]

This (rather loose but still notable) apposition of darkness with treasure itself contains a second (very tight and compact) apposition, that of treasure (in this case the stolen cup) with the ambivalent 'shadow' marker *fāh*.²⁰ This cannot but recall a virtually identical appositive complex used before about Grendel, but much more compact in its expression (166b-7):

	Heorot eardode,
sincfage sel	swærtum nihtum

[He inhabited Heorot, the treasure-*fāh* hall on black nights]

Another passage on Grendel yields further similarities (274b-6):

¹⁹ On this and other emendations in this passage see Fulk *et al.*, *Beowulf*, p. 75.

²⁰ On the semantic importance of apposition in *Beowulf* see Robinson, *Appositive Style*, esp. pp. 3-28, 60, and 79-80.

sceaðona ic nat hwylc,
 deogol dædhata **deorcum nihtum**
 eaweð þurh egsan uncuðne nið

[I know not what enemy, mysterious persecutor on dark nights shows through terror unheard-of malice]

Just as Grendel, enveloped in darkness (*sweartum nihtum*, *deorcum nihtum*) and mystery (*uncuðne nið*), marks with blood/evil/doom (*fāh*) the treasure-marked hall (*sincfage sel*), so the dragon's ravages are connected grammatically, lexically, and through 'shadow', to the same emphatic darkness (*deorcum nihtum*) and un-knowing (*eldum uncuð*, *niða nathwylc*), a treasure-filled hall (*on heaum hofe hord*), and a treasure-marked (*since fah*) cup.

The *Beowulf*-poet is keen to trace the origins of the dragon's enmity and the resulting tragedy to the treasure, and the cup. This he does as soon as the dragon steps into his narrative (cf. above, 2210b-17a). First, darkness, dragon, treasure, and the interdependence of these notions are given salience. The matter of the theft immediately follows, but the character of the thief himself receives little prominence; what is foregrounded, rather, is the *mystery* of the thief's origin (*niðða nathwylc*, cf. also 2223b) and the secrecy of the subterranean entrance through which he accessed the hoard (cf. the theme of mystery clinging to the Grendel-kin and their mere). Instead of the thief, it is the hoard that is again thrown into relief (*hæðnum horde*), and then specifically the cup. It is worth listing the half-lines in which the poet mentions this notorious cup:

[*searo*] *since fah* ('[?artwork] *fāh* with treasure', 2217a)

sincfæt sohte ('sought the treasure-vessel', 2231a)

fæted wæge, / *dryncfæt deore* ('ornamented flagon, precious drink-vessel', 2253b-4a)

fæted wæge ('ornamented flagon', 2282a)

drincfæt dyre ('precious drink-vessel', 2306a)

maðþumfæt mære ('famous treasure-vessel', 2405a)

This list shows that, whatever word the poet used to first introduce the cup (perhaps the indeterminate *searo*), he afterwards repeatedly identifies the cup by the word *fæt* and/or the paronomastic play *fæt/fæted*, in on-verses that are all metrically identical.²¹ The cup, emphatically marked not only by adornment but also from the start by *fāh*, assumes as eminent and ambiguous a position as Grendel's hand has in the first part of the poem. The cup focalises the hoard's connections with the dragon and the Geats' doom just as the hand focalises the links of blood and doom between the hall and the monster. The hall and the hand, and the hoard and the cup, are 'shadow' centres, so to speak; that is, they are privileged focal points where 'shadow' orbits and intersects to form patterns, and these patterns resonate with some of the poem's larger themes and structure.

Although these resounding reminders of the role of the doom-laden cup eventually fade, the hoard becomes a major player in the poem, as its history and subsequent fate are repeatedly foregrounded.²² There are admittedly no other direct verbal connections in the poem between the dragon's hoard and *fāh* or other 'shadow' words. Having deployed formulas of the *golde fah* type to ominous effect in the first part of his narrative, the poet perhaps needs no more than one last but resounding reminder at the onset of the second part (the *since fah* cup and its phonetic repercussions) for his audience to imagine an inauspicious context for all subsequent references to treasure. At any rate one still notes some collocations of treasure and 'shadow' in the remainder of the poem (*hord* alliterates with *under harne stan* (887,

²¹ The first five stages are furthermore separated by roughly regular, twenty-odd-line intervals, providing some kind of rhythm.

²² Although the ubiquity of treasure in Old English poetry is a function of its being a fundamental and enduring poetic convention, the *Beowulf*-poet deploys it in ways that are story-specific as well as traditional, shaping conventions to foreground his own view on the themes he deals with. There is still salience, therefore, in references to treasure in *Beowulf*, even though their abundance may not be surprising in itself. See further Tyler, *Poetics*, pp. 24-5, 36-7, 100.

2744); cf. *middelnihtum maðmæhta wlonc* ('in the middle of nights proud with treasure-riches', 2833)).

Treasure is also associated with death, however. This is a broader association, less lexically-based, to which 'shadow' nevertheless crucially contributes throughout the poem mainly through the doom-marking analysed above and its possible implications. Chronologically the dragon-hoard's origin is the commitment to the earth of an ancient treasure by the so-called 'last survivor' (2231b-70a). His speech, fraught with references to the treasure and to the death of its owners (often in apposition to each other, cf. 2260-2a), begins and ends by the mention of the death of his people (2249a-1b, 2265b-6b), and is framed itself by references to death, that of his people (2236b-7a) and his own (2269b-70a). The apposition of human death and treasure burial in this (double) envelope pattern recalls a larger envelope: *Beowulf* begins and ends with a funeral. What is less noted, but in the context of this discussion extremely significant, is that treasure accompanying the dead receives incommensurate emphasis in both funerals: Scyld's (36b-49a) and Beowulf's (3010b-17, 3137-40, 3163-8, and countless references to the hoard in the context of Beowulf's death). Stylistically the suggestion seems to be that treasure 'dies' alongside men.²³ Such suggestive appositions have analogues in pagan Old Norse verse;²⁴ the most concisely put being *deyr fé, deyja frændr, deyr sjálfr it sama* ('wealth dies, kinsmen die, one dies likewise', *Hávamál* 76.1-2, 77.1-2), but a proximate apposition in Old English is *her bið feoh læne, her bið freond læne* ('here wealth is transient, here friend is transient', *The Wanderer* 108). As this larger comparative context suggests, the idea of the 'death' of treasure, whose momentum in *Beowulf* is initiated by 'shadow' and its associations with gold, bridges secular poetic tradition and Christian values. This close parallelism between human

²³ The fate of the *Brosinga* necklace is similar: man and wealth are closely intertwined and perish together (1197-1211).

²⁴ See Chapter 5.

death and artifacts' death is little more than a subliminal insinuation that depends on the audience's inferential judgments; but it is nonetheless grounded in a richly suggestive tapestry of apposed words and apposed meanings, and as Robinson demonstrates, multi-layered apposition, by 'bring[ing] out by suggestion the complex meanings of events, motifs, and words', serves to express themes and thoughts of fundamental significance.²⁵ Treasure is of course a potently significant symbol in Old English poetry, not least as the focus of a tight moral correlation between the worth and splendour of treasure and the virtue and glory of its givers and recipients.²⁶ The contribution of 'shadow' to our understanding of these themes and images is the fundamentally linguistic dimension in which the complex thematics of treasure's splendour/decay and Beowulf's victory/death,²⁷ and more generally the fates of humans and of humans' wondrous creations, interpenetrate each other; and, importantly, the linguistic centres of the discourse of doom are not doomed persons but 'shadow'-marked things (see further below in this section).

But 'shadow' does not simply signify death. The appositions of 'shadow' conjure transfers and transformations of a strange and rather supernatural order, which are in keeping with the poem's superhuman and unhuman protagonists. When the dragon soars over Geatland, [*w*]æ̅s þ̅æs wyr̅mes wig wide gesyne, / *nearofages nið* ('the dragon's war was widely seen, the enmity of the oppression-*fāh* one', 2316-17a). What is 'seen' of the dragon's 'enmity' is fire, as is insistently recalled: the beast is *fyre befangen* ('enveloped with fire', 2274a, cf. 2671a). The phraseology replicates itself when Beowulf, facing the dragon, *nearo ðrowode / fyre befangen* ('suffered oppression, enveloped with fire', 2594b-5a). After Heorot, it is now the hero's turn to receive the

²⁵ Robinson, *Appositive Style*, p. 80.

²⁶ See Tyler, *Poetics*, pp. 9ff; also Michael D. Cherniss, 'The Progress of the Hoard in *Beowulf*', *PQ* 47 (1968), pp. 473-9, and Ernst Leisi, 'Gold und Manneswert im *Beowulf*', *Anglia* 71 (1953), pp. 259-73, esp. at pp. 262 and 272.

²⁷ On which see e.g. Edward B. Irving, Jr., *Rereading Beowulf* (Philadelphia, 1989), pp. 127-8.

branding marks of his foe. More striking still is the ‘shadow’-marking at the climactic moment of the slaying of the dragon. The alternating application of *fāh* to the dragon (2317a, 2576b, 2671a, 3041a) and to swords/helmets (2615a, 2701a, 2811b) provides an interesting, larger context to this scene. The two helmets involved — Beowulf’s and Wiglaf’s — are connected by context and verbal echoes to their slaying of the dragon and to its hoard. The sword — Wiglaf’s — is the one that stabs the dragon. After being referred to as *gryrefah* (‘terror-*fāh*’, 2576b) and *fyrwylmum fah* (‘*fāh* in fire-surges’, 2671a), the dragon is slain by a *fāh* sword (2701a). It is as if the *fāh*-ness characterising the dragon were transferred to the slaying weapons and, by synecdoche, conquered by its slayers Beowulf and Wiglaf.²⁸ Since what is actually conquered is the cursed hoard, at which Beowulf obsessively directs his dying thoughts, and since Beowulf dies and his people (presumably including Wiglaf) are doomed, the transfer of *fāh* looks like some kind of curse or deadly contamination. This associative process seems akin to the poetics of ‘shadow’ in the context of Grendel.

The workings of ‘shadow’ in the whole poem, then, afford fresh perspectives through which critical interpretations that see humanity mingling with monstrosity can be reassessed. The *Beowulf*-poet reflects on something more abstract than just the contrast and conflict opposing/connecting human artifice to hostile nature.²⁹ He broods on the realisation that even the most glorious human art and beauty, precious objects and golden halls, eventually pass out of human control to be perverted and consumed by nature and its monsters. The poet appears fascinated by the ways in which living beings and cultural artefacts, and especially his story’s most highlighted emblems — hero, monster, hall, treasure, dragon — share in doom and death. His complex deployment of ‘shadow’ and its branching themes is a measure of his fascination.

²⁸ See more fully on this theme §2.2.7.

²⁹ Cf. Robinson, *Appositive Style*, pp. 73-4.

Furthermore, the privileged foci of much reflection and fascination are *things*. ‘Shadow’ forces us to reappraise the crucial importance of things and their aspects and qualities, which critics tend to undervalue. By zooming in on blood, on the hall and the hand, on the hoard and the cup, and on the fire and the sword; by weaving ‘shadow’ webs around them; and by inserting echoes and foreshadowings of these things, the poet is able to dramatise the interlinked glory and doom of social interaction, contact and fighting, drinking and gift-giving. Indeed another effect/function of ‘shadow’, operative rather in the background but no less crucial, is that of interlinking things and motifs and, thereby, correlating and harmonising themes, events, and structure in the entire poem. The thrice-hovering raven discussed above and the fourfold repetition of the *harne stan* formula (marking off key places of deadly danger and the supernatural)³⁰ are cases in point of such ‘shadow’ links that ensure that the prefigurations and replications become interconnected themes.

This study, then, shows that ‘shadow’ is both a deeply rooted and a highly functional poetic device in *Beowulf*. To trace its ramifications is to take a fresh path through a number of the most prominent themes that have long been recognised in the poem, an approach that can consolidate or challenge previous thematic interpretations by providing new, specific models based on a firm linguistic/semantic platform. On account of the poem’s length and the theme’s generous deployment throughout such a long work, it is more readily observable in *Beowulf* than in any other text that ‘shadow’ is not a self-contained phenomenon. Rather, it appears to have fluid boundaries with other stylistic/semantic complexes (glimpsed in the analysis) that seem to be also thriving on ambivalences. In other words, although it may be particularly practical to isolate and study the ‘shadow’ nexus for its appeal to visual perception, ‘shadow’ can be presumed to be part of a larger nexus, or poetic style of composition, whereby narratives

³⁰ §2.2.6.

are underpinned by uncanny but locally motivated ambivalences, adumbrations, and transformations. ‘Shadow’, therefore, may be the best pathway to exposing these larger patterns and enriching our appreciation of the thought-world behind the words.

4.1.2 *Judith*

At first sight ‘shadow’ elements are few and far between in the remainder of the Nowell Codex, so much so that after surveying the impressive richness in ‘shadow’ in *Beowulf*, it may seem, by contrast, that there is little else to be gleaned from the manuscript in that respect. Yet the three prose works contained there, *The Passion of Saint Christopher*, *The Wonders of the East*, and *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, as well as the (now) concluding text, the poem *Judith*,³¹ all deserve closer scrutiny on that matter. This is not only to provide the findings in *Beowulf* with some kind of background context. As has long been noticed and more recently re-explored, all these texts exhibit to various degrees a number of shared characteristics, the most obvious of which is the theme of monstrosity.³² Because ‘shadow’ in *Beowulf* is mostly rooted in, and dependent on, the characterisation of the monsters, as the preceding section has shown, it therefore begs the question of whether this thematic relationship of ‘shadow’ with monstrosity could also be a shared feature across the manuscript.

The two main themes that have just been explored in *Beowulf* can be detected in a much reduced form in *Judith*. The nexus linking together the boundary of day and night, the coming of the monster, and the insinuation of doom into the sequence feast-

³¹ On the compilation and order of the texts in the present manuscript, see for example Peter J. Lucas, ‘The Place of *Judith* in the *Beowulf*-Manuscript’, *RES* n.s. 41 (1990), pp. 463-78, notably the argument that *Christopher* and *Judith* were originally compiled separately (p. 474).

³² Orchard, *Companion*, p. 24 n. 48. Other apparently shared themes (often brought into relief precisely through monstrous characters) include pride, wonders, and the ambiguity and tension between heathen past and Christian present. See especially Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 3-6, 169, and passim.

treasure-sleep, seems to operate in vaguely comparable ways in the latter poem, where it is articulated around the figure of Holofernes. His exaggeratedly monstrous characterisation,³³ peculiar to the Old English version, turns the king of the Assyrians into an uncannily ambiguous being, a verbal and thematic analogue not only of king Hrothgar (as the arranger of a magnificent banquet in his hall (7b-12a), a distributor of wealth (22a, 30a) etc.) but also, as per most of his later depiction and actions (demonic noises (23, 25b), malice (34b, 48b), hatefulness to God (45b) etc.), of Grendel. His function as monster accounts for patterns of ‘shadow’ language that are very reminiscent of the Grendel episode. These are the portentous descent of night, *oð þæt fira bearnum / nealæhte niht seo þystre* (‘until dark night approached the children of men’, 33b-4a); his implicit association with darkness seen in collocations (34, 45, 63, 67); his featuring in nearly all of the poem’s *n*-alliterating lines (34, 45, 53, 73, 113); and his death-journey to depths of darkness and hellish fire (112b-21) which, although being explicitly spiritual, contains geographical markers indexing it to damnation places in Old English poetry but also to *Beowulfian* monster landscape:³⁴ his spirit descends *under neowelne næs* (‘under the abysmal/dark cliff’, 113a).

Woven into these patterns of ‘shadow’ is a subtle network of grim prefigurations. The scene in which the soldiers bring their drunken lord to bed ‘for the last time’ (73a), where he ‘fell’ (67b), ‘where he would lose his glory’ (63b), having ‘reached his end’ (64b), clearly anticipates Holofernes’ impending execution, and is deployed against a suggestive lexical background of ‘night’ (64a) and *under wolcna hrofe* (‘under clouds’ roof’, 67a). The connotation linking drunkenness with death is interestingly elaborated through references to Holofernes’ soldiers, his *weagesiðas* (‘companions of misery’, 16b), *fæge* (‘doomed’, 19b), whom he intoxicates *oð þæt hie*

³³ See Mark Griffith, ed., *Judith* (Exeter, 1997), pp. 64-6; the poem is quoted from this edition.

³⁴ See Griffith, *Judith*, pp. 124-5, who however does not mention *Beowulf* in this connection.

on swiman lagon / ... swylce hie wæron deaðe geslegene ('until they lay in swoon ... as if they were struck with death', 30b, 31b). On the verbal level this anticipation seems fulfilled on the person of Holofernes, not the soldiers, so resonant is the echo when Judith strikes him with the sword *þæt he on swiman læg, / druncen ond dolhwund* ('so that he lay in swoon, drunk and wounded', 106b-7a). This prefiguration of doom, however, looks in two directions at once, so to speak; that is, not only to the matter near at hand, the slaying of Holofernes, but also to a more distant doom, the destruction of his people in a battle which at this point the poet does not even hint at otherwise than by these few indirections. This double referentiality to some extent can be compared to the way in which some of the 'shadow' clusters in *Beowulf's* Grendel episode have been shown to extend their proleptic/analeptic significance a good way forward to the dragon finale (cf. the *hrefn blaca* incident). The matter of the upcoming battle is not introduced until Judith, having managed to return to Bethulia, delivers an exhorting speech to its inhabitants (see 189ff). In the actual strife (212b-323a), most of the Assyrians perish, fulfilling the earlier harbingers of doom.

Doom and 'shadow' collocate in the poem in patterned ways. The first prefigurations just quoted are encapsulated in an envelope pattern (15-34a). The latter is signalled by the repetition of *fletsittendum* ('hall-guests', 19a, 33a) in connection to the intimation of their doom (16b, 19b); this figure, which centres on the unsuspecting Holofernes' drunken frenzy (21b-27b), is articulated between the image of Judith's radiance (14a) and the ominous descent of night already quoted (33b-4a), the latter phrasing being attached syntactically to the doomed soldiers (33b referring back to 30b and 31b) and by *n*-alliteration to the doomed king (34b).

Doom, death, and 'shadow' are further interlinked in a network of echoes attending the image of the punishment of Holofernes (and later of all the Assyrians) by

the sword, in which aural markers abound and are partly related to ‘shadow’; the most relevant lexical elements are set in bold in the following quotations, while ornamental patterns of alliteration (carried over the line) are underlined (77b-9b, 103b-4b, 193a-5a, 229b-30b, 264b, 299b-301b):

Genam ða wundenlocc
Scyppendes mægð scearpne mece,
scurum heardne, ond of **sceaðe** abræd

[Then the Creator’s maid with braided hair seized a sharp sword, hardened in battle-showers, and drew it from the sheath]

Sloh ða wundenlocc
 þone feonds**sceaðan** **fagum** mece

[Then the one with braided hair struck the hateful harm-bringer with the *fah* sword]

scire helmas in **sceaðena** gemong;
 fyllað folctogan **fagum** sweordum,
fæge frumgaras

[bright helmets into the crowd of harm-bringers; fell the army leaders with *fah* swords, the doomed chieftains]

Mundum brugdon
 scealcas of **sceaðum** scirmæled swyrd

[The warriors drew with their hands bright-marked swords from the sheaths]

fagum swyrdum
 [with *fah* swords]

him feng Dryhten God
fægre on fultum, frea ælmihtig.
 Hi ða fromlice **fagum** swyrdum

[the Lord God, almighty ruler, had kindly come to their aid. They boldly with *fah* swords...]

The remarkably frequent usage of *fāh* (four times in two hundred lines) is comparable with *Beowulf*. While it cannot be advanced that *sceað-* is meant in *Judith* to resonate with *sceadu* (since the latter word is absent from this poem), the recurring collocation of this element, in either of its meanings, with *fāh* (and once with *scirmæled*, a word to some extent semantically cognate with *fāh*), can be helpfully contextualised by reference to the discussion on how certain phonetic elements gravitate around

‘shadow’ in *Beowulf*.³⁵ In addition, the evident wordplay on *fāh* and *fæge* (and even *fæger*) adds an internal contribution of a similar vein to the phonetic and semantic indexation of this ‘shadow’/doom motif. It also appears significant that the passages quoted above tend to be closely followed by more ‘shadow’ elements and/or an *n*-alliterating line. A context of ‘shadow’, therefore, together with related formal associations, brings to the fore a conceptual association that can be presented as follows:

a *fāh* weapon (drawn from a *scēað* ‘sheath’) : a *fæge* enemy (*sceaða* ‘harm-bringer’)

The apposition *fagum sweordum, / fæge frumgaras*, furthermore, almost blends the meanings and fields of reference together, since *frumgaras* refers to the enemy but literally denotes weapons.³⁶ This is a good example of double referentiality and transfer of attributes as typical aspects of ‘shadow’, and for which *Beowulf* is otherwise the best place to look.³⁷

Connections between ‘shadow’ and treasure can also be found in *Judith*, though they are much less obvious there than in *Beowulf*, and their possible implications are also somewhat different. In the poem as we now have it, treasure is first mentioned repeatedly in relation to Holofernes and his soldiers. Precious cups are interlaced with the notion of the drinkers’ doom, while their lord is called *goldwine* and *sinces brytta* (respectively ‘gold-friend’ and ‘dispenser of treasure’, 22a, 30a), conventionally but arguably ironically (he dispenses in fact alcohol which, as seen above, is used to

³⁵ Cf. also a remarkably similar collocation of *sceað-* with *fāh* in *Andreas* 1133b-4a.

³⁶ On this collocation cf. §2.2.7.

³⁷ The assonance-ridden sequence *slegfæge hæleð slæpe* (‘blow-doomed hero from sleep’, 247a) is further indication that the poet is keen to bring out any possibly relevant semantic/phonetic connotations of *fæge*.

connote death, and cf. his being a *morðres brytta* ‘dispenser of murder’, 90a)³⁸ and with the possible admixture of the idea of the ill-fatedness of treasure. This is immediately followed by ‘shadow’, in this case the ominous arrival of dark night. The use of treasure imagery to describe Judith (and her servant), such as *hringum gehroden* and *golde gefrætwod* (respectively ‘adorned with rings’ and ‘decorated with gold’, 37a, 171b), therefore occurs against an already established ill-boding context; however, the lost beginning of the poem may well have contained more references to treasure, so the original relationships between these contexts are now unrecoverable.³⁹ It is also difficult to determine if there is any significance in the collocation of ‘gold’ with a ‘shadow’ word in *blacne licgan / his goldgifan* (‘his gold-giver lying ?pale/dark (*blāc/blæc*)’, 278b-9a), in relation to Holofernes’ corpse. That the only other use of this epithet, in describing Judith’s maid as a *blachleor ides* (‘?pale-cheeked lady’, 128a), is sandwiched between references to Holofernes’ gory head, suggests that death and blood, rather than treasure, provide the motivation for ‘shadow’ in both passages.⁴⁰ In the final part of the poem, the treasure and precious weapons looted from the defeated Assyrians are marked by two ‘shadow’ words, *brūn* and *hār*, which however have normally no special tendency for negative connotations (at least in *Beowulf*). Holofernes’ treasure is *golde gefrætewod* (328b), a formula used before but only about Judith (171b, cf. above), and when it is brought to her, both she and the treasure are characterised by *beorht* (a highly positive epithet often implying a moral value), rather conspicuously in the line *beaga ond beorhtra maðma, hi þæt þære beorhtran idese* (‘of rings and bright treasures, that they [gave] to the bright lady’, 340). Lexically, this treasure, initially suspect, is redeemed and allowed into the sphere of Judith’s moral brightness. Despite differences

³⁸ On the question of the Old English poet’s use of irony, including dramatic irony inasmuch as the notion overlaps with the kind of proleptic hinting discussed here, see Griffith, *Judith*, pp. 62ff, with further bibliography.

³⁹ On this lost opening see Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 4-5, and Griffith, *Judith*, pp. 1-4.

⁴⁰ Cf. §2.2.5.

of treatment and point of view, then, both *Judith* and *Beowulf* interlace ‘shadow’ with the fates of the hero and an evil but heroically well-gotten treasure. Furthermore, if Judith being extraordinarily radiant (and, through character pairing, also *blachleor*) has anything to do with a ‘valkyrie reflex’,⁴¹ the resultant addition of a supernatural aspect brings her closer to the world of eerie light and ‘shadow’ surrounding treasure in *Beowulf*.

4.1.3 *The Passion of Saint Christopher*

There is no ‘shadow’ phraseology per se in *Christopher*. This is in itself no conclusive indication, however, since the relevant lexis makes at best a scarce appearance in prose anyway. In the present case its appearance could be deemed the more improbable in a text whose brevity (forty-odd sentences),⁴² mutilated state of preservation (the first two thirds are missing),⁴³ and the fact that it follows fairly closely a Latin original,⁴⁴ combine into making it an unlikely candidate for a quarry for any traditional poetic features. However, a few fragmentary elements, tangential to the matter but perhaps bearing some indirect relevance, deserve to be mentioned.

The only tangible feature that *Christopher* appears to share with *Beowulf* is the monstrosity of Saint Christopher; or rather, his unclear, borderline status between holy

⁴¹ See Helen Damico, ‘The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature’, in Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington, 1990), pp. 176-90, at pp. 183-5.

⁴² As edited by R.D. Fulk, ed. and tr., *The Beowulf Manuscript: Complete Texts and The Fight at Finnsburg* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), at pp. 1-13. All three prose texts discussed in this chapter are quoted from this edition, by sentence number.

⁴³ See Phillip Pulsiano, ‘The Passion of Saint Christopher’, in Elaine Treharne and Susan Rosser, eds., *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg* (Tempe, 2002), pp. 167-99, at p. 167.

⁴⁴ The author’s immediate Latin source is not preserved but is best approximated by a version printed in the *Acta Sanctorum* and edited by Pulsiano, ‘Passion’, at pp. 184-6.

man and monster. Indeed, although he is referred to as a ‘man’ (6) and speaks like a saintly one, he is also endowed with a dog’s head and a gigantic size.⁴⁵ The extant text alludes to the latter trait (18) but not to the former; yet since the canine head is explicitly introduced in both the approximate Latin source and the recorded incipit of a now lost Old English life of Saint Christopher, there is no reason to think that the lost beginning of the present text did not have it too.⁴⁶ There is an element of analogy, then, between this character of the martyred saint and Grendel, however contingent and limited such a link must remain.

Against this sketchy comparative backdrop, a few minor details of the *Christopher* text may be worthy of attention. Intriguing, for example, are the frequently recurring references to dawn and dusk. The six of them all appear in the first twenty-five sentences — almost one every fourth sentence. Thus the heathen king Dagnus has the saint tortured *fram þære ærestan tide þæs dæges oð æfen* (‘from the earliest hour of the day until evening’, 19) and means to murder him *ðis mergenlican dæge* (‘on the morrow’, 25). These and remaining instances (cf. 11, 15, 21, 29) associate assaults, dramatic reversals of action, and/or terror with the vocabulary of liminal times at the edge of night. Although this association is in fact no more than an implication of the juxtaposition of phrases, its consistency seems more than incidental, and it is difficult to ignore that the same kind of association has been observed in relation to the monsters’ similar activity in *Beowulf*. In that poem, however, the corresponding temporal cues are intertwined with highly poetic ‘shadow’ vocabulary and images through which the ominousness and dread that mark such moments are made much more palpable. Conversely, the prose text of *Christopher* exhibits in this respect no poetic words nor even the idea of darkness (in most cases what is actually meant seems to be some time

⁴⁵ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 29 and passim, insists on the humanity of the monsters in the manuscript.

⁴⁶ Pulsiano, ‘Passion’, p. 180; Fulk, *Beowulf Manuscript*, pp. 345-6; Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 14.

of the day), and all these temporal statements can be accounted for in the Latin text. Still, it is noteworthy that the Old English repeats the phrase *ðys/ðis/py mergenlican dæge* four times (15, 21, 25, 29) where the Latin has more variation and less wordiness (resp. *crastina, nocte, crastino, and hora*).⁴⁷ The effect is that the narrative seems punctuated by the recurrence of a gradually more ominous phrasal pattern, a feature that is also present (admittedly to much greater effect) in *Beowulf*. Even in the limited sample now available to us, then, this prose piece evidences an element of skeletal structure which is remarkably analogous to the recurrence of a connection between monsters and gloomy shifts of darkness and light that, in the poetry, is a structural element fleshed out with ‘shadow’, for which it is a major focus there.

Another point of interest is the nexus of fire, fear, and face. Saint Christopher, standing in the middle of the fire with which he is being tormented, strikes terror in Dagnus by showing him his face ‘blooming like a rose’ (10). Arrows are then shot at him, but cannot touch him, and two of these blind the king’s eyes instead. Finally, the saint’s last prayer contains the injunction that his resting place be free from ‘the danger of fire’ (29). An earlier version, however — perhaps in the original manuscript — was likely to contain one more element; namely, that a fiery helmet was put on the martyr’s head at the earlier stage of the torments; this detail, present in the Latin text, is not in our surviving Old English version probably because it has been simply overlooked in the course of scribal copying.⁴⁸ Admittedly none of these details necessarily implies ‘shadow’. But the implicitly double-edged character of these weapons of torment and terror, the fire and the arrows, to which one may wish to try and articulate a hypothetical connection between fiery (blinding) helmet, radiant face, and blinding of the

⁴⁷ Cf. Pulsiano, ‘Passion’, pp. 184-5.

⁴⁸ Fulk, *Beowulf Manuscript*, p. 346.

opponent,⁴⁹ is not without resemblance to *Beowulfian* motifs that operate with, and are articulated by, ‘shadow’ (cf. *fāh* helmet, dragon *fāh* with terror, transfer of fire and *fāh*-ness from foe to hero). Of course this only opens up to speculative thinking, in the vein of, ‘If someone like the *Beowulf*-poet had tried to adapt *Christopher* to Old English verse he would have found good material for his ‘shadow’ themes’. The suggestive details of this brief prose text, in the lack of tangible verbal evidence, remain no more than suggestive details.

The total absence of ‘shadow’ in a presumably ‘shadow’-attracting narrative context highlights the ‘poeticness’ of the phenomenon under study; ‘shadow’ is not only story- and theme-specific, it also depends crucially on fundamental features of Old English verse such as repetition of sounds, parallelism, variation, and deployment of poetic vocabulary, none of which characteristics are present in *Christopher*. Despite the arguable connections at the level of themes and motifs to the other texts in the manuscript, including some more general analogies in addition to the specific points discussed here,⁵⁰ the formal and stylistic characteristics of the prose in *Christopher* bear no direct relationship to the poetry present in the *Beowulf* manuscript (nor to any other poetic work, be it in Old English or in Latin). It is probably in this context of nearly complete removal from poetic tradition that the lack of ‘shadow’ in this text should be apprehended. The only formal feature in *Christopher* found to go some way in the direction of ‘shadow’, namely the repetition of the *mergen*- phrase, must fall short of counting as a ‘shadow’ element or indeed a poetic feature, and is isolated and inconclusive. There is no internal or external evidence to suggest that it represents some

⁴⁹ Kathryn Powell, ‘Meditating on Men and Monsters: A Reconsideration of the Thematic Unity of the *Beowulf* Manuscript’, *RES* n.s. 57 (2006), pp. 1-15, at pp. 12-14, explores the theme of sight and blinding in *Christopher* (and finds parallels in *Judith*), but does not invoke the hypothetical helmet in this connection.

⁵⁰ Powell, ‘Men and Monsters’, argues that the theme of rulership coming to grips with foreignness and monstrosity was the notion that presided over the addition of *Christopher* and *Judith* to the earlier compilation.

sort of theme-driven formulaicness rather than coincidental repetition by an uninspired translator. An instructive comparison that may shed some light on such questions, however, is provided by the two prose texts that follow in the manuscript.

4.1.4 *The Wonders of the East*

Monster-related danger, hostility, and attacks also seem to associate with ‘shadow’ in *Wonders* and the *Letter*. These two texts are also prose translations of prose Latin originals, yet they display slightly more direct verbal evidence than *Christopher*. In *Wonders*,⁵¹ exotic beings whose appearance is characterised by darkness are generally vicious and/or occupy a perilous land, whereas explicitly non-threatening beings are never so described. Some gigantic men (50), for example, are called *hostes* (‘Enemies’) and are *sweartes hiwes* (‘of a black hue’, 52). The text goes on to say that they are a cannibalistic tribe (the only one in the list), introducing this information with *cuplice* (‘clearly’, ‘evidently’, ‘indeed’, 53) as if perhaps suggesting that this is just the behaviour expected from huge dark-coloured enemies. A *sweart* complexion reappears in connection to people who cannot be approached on account of a fiery mountain (108) and to *Sigelwara* (101) — although nothing more is said about the latter tribe, the name alone (translating ‘Ethiopians’) may connote, or might have connoted at some remove in the past, both hostility (or monstrosity) and ‘shadow’ (fire and darkness).⁵² Fire as well as gigantism tends to collocate with characterisations of this type, and there often is

⁵¹ For a general presentation of this text and its relationship to its sources, see Kenneth Sisam, ‘The Compilation of the *Beowulf* Manuscript’, in *idem, Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 65-96, at pp. 72-83; Ann Knock, ‘Analysis of a Translator: The Old English *Wonders of the East*’, in Jane Roberts and Janet L. Nelson, and Malcolm Godden, eds., *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on the Occasion of her Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 121-6; and Fulk, *Beowulf Manuscript*, pp. xi-xii. The text is quoted from the edition in the latter, pp. 16-30.

⁵² Tolkien, ‘*Sigelwara land*’.

something special about heads. The *healfhundingas* ('half-dog people', 27, rendering *cynocephali*) have 'dogs' heads and their breath is like a fiery flame'; and there are bicephalic snakes *para eagan scinað nihtes swa leohte swa blæcern* ('whose eyes shine in the night as bright as lanterns', 17), an expression in which the alternation of words for brightness and darkness perhaps activates the potential etymological ambiguity of *blæcern* ('light-house/dark-house').⁵³

It should be added that all the elements discussed above have their origin and equivalent in the corresponding Latin text of the *Wonders*, which the Anglo-Saxon translator follows rather faithfully, 'with only minor omissions and errors' and the occasional addition of 'a brief explanation'.⁵⁴ That being said, a few such alterations are potentially relevant to this discussion. As already noted, the (Greek-derived) Latin *cynocephali* becomes in Old English *healfhundingas*; not only does the translator care to deploy a native self-alliterating compound, he is also able to preserve the slightly unusually alliterating style of the corresponding Latin passage (*c- c- c-*, *c- c-*, *f- f-*), in fact even improving on it in his Old English prose (*c- h- h- h- c-*, *h- h-*, *h- h-*, *w- w-*). Elsewhere he uses another set of compounds, *wælcyrrie* ('valkyrie', 'slain-chooser', 14) and a derived name *Wælkýrging* (33), where the source speaks of 'Gorgons'. There is no alliteration or other poetic features in the corresponding passages, although another point of interest here is the presence of darkness, dusk, and fire in the immediate vicinity, whether this is a coincidence or not (fire is also mentioned alongside the *healfhundingas*). But compound words are primarily a hallmark of Old English verse, a fact which, together with their denoting here mythical beings and, in the case of the 'valkyrie' ones, harking back to ancient native myths, arguably insinuates a poetic

⁵³ The expression recurs in slightly changed form later on (78), where it describes people; see below.

⁵⁴ Fulk, *Beowulf Manuscript*, p. xi. For an edition of the Latin text cf. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 175-81.

flavour into this prose text.⁵⁵ As the example with alliteration cited above suggests, this (very faint) poetic colouring seems to have been prompted by features already present in the Latin, which the translator may have perceived as either poetic or demanding a poetic response. A further intimation of this, and one that directly concerns ‘shadow’, is found in the way he renders two clauses in his source that end with the paronomastic/etymological figure *sicut lucernae lucent*. The rendering of the first of these, *quorum oculi nocte sicut lucernae lucent* (‘whose eyes shine at night like lamps’),⁵⁶ is a close translation: *þara eagan scinað nihtes swa leohte swa blæcern* (already mentioned above). But when the translator encounters a similar clause with an identical figure a second time, *quorum oculi sicut lucernae lucent*,⁵⁷ he incorporates new material into his translation, putting light and darkness into sharper relief and even managing some amount of rhythm and rhyme: *þara eagan scinaþ swa leohte swa man micel blæcern onele on þeostre nihte* (‘whose eyes shine as bright as if a great lantern (‘light-house’) were kindled on a dark night’, 78). This is the more remarkable because the stand-alone sentence which the latter example concludes constitutes an item in the list of wonders that contributes unusually little new data to it; and yet the scribe, who ‘seems to have had little regard for the text, which he frequently shortened’,⁵⁸ has nonetheless kept this most uninformative and comparatively uninteresting item.⁵⁹ One might wish to connect these and other examples to Grendel and the dragon in *Beowulf*

⁵⁵ So does the rendering of two instances of *margaritae* (‘pearls’) (Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 179, §§24 and 25) by *saragimmas/sarogimmas* (‘crafty jewels’, 83, 87), a rare compound otherwise confined to OE verse and occurring with any frequency only in *Beowulf* (cf. *Beowulf* 1157a, 2749a, 3102b; also *The Ruin* 35b and *The Metres of Boethius* 21.21b). Only the *Beowulf*-codex version of *Wonders* deploys this poetic compound; the version preserved in London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. v, has two different prosaic expressions instead.

⁵⁶ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 176, §5.

⁵⁷ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 179, §22.

⁵⁸ Fulk, *Beowulf Manuscript*, p. xi, comparing the version in the *Beowulf* codex to that preserved in the other manuscript.

⁵⁹ Knock, ‘*Wonders*’, p. 126, supposes that the translator is merely interested in the imagery of light and fire, a keenness of his own and unrelated to the illustrations in the manuscript (of which he cannot have been the author).

and, through the *healfhundingas*, to the other two prose texts (see above and below),⁶⁰ although the lack of further contexts means that the link must remain thin.

Both the translator of the version of *Wonders* that ended up in the *Beowulf* codex and the scribe who copied it appear therefore to have contributed to this prose text some degree of poeticness, by enhancing pre-existing elements with features such as repetition, poetic vocabulary, alliteration, or metrical patterns, and bestowed this quality mainly on passages containing ‘shadow’-related elements. Still more alteration and adaptation, however, is found in the text of the *Letter*, which accordingly yields more tangible results.

4.1.5 *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*

Following *Wonders* in the manuscript, *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* is likewise a vernacular translation of a Latin text (*Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*, a seventh-century translation of a Greek text) evidencing keen interest in exotic places and dangerous monsters.⁶¹ In a more accentuated manner than its source, the *Letter* focuses on the figure of Alexander as he ruthlessly leads his army through danger and death into unknown lands, and through his exploits presents him both as a monster-slayer and as a monster of cruelty and pride himself.⁶² A further departure from the Latin text is the translator’s decision to end the account straight after Alexander’s own death is prophesied, ignoring a large (rather anticlimactic) section of the Latin source.⁶³ These vernacular alterations at the narrative level, inasmuch as they evince a concern

⁶⁰ Cf. Orchard, *Companion*, p. 25.

⁶¹ See Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 116-39, his edition of the Latin text pp. 204-23; and Fulk, *Beowulf Manuscript*, pp. xii-xiii and his edition of the Old English text (with translation) pp. 34-83.

⁶² Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 121-5, 131, and 135-8.

⁶³ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 135.

for monstrosity and doom, bring the *Letter* suggestively close to *Beowulf* which it immediately precedes in the manuscript.⁶⁴

The first part of the *Letter* (1-224) consists mainly of a series of more or less monstrous attacks; wild beasts, savages, and nature itself take turns oppressing Alexander and his army at every night camp.⁶⁵ Some of these encounters afford striking verbal parallels, assembled by Orchard, with *Beowulfian* monstrous episodes.⁶⁶ But further, subtler reminiscences of Grendel's and the dragon's depredations, not noted by Orchard, are provided by the use of 'shadow' phraseology during and, especially, before such attacks.⁶⁷ The Macedonians set up camp by a *mere* ('lake', 94, 99) which is *eall mid wudu beweaxen* ('all overhung with woods', 95).⁶⁸ A sense of indeterminate foreboding is created and repeated: *us wæs uncuð hwæt us on nihtlicum fyrste gesælde* ('it was unknown to us what might happen to us in the night', 100); *gif us on niht uncuðes hwæt on becwome* ('if anything unknown came on us during the night', 103). The conspicuous collocation of *niht* with *uncuð*, a word used in *Beowulf* in relation to dark and dreadful habitats of monsters, is here augmented with copious reference to fire and burning (100-5). The fire is meant as a defence against the undefined threat which finally materialises in the form of *wyrmcyn* ('serpent-race', 106) and *nædran* ('snakes', 108, 115) gleaming with many colours — yet some are *blace* ('?black' or '?shining', 109) — and marked with both wonder and terror (115); they exhale deadly venom and fire (119-20). When campfire is mentioned again, it also comes in conjunction with the by then highly foreboding descent of night, *Mid þy hit æfenne nealæhte* ('When evening approached', 208; cf. 203), followed by uncanny winds, snow, cold (204, 208-9), and

⁶⁴ See further Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 139.

⁶⁵ For an introduction to the Old English text and its contexts cf. Fulk, *Beowulf Manuscript*, pp. xii-xiii; and Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 116-39.

⁶⁶ Orchard, *Companion*, pp. 28-35.

⁶⁷ Most of the quotes that follow correspond to sizeable expansions and elaborations by the translator compared to his Latin source; cf. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 132-9.

⁶⁸ Cf. Orchard, *Companion*, p. 34.

finally emphatic darkness and fire falling from the sky ; it is noteworthy that at the level of form, this passage is adorned by conspicuous repetition and alliterative patterns, notably cross-alliteration (213-14; formal ornamentation highlighted in boldface):

Ða sona wæs æfter þon **swiðe sweart** wolcen ond genip, ond þa eac cwoman of þæm sweartan wolcne **byrnende fyr**. Ða fyr ðonne **feollon** on þa eorþan swelce **byrnende þecelle**, ond for þæs fyres **bryne eall se feld born**.

[Soon after that there was a very black cloud and darkness (*genip*), and then burning fires also came out of the black cloud. These fires then fell upon the earth like burning torches, and on account of the blaze of the fire the entire ground was burning.]

It is remarkable that the same phrase *swelce byrnende þecelle* is used of both the cloud-fire and the preceding serpent-fire (119). Thus human fire is countered, as it were, with the fire of serpents and dark skies whose successive onslaughts form patterns which, in their outline and some details, recall the *Beowulf* dragon; the increased poeticness in the prose at the formal level confirms the impression of a connection.

Throughout the text, threatening or otherwise dramatic passages are introduced by references to the passing of the liminal phases of day and night (cf. 136, 139, 203, 208, 250), an association of motifs that is remarkably evenly distributed across the entire manuscript. On one such time, in between the two passages highlighted above (serpent-fire and sky-fire), a poisonous fume appears and spreads death far and wide, yet its source is not revealed. However, suggestively inserted in a sequence of potentially 'shadow'-inviting markers (pre-dawn, pestilence, white colour, death), is the detail that the vapour is *on hringwisan fag* ('?marked/shaped/shining (*fāh*) with ring-patterns / in whorls', 136). The multivalent 'shadow' word *fāh* is appropriate in the narrative context because the danger is both indeterminate and acute. Since serpents have occurred earlier in the text in connection with poisonous vapour (120) and represent one of *fāh*'s main associations in verse and specifically in *Beowulf*, the intrusion of this term seems to contribute to an ill-boding impression that this section of

the text is meant to culminate with something akin to a dragon's fiery and 'shadow'-marked attack.

But it is striking that this highly poetic 'shadow' epithet should occur in Latin-based prose, even more so because the whole phrase even seems to approximate a Sievers type E verse familiar notably from *Beowulf* (compare *hringwisan fag* to *wældreore fag* and *fyrwylmum fah* (*Beowulf* 1631b and 2671a)). Furthermore, *fāh* collocates with another 'shadow' word, *ūht* ('pre-dawn'), in a sentence that is besides characterised by the extraordinary repetition of *wolberende* ('pestilential', 3x), a triple alliterative pattern (vocalic, *h-*, *m-*), and a mini-ring pattern around the 'shadow' phrase (*æteowde ... wolberende lyft ... on hringwisan fag ... wolbeorendan lyfte ... æteowde*).⁶⁹ What immediately follows, before any of the monstrous, serpentine, and fiery attacks whose eventual coming has now been perhaps consciously prefigured, seems like something of an anticlimax, namely *mys* ('mice', 137, translating *mures*, but presumably referring to bats). This sequence of 'shadow' and poeticness followed by *mys*, however, echoes a slightly earlier sequence where a 'shadow' phrase, *in þære sweartan nihte ond in þære bystran* ('in the black night and in the dark', 124), is *also* surrounded by a double alliterative pattern and *also* immediately followed, *also* before a more formidable foe is ushered in, by the mention of *mys* — in that case *hreaþemys* ('bats', 125, translating *uespertiliones*).⁷⁰ The result is a set of clusters of thematic, linguistic, and formal features binding 'shadow' to particular, story-specific elements, and whose deployment intensifies a sense of impending danger and doom. This provides a strikingly close analogue to *Beowulf*, and its significance should be appreciated in the view of a number of other similarities of motif, lexis, and form that

⁶⁹ By contrast, the corresponding Latin text is much more concise and unadorned; the source of the Old English *fāh* phrase is *in modum zonarum* ('like girdles/circles'), apparently an error for *in modum ranarum* ('like frogs'); cf. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 212, §21, and p. 128.

⁷⁰ Cf. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 212, §21, and p. 211, §19, respectively.

Andy Orchard finds between the two texts.⁷¹ The translator of the *Letter*, therefore, appears to activate the Old English linguistic associations he has found as dormant possibilities in his Latin source and to clothe them in as much poeticness as he dares incorporate into his prose. ‘Shadow’ and poetic features tend to occur in clusters in his prose and to be further indexed by verbal repetition, just as ‘shadow’ and unusually salient poetic features do in *Beowulf*, to a similar effect in both texts.

In its patterned, echoic texture at times superimposed on its Latin-based narrative, the *Letter* situates itself somewhere midway between *Beowulf* and *Wonders*. Approaching the text of the *Letter* through the lens of ‘shadow’, therefore, adds new support for the case that its translator knew and used *Beowulf*; in light of the similarity of many of the patterns just discussed (and the different degrees to which they can be detected), it also provides additional data to bear on the question of the interrelationship between the prose texts and between any or all of them and *Beowulf*.⁷²

This analysis demonstrates that ‘shadow’ occurs only in prose passages that (1) share themes and/or motifs with poetry that is rich in ‘shadow’ (like *Beowulf*), and (2) evince some formal poetic patterning. The reliance of ‘shadow’ on very specific poetic lexis as well as on rhythmical patterns means that the second criterion is not enough to attract ‘shadow’ in prose — witness for example Wulfstan’s sonic patterns or Ælfric’s alliterative prose, both essentially devoid of ‘shadow’. In other words, the prose must not only approximate verse superficially, but locally almost *become* verse.⁷³

If one accepts Kathryn Powell’s recent proposition (seeking to refine earlier opinions on thematic unity that have been most fully articulated by Orchard) that the *Beowulf* codex came to being as a collection of stories about marvellous conflicts of

⁷¹ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 116-39; and, more particularly, *idem*, *Companion*, pp. 25-39.

⁷² Cf. Orchard, *Companion*, p. 25.

⁷³ For parallel reflections on whether and how prose can become verse see Roberta Frank, ‘Poetic Words in Late Old English Prose’, in Malcolm Godden, Douglas Gray, and Terry Hoad, eds., *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E.G. Stanley* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 87-107, esp. pp. 88-9.

heroism and monstrosity (*Beowulf*, *Wonders*, the *Letter*) subsequently updated, with only a slight reinterpretation of its driving theme, to include the oppositions of powerful rulership and invading foreignness (*Christopher*, *Judith*),⁷⁴ then both putative stages of the manuscript constitute an ideal context for interpreting the presence and the absence of the phenomenon under study. This follows not only from Powell's strengthening of the case for thematic coherence, but more importantly from the pertinence of her two related themes to the manifestations and effects of 'shadow'. Contexts in which a distance in both time and space is implied between text and audience, and in which the opposition between superhumans and supernatural (or otherwise 'other') enemies is dramatised to the point where boundaries between the two camps, physical, symbolic, or ethical, are on the brink of being displaced or transcended,⁷⁵ are contexts in which 'shadow' often thrives (as its ambivalent semantic force and supernatural connotations insinuate themselves into the dialectic interface between the two sides).

On the one hand, then, arguments about the thematic unity of the codex provide a context for trying to link the dots between the fragmentary findings in the prose texts, and thence for claiming a deeper formal and semantic coherence of the manuscript on the basis of the presence of 'shadow' acting as a binding force and perhaps even having been operative in its compilation. On the other hand, however, the same thematic affinities can constitute a springboard from which to assess the resilience of prose in respect to 'shadow', and thus measure, in turn, how intrinsically poetic this phenomenon is in its nature and function. The bulk of the three prose works discussed, indeed, seems largely impervious to 'shadow' despite abundant recurrence of what, seen from the perspective of poetry and its tendencies, would appear as inviting cues, such as

⁷⁴ Powell, 'Men and Monsters', esp. pp. 10 and 14-15. See Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, pp. 2-18 and 27. Michael Lapidge, 'The Archetype of *Beowulf*', *ASE* 29 (2000), pp. 5-41, at pp. 40-1, suggests on palaeographical grounds that *Beowulf*, *Wonders*, and the *Letter* (but not *Christopher* or *Judith*) may have already belonged together in the earliest stage of *Beowulf*'s written transmission.

⁷⁵ Cf. Powell, 'Men and Monsters', pp. 1-2, 4, and 10.

the nightly attacks by gigantic or serpentine predators. If one should ignore the occasional mention of night or the dark as purely circumstantial, and the occasional alliterating doublet as a natural feature of Old English prose, one would be left essentially with no more than two real ‘shadow’ moments in the prose, one in *Wonders* (abnormal elaboration of eyes’ glow) and one in the *Letter* (centred on *fāh*). Their isolation precludes the presence of an active ‘shadow’ theme informing either prose text, and only by invoking an external backdrop of poetry can a meaningful interpretation be attempted. In other words, while the prose could be claimed to resemble ‘shadow’ by exhibiting a number of conditions for its appearance, ‘shadow’ itself is not dynamically active within its structure. When ‘shadow’ words and some attending features do occur, the special ‘moments’ thus created are disturbances in the texture of the prose, ‘powerful and significant “others”’, “icebergs”’.⁷⁶ Their interpretation implies a larger hybrid context of prose and verse. A native development of prose out of the vernacular poetic matrix is not warranted, but early Old English prose, like that associated with the *Beowulf* manuscript, was shaped by many formal and thematic influences, some of which (given the right blend of vernacular poetics, Latin symbolism, and perhaps traditional patterned language) occasionally incorporated ‘shadow’ and a partly poetic-feeling texture.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Frank, ‘Poetic Words’, p. 107 (quoting Geoffrey Shepherd, ‘Scriptural Poetry’, in E.G. Stanley, ed., *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature* (London, 1966), p. 21), and on possible reasons for poetic words to appear in prose cf. pp. 95 and 103.

⁷⁷ The larger questions pertaining to this debate are set by Janet M. Bately, ‘Old English Prose Before and After the Reign of Alfred’, *ASE* 17 (1988), pp. 93-138, most relevantly to the present discussion at pp. 132-8.

4.2 THE GUTHLAC TRADITION

4.2.1 The prose material relating to Guthlac

The Anglo-Saxon material relating to the life and legend of St Guthlac⁷⁸ furnishes a promising ground for an analysis of ‘shadow’ on account of both the nature of the sources (and of their interrelationships) and the themes and imagery given prominence in the narrative that they have in common. The relevance of the latter aspect can be summarized in three points. The topographical background of the fens and barrows of Crowland sets the narratives within a liminal space, a borderland, whose closest analogues in Old English literature would be the water and mountain landscape of the Grendelkin in *Beowulf*, the mound setting of the dragon in the same poem, or the hostile desert wasteland of *Exodus* — all of which not only procure a backdrop for ‘shadow’ in their respective contexts but are among its essential components. Secondly, the prominent aspect of the struggles opposing the (mound-breaking) saint and hermit Guthlac to demons which are linked to both the Christian hell and the pagan burial mounds, creates a kind of situation which is comparable to scenes of climactic confrontation already discussed in the context of Old English verse,⁷⁹ in which ‘shadow’ has been found to be a notable part of the dramatisation. Thirdly and more generally, although the real life story that underpins the different literary accounts is not very far removed in time, the setting and the themes used in these accounts still

⁷⁸ For an overview of Guthlac’s cult and its relationship with the sources to be analysed here, see Jane Roberts, ‘Hagiography and Literature: The Case of Guthlac of Crowland’, in Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr, eds., *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (London, 2001), pp. 69-86.

⁷⁹ For connections between these demons, the mound landscape, and Grendel, see Audrey L. Meaney, ‘Anglo-Saxon Pagan and Early Christian Attitudes to the Dead’, in Martin Carver, ed., *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300* (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY, 2003), pp. 229-41, at pp. 231-2. On Guthlac’s (?burial) mound’s further connotations of possible relevance here, see Karl P. Wentersdorf, ‘Guthlac A: The Battle for the *Beorg*’, *Neophilologus* 62 (1978), pp. 135-42; and Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, ‘The Hill of the Dragon: Anglo-Saxon Burial Mounds in Literature and Archaeology’, *Folklore* 61 (1950), pp. 169-85.

introduce a distancing gap into the texture of the narratives (remote place, relics of paganism), thus conjuring a kind of perspective in which ‘shadow’ appears to thrive.

The Guthlac material, in addition to seeming so ‘shadow’-inviting, presents another interest which lies in the hybrid and intersected nature of the sources involved. The Latin *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, written by one Felix in the mid-eighth century within probably no more than a generation of the saint’s death, has been shown to depend at least as much on vernacular modes of composition and on orality as on Latin literary models.⁸⁰ The relatively close Old English translation whose sole copy survives in BL, Cotton Vespasian D.xxi, probably dates from the ninth or early tenth century.⁸¹ From an earlier version of the Vespasian *Life* was excerpted the so-called Vercelli homily XXIII, in reality a narrative text presenting some homiletic features, with a complex and vexed generic allegiance.⁸² Finally, two poems about the saint, by different authors, are found in the late-tenth-century Exeter Book. While the sources of *Guthlac A*, a reflective account of the saint’s fights against the demons, are hard to ascertain and may have been predominantly oral, *Guthlac B*, a substantial elaboration of the saint’s death, is based on chapter 50 of Felix’s *Vita* and appears strikingly literate.⁸³ These five sources, therefore — the main witnesses to the Guthlac legend — encompass a remarkable range

⁸⁰ Gernot R. Wieland, ‘*Aures lectoris*: Orality and Literacy in Felix’s *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*’, *Journal of Medieval Latin* 7 (1997), pp. 168-77. The Latin text is cited by chapter and page number from Bertram Colgrave, ed. and tr., *Felix’s Life of Saint Guthlac* (Cambridge, 1956) (hereafter *VSG*).

⁸¹ Jane Roberts, ‘The Old English Prose Translation of Felix’s *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*’, in Paul E. Szarmach, ed., *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose: Sixteen Original Contributions* (Albany, 1986), pp. 363-79, at pp. 365-9. The Old English translation is cited by chapter and line number from P. Gosser, ed., *Das angelsächsische Prosa-Leben des heiligen Guthlac*. Anglistische Forschungen 27 (Heidelberg, 1909).

⁸² Samantha Zacher, *Preaching the Converted: The Style and Rhetoric of the Vercelli Book Homilies* (Toronto, 2009), pp. 228-9. The homily is cited by line number from D.G. Scragg, ed., *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*. EETS 300 (Oxford, 1992) (Vercelli XXIII is edited pp. 383-92).

⁸³ Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, pp. 19-43; on *Guthlac A*, see further Jane Roberts, ‘*Guthlac A*: Sources and Source Hunting’, in Edward D. Kennedy, Ronald Waldron, and Joseph S. Wittig, eds., *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 1-18, and Alaric Hall, ‘Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity: Tradition, Innovation and Saint Guthlac’, in Debra Higgs Strickland, *Images of Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson* (Leiden, 2007), pp. 207-35, accessed from <<http://www.alarichall.org.uk>>, 6 June 2011; and on *Guthlac B*, Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, ‘Guthlac on the Beach’, *Neophilologus* 64 (1980), pp. 290-6, at pp. 290-1.

of perspectives on a set of discourses whose origin is both in traditional native stock and, to a different degree in each text, in Latin and literary inspiration.

The prose texts

A comparative analysis of the *Vespasian Life* and *Vercelli XXIII* affords insights into the differential treatment of the same inherited ‘shadow’ material in the course of transmission. Felix’s text, in turn, provides a point of reference against which to measure the degree of originality and development of the theme in Old English. Furthermore, however, being written at such an early period and by an Anglo-Saxon, it also constitutes a rare witness to the possible presence of ‘shadow’-like features in early Anglo-Latin literature.

The introduction of the landscape surrounding Guthlac’s hermitage, as presented in the Old English text of the *Vespasian Life* at the beginning of chapter 3, is tinged with the characteristics of ‘shadow’. The heavy presence of moors and darkness, emphasized in a way recalling their use in poetry, is thrown into even greater relief by formal ornamentation in a text that in this respect is otherwise generally unremarkable (except in the few other special places discussed in due course below), suggesting that their traditional connotations in poetry may be operative here as well. The place is a *fenn unmætre mycelnysse* and *unmæte moras* (‘fen of immense vastness’, ‘immense moors’, 3.1-4), the ominousness of *fenn* and *moras* being bound with *m*-alliteration twice.⁸⁴ The immense moors are paired with *sweart wætersteal* (‘black standing water’, 3.4), an expression containing several quasi-asonances. The topographical features immediately following this are in the same vein as far as soundplay is concerned: the stressed syllables of *eariþas yrnende* (‘river-streams running’, 3.4-5) and *hreod and*

⁸⁴ If the plausibility of the root syllable of *unmæte* receiving at least some secondary stress is accepted; cf. Fulk *et al.*, *Beowulf*, pp. 216-7, note on *unigmetes*.

beorhgas and treowgewrido ('reeds and barrows and tree-thickets', 3.5-6) are all caught in assonance patterns. Words such as *fenn*, *moras*, *sweart*, or the hapax compound *treowgewrido*, while not strictly speaking poetic words, have a relatively high poetic rank or (in the case of the last mentioned) feel. *Sweart*, for example, is slightly less of a prose word and more of a verse word than *blæc* for the sense 'black'.⁸⁵ It is noteworthy that while *sweart* usually occurs no more than twice, if at all, in any of the other homilies and saints' lives, it is found five times in Vercelli XXIII and seven times in the *Vespasian Life*. In this context it should be added that the connotations of the repeated adjective *unmæte* probably go beyond size to cover a similar semantic area to those of *uncūð*, whose usage in verse to ominous effect and in conjunction with 'shadow' has been noted before. The congregation of these words in such a short passage, together with their integration in a web of sound patterns, strongly suggests that we have here an equivalent in prose of the type of cluster, familiar from *Beowulf* or *Exodus* for example, that in poetry conjures a dark and dismal borderland of moors and waters implicitly foreboding strife and death. The impression of a local presence of poeticness is confirmed by the fact that some of these words engage in such patterns as alliteration (see below).⁸⁶ Although these words are all accounted for in the corresponding passage in the Latin source, the patterns are not,⁸⁷ thus reinforcing the impression that the Old English translator has adapted his text to incorporate traditional poetic structures connected to the moor motif.

Accordingly there also is a certain indeterminacy at this early stage when Guthlac's enemies are first adumbrated through the reference to *eardunga para awerigedra gasta* ('dwellings of the accursed spirits', 3.30-1), which suggests that the

⁸⁵ §2.2.5.

⁸⁶ On the correlation between alliterative frequency and poetic vocabulary see Dennis Cronan, 'Alliterative Rank in Old English Poetry', *SN* 58 (1986), pp. 145-58.

⁸⁷ *VSG* 25, p. 88.

fens are teaming with some unidentified monsters, possibly corporeal, without yet specifying these are primarily the saint's spiritual foes.⁸⁸

In a manner reminiscent of the workings of poetic 'shadow', the translator deploys a series of ominous verbal echoes in the wake of this ill-boding passage. The word *wīdgil* ('widespread'), first applied to the landscape in the introduction (3.7), soon reappears in collocation with *westen* ('wasteland', 3.9, 14-15, 18, 34), an alliterative association which, by being repeated four times in the course of the chapter (at fairly regular intervals) with some variation of wording, acquires a quasi-formulaic feel. The last of these repetitions, *þa fenlican gewrido þæs wīdgillan westenes* ('the fenlike thickets of this widespread wasteland', 3.33-4), in the context of Guthlac enduring the harassment *þæra awerigdra gasta* (an expression which also works much like a formula throughout the text), weaves together several of the initial gloomy moor words into a further extended alliterative construction; interestingly, Felix's corresponding phrase *inter umbrosa solitudinis nemora* ('in the shadowy solitary heath')⁸⁹ makes an explicit reference to darkness that is lacking in the Old English, but is much less echoic.⁹⁰ Meanwhile another adjective, *dīgle* ('secret, obscure'), also appears four times in the chapter (3.16, 27, 38, 63), semantically 'replacing' *unmāte* (which does not appear in this chapter beyond the introductory passage). In its first three instances it alternates with *wīdgil*, with which it shares, oddly enough, all its constituent phonemes as well as the same referent (the wasteland fens). Its last occurrence, by interesting contrast, qualifies not the demon-infested fen but *mihte ures Drihtnes* ('the might of our Lord', 3.63). It might be significant that this referential transposition follows shortly after another one where the translator repeats the element *gāst*- thrice within a single

⁸⁸ Note that explicit terms, such as *deofol*, are not used at this stage. Grendel is also repeatedly and ambiguously called a *gāst*, cf. §4.1.1.

⁸⁹ *VSG* 25, p. 88.

⁹⁰ Of these three words only the last has occurred in Felix's introductory fenland passage (*nemoribus*).

sentence (3.55-6) in reference, respectively, to the demons, the spiritual weapons with which to fight them, and the Holy Spirit. It is perhaps not a coincidence either that the last mentioned echoes and repetitions occur within one of the few passages in the text that are markedly enhanced with relatively dense alliteration. In the following chapter and a half, however, despite intervening attacks by the demons, no ‘shadow’ nor such related patterns are to be found any more; not until a good way into chapter 5 in the climactic scene in which the demons drag Guthlac to the gates of hell.

The beginning of this culminating assault is signalled by a repetition of the word *niht* (‘night’, 5.52, 53); this is soon followed by a recurrence of the motif of the dark moor and waters and of ‘shadow’ clusters echoing the phraseology of the earlier passage in chapter 3 discussed above. The devils throw Guthlac *on þone sweartan fenn*, *on þa horwihtan wæter*, and *on þære þystrunge* (‘into the black fen’, ‘into the filthy water’, ‘into the darkness’, 5.72, 73, 77). After a brief respite, the vision of hell’s gates unfolds (5.88-96):⁹¹

þa geseah he ealne norðdæl heofones, swylce he wære þam **sweartestan** **wolcnum** ymbseald swiðlicra **þeostra**. Ða geseah he færinga unmete werod þæra awerigedra gasta ... þone halgan wer gelæddon to þam **sweartum** tintrehstowum, helle dura hi hine gebrohton. Ða he þa þær geseah þa fulnysse þæs smyces and þa byrnendan lega and þone ege þære **sweartan** deopnysse...

[then he saw all the northern part of heaven as if it were surrounded with the blackest clouds of deep darkness. Then he suddenly saw an immense troop of accursed spirits ... they led the holy man to the black torment-places, brought him to hell’s door. Then when he saw the foulness of the smoke and the burning flames and the terror of the black depth...]

The elements *norð-*, *unmæte*, and *sweart-*, which in the earlier fenland passage have been used in respect to the haunted earthly landscape, now apply to the spiritual vision of hell. This linking with referential transfer recalls the examples of the use of *dīgle* and *gāst-* noted above, and can be linked forward to subsequent divine manifestations, as discussed below.

⁹¹ With ‘shadow’/darkness phraseology in boldface and poetic-like sound patterns (alliteration, assonance) underlined.

Before investigating further the *Vespasian Life*, however, it is necessary to turn to the corresponding text of Vercelli XXIII, which presents subtle but interesting variations. The latter begins with the account corresponding to chapter 4 in the *Vespasian* text, that is, *after* the first series of ‘shadow’ clusters and echoes. The building up to the vision of hell in it, therefore, has none of the echoic context it has in the *Vespasian* text. Nevertheless both Old English texts exhibit virtually the same wording here as far as ‘shadow’ is concerned, down to the passage corresponding to the *Vespasian* quotation above. The only marked difference is that Vercelli XXIII has the reading *nywylnesse* (123) where the *Vespasian Life* has *deopnysse*. The Vercelli word is based on the adjective *neowol* (variant form *nifol*), which through its semantic associations with darkness and various kinds of sinister connotations is much closer to the ‘shadow’ nexus than *dēop*; it is a rather poetic word, prone to enter ‘shadow’ *n*-alliterating patterns. Now on account of its formal characteristics, the passage quoted can be seen as a prose equivalent of what in poetry is called ring composition; *helle dura*, the key idea of the entire episode, is the centre of the ring, surrounded on both sides by emphatic darkness (*sweart-*). In the Vercelli version, the ring’s ending, *sweartan nywylnesse*, mirrors the ring’s beginning (*norðdæl ... sweartestan*) much more satisfactorily than in the *Vespasian* version, on account of both the cross-alliteration and the connotative closeness (since the idea of ‘north’ often connects to ‘shadow’ themes). In both texts, the hell gates passage engenders a number of verbal echoes (comparable to the echoes that have been shown to follow the fenland passage), involving the words *sweart* and *þēostru* in both. The *Vespasian* text’s repetition of *deopnysse*, however, is a markedly less prominent echo than the Vercelli text’s consistent reuse of *neowolnesse* instead, a word whose rareness and specific associations arguably ensure a more striking effect. In both its instances, this term is not motivated by the Anglo-Latin *Vita*

where, although the other repetitions are present at least to some extent (*atrae, atrarum, atras*, ‘black’; *tenebrarum, tenebras*, ‘darkness’),⁹² they are less insistent than in the Old English version.

In two further details Vercelli XXIII’s treatment of the ‘shadow’ material is more poetic, giving the theme more salience. One is found in the variation in the motif of the devils hiding themselves in the darkness; while the *Vespasian Life* has *on þeostre gehyddon* (‘hid themselves in the darkness’, 5.123), the Vercelli text boasts an alliterating equivalent: *in heolstre hyddon* (‘hid themselves in the darkness’, 147). The other is a more refined beginning of the hell gates passage, which in Vercelli XXIII runs thus (117-18):

þa geseah he ealne norðdæl heofones swylce he wære þam **sweartestan wolcnum** afylled
swiðra **genipa**.

[then he saw all the northern part of heaven as if it were filled with the blackest clouds of
deep *genip*]

This effects a miniature ring or envelope pattern, since the substitution of *þeostra* with *genipa* links back to *norðdæl* via alliteration. Poetically, furthermore, *genip* is as much an enhancement of *þeostu* as *neowylness* is of *dēopness*. The Latin source of this clause is not marked by anything comparable, but interestingly strings together even more darkness words than the Old English: *ecce septentrionalis caeli plaga fuscis atrarum nubium caliginibus nigrescere videbatur* (‘the northern region of the sky seemed to blacken with the dark mists of murky clouds’),⁹³ and on several occasions Felix uses *umbra* (‘shadow’) and related forms which are surprisingly ignored in both Old English witnesses.⁹⁴ This vision of hell represents the culminating and final event in Vercelli XXIII, a situation it does not have in the *Vespasian Life* nor in its Latin source which both continue with anti-climactic attacks and end with a second climax, namely

⁹² VSG 31, pp. 102 and 104, and VSG 32, p. 106, respectively.

⁹³ VSG 31, p. 104.

⁹⁴ Compare e.g. VSG 52, p. 164 with *Vespasian Life* 21.14.

Guthlac's death. In addition, if one considers on the one hand the suggestive connections, perhaps more than just codicological, between this homily and the poem *Elene*,⁹⁵ and on the other hand the similarities to the vision of hell in Blickling homily XVI notably as regards near-poetic features, one arrives at a useful context within which to interpret the superior 'shadow' qualities of Vercelli XXIII in the relevant passages.

The last 'shadow' echo-words that follow in the wake of the hell gates passage occur in the context of the salvatory intervention of Saint Bartholomew rescuing Guthlac from the demons. While this event quickly leads up to the ending of Vercelli XXIII, in the *Vespasian Life* it also initiates, through its lexical and syntactical structure, a last 'shadow' theme: the coming of light dispelling/interplaying with the darkness. Light is first ushered in by Bartholomew as he arrives *mid heofonlicre byrhtnysse and wuldre scinende, betwuhx þa dimnysse þeostru þære sweartan helle* ('shining with heavenly brightness and glory, among the murky darkness of black hell', 5.120-1) — a transition artistically enhanced by the rhythmical parallelism between these two contrastive phrases, as also by rhyme (*byrhtnysse / dimnysse*) and chiasmic structure (*heofonlicre ... / ... helle*). The devils' next harassment, however anticlimactic, varies this incipient theme of light playing with darkness, the particular structure of the passage in question introducing what will become a recognizable pattern: the swift succession of (1) mentions of night (repeated), (2) sleep (repeated), and (3) a specific syntactic way of expressing the sight of fire or some other light filling a confined place. Thus in this first instance (6.5-12):

nihte ... uht ...
 mid leohte **slæpe swefed ...**
 Ða sona æfter þon he geseah eall his hus mid **fyre** afylled

[night ... pre-dawn ... asleep into a light slumber ... Then soon afterwards he saw all his house filled with fire]

⁹⁵ Roberts, 'Translation of Felix's *Vita*', pp. 375-6.

Subsequent attacks do not follow the pattern, but parallels occur near the end, before and after Guthlac's death, when he is attended not by demons any more, but by manifestations of the divine (20.96-113):

nihte ... nihtlicum ...

þa geseah he eall þæt hus utan mid mycelre **beorhtnesse** ymbseald ...
eall þæt hus mid heofonlicre **bryhto** geondgoten, and he þær geseah **fyrene** torr

[night ... nightly ... then he saw all the house surrounded outside with a great brightness ...
all the house suffused with a heavenly brightness, and he saw there a fiery tower]

This quotation is followed by more light/darkness interplay: *þæt seo sunne sylf æt middum dæge, eall hire scima wæs on blæco gecyrred* ('that the sun itself at midday, all its radiance was turned to 'darkness/paleness', 20.115-16). By its wording, the dramatic heavenly vision paradoxically recalls the vision of hell, an impression reinforced by the use of the specific phrase *þære lyfte facu* ('regions of the air', 20.116-17) which echoes *þa caldan facu þære lyfte* ('the cold regions of the air', 5.88) in the earlier scene of hell. Finally, the pattern is instantiated by Guthlac himself when he appears, after his death, to king Æthelbald (21.14-20):

nihtlice ...

mid **slæpe** betyned ...
þa geseah he ealle þa cytan innan mid heofonlice **leohte** gefylde

[nightly ... closed with sleep ... then he saw all his cell filled within with a heavenly light]

This extended echoic network certainly achieves what the earlier repetition of *dīgle* perhaps prefigures (purposefully or not): the impression of a progressive reversal of the dark and the demoniac into becoming light and the divine. This is an ambivalence of the 'shadow' type, partly effected by 'shadow' language, whereby antagonistic forces of a supernatural nature become the more verbally cognate as their conflict is artistically dramatized.⁹⁶ A convenient kernel of this dialectics in the *Vespasian Life* could be

⁹⁶ For this theme's connections to both religious and traditional heroic verse and its deployment in *Guthlac B*, see Olsen, 'Guthlac on the Beach', pp. 292-4. See further Peter J. Lucas, 'Easter, the Death of

imagined to be the word *scīma*, cited above in its context of quickly alternating references to darkness and brightness (*niht ... bryhto ... fyrene ... scīma ... blæco*) where, alongside the sense ‘radiance’ of *scīma*, undoubtedly the correct one here, may well hover the sense (‘shadow’) of *scīma*.

The passages identified and discussed represent in fact a very small portion of the texts. The beginning and middle section of the homily as well as long swathes of the Vespasian text offer virtually no ‘shadow’ evidence, thwarting the expectations based on backdrop and subject-matter announced at the onset of this section. The first demonic invasions to follow the foreboding language of the fenland’s description are not attended by any echo of that language, no ‘shadow’ epithet is ever applied to the devils, and indeed most of Guthlac’s trials cannot be inscribed in any ‘shadow’ framework. Furthermore, the underlying Latin source, much unlike *Guthlac A* (see next section), does not seem primarily interested in the demon-fights,⁹⁷ although the present analysis perhaps leaves the impression that the Old English texts show more concern for the matter, as possibly witnessed by the localised stylistic elaborations discussed. ‘Shadow’ occurs not just in any place where the subject-matter is congenial to it, but only in the few places that also have a poetic feel. But the presence of echoic networks, however few and faint, opens the question of whether some layer of vernacular (re)composition might lie between the source and the translations, a layer incorporating and reactivating dormant traditional associations. The way in which the few and very localised ‘shadow’ moments nonetheless seem embedded in the texture points not to a generically heterogeneous text (prose with sudden sprinkles of poetry) but rather to a heightened language that constantly wavers between various degrees of prosaic un-patterning and natural patterning. It is not surprising that Old English prose, a relatively

St Guthlac and the Liturgy for Holy Saturday in Felix’s *Vita* and the Old English *Guthlac B*, *MÆ* 61 (1992), pp. 1-16, at pp. 7-12; and §4.2.2 below.

⁹⁷ Hall, ‘Sanctity’, p. 214.

new medium drawing on traditional language patterns as well as on Latin/learned influence, should be unstable and manifold. This situation recalls *The Letter of Alexander*, whose literary connections also include poetic matter.

Despite offering little exploitable evidence, the Anglo-Latin source does exhibit interesting collocations of (what in Old English would presumably count as) ‘shadow’ words, sometimes more extended than their Old English equivalents. Nevertheless, unlike its Old English counterpart, the Latin phraseology of darkness, however rich, does not seem to weave any themes or motifs together. This comparison between the Latin and the Old English texts may be just enough to suggest that some of Felix’s sources contained traditional, possibly poetic material rich in ‘shadow’ — material which he included (and, depending on how steeped he might have been in the vernacular culture, perhaps even expanded) in his account, but whose formal and echoic aspects he was unable, unwilling, or uninterested in fully rendering into Latin.

4.2.2 The poems on Guthlac

The study of the prose accounts of Guthlac has yielded a map of a sparse yet patterned deployment of ‘shadow’; the patterns in question have been identified as verse-like and have been shown to occur in passages in which the prose language exhibits poetic features and, locally, can even be said to become poetic language. In this respect it is particularly interesting to investigate the Guthlac poems, as we are so fortunate as to have two distinct poetic pieces on Guthlac, contiguously copied into the same manuscript — the Exeter Book — but strikingly differing in form and in their respective relationship to the prose texts. *Guthlac A* deals with the saint’s earlier life and

struggles with demons. Whether it is ultimately based on Felix's Latin *Vita* is disputed; its precise sources are unknown and suspected to belong at least in part to the oral vernacular tradition.⁹⁸ Conversely, *Guthlac B*, which concentrates on the saint's death, follows rather closely chapter 50 of the *Vita*. On metrical and other grounds both poems are generally considered to be early (perhaps eighth or ninth century); *Guthlac A* especially could well be eighth-century,⁹⁹ in which case it predates the Old English translation of Felix's work, the *Vespasian Life*. This situation lends therefore increased interest to the comparative study of 'shadow' in the poems, given the radical difference in their respective allegiance to sources — one derived from the Latin prose and thus also almost directly comparable to the Old English translation, and the other presumably largely independent from that prose tradition. It opens up questions on how 'shadow' arises, whether it is simply inherited by authors or whether it can be refurbished to serve new agendas, how 'poetic' or simply 'vernacular' the phenomenon appears to be, and whether it can be to some extent historicized.

Guthlac A, while being the longer poem, is markedly less rich in 'shadow' than *Guthlac B*. The statistics of 'shadow' lexical elements can give a rough idea of the difference: there are twelve such elements in *Guthlac A* (one every sixty-eight lines) but twenty-eight in *Guthlac B* (one every twenty lines). This picture of course will need refinement, but even before doing so, this general fact should be considered in the view of some general remarks. For one, it may seem surprising that *Guthlac B*, the poem more closely linked to written Latin texts, is the richer in 'shadow', not *Guthlac A*, even though it is the latter which, in terms of language, diction, and metre, is relatable in the

⁹⁸ Jane Roberts, 'Guthlac A: Sources and Source Hunting', in Edward D. Kennedy, Ronald Waldron, and Joseph S. Wittig, eds., *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 1-18. See also Hall, 'Sanctity', pp. 207-35.

⁹⁹ Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, pp. 70-1; Hall, 'Sanctity', p. 209.

first place to the type of verse represented by *Beowulf*, *Exodus*, and *Andreas*,¹⁰⁰ i.e., poems that yield the most ‘shadow’ evidence. Perhaps more significant, however, are Jane Roberts’ remarks that the *Guthlac B* poet ‘achieves a far greater degree of decorativeness in the sound of his lines [than in *Guthlac A*]’, notably in his deployment of assonance, and his ‘love of extra alliteration and of rhyme’,¹⁰¹ features which have been shown to constitute a ‘shadow’-friendly environment in prose as well as in verse, and notably in the Old English prose translation of that poem’s Latin source. Also relevant to the comparison is the suggestion that the homiletic tone and prosaic language of *Guthlac A* reflects the poet’s aiming at a predominantly monastic audience.¹⁰² The avoidance of heroic language by that poet contrasts with the salience of linguistic and thematic features in *Guthlac B* that belong to the secular and heroic poetic tradition.¹⁰³ However, in view of the association of ‘shadow’ with the intimation of doom (as demonstrated so far at the level of entire poems as well as localised passages), it might be the thematic organisation of the poems that provides the best general context within which to register the discrepancy in the deployment of ‘shadow’ in the two poems. *Guthlac A* is the account of the progression of a righteous soul to heaven, a theme prefigured in miniature in the first section of the poem (lines 1-92), and whose main concern and ending is in salvation, bliss, and divine light; in other words, the poem is ‘a parable of the good soul whose journey to heaven is fully deserved, so the emphasis is very properly more on his being taken up to heaven than on his death’.¹⁰⁴ In *Guthlac B*, by contrast, the emphasis is on death and sorrow, with an opening section in

¹⁰⁰ Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, pp. 60 and 70.

¹⁰¹ Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, pp. 62-3.

¹⁰² Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, pp 49-52.

¹⁰³ On the unheroicness of *Guthlac A* see Joyce Hill, ‘The Soldier of Christ in Old English Prose and Poetry’, *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 12 (1981), pp. 57-80, esp. pp. 67-9. For the heroic overtones in *Guthlac B* see Olsen, ‘Guthlac on the Beach’. It is also revealing that poetic words and especially compounds are much more numerous in *Guthlac B* (Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, pp. 56-7), as well as hapaxes (p. 69), while the diction in *Guthlac A* is marked by ‘clarity and simplicity’, with kennings being ‘descriptive and rarely metaphorical’ (p. 53).

¹⁰⁴ Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, p. 49, and cf. p. 25.

which the elaborated account of the fall of mankind frames the rest of the narrative about Guthlac's death, thus permeating the poem with the dark and oppressing notion of the inevitability of death;¹⁰⁵ although the ending of that poem is lost, it likely contained the saint's burial and further mourning,¹⁰⁶ in any case surely a gloomier conclusion than the 'happy ending' of *Guthlac A*.

Guthlac A

In a number of places where *Guthlac A* and the prose accounts can be compared, the poet appears less interested in 'shadow' imagery than the prose authors. The first such place in the narrative is the description of the saint's hermitage. While in the *Vespasian Life* the word *beorg* ('hill, mound') occurs only once but is embedded in a sound-patterned cluster of phraseology which marks the first depiction of Guthlac's dwelling and which has been shown to constitute a nexus of 'shadow' that lexically trickles into the remainder of the text in the form of echoes, in the case of *Guthlac A* it is rather the reverse. *Beorg* occurs thirteen times, being the principal designation of Guthlac's abode, but never collocates with 'shadow'. The compound *beorgseþel* ('hill-dwelling', 102a) alliterates with *blæd Godes* ('glory of God', 102b), and many subsequent instances confirm that the poet imagined a pleasant landscape (139b-40a, 148a, 232b, 429a, 439a, 742, 746). It is true that the *beorg* is sometimes also connected with the demons' threats of torments and fiery death; it alliterates with *broga* ('terror', 140b), itself in apposition with *egeslic ond uncuð ealdfeonda nið* ('terrible and unknown old fiends' malice', 141), and with *byrnan* ('burn', 192b). But if there is a

¹⁰⁵ James L. Rosier, 'Death and Transfiguration: *Guthlac B*', in *idem, Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature in Honour of Herbert Dean Meritt* (The Hague, 1970), pp. 82-92; Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, pp. 36-7 and 45.

¹⁰⁶ Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, p. 43.

potential for ambivalence about the symbolism of the *beorg*, the poet does not highlight it by varying the expressions *grene beorgas* ('green hills', 232b) and *se grena wong* ('the green plain', 746a) with ones involving more ambiguous, 'shadow' adjectives as is the case for example in *Exodus* in connection to the sea,¹⁰⁷ no more than he makes explicit any heathen associations with burial mounds.¹⁰⁸ Fens and moors, key features of 'shadow' imagery that figure prominently in the *Vespasian Life*, are absent from both poems.

There are, however, a few passages in *Guthlac A* which collectively could constitute a distant analogue of the echoic network observed in the prose accounts. In the poem's introductory section an allusion to anchorites that neatly announces Guthlac's plight begins thus (81-3a):

Sume þa wuniað on westennum
secað ond gesittað sylfra willum
hamas on heolstrum

[Some live in the wilderness, and seek and settle of their own will dwellings in the darkness]

In this and its two other occurrences, *wēsten* ('wilderness') forms collocations whose sense and distribution in the poem recall the protracted echoes in the Old English prose *Life* originating in the dark moor passage and involving *wēsten*, *wīdgil*, *unmāete*, and *dīgle* (see above). The second instance is where Guthlac *on westenne / beorgas bræce* ('broke into hills in the wilderness', 208b-9a), the third when he addresses the devils (296-7):

Wid is þes westen, wræcsetla fela,
eardas onhæle earmra gæsta

[Wide is this wilderness, many settlements of exile, hidden abodes of the wretched spirits]

¹⁰⁷ The path through the salutary/destroying sea in *Exodus* is described as *grēne* (312a), *hasu* (284a), and *fāh* (287a, 476a); cf. Lucas, *Exodus*, p. 114-5 (note to 284a) and 118 (note to 312a).

¹⁰⁸ For the vexed question of the *beorg* symbolism (hill or burial mound), see Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, p. 132; Wentersdorf, '*Guthlac A*'; Meaney, 'Attitudes to the Dead', pp. 231-2; and Hall, 'Sanctity'.

above); a fact that gains in significance when correlated with the probability that the two texts are witnesses to this tradition's earliest stage.

The *n*-alliterations in *Guthlac A* can be seen as forming part of the 'shadow' patterning, or at least as intersecting with it. Out of fourteen *n*-alliterating lines in the poem, eleven deal with the grimness of demons' assaults, often building on the negative words *nīþ* and *nȳd*; three of these lines sport four 'shadow' words between them, and four or five more collocate with 'shadow'. The hell-door passage is anticipated by two such lines at the beginning of the seventh fitt (540, 553), and two more occur before the episode draws to an end in the seventh and eighth fitts (598, 648). This kind of indexation might recall the envelope/ring pattern that demarcates the corresponding episode in the homily, also using *n*-alliteration. A further verbal parallel with the homily, though corresponding in terms of narrative to the *Vespasian Life*'s earlier attacks by demons indexed by *niht*, occurs in an earlier passage in which the devils (350-1):

þurh nihta genipu neosan cwoman
þa þe onhæle eardas weredon

[through the darkness of nights they came seeking, those who guarded the hidden dwellings]

It is noteworthy, finally, that most of the hell-door scene in the poem is actually contained in Guthlac's reply to the devils following the vision and threats, and that his discourse is the occasion of hurling an extraordinary concentration of darkness imagery at the evil spirits. This is expressed notably by *sweart* ('black', 625a, 651a, 667a, 678a) and *þȳstro/þēostre* ('dark(ness)', 635b, 696a), thus providing further parallels to the distribution of 'shadow' in the Old English prose *Guthlac* texts; the analogy is strengthened by the fact that fire imagery alternates with darkness (624b, 634b, 668a, 672a, 676a). The following citation, which effectively mirrors the earlier vision of the gates of hell, displays the richest 'shadow' cluster (675-8a):

under scæd sconde scufan motan
 ne in bælblæsan bregdon on hinder,
 in helle hus, þær eow is ham sceapen,
 sweart sinnehte

[[cannot] shamefully thrust [me] under the shadow nor drag me down in the fire-blaze, in the house of hell, where a home is appointed to you, a black perpetual night]

Guthlac B

If *Guthlac B* is considered in its own context and in relationship to its most identifiable source, what comes to the foreground is a deployment of ‘shadow’ that is remarkably rich, internally coherent, partly comparable to the Latin source and the Old English translation thereof (with interesting implications as to origins and analogues of ‘shadow’), but also in many respects original, inasmuch as that deployment and its lexical features is far from being only an imitation of pre-existing elements in the prose. From this perspective, therefore, ‘shadow’ to a certain extent transcends the important differences in terms of diction and style between the two poems.

On the other hand, if the two poems came to be read or heard read in succession, as the compiler of the Exeter Book seems to have intended, it is interesting to reflect on the following observation: While in *Guthlac A* ‘shadow’, specifically in the form of repetitive darkness imagery with the frequent addition of fire, indexes the harassing activities of the devils, in *Guthlac B* a generally very similar and also recurring nexus provides a visually striking and recognizable context for the coming of death. The resulting impression must be that the demons’ attacks on Guthlac prefigure the manner of the hermit’s death; which could imply, therefore, that the spiritual significance of his passing is bound with that of his earlier victorious fights against the evil spirits. This observation points to a parallel in the prose Guthlac tradition that has been documented above, namely the particular combination in the *Vespasian Life* of darkness and brightness motifs signalling the devils and the paradoxical recurrence of the same

structure in the heavenly ambience of Guthlac's death. The comparative approach thus fleshes out what appears as a Guthlac-specific instance of 'shadow', yet one largely compatible, at the same time, with the general characteristics and behaviour of the phenomenon as discerned in Old English literature so far in this study.

The subject-matter of the poem, a saint's death, by definition implies the kind of dramatic oppositions on which Old English poetry thrives: victory in defeat, joy and sorrow, glory and death. Accordingly, a key notion in this poem which finds analogues in heroic vernacular poetic tradition is that of tragic reversal, a grievous turning-point brought about by a mighty and fierce, superhuman or non-human adversary connected with the forces of nature. The theme pervades the poem and generates an atmosphere of doom and grief because the destructive force is active at many levels in the text and takes many guises. In the prologue it is represented by the snake/Satan and human death in general; although the former spreads the latter, the malefactor actually mingles with his instrument: *Deað in geþrong / fira cynne, feond rixade / geond middangeard* ('Death pressed in among mankind, the enemy ruled throughout the world', 863b-5a); *Deað ricsade / ofer foldbuend* ('Death ruled over the earth-dwellers', 871b-2a). These two quotations refer to a reversal in the fortunes of men and find verbal analogues in *Beowulf* 144-6a, 2210b-11b, and *Andreas* 1115b-16a, where the malicious force is respectively Grendel, the dragon, and (cannibalistic) hunger. Both these *Beowulf* passages contain or collocate with an *oþþæt* clause signalling reversal. The striking characterization of death in *Guthlac B* as a monstrous warrior — *Wiga nealæceð* ('The warrior approaches', 1033b), *Deað nealæcte* ('Death approached', 1139b) — can be further compared with both the angel and the Red Sea in *Exodus* (39b-41a, 471-6), where the destructive forces are characterized by 'shadow'. One of the originalities of

Guthlac B, however, lies in the fact that it is not so much death that is associated with ‘shadow’ but rather its harbinger, the illness which assails the hermit.

The moment when Guthlac is struck by God-sent illness for the first time (932b-45a) is integrated in a sequence of self-contained but topically apposed passages. At the end of the first fitt Guthlac is introduced, with an emphasis on his miraculous healing of those *adle gebundne* (‘bound by disease’, 886b). The second fitt begins with the harassing devils (895-915), in the vein of similar scenes recurring in *Guthlac A* but the only such scene in *Guthlac B*. This is followed by a passage whose point is that the hermit *hælde* (‘healed’, 928b) the physically and spiritually sick. His own illness descends upon him at this juncture (932b-45a):

Wæs gewinnes þa
 yrmþa for eorðan endedogor
 þurh nydgedal neah geþrunge,
 siþþan he on westenne wiceard geceas,
 fiftynu gear, þa wæs frofre gæst
 eadgum æbodan ufan onsended,
 halig of heahþu; hreþer innan born,
 afysed on forðsið. Him færinga
 adl in gewod — he on elne swa þeah
 ungeblyged bad beorhtra gehata,
 bliþe in burgum — wæs þam bancofan
 æfter nihtglome neah geþrunge,
 breosthord onboren: wæs se bliþa gæst
 fus on forðweg.

[The day of the end of strife and miseries for the earth, through death’s forced separation, was pressing near, fifteen years after he had chosen abode in the wilderness, when the spirit of consolation was sent from above to the blessed preacher, the holy one from high; his breast was burning within, yearning for the journey forward. Suddenly a disease invaded him — yet he waited with courage, undismayed, for the bright promises, joyful in these dwelling-places — his bone-frame was pressed hard in/after night-gloom, his breast-board weakened: the joyful spirit was yearning for the way forward.]

Guthlac’s final disease, then, is integrated in the poem’s ‘shadow’ theme. Appositional structures draw attention to the possibility of conceptual connections between Guthlac’s illness, the demons, and divine grace. That this affliction should first appear *æfter nihtglome* (943a) is significant in relation to subsequent contextualisations of the illness

in darkness, such as *on ðære dimman adle* ('in that dark disease', 1162a). The association is made by Guthlac's disciple too (1016b-18b):

Is me on wene geþuht
 þæt þe untrymnes adle gongum
 on þisse nyhstan niht bysgade

[It seems to my mind that an infirmity has afflicted you with attacks of sickness last night]

Guthlac confirms: *weorc in gewod in ðisse wonnan niht* ('suffering entered on this dark night', 1028). This exchange is based on Felix, including the repetition of night indications: *an forte nocte hac ulla te infirmitatis molestia tetigit? ... molestia me tetigit nocte hac* ('perhaps some sickness has touched you in the night? ... sickness touched me in the night').¹¹² The Old English prose also follows closely here: *ac þe on þisse nihte sum untrumnyse gelamp? ... Adle me gelamp on þisse nihte* ('but has some infirmity befallen you in the night? ... A sickness befell me in the night', 20.21-3). The poet, however, expands the idea using other 'shadow' motifs.

Guthlac's fits of sickness (and more generally references to his approaching death) occur at transitional times between day and night, light and dark. Thus his illness inserts itself in the traditional poetics of morning and nightfall misery, while also intersecting with Christian death/resurrection symbolism.¹¹³ The move from twilight to night encapsulated in the line *æfter nihtglome neah geþrunge* quoted above (943) when Guthlac is first stricken, is closely replicated when death *æfter nihtscuan neah gepyded* ('was closely attached [to Guthlac] after night-shadow', 998). Darkness in motion, sneaking in and displacing light, is a motif that accompanies the hermit's illness and approaching death (969b-72a):

Dagas forð scridun,

¹¹² VSG 50, p. 152.

¹¹³ See E.G. Stanley, 'Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* and *The Penitent's Prayer*', *Anglia* 73 (1956), pp. 413-66, at pp. 434-6; and Karma Lochrie, 'Anglo-Saxon Morning Sickness', *Neophilologus* 70 (1986), pp. 316-18.

nihthelma genipu. Wæs neah seo tid
 þæt he fyrngewyrht fyllan sceolde
 þurh deaðes cyme

[The days glided forward, the darkness of night-covers. The time was near when he must fulfil the ancient decree through the coming of death]

The ominous wording soon reappears (1038a-9b):

dæg scriþende. Þonne dogor beoð
 on moldwege min forð scriþen

[...gliding day. When my days on the earth's path have glided past]

and again (1096b-98a):

Rodor swamode
 ofer niðða bearn, nihtrim scridon,
 deorc ofer dugeðum

[The sky moved over the children of men, many nights glided past, dark over the people]

Although there is no 'shadow' per se in the second quotation, the recurrence of the verb *scriþan* in the same semantic context (and in part also lexical) arguably invokes the same 'shadow' theme every time, the same associations with impending death, albeit silently. Such a reading is consolidated by a remarkably close *Beowulfian* parallel for both this cluster (as it involves *scriþan* and 'shadow') and the way it recurs.¹¹⁴ Felix's corresponding chapter 50 is not the source of these three quotations which therefore probably originate in traditional verse composition, although it is interesting to note the resemblance in sense (but not in context) in the Latin wording at the end of chapter 49: *et dies illius velut umbra pertransibunt* ('and their days will pass like a shadow').¹¹⁵ In the same way, when both the Latin and the Old English prose state that the heavenly radiance encompassing the hermit in the last moments of his illness appears at night, the moment is only emphasized by repetition *nocte ... nocturnis*;¹¹⁶ *nihte ... nihtlicum*

¹¹⁴ See §4.1.1, and the analysis by Foley, *Immanent Art*, pp. 32-3.

¹¹⁵ *VSG* 49, p. 150.

¹¹⁶ *VSG* 50, p. 158.

(20.96-7); but in *Guthlac B* the scene receives an ominous prologue of darkness moving in (1278b-82a):

Pa se æþela glæm
 setlgong sohte; swearc norðrodor,
 won under wolcnum, woruld miste oferteah,
 þystrum biþeahte; þrong niht ofer tiht
 londes frætwa

[Then the noble radiance sought its setting; the northern sky grew dark, somber beneath the clouds, covered the world with mist, wrapped it in darkness; night pressed over the expanse of the adornments of the land]

A moving thing of the dark, the illness assails Guthlac in the dark and in the form of darkness. Its nature, allegiance, and mode of operation are therefore remarkably analogous to the demons of *Guthlac A*. But it is also coherent in *Guthlac B* with the personification of death as a warrior who is also on the move, stealthily: *Deað nealæcte*, / *stop stalgongum* ('Death approached, advanced with furtive steps', 1139b-40a). The 'shadow'-marked illness and the personified death form one and the same concept in the poem. However, this sustained association with an atmospherically conceptualized liminality also links back to the Vespasian *Life*'s use of patterned motifs of night and light or fire that correspond to manifestations of demons, death, and divine glory. Since this study has detected structures similar in form and function in prose texts (notably in the *Beowulf* manuscript) as well as in poems (*Guthlac A*, *Beowulf*), this major 'shadow' pattern seems to be much more dependent on subject type (hostile attacks, doomed characters etc) than on medium.

The quite elaborate poetic diction suggests that 'shadow' was one of the major aspects that the poet took from the written source and reworked into a traditional-sounding theme. Thus the Felix-based emphasizing repetitions and doublets in the Vespasian *Life* of the *niht...niht* type are paralleled by such quasi-tautological poetic locutions and compounds as *æfter nihtglome*, *nihthelma genipu*, *æfter nihtscuan*, *in ðisse wonnan niht*, or *from æfenglome*. Numerous resonances with other early and/or

more traditional poems contribute in framing the *Guthlac B* ‘shadow’ within the vernacular poetic tradition, and notably within its ‘shadow’ tradition. To the parallel with *Beowulf* noted above can be added one with *Exodus*. The heavenly light visiting Guthlac in the terminal stage of his sickness when he is *awrecen wælstralum* (‘oppressed by deadly arrows’, 1286a) shines in a peculiar manner (1286b-93a):

Wuldres scima,
 æþele ymb æþelne, ondlonge niht
 scan scirwered. Scadu sweþredon,
 tolysed under lyfte. Wæs se leohta glæm
 ymb þæt halge hus, heofonlic condel,
 from æfenglome oþþæt eastan cwom
 ofer deop gelad dægredwoma,
 wedertacen wearm.

[The radiance of glory shone all night long, the noble light on the noble man, clothed in brightness. The shadows subsided, unloosed beneath the sky. The radiance of light was about the holy house, the heavenly candle, from even-gloom until from the east came the crack of dawn over the deep expanse, a warm weather-sign.]

Both phrases *scan scirwered* and *scadu sweþredon* are also found in *Exodus* 125a and 113b respectively,¹¹⁷ admittedly some lines apart but belonging to the same self-contained scene, one in which another heavenly light (the fire-pillar) is similarly, through poetic variation, tightly intertwined, to the point of ambiguity, with surrounding and threatening darkness.¹¹⁸ When the larger passage, including the earlier quotation of the darkening sky, is considered (1278b-93a), the parallel with *Exodus* 107b-25b is even more striking through the similarity of collocations, diction, and imagery. It is worth noting, furthermore, that in both poems these episodes conceivably reflect Paschal liturgy, whose thematic implications of fire, death, and resurrection may again provide an external context for ‘shadow’.¹¹⁹

Guthlac B is relatively rich in *n*-alliterating lines imbued with a negative/sinister sense (ten out of twelve such lines, six of which contain one or more ‘shadow’

¹¹⁷ See Lucas, *Exodus*, pp. 94 and 96; Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, p. 178.

¹¹⁸ See §2.2.5. Another parallel, though slightly less comparable, is *Andreas* 836 and surrounding lines.

¹¹⁹ Explicitly in *Guthlac B* (1102b), and see Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, p. 46; cf. Lucas, *Exodus*, pp. 59-60.

elements), a proportion comparable to *Guthlac A* where this formal feature punctuates devils' attacks. Here most of them appear in the context of the illness; they are articulated around the word *niht* and form part of, and further underline, the liminal time-marking discussed above. The other alliterating word is most often *nēah* ('near, nigh') or its superlative *nyhst* ('next'), as in *nihthelma genipu, wæs neah seo tid* ('darkness of night-covers, the time was near', 970). Apart from supplying an internal rhyme with *niht*, this accentuates the foreboding and 'closing-in' effect of the 'shadow' passages. It correlates well, therefore, with the twice repeated verb *nealæcan* ('draw near', 1033b, 1139b, quoted earlier) used about death. After line 1210 no further *n*-alliterations occur until the end (1379), even though this section is filled with the 'shadow' that attends Guthlac's death. Although this could be mere statistical coincidence, one notes that the pattern also decreases in frequency in the last two hundred lines of *Guthlac A* after the vision of hell and the devils' defeat, and perhaps more significantly, the long series of ominous *n*-alliterations in *Beowulf* stops after the dragon fight some four hundred lines before the poem's end, leaving none to accompany the 'shadow'-ridden matter of the hero's death and funeral. Perhaps *n*-alliterating lines are not needed anymore when a tragic ending is at hand and there is no furtive entity or event left to foreshadow. Formal as well as thematic features of 'shadow', then, afford a series of partial yet suggestive parallels with *Beowulf*. Furthermore, in the light of the aggregate evidence one is tempted to wonder whether the manuscript context of *Guthlac A* and *B* replicates the apposition in *Beowulf* of the monsters episode and the dragon episode. Not only a scattering of parallel events, but also the network of symmetries and echoes within and across the two poems allows one to entertain the idea that they were meant to be received in a *Beowulfian* or 'shadow' sequence of prefiguring monsters and extraordinary death.

The characterisation of Guthlac's sickness, then, can lend it a larger dimension when set against analogous patterning observed in *Guthlac A* or the prose texts about accursed spirits and heavenly aid. Internal evidence, on the other hand, further underscores the ambiguity and paradoxicality of the illness theme. The term *adloman* (912a) applied to the demons has caused some puzzlement, as it can be construed as 'fire-cripples', reading *ād-loman* (the most accepted interpretation), or just less plausibly 'disease-cripples', reading *ādl-loman*. On the one hand, it is natural to link the devils to the fire they endure in hell and with which they also threaten Guthlac.¹²⁰ But on the other hand, the conceptualisation of the demons as spiritually maimed by disease, or even as vectors of disease, cannot be entirely ruled out. In any case, the ambivalence of *adloman* is put in perspective by its insertion within a series of alternating allusions to both disease (*adle* 886b, *adl* 940a, *adle* 955a, *adlpracu* 962a) and fire/burning (?*adloman* 912a, *born* 938b, *onæled* 955a, *born* 964a, *brondhat* 964b, *born* 980a), while 'shadow' (943a) and two *n*-alliterating lines (934, 943) further demarcate this passage, especially the section 912-80. The two notions of course overlap, since Guthlac is *adle onæled* ('kindled/consumed with disease', 955a), but paradoxically he is simultaneously consumed by God's *brondhat lufu* ('brand-hot love', 964b) which prevails over the suffering, *seo him sara gehwylc / symle forswiðde* ('which always overcame all his pains', 965b-6a). This paronomasia probably belongs to the kind, often found in Old English biblical poetry, of 'ironic and startling collocation of sound and sense ... implying that the convergence [of two words/sounds/meanings] was predestined by God', but surely conveys more than just 'a hint, a slight emphasis, that the words so enclosed may have other than a strictly literal significance'.¹²¹ Like in the case of the *Beowulfian* exchanges and contaminations between monsters and splendour, 'shadow'

¹²⁰ Subliminal fire-threats are conceivably present when the devils take the form of a serpent/dragon in this *Guthlac B* passage (911b-12b); explicit fire-threats occur in *Guthlac A* (190b-3b, 374-5).

¹²¹ Frank, *Paronomasia*, pp. 210 and 214, respectively.

helps recast Guthlac's dealings with evil as a shockingly supernatural and transcendental experience.

The paradox in the disease concept, thus introduced from the onset, informs the entire text; the illness is both a deadly enemy and a divine sign connecting the saint to God. Near the end, in the context of Guthlac's death, darkness (deadly enemy) and light (divine sign) through their quick-paced alternation form a background for each other, in such a bewildering play of alliteration, apposition, and variation that one is unsure which is the more terrible power (quite in the manner of the fire-pillar in *Exodus*). Radiance prevails (1286b-93a quoted above) but terror remains as an after-effect (1325b-7a), and the light that shines on the saint's follower as he departs in grief, *Swegl hate scan / blac ofer burgsalo* ('The sun was shining hotly, *blāc* over the dwellings', 1330b-1b) sounds more 'shadow'-bleak than the one shining *beorhte ofer burgsalu* ('bright over the dwellings', 1284a).¹²² Accordingly, a much more doom-laden atmosphere is upheld than in the case of either *Guthlac A* and, even, the prose source.

The darkness/illness/fire/light nexus provides a visual poetic manifestation of Guthlac's death in divine glory. The 'shadow' theme in the poem, therefore, is instrumental in highlighting the signs of his sainthood. But by deploying a triple connection/connotation with darkness, fire (potentially hellish) and light (potentially divine), the poet is able to elevate Guthlac's suffering and death to traditional accounts of climactic confrontations of which such texts as *Beowulf*, *Andreas*, or *Exodus* seem to be (more or less direct) witnesses, with their attendant supernatural, near-mythical overtones.

On the other hand, the written tradition, as represented by the Latin *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, the Old English Vespasian *Life* and Vercelli homily XXIII, and also further removed strands of Old English prose, remains always close and informs or parallels

¹²² See §2.2.5.

much of the ‘shadow’ matter observed in the poem. The Guthlac material may be in some way related to vernacular traditions perhaps associated with the *Visio Pauli*, in the same or similar way as *Beowulf* and the *Letter* also appear to relate to such traditions. As the present study of the texts in the *Beowulf* manuscript and the Guthlac material demonstrates, the seemingly *Visio Pauli*- or Latin-inspired motifs and the manner of their deployment are always particular and ideally suited to the text in which they occur, and further to the broader subject-matter of what appear to have been relatively widespread traditions (the Guthlac tradition and perhaps a monsters-and-wonders tradition) within which sets of components are shared. Ingrained in the texture as it is, ‘shadow’ appears to belong to a vernacular compositional stage, yet one that refers to, and thrives on, learned and religious symbolism. Interconnected from early on, these techniques and traditions shape each other, a process witnessed by the network of ‘shadow’ links. The findings suggest early hybrid associations and blending of oral vernacular diction with translated/adapted classical Latin and biblical inspiration, dependent on any poet’s or redactor’s taste or agenda. The picture is complicated by the number and variety of texts sharing these ‘shadow’ features, further compounded by the dating difficulty. But at any rate, ‘shadow’ is a case in point for our growing realisation that binary assumptions and methodologies — religious/secular, Latin/vernacular, prose/verse — are not productive approaches to poetics. Hence a salutary way to rethink some of these questions is to frame them in a broader perspective and change angles, and this is afforded by the partly cognate, partly contrasting Old Norse tradition.

CHAPTER FIVE:

OLD NORSE ‘SHADOW’ CASE STUDIES

5.1 EDDIC MYTHOLOGICAL POEMS

Approximately half of the source quotations for the Old Norse word studies in Chapter 3 came from Eddic verse. The single most important source for this material is the Codex Regius of the Elder (or Poetic) Edda (GKS 2365 4to) dated to c. 1270. Several mythological poems from the Codex Regius are also preserved in part or in full in other Icelandic manuscripts, notably AM 748 4to and *Hauksbók*, both dated to the first part of the fourteenth century. A number of verses are also found in recensions of Snorri’s *Edda* from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.¹ References to readings not found in the Codex Regius, however, will only be made if they shed additional light on interpretative problems. While the textual history of these poems can be indirectly traced back to the early thirteenth century, most of them have certainly been in oral circulation before entering the manuscript tradition, and for some of them this probably means they existed in some form before Iceland’s conversion to Christianity (c. 1000).²

The twenty-nine poems preserved in this manuscript evidence a variety of metrical types; while these are conventionally grouped under the umbrella term ‘Eddic’, the metrical diversity to some extent reflects differences in theme and narrative form.³ The compiler’s (or his predecessors’) basic ordering criterion, however, seems to have been subject matter; the first eleven poems of the manuscript deal with mythological

¹ On the manuscripts, see further Joseph Harris, ‘Eddic Poetry’, in Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, eds, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Ithaca, 1985), pp. 68-156, at pp. 74-9 (with reference to Gustaf Lindblad’s seminal studies on the Codex Regius); Gunnell, ‘Eddic Poetry’, pp. 82-4; E.G. Pétursson, ‘Codex Regius’, in Philip Pulsiano *et al.*, eds, *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia* (New York, 1993).

² On the problems of dating, see Harris, ‘Eddic Poetry’, pp. 106-11.

³ Chief among them are *fornyrðislag*, *ljóðahátt*, and *málahátt*. Cf. Poole, ‘Metre and Metrics’.

topics, while the rest is concerned with heroes and the legends attached to them. This classification, therefore, is also reflected in the following case studies. In this section, the main material for a case study of the ‘shadow’ theme is provided by the first poem in the Codex Regius, *Völuspá*. The results of this examination are then contextualized within the mythological portion of the manuscript.

5.1.1 *Völuspá*

Völuspá, the opening poem of the Codex Regius, is also found in *Hauksbók* (with some marked differences), while Snorri incorporates extensive quotations from it into his *Edda*. As it stands in the Codex Regius, the poem provides some sort of a thematic and temporal frame for not only the other mythological pieces but indeed for the whole poetic collection contained in this manuscript.⁴ The origins and circumstances of its composition are hotly disputed, but a period sometime around 1000 is often postulated, which seems to accord with the impression of a not fully heathen yet not overtly Christian world-view underlying the poem.⁵ Set in *fornyrðislag*, *Völuspá* imparts mythological knowledge arranged in the form of a monologue, uttered by a *völva* or seeress at the bidding of the god Óðinn. She tells of the creation and ordering of the world, its destruction, and rebirth.⁶

⁴ Gunnell, ‘Eddic Poetry’, p. 84.

⁵ The best discussion of the underlying world-view is John McKinnell, *Both One and Many. Essays on Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism* (Rome, 1994), pp. 107-28. Cf. also Harris, ‘Eddic Poetry’, p. 98.

⁶ For a short summary of the structure of the poem see Carolyne Larrington, tr., *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford, 1996), p. 3, or Gunnell, ‘Eddic Poetry’, pp. 84-5; for a detailed summary see Dronke, *Mythological Poems*, pp. 30-60.

For the present purpose the narrative structure of *Völuspá* can be summarised by four successive sections which I will call ‘movements’:⁷

- ❖ First movement (1-30): Rise. The world is lifted out of darkness and chaos, the gods perform creative acts, life flourishes, beauty and light prevail.
- ❖ Second movement (31-58): Sinking. The world and its inhabitants, human and divine, are threatened from within (internal seeds of decay and destruction) and without (external forces embodied by various monsters) in the mythical present and destroyed at the end of time (Ragnarøk). Fire and darkness prevail.
- ❖ Third movement (59-65): Rise. A new world arises into beauty and light again. Survivors of Ragnarøk dwell in bliss among the ruins of the old world.
- ❖ Fourth movement (66): Sinking. Death and darkness make an ominous return. The vǫlva sinks back into her grave.

The two last movements are of course very brief, but in their particularly dramatic and echoic imagery they provide an oddly fitting and balanced, yet spectacular and unforgettable conclusion to a long sequence of contrastive replications and adumbrations. The combination of a series of basic oppositions is a conspicuous feature of the poem: birth and death, creation and destruction, chaos and the ordered world, joy and sorrow, greenness and decay.⁸ There are, however, many subtler oppositions, notably those in which the same element occurs in radically different yet related contexts, with different yet related attributes, and presented with formally or semantically proximate diction. An example is the vǫlva’s recurring visions of a prominent hall; at one time it is a glorious one, at another a hall of horrors. Such

⁷ See also the summary (somewhat differently arranged) in McKinnell, *One and Many*, pp. 109-12.

⁸ On the poet’s propensity to proceed by artful contrasts, see for example Lars Lönnroth, ‘The Founding of Miðgarðr (*Völuspá* 1-8)’, in Paul Acker and Carolyn Larrington, eds., *The Poetic Edda. Essays on Old Norse Mythology* (Routledge, 2002), pp. 5-25, at p. 11. See also Dronke, *Mythological Poems*, p. 25.

contrastive treatments of the same idea alternatively brighten and darken the atmosphere of the poem. Their function can be seen as a threefold one:

- (1) to visually and emotionally charge the different movements;
- (2) to sharply demarcate the movements from each other;
- (3) to suggest, paradoxically, that the movements share a number of key elements (places, events, characters, symbols).

While the first two functions could accommodate a linear view of the poem's temporal frame, the third one, implying a pattern of repetition, would suggest a cyclical view of mythological time.⁹

The possibility of significant parallelism between the different movements is an interesting one in view of the poem's subject-matter. *Völuspá* is a prophecy, but one that is apparently underpinned by a strong aetiological purpose, since the seeress has to deploy a great deal of mythological 'prehistory' before she is able to develop her vision of the future, and she seems indeed to imply that that future (the end of the gods and of their world) is the result of all that happened in the past and possibly of what is happening in the 'mythical present' (oath-breaking and kin-slaying). What we have, then, is a prophecy of destruction that follows an account of the events which prefigured it, with the added potential of numerous connections arising from the repetitiveness/cyclicity aspect; in short, a network of portentous echoes. This in turn would provide a seemingly ideal context for the presence of the kind of ambivalence and bidirectional referentiality which, as Chapter Three demonstrated, are closely associated with the Old Norse 'shadow' words examined. The expectation that such words and the themes they represent will occur is further reinforced by the imagery of

⁹ Jens Peter Schjødt, 'Völuspá – cyklisk tidsopfattelse i gammelnordisk religion', *Danske Studier* 76 (1981), pp. 91-5, considers the poet's conception of time as cyclical. Linearity (with traces of cyclicity) is stressed by Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society. I: The Myths* (Odense, 1994), pp. 241-2.

darkness, light, and fire and the foregrounding of doom and death which unsurprisingly attend this dramatic epitome of a world's creation and destruction.

Surprisingly, only two such words appear in *Völuspá*, and each only once: the adjectives *fránn* (66.3) and *fǫlr* (as the basis of an adjectival compound, 50.7). I will show, however, that they play a relatively prominent and meaningful part when contextualized within the overarching structure of oppositions in the poem. Although no other intrinsically ambivalent 'shadow' lexis is used except these two words, darkness imagery interacts with light imagery throughout *Völuspá* in a manner that suggests the operation of the 'shadow' theme.

In view of the foreboding character of the poem, it is pertinent to begin with examining the last stanza of *Völuspá*. Significantly, it is in this dramatic and mysterious finale, the fourth and last movement of the poem, that *fránn* appears. Having given her account of the glorious rise and cataclysmical fall of the world, the prophetess has just outlined a new world reborn (third movement). The story, however, does not end on this note of splendour and hope, but instead with a vision whose wording strikingly recalls some of the earlier eschatological motifs associated with Ragnarøk (66):

Þar kǫmr inn dimmi dreki fliúgandi,
naðr fránn, neðan frá Niðafjollom;
berr sér í fiqðrom — flýgr vǫll yfir —,
Níðhoggr, nái — nú mun hon sǫcqvaz.

[There comes the dark dragon flying, the *fránn* serpent, from below out of Niðafjöll ('Mountains of ?Darkness'); he carries in his ?feathers/wings — he flies over the plain —, Níðhoggr, corpses — now she will sink.]

Darkness, serpents, and corpses have all already appeared specifically in conjunction with Ragnarøk or the events leading to it (38, 39, 41, 50, 56, 57). The stanza opens with a phrase (*Þar kǫmr...*) which the poet had previously used, presumably to a dramatic effect, as a formulaic introduction to the last stand of each god against his monstrous

adversary (53, 55, 56). It ends with the seeress ‘sinking’, probably back into her grave,¹⁰ and this may also recall the stanzas recounting the god’s fights and ending with their death and fall, notably 53.7-8 and 56.11.¹¹ Alternatively, one may see in the poem’s last word a resonance of the earlier sinking (*sígr*) of the earth into the ocean. In either case, the final stanza is dense with verbal and thematic echoes of Ragnarøk. While this stanza could mark the start of the same Ragnarøk the *völva* has been prophesying all along (delaying Óðinn until its beginning),¹² the view that she or the poet counterpoints the bright vision of bliss with a dark menace of doom is likewise plausible,¹³ given how keenly the poet undercuts his glorious images with counter-images and tragic reversals. In either case, in the poem’s accelerating alternation of positive and negative themes and motifs, death and doom have the last word. Of these eschatological elements what is most in prominence here is an expanded network of ‘shadow’ and tightly correlated associations (serpent, underground, *fránn*). Darkness is introduced by the adjective *dimmr*, and is probably further foregrounded by the element *nið-*, which is attested in another mythological poem in the Codex Regius (*Vafþrúðnismál* 25.4 and 24.6) with the probable meaning ‘dark/waning moon’; this therefore is probably also the sense of *niðiom* (dat. pl.) in *Völuspá* 6.5 in a similar context.¹⁴ The use of *nið-*, still in the same manuscript, as a prefix underscoring darkness (*niðmyrkr* ~ ‘waning-moon-darkness’, *Guðrúnarkviða II* 12.2) consolidates the hypothesis that in *Völuspá* 66, the mythological place-name *Niðafiollom* means ‘Waning-Moon or Darkness Mountains’. There probably is a deliberate correlation with the name of the dragon emerging from these mountains. Although its name is commonly understood as *Níðhoggr* (‘Enmity-

¹⁰ The main basis for this inference is comparison with *Baldrs draumar* 4 and 5, where Óðinn rouses a long-dead seeress from the underground.

¹¹ In the latter, Þórr’s collapse is probably implicit in *neppr* (?‘exhausted’, ?‘failing’).

¹² McKinnell, *One and Many*, p. 112.

¹³ Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, p. 64. This view is also implicit in Sigurður Nordal, ‘Three Essays on *Völuspá*’, *SB* 18 (1970-1), pp. 74-135, at p. 97.

¹⁴ *nið* (neuter sing. or pl.) or *niðar* (fem. pl.).

striker’), this seems to be an arbitrary editorial convention; there is at least equal reason for reading *Niðhoggr* (~‘Striker in/from the Dark’).¹⁵ In fact it is likely that a paronomastic complex of ideas linking together darkness, enmity/malice, and the underground (*neðan*) is active in *Völuspá*, so that precise lexical distinctions based on a one form, one meaning approach are unnecessary as well as unattainable.¹⁶

The vision of the corpse-gripping *Niðhoggr* in the last stanza replicates a scene in stanza 39 in which a corpse-sucking dragon is identified by the same name and similarly alliterates with *nái*. The moral overtones of the latter stanza, which is concerned with the punishment reserved for perjurers and murderers, may be implied when the motif reappears at the end of the poem. Although it may be rational to imagine that the poet had in mind the fate of the wicked who perished during Ragnarøk, the way in which the final stanza puts an abrupt end to the paradisiac tone of the third movement suggests that a new reversal is taking place — or rather, given the repetitions of motifs, that the world’s history is cyclically repeating itself.

A related motif of corpse-tearing is found in another warning of Ragnarøk (50.5-8):

ormr knýr unnir, enn ari hlaccar,
slítr nái neffǫlr, Naglfar losnar.

[the serpent slashes the waves, and the eagle screams, the beak-*fǫlr* tears at corpses, Nail-ship breaks free.]

¹⁵ All modern editions print *Niðhoggr*. But Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Völuspá*. Tr. B.S. Benedikz and John McKinnell (Durham, 1978 [1923]), p. 79, favours *Niðhoggr*, while Dronke, *Mythological Poems*, p. 143, considers it a valid alternative; her preference for the former is based on the association of *níð* with another *náðr*, the World-serpent, in 56.11-12.

¹⁶ See §3.2.4 for a variant of this darkness-related complex. My subsequent use of the form *Niðhoggr* is similarly arbitrary and always stands qualified by the above remarks.

The reading *neffǫlr* is only transmitted by the Codex Regius, while the other redactions have *niðfǫlr*.¹⁷ If the former reading is accepted, the eagle is the one tearing carrion, which would make for a logical sequence of ideas in the stanza and of course the motif would be appropriate in terms of the ‘beasts of battle’ theme as a portent of the final confrontation. Now the grim eagle of death soon finds a contrastive counterpart in the benign eagle of the reborn world, which prefers fish to corpses (59.6-8):

flýgr ǫrn yfir,
sá er á fialli fisca veiðir

[an eagle flies over, the one hunting fish in the mountains]

Echoes of both eagles can in turn be discerned in the final vision of the dragon. While *Níðhöggr* echoes the fishing eagle with a striking reflection of diction (*flýgr ǫrn yfir* : *flýgr vǫll yfir*, and *á fialli* : *frá Niðafiǫllom*), his dealing with dead bodies calls to mind the eagle of Ragnarǫk which *slítr nái*. The latter phrase, however, in turn closely resonates with 39.7-9:

þar saug Níðhöggr nái framgengna,
sleit vargr vera

[there Níðhöggr sucked the corpses of the dead, the *vargr* tore men apart]

The last line of this quotation seems to be a variation on the preceding statement, and although *vargr* can mean ‘wolf’ it can also have the more abstract sense of ‘criminal’. *Vargr*, therefore, probably denotes the dragon.¹⁸ Thus we find here the same associations of symbols as with the eagle of Ragnarǫk and the final flying dragon.

These observations, however, force us to return to the *neffǫlr* eagle and wonder whether it is an eagle at all. Should we consider the manuscript variant *niðfǫlr* as a superior

¹⁷ Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, p. 11.

¹⁸ So Sigurður Nordal, *Vǫluspá*, p. 79. Dronke, *Mythological Poems*, p. 55, opts for two separate beasts.

reading, then *nið-* could be seen to imply that *Niðhoggr*, not the eagle, is the agent of *slítr nái*.¹⁹ However, *fǫlr* is never attested in relation to serpents, as has been seen, but does occur in a nominal compound among *heiti* for hawks,²⁰ thus providing a context (admittedly faint) for still linking *niðfǫlr* to the eagle. The line was perhaps meant to be obscure, and the textual variants might reflect attempts by poets or copyists to resolve the ambiguity.

From the aggregate evidence, then, emerges the likelihood that eagle and dragon have been merged into a single motif. This would account for the surprising image of the flying dragon and especially the mention of *fiϥðrom*, which has puzzled editors.²¹ The usual translation as ‘wings’ is ad hoc; the word normally refers to feathers, the incongruity of which is considerably lessened if we recognize that in his last appearance *Niðhoggr* symbolically embodies both the dragon and the eagle of the earlier stanzas. By involving the ambivalent and portentous ‘shadow’ qualifiers *fǫlr* and *fránn* (to which *nið-* might be added) into a correlation between monsters, darkness, and corpse-eating, the poet has not only foreshadowed Ragnarϥk (39 anticipating 50) within his second movement, but also interconnected his three last movements — fall, new rise, and new fall. The seemingly linear sequence of different events involving seemingly different characters (in this case the monsters) thus gives way to a cyclical conception in which destruction bears the seeds of creation (the eagle, like the universe, is reborn from its monstrous predecessor) and creation bears the seeds of destruction (the eagle is potentially the dragon). This presentation conceivably allowed the poet to express his personal as well as traditional views about fate and moral corruption, probably

¹⁹ For the case for *niðfǫlr* see Sigurður Nordal, *Vǫluspá*, p. 98, with references. Invoking Björn M. Ólsen, ‘Til Eddakvæðerne. I. Til Vǫluspá’, *Arkiv* 30 (1914), pp. 129-69, at p. 161, he is inclined to see two distinct beings here, just as Dronke does about the eagle/wolf issue (cf. preceding note).

²⁰ *Pula IV (Hauks heiti)*, Viðbótarþulur úr A (748) & B (757), *Skj B I*, p. 676.

²¹ Dronke, *Mythological Poems*, p. 153.

reflecting ambivalences in his world-view, although how heathen and how Christian the latter was is a highly debatable matter.²²

The poet in fact employs a number of other oppositional pairs which function in ways similar to the model just described, including the use of equivocal darkness/light imagery.²³ Close to the theme of the eagle/dragon, for its introduction immediately precedes (and provides the setting for) *Níðhoggr*'s first appearance, is the image of the hall, or halls (37-8):

Stóð fyr norðan,	á Niðavøllum,
salr ór gulli	Sindra ættar;
enn annarr stóð	á Ókólni,
biórsalr iotuns,	enn sá Brimir heitir.

Sal sá hon standa,	sólo fiarri,
Náströndo á,	norðr horfa dyrr;
fello eitrdropar	inn um líóra,
sá er undinn salr	orma hryggiom.

[There stood to the north, on ?Darkness-fields, a hall of gold, of Sindri's lineage; but another stood on ?Un-cold (*Ókólnir*), a giant's beer-hall, and he is called Brimir.
A hall she saw standing, far from the sun, on Corpse-shores, its doors face north; poisonous drops fell in through the roof-vents, this hall is woven with the spines of serpents.]

This hall-complex may counterpoint the earlier mention of a hall on which 'the sun shone from the south' at the time of the world's creation (4.5-6). The first two halls are ambiguous as to their moral and portentous significance, since apparently negatively marked elements (north, darkness, giant) are matched with potentially positive ones (gold, and an 'un-cold' location). *Ókólnir* is unclear,²⁴ but contextually gold can carry a twofold symbolism. The first mention of gold in *Völuspá* corresponds both to the apex of the joy of the gods when creation is complete and to the first dark hint of a looming catastrophe; indeed, the same expression *ór gulli* (8.4) was immediately followed there by the portentous *unz þrjár qvómo...* ('until three [giantesses] came', 8.5). On the other

²² For Christian parallels to and possible influence on the peculiar structural-thematic aspects of *Völuspá*, see McKinnell, *One and Many*, pp. 107-28, esp. pp. 121-7.

²³ Cf. Lönnroth, 'Miðgarðr', p. 10.

²⁴ Finnur Jónsson (*LP*, s.v. *Ókólnir*) suggests an error for *Ofkólnir* (?'Over-cold')

hand, both the (perhaps ominous) motif of the golden hall and the (certainly ominous) one of the northern, sunless hall (38.1) point to a lexically and formally proximate but thematically reversed imagery in the new world (64.1-4):

Sal sá hon standa, sólo fegra,
gulli þacðan, á Gimlé

[A hall she saw standing, fairer than the sun, thatched with gold, on ?Fire-refuge]

It may well be that this hall is meant to be eternal, and therefore will not be destroyed again by the possibly recurring Ragnarök hinted at in the final stanza. Indeed it has been suggested that it is modelled on the New Jerusalem. However, it also recalls Valhöll, the hall of the gods and dead heroes, which *is* doomed. The third mention of gold after two portentous ones in the poem may at least suggest that this hall's fate is uncertain, especially if a cyclical conception of time is operative. It should be noted that no 'shadow' term is used (with the possible exception of the place-name *Niðavöllom*), despite the fact that some of the motifs and their context would seem favourable to ambivalent darkness/brightness lexis. An instructive Old English analogue is the *Beowulf* poet's introduction of the motif of the golden hall whose glorification is simultaneously undercut by the anticipation of its destruction by fire; as has been shown, this double perspective is highlighted by the qualification of gold with the ambivalent adjective *fāh* — but in *Völuspá* images stand without ambivalent modifiers, and it is rather the echoic patterns that link the different visions that are chiefly responsible for the 'shadow' theme.

Prominent in the attack on the gods, and a final example of echoic visions, is Surtr ('Black'), a demon wielding fire and a shining sword explicitly associated with the sun and the gods (52.1-4):

Surtr ferr sunnan með sviga lævi,
 scínn af sverði sól valtíva

[Surtr advances from the south with the harm of branches, the sun of the slaughter-gods shines from the sword]

This vision brings together the shining sun (4.5-6, cf. 64.2) and the darkening sun (*svört verða sólscin* ('sunshine becomes black', 41.5), *Sól tér sortna* ('The sun starts to blacken', 57.1)). Furthermore, the 'shining' god Freyr is slain by the black and fiery Surtr (53.5-8) possibly with the god's own shining sword (*scínn af sverði sól valtíva*), although our knowledge of the details depends on external sources.²⁵ In any case this nexus, a divinely shining sword in the hands of a fire-demon killing a shining god in the immediate context of a shining/darkening sun, is of a 'shadow' type even if lexical 'shadow' is not prominent; indeed one is reminded of partly similar intersections and odd contrasts/blendings in the *Beowulf* dragon-slaying scenes — an Old English material also relatable to Ragnarøk on other grounds.²⁶

5.1.2 *Völuspá* in the context of the other mythological poems in the Codex Regius

The deployment of ambivalent darkness/brightness symbolism in *Völuspá* is dependent on that poem's interest in and treatment of the doom- and death-laden Ragnarøk and more specifically, as has been seen, on its temporal framework which allows for a bidirectional association between past/creation and future/destruction. No other poem in the Codex Regius is generically or thematically comparable. However, a Ragnarøk-oriented conception of history seems to underpin several of the other mythological poems in the manuscript. This is chiefly visible in *Vafþrúðnismál*,

²⁵ See further below, §5.1.2.

²⁶ See §4.1.1; and cf. Ursula Dronke, 'Beowulf and Ragnarøk', *SB* 17 (1968), pp. 300-25.

Grímnismál, and *Alvíssmál*, albeit not as prominently as in *Völuspá*; what is foregrounded in these three poems is a god either engaged in a wisdom-contest with an otherworldly opponent or (*Grímnismál*) imparting wisdom to a human being.

The content of the questions and answers in *Vafþrúðnismál* is mythical lore about the world's creation, destruction, and rebirth, and seems to have been planned according to mythical chronology;²⁷ the monologue of *Völuspá* offers the only topical parallel. It has been recognized, furthermore, that the narrative frame (a wisdom-contest between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir) is linked to the mythical content; on the cosmic level, the god's increasingly insistent questioning about Ragnarøk ominously prefigures the giant's own *røk*: his eventual defeat and (by inference) death at the end of the poem.²⁸ Already Vafþrúðnir's first memory is death, and of his own kin at that (35). The giant's admission that his knowledge originates in the nine worlds of the dead (43), specifically *fyr Niflhel neðan* ('down below Nifl-hell', 43.6), is a formulaic variant of the *völva*'s first memories of nine worlds *fyr mold neðan* ('down below the earth', *Völuspá* 2). Just as the seeress, who can be inferred to be dead throughout *Völuspá*,²⁹ sinks back to those *n*-alliterating, 'shadow'-marked realms of death at the end of her monologue, so Vafþrúðnir is symbolically marked by 'shadow' and death in his own origin, his wisdom travels, and his last words. A similar inscription of a god's adversary in death by means of 'shadow' lexis is apparent in another poem about a wisdom-contest, namely Þórr's encounter with a dwarf in *Alvíssmál*. Here too, from the last stanza, the logical inference is the dwarf's defeat and death, something that seems to have been obscurely foreshadowed ever since Þórr's first address to him: 'Why are you so *fqlr*

²⁷ Carolyne Larrington, 'Vafþrúðnismál and Grímnismál: Cosmic History, Cosmic Geography', in Paul Acker and ead., eds., *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology* (London, 2002), pp. 59-77, at pp. 63-5. See further McKinnell, *One and Many*, pp. 87ff.

²⁸ Tim W. Machan, ed., *Vafþrúðnismál*. 2nd edn. (Durham, 2008), p. 46.

²⁹ McKinnell, *One and Many*, p. 116.

about the nose? Have you been with a corpse in the night?’ (*í nótt með ná*) (2.2-3). The god heavily underlines the dwarf’s chthonic origins, whose potential for connoting darkness and death are only confirmed by the dwarf’s ominous, *Vǫluspá*-recalling admission that he dwells *fyr i ǫrð neðan* (‘down below the earth’, 3.2). In that he comes from the darkness of the underground and will be killed by the sunlight, the dwarf conceptually belongs to the giant-group, or the ‘otherworld predators’.³⁰

If the *Vǫluspá* tradition is brought to bear on other works, any victory of a god over the forces of chaos is bound to be dimmed by the shadow of Ragnarǫk. Sometimes poets hint at this larger and grimmer picture. By the end of *Lokasenna* order has been restored by Þórr, but Loki undermines it. His prediction that the giant Ægir will be burnt in his hall with all his possessions (65) is unsettling and double-edged since it not only alludes to the final cosmic conflagration, but also reminds the gods that fiery destruction will actually come down on them from Ægir’s kin. To return to *Vafþrúðnismál*, Óðinn, though victorious, arguably goes through a Ragnarǫk-like experience himself, too; his venture to the giant’s hall is also fraught with foreboding undertones which appear all the more sinister in the context of *Vǫluspá*.³¹ Frigg’s fears when Óðinn resolves to contend with Vafþrúðnir (2, 4) cannot but recall Frigg’s grief when the doomed Óðinn fights the wolf Fenrir at Ragnarǫk (*Vǫluspá* 53). Thematically and symbolically, Frigg’s foreboding in *Vafþrúðnismál* comes true when the giant, answering the god’s penultimate question, tells him that his (Óðinn’s) fate will be death from the mythical wolf (52-3) — certainly the climax of the poem from Óðinn’s point of view. The god can hardly miss the fact that his opponent in the poem is related by kinship to Ragnarǫk

³⁰ Cf. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*. In the poem, Þórr finds the dwarf to be rather þurs-like. See further John Lindow, ‘Poetry, Dwarfs and Gods: Understanding *Alvíssmál*’, in Judy Quinn *et al.*, eds., *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross* (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 287-305, esp. at pp. 286-7 and 301.

³¹ See also, along similar lines, McKinnell, *One and Many*, pp. 98ff, who speaks of ‘a mutual tragedy’ (p. 103).

god-destroyers such as the fire-demon giant Surtr and the giant-bred wolf Fenrir, who both feature prominently in *Völuspá* as well as in *Vafþrúðnismál*. In this context, calling Vafþrúðnir ‘Ímr’s father’ (5.5) when Óðinn enters his hall may well be another allusion on the part of the poet to this giant’s semiotic value; the word *ímr* means ‘dark’, and though recorded as a giant’s name, it is primarily a *heiti* for ‘wolf’.³² Whoever Ímr was thought to be,³³ linking the god’s adversary to this name could be a means of invoking both Surtr (whose name means ‘black’) and Fenrir.

One would expect the ‘oppositional pairing’ of ‘shadow’-marked motifs as it has just been analyzed in *Völuspá* to occur as well in the other catalogue poems, especially in connection with Ragnarøk and its darkness-and-fire imagery. However, such patterns are barely detectable, if at all, in the poems concerned. Some mythological facts in *Vafþrúðnismál* are presented in contrastive pairs — the names of the horses of day and night, the origin of moon and sun — and some elements recur later — the origin of day and night, the post-Ragnarøk sun — but these are not elaborated enough to give rise to paradox or grim foreboding of the ‘shadow’ type, like in *Völuspá*. The imagistic content of *Vafþrúðnismál* is associated much more with birth and regeneration than with death and destruction, and, as Carolyne Larrington remarks, ‘there is no ominous figure like that of Níðhöggr, the dragon of *Völuspá* 66, to trouble the vision of the new world’.³⁴ Níðhöggr does appear in *Grímnismál* (32.6, 35.6), a poem whose narrative context (Óðinn tortured between two fires) and mythological content (mention of several portents of Ragnarøk) would seem to make it a candidate for ‘shadow’ paradoxicality.

³² LP, s.vv. *ímr*, *íma*, *ímarr*, *ímleitr*, *Ímgerðr*.

³³ Being both puzzling and metrically irregular, the verse containing this name has been the object of various (unsatisfactory) emendations; see Machan, *Vafþrúðnismál*, p. 75.

³⁴ Larrington, ‘*Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*’, p. 68.

These instances are difficult to relate to any other part of the poem, however, probably because the doom of the gods is not really at issue.³⁵

‘Shadow’ material in the mythological Eddic poems other than *Völuspá* mainly consists of scattered, isolated expressions, but these are nevertheless useful inasmuch as they consolidate the interpretation of ‘shadow’ in *Völuspá*. Several stanzas from three poems in different contexts throw into sharper relief the peculiar connection in *Völuspá* between the functionally ambiguous eagle and the sinister dragon Níðhöggr. A long portion of *Grímnismál* (25-35) elaborates on the beings living off the ash-tree Yggdrasill and thus causing it decay. Níðhöggr is named twice (32.6, 35.6), each time in the last line, where it alliterates with *niðr* or *neðan* (‘down’). The dragon worries the world tree from below (35.6), and is imagined in symmetrical opposition, on a vertical axis, to other animals that dwell on or near the tree-top: a hart (35.4) and, more interestingly, an eagle (32.4). The moral allegiance of the eagle (and hart) are unclear, although antagonism towards the dragon may be implied. In *Skírnismál*, a stanza of the curse sequence juxtaposes two notions conceived of as extremely hateful, an ‘eagle’s mound’ (27.1) and a ‘fránn serpent among men’ (27.7). The latter instance is itself enlightened by the *Vafþrúðnismál* eagle: *Hræsvelgr heitir, er sitr á himins enda, / iotunn, í arnar ham* (‘Corpse-swallower he is called, who sits at the sky’s ends, a giant, in eagle’s shape’, 37.1-3). This is enough to posit a traditional idea-complex involving serpents and eagles in which either the serpent alone or (if the eagle is a giant in disguise) both creatures are vicious and destructive, and whose poetic expression relies on the basic above/below opposition and its formal correspondence in the structure of

³⁵ Indeed the only apparent connection between narrative frame and mythological content in *Grímnismál* seems to be tied to the theme of initiation into sacral kingship; cf. Larrington, ‘*Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*’, pp. 68-75.

the actual stanza. The Ragnarøk theme in *Völuspá* and its rise/fall structure and ‘shadow’ poetic language are an artful deployment of this network of motifs.

Another motif-sequence detectable in *Völuspá* but difficult to interpret is the mythical sword and its thematically/verbally ‘shadow’-like characterisation. As shown above,³⁶ Freyr is slain by Surtr within an antagonistic bright/dark symbolism (*Völuspá* 53), and it seems likely that he is imagined as killed with his own sword, now gleaming god-like (like Freyr) in Surtr’s grasp.³⁷ The episode can be fitted into a clearer picture with the help of comparative material from the Codex Regius. Valuable extraneous information is provided, first, by *Lokasenna* 42, where we learn that Freyr will miss his sword at Ragnarøk, having given it away in the course of events related in *Skírnismál*. In *Skírnismál* Freyr indeed lends his sword to his servant Skírnir (‘the shining one’) as a weapon that ‘fights by itself against giant-kin’ (8.4-6). It then serves to introduce Skírnir’s threats to the giant’s daughter: *Sér þú þenna mæki, mæer, mióvan, málfán...?* (‘Do you see this sword, girl, slender, sign-fár...?’, 23.1-2, 25.1-2). As in the verses concerning Surtr’s sword, a fourfold alliterative pattern emphasizes both the sword and its verbal attributes; the latter in both cases characterize the sword in terms that would also be appropriate to the description of its intended victim, since the epithets *mjór* and (to a lesser extent) *málfár*, though grammatically attached to the sword, could in theory suit Gerðr herself.³⁸ Furthermore, Skírnir’s verses contextualize the verbally proximate description of the harmful/beautiful mistletoe in *Völuspá* which, as has been shown, is made to evoke the beauty of its victim (Baldr) as well as its opposed reflection (the World Tree). *Völundarkviða* furnishes a possible analogue. The elf/god-like smith

³⁶ §5.1.1 above.

³⁷ Dronke, *Mythological Poems*, pp. 58-9.

³⁸ *Mjór* is attested in relation to a woman (*LP*, s.v.); it is likely that *málfár*, by invoking brightness and ornaments, could have been construed as an epithet for a woman’s dressing, even though its primary relationship must be with swords (cf. §3.2.7.1). Gerðr’s beauty and radiance are highlighted in *Skírnismál* (6.4-6).

Vǫlundr has been deprived of his wondrous sword, too; the latter is emphasized by the ‘shadow’ epithet *fránn* (which has been shown to be partly synonymous with the last element of *málfár*), a word his captors also use to describe Vǫlundr himself (more precisely, his eyes) when they threaten him with his weapon. This dynamic aspect of double referentiality is best observed in *Fáfnismál*, a heroic poem but with mythical characteristics (something *Vǫlundarkviða* is sometimes also said to be). The dragon, a mythical being to which a probably mythical attribute, *fránn*, is attached, appears to transfer verbally this attribute onto the hero’s eyes and sword while dying from the latter. The transfer of the ‘shadow’ epithet, furthermore, seems to imply a transfer of numinous power in the form of both knowledge and terror. Some aspects in other mythical/legendary dragon-fights where the context is relatable to Ragnarǫk, notably in *Hymiskviða* and, outside this manuscript, in *Húsdrapa* and the Old English *Beowulf*, seem comparable, though sometimes (especially in *Hymiskviða*) difficult to reconstruct. The aggregate comparative evidence, then, provides a context for reading the *Vǫluspá* Ragnarǫk’s archetypal fight of shining god against dark monster (and perhaps also Þórr’s fight against the World-serpent, but the *Vǫluspá* text is notoriously obscure there). These instances of double referentiality served by ‘shadow’ words consolidate by their comparative value the thesis that the ‘shadow’ theme is active and functional in *Vǫluspá*, a conclusion the scarcity of actual ‘shadow’ vocabulary in that poem would make doubtful if the latter were considered in isolation.

It is interesting and perhaps significant that the two other poems in Eddic metres that feature a seeress comparable to the *Vǫluspá* vǫlva (in a death-like state and uttering prophecies), namely *Baldurs draumar* and *Hyndluljóð* (the latter containing the sequence known as *Vǫluspá in skamma*), but which are not transmitted by the Codex Regius,

have, by contrast, only very little to offer in the way of ‘shadow’ material.³⁹ But even within the manuscript, factors like genre and tone presumably play a part. Thus *Hárbarðsljóð*, *Prymskviða*, and *Lokasenna*, except from the remarks above, hardly exhibit any trace of ‘shadow’ lexis or theme, a fact that may be related to their comedic character. *Hávamál*, the poem immediately following *Völuspá* in the manuscript, yields only a few isolated words but no theme; this may simply be due to the difficulty of extracting any sustained coherent narrative from this work (which may be because of its engagement with wisdom and its composite structure). More generally, however, Old Norse ‘shadow’ does not appear to be primarily a characteristic of mythological poetry, especially from a lexical perspective. Indeed, as the following section will show, heroic verse supplies richer evidence. This generic observation is noteworthy since, somewhat paradoxically, ‘shadow’ material found in Old Norse non-mythological verse (and perhaps in Old English too) often seems entwined with veiled mythological allusions. Thus ‘shadow’ should probably be related not so much to contexts being alluded to but rather to the very process of alluding.

5.2 EDDIC HEROIC POEMS OF THE CODEx REGIUS

The eleven mythological poems of the Codex Regius are followed by eighteen lays dealing with heroic material. Some themes and motifs employed in the mythological part also find expression in the heroic section. Reflection of the world of the gods in the legendary tales of heroes seems in fact to have been at the core of the

³⁹ For these basic similarities between the *völva* figures, notably the death state in an underground setting, see, for *Baldrs draumar*, Judy Quinn, ‘Dialogue with a *völva*: *Völuspá*, *Baldrs draumar* and *Hyndluljóð*’, in Acker and Larrington, *Poetic Edda*, pp. 245-74, at p. 255; and for *Hyndluljóð*, Jens Peter Schjødt, *Initiation between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion*. Tr. Victor Hansen (Odense, 2008), pp. 255-6.

whole architectural design in the manuscript. The adventures of the principal heroes and heroines, Helgi, Sigurðr, Gunnarr, Brynhildr, Guðrún, and Hamðir, despite their narrative originality, follow patterns that can be related above all to the progression to Ragnarøk found in *Völuspá*, notably including prophecies, oath-breaking, climactic fights, tragic deaths, and symbolic (genealogical) regeneration (or sometimes even actual reincarnation).

As the previous section has shown, the Ragnarøk-driven themes of *Völuspá* incorporate major aspects of the ‘shadow’ theme and motifs involving ambivalent darkness, and these elements in turn have parallels in the remainder of the mythological series, and even correspondences in some of the heroic poems. The aim of the present section, therefore, is to assess the nature and function of ‘shadow’ imagery and theme(s) in the heroic part of the manuscript, and see whether they are merely an extension of the mythological patterns or an at least partly distinct phenomenon. As a case study, *Atlakviða* is perhaps the best candidate, as it is one of the most dense in ‘shadow’ lexical elements (fourteen, or one in every third stanza). A further interest is that the *Atlakviða* ‘shadow’ material cannot be easily related, on the face of it, to the patterns already found to be common to the heroic as well as the mythological section, such as the dragon- and sword-complexes.⁴⁰

5.2.1 *Atlakviða*

By virtue of its placing in the manuscript near the end of the heroic section and its tragic and catastrophic storyline, *Atlakviða* is sometimes regarded as part of a heroic

⁴⁰ Thus a case study of *Fáfnismál*, for example, would repeat much of the information already extracted from the mythological poems.

version of Ragnarøk. ⁴¹ At the same time, its setting and characters are further removed from the mythical universe than is the case in most of the heroic works; unlike the Helgi and Sigurðr cycles that precede it in the manuscript, *Atlakviða* features no semi-divine champions, no apparitions of a god, no valkyries, no dragon, no magic.

Probably one of the oldest poems in the Codex Regius, *Atlakviða* cannot be dependent on *Völuspá* and the version of Ragnarøk transmitted there; it certainly belongs to a different tradition, one that does not seem to show any hints of Christian influence. Like the Sigurðr cycle, its background is Migration Age legendary history, ⁴² here pitching the Burgundians against the Huns. The leading characters are the *Niflungar* (Burgundian) princes Gunnarr and Hǫgni, their sister Guðrún, and Atli the Hunnish king who is now her husband. The poem is thus a sequel of the Sigurðr and *Niflungar* cycle. Its narrative, however, is independent, as it draws very little on the stuff of the stories preceding it. The only relevant link is the cursed treasure which, having precipitated the deaths of the dragon Fáfnir and subsequently of his slayer Sigurðr, is now in the possession of the brothers Gunnarr and Hǫgni. Of the actual curse, however, there is no mention in the poem. Atli covets the hoard, and lures the *Niflungar* to his hall. Failing to secure the gold in exchange for their lives, he tortures and kills them. A grim and fey Guðrún avenges her brothers by feeding Atli with the sons he had with her, passing them off as part of the banquet menu, before burning the Huns in their hall. The narrative sequence can thus be divided into three acts: ⁴³

- (1) In Gunnarr's hall: discussion of Atli's invitation; ride to Atli's hall;
- (2) In Atli's hall: capture and killing of Gunnar and Hǫgni;
- (3) In Atli's hall: Guðrún's revenge.

⁴¹ Gunnell, 'Eddic Poetry', p. 91.

⁴² On the poem's historical and legendary roots and its dating, see Harris, 'Eddic Poetry', pp. 102-3, and Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, pp. 29-45.

⁴³ Based on Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, pp. 13-16.

A close inspection of the poet's language as well as his story, however, suggests that this linear structure is complicated by an underlying design based on (at least) three levels of interconnections between two structurally parallel, if morally polarized, universes, both fated to be annihilated:

- (1) Gunnarr's hall vs Atli's;
- (2) The Niflungs' hoard (and splendid weapons) vs Atli's gold and weapons;
- (3) The Niflungs vs the Huns.

Such a view, as will be seen, puts into sharp relief the 'shadow' lexis, as the latter is instrumental to the deployment of interconnections between the two doomed peoples and between their respective doomed possessions. It is also instrumental to the characterization of those elements which simultaneously partake of both worlds, namely Guðrún, her sons by Atli, and the dark borderland wood. The constant mirroring of diction and the reflection of idea-complexes, a process in which 'shadow' is prominent, causes a partial fusion of the two universes in one tragic, fate-driven chain of destructive events.

As soon as Knéfrøðr the messenger transmits the fateful invitation as he sits in Gunnarr's hall, features pertaining to this hall begin to be echoed by those marking the abode of the deceitful villain. The two halls are characterized, apparently indiscriminately, with what seems at first to be conventional elements: hearth, benches, wine-drinking, gold. Some of the references to Gunnarr's hall, however, are strangely phrased, and can only be fully interpreted by reference to their more explicit analogues in the enemy's hall. The distribution is synoptically presented below.

In Gunnarr's hall	In Atli's hall
becciom aringreypom (1.7) [hearth-?encircling benches]	bekk ... / með hiálmom aringreypom (3.6-7) [benches with hearth-?encircling helmets] sleginn sessmeiðom (14.6) [surrounded with seat-benches]
bióri svásom (1.8) [sweet beer]	buri svása (38.8) [sweet sons]
vín í valhǫllo (2.3) [wine in foreign/death-hall]	vín í valhǫllo (14.11) [wine in foreign/death-hall]
látu á flet vaða / greppa gullscálar (10.2-3) [send the warriors' gold-cups flowing round the hall]	lét ... / ... scíran málm vaða (39.5-6) [sent bright gold flowing]
ór garði H/húna (12.4) [from the court of the Huns/boys/bear-cups]	í hǫll saman Húnar tǫlðuz (34.3-4) [the Huns assembled in the hall]

That exactly the same phrase, *vín í valhǫllo* ('wine in the ?foreign hall'), should be used in both places can just be formulaic convention. On the other hand, it being recognized that the *Atlakviða* 'poet delights in placing words so as to exploit them to the full',⁴⁴ and the prefix *val-* evidencing the meaning 'slain' elsewhere in the poem,⁴⁵ the expression when applied to Atli's drinking is likely to refer to the tyrant's 'slaughter-house', for that is what this place is about to become at that stage in the poem. The line *ok at bióri svásom*, an apparently benign mention of blissful drinking in Gunnarr's hall, perhaps has something of an unexpected ring about it, as this is the only instance in the poetic corpus where *sváss* does not qualify people. Its more conventional sister line in

⁴⁴ Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, p. 28.

⁴⁵ Cf. *valbráðir* ('corpse-meat, 36.6'), and the probably intentional ambivalence in *serki valrauða* ('foreign red/blood-red tunics/corselets', 4.6) and *valbaugar* ('foreign/death-rings', 27.10), as argued below.

the context of the murderer's hall, *ok buri svása*, refers to the mourning of Guðrún's murdered sons; with hindsight, the sound-play *bióri/buri* could conceivably be a subtle if gruesome joke recalling the boys having been eaten as 'ale-morsels' (36.6), a thread of humour the poet seems to delight in (he's just called them *qlreifa* ('ale-merry', 37.4)). In a similar vein, the verb *vaða*, usually used of violent movements in contexts of fighting, stormy waters etc.,⁴⁶ in Gunnarr's order to pour more drink seems disproportionate; it almost sounds as if the 'gold-cups' should be hurled about the hall's *flet*. In Atli's temple, reckless hurling of gold (*scíran málm*) occurs literally, in a context of explicit doom and blasphemous destruction (38); again, the two phrases' verbal and syntactical similarity is striking. Finally, the 'hearth-encircling benches' in the *Niflungar*'s hall initiate a network of echoes with more far-reaching impact. The normal meaning of *greypr* is 'hard, fierce, cruel'; the sense 'encircling' in *aringreypr*, a compound unique to *Atlakviða*, is ad hoc, and poorly attested elsewhere.⁴⁷ Our only pertinent clues are provided by the poet. His equally eyebrow-raising phrase *sleginn sessmeiðom* may work as a correspondingly ominous description of Atli's hall.⁴⁸ More to the point, however, are the resonances which the messenger soon provides in his speech (3):

Atli mic hingat sendi	ríða ørindi,
mar inom mélgreypa,	Myrcvið inn ókunna,
at biðia yðr, Gunnarr,	at iþ á bekk kæmit
með hiálmom aringreypom,	at sækia heim Atla.

[Atli sent me here riding an errand on a bit-?gnashing horse, through unknown *Myrk-*wood, to bid you two, Gunnarr, come to the benches with hearth-?encircling helmets, visit Atli's home.]

⁴⁶ *LP*, s.v. Relevant here is Atli's use of this verb in *Atlamál* when he points out that Guðrún has 'plunged into slaughter' (92.1).

⁴⁷ The only parallel would be *dulgreypr* (*LP*, s.v.), but its exact meaning is uncertain ('?encompassed in conceit').

⁴⁸ The verb *slá* ('to strike, beat, slay'), past participle *sleginn*, does sometimes have the sense 'to encircle' in poetry, but generally in respect to dangerous things like fire or weapons; and cf. the image of Atli *sleginn rógþornom* ('surrounded by swords', 29.3).

The expression used about Atli's hall is made grimmer by the insertion of 'helmets'.

The answer to Dronke's wondering why 'Knéfrøðr mentions helmets in connection with a friendly visit',⁴⁹ must be that the vision of helmets being *greypr* at/around the hearth is a deliberate hint at an ambush being plotted by armed men in the Atli's hall — an idea confirmed by Guðrún's use of the same words when she means 'armed escort' (16.1-4).

A further ill omen ringing in the messenger's 'cold voice' (2.6) is the manner of his coming, riding a 'bit-clenching' horse — perhaps 'cruel (*greypr*) to the bit' — through the ominous *Myrk*-wood, a place conceptualized as a dark borderland of hostile forests or mountains, a liminal space beyond which is the realm of supernatural and/or often malevolent beings, or death, or whatever else the cheerless connotations of the 'shadow' word *myrkr* could bring to mind in the context.⁵⁰ With his tight interweaving of *Myrk*-wood with (via alliteration) his vaguely aggressive horse and further with the slightly threatening helmets, Atli's envoy fulfills the *Niflungar*'s suspicions and fears (2.2, 2.4).

He has cast a gloomy shadow which permeates the hall of the heroes. As if tainted by doom, in their fateful ride to Hunland they cross the same liminal woods and mountains accompanied by the same words, *marina mélgreyþo*, / *Myrcvið inn ókunna* (13.3-4).

The poem is punctuated by *Myrk*- (4x) and *-greypr* (6x) as if by a refrain;⁵¹ Gunnarr has not brought his own *greypr* helmets (16.3) to resist Atli's, which means his death; he is murdered on a heath accessible by riding, with imagery reminiscent of *Myrk*-wood crossings (32), later identified as *Myrkheimr* (42.4). His last destination is a *garðr*, a 'court' of sorts (31.2), a 'serpent-*garðr*' (16.12, 16.13), perhaps a last echo of his 'courts' and 'hall' in the opening act (1.5-6). Gunnarr dead, his true hall may be expected to meet a grim end, in line with the ill-auguring stanzas 11 and 12. Meanwhile, Atli's hall has been destroyed in an almost Ragnarøk-like fiery finale (41-2). In this

⁴⁹ Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, p. 48.

⁵⁰ See §3.2.1 for other references of *Myrk*-wood.

⁵¹ Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, p. 48.

connection, the ambivalence of the verse *ór garði húna*, designating the *Niflungar* court by reference to its ‘bear-cubs’ (or just ‘boys’) but easily construable (out of context) as referring to the court of the Huns, should be allowed to stand; there is little point in assuming an error of transmission unless one wishes to hypercritically correct all the other unexpected wordings in this poem.⁵² Contextual information suggests that what is meant is the court of Gunnarr and Hǫgni’s sons: an address by ‘Hǫgni’s young heir’ follows (12.5-8), while elsewhere in the poem bear symbolism is also applied to the *Niflungar* (11.5, 38.7).⁵³ On the other hand, the poet otherwise uses the word throughout to unambiguously refer to the Huns. In a poem which ‘keeps the two tribes scrupulously separate’,⁵⁴ the introduced confusion between the the two courts looks deliberate and, in light of what precedes, significant. We thus have a remote (beyond *Myrk*-wood), foreign hall of death (*valhǫll* in both its senses) whose lexical characterization is paradoxically replicated, to some extent, in respect to a hall on the hither (‘good’) side of the *myrk* border. This can be interpreted as a cryptic prefiguration of the annihilation of both sides in the ‘death hall’, including perhaps some sort of (moral?) contamination of the heroic side. At the semantic and symbolic levels, a key vehicle for such processes is the *myrk*- element whose recurrence weaves into the text its network of associations (including liminality, dangerous crossing, death).

Another focal point is treasure. The legendary hoard owned by Gunnarr and Hǫgni is what Atli wants and what sets in motion the tragic events recounted, although it is not alluded to as the object of discord until stanza 11 (in rather cryptic terms) and its central role not spelled out before stanza 20. The theme is central from the start, however, as it lurks in the ‘invitation’ passage. Atli’s messenger duplicitously promises

⁵² For proposed emendations cf. apparatus in Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, p. 242. The capitalisation of *Húna* in that edition (*op.cit.*) makes for little sense.

⁵³ Guðrún uses the word about her sons by Atli, probably with a similar ambivalence, in *Guðrúnarhvot* 12.1.

⁵⁴ Larrington, *Poetic Edda*, p. 290.

to give the *Niflungar* an impressive list of Hunnish treasures (4-5). The brothers denigrate this with a list of what they already own, much of which replicates and even bests Atli's offer (6-7). Both sides are rich in gold, shields, helmets, and horses. However, while the *Niflungar*'s valuables are simply radiant and splendid, every other item on the enemy's offer has an uncanny flavour. When the preceding stanza concluded with the ominous 'hearth-greypr helmets' waiting by Atli's benches discussed above, the offer of 'gold-reddened helmets and a multitude of Huns' (4.3-4) might give further pause; the impression of lurking violence would not be dissipated by the inevitable ambiguity of *valrauða* garments ('foreign-/slaughter-red') nor by the by now suspect *mélgreyppa* horses, and still less by the prospect of 'shrieking spears' (5.3). The promise of Gnitahéiðr, the *Niflungar*-controlled heath from where their Hun-coveted hoard has come to them in the first place, sounds like a barely veiled menace. But the Hunnish proposition culminates with the last treat/threat, *Myrk*-wood itself.⁵⁵ Ironically, the brothers eventually get the essence of Atli's offer, since they are indeed violently assailed by a multitude of armed Huns (implied in 19), while Gunnarr gets as his death place *Myrkheimr* (which may be identical with *Myrk*-wood). The brothers' hoard is referred to three times by the solemn phrase *arfr* (or *hodd*) *Niflunga* ('*Niflungar*'s inheritance/hoard') (11, 26.5-8, 27):

'Ulfr mun ráða	arfi Niflunga,
gamlir gránverðir,	ef Gunnars missir,
birnir blacfiállir	bíta þreftönnom,
gamna greystóði,	ef Gunnar né kómrað.'

['The wolf will rule the *Niflungar*'s inheritance, the old grey guardians, if Gunnarr goes lost, black-coated bears will bite with savage teeth, bring sport to the cur-packs, if Gunnarr does not return.']

'... er und einom mér	öllum of fölginn
hodd Niflunga:	lifra nú Högni.'

⁵⁵ The fact that in the preceding stanza the Hunnish gift-list ends precisely with *mélgreyppa* horses is, if not coincidental, and given the earlier discussion, a possible indication of how significant these two motifs — *Myrk*-wood and *greypr* horses/helmets — are in the building up of an atmosphere of dread and deceit.

[‘under me alone is wholly concealed the *Niflungar*’s hoard: dead is now Hǫgni.]

‘Ey var mér týia, meðan vit tveir lifðom,
nú er mér engi, er ec einn lific;
Rín skal ráða rógmálmi skatna,
sú in áskunna, arfi Niflunga,
í veltanda vatni lýsaz valbaugar,
heldr en á hǫndom gull scíni Húna bornom.’

[I always had some doubt while we both lived, now that I alone live I have none; the Rhine must rule the strife-metal of warriors, the divine river, the *Niflungar*’s inheritance, the foreign/death-rings will glow in the surging waters, rather than the gold shine on the arms of the children of the Huns]

In all three citations, the *arfi/hodd Niflunga* is envisaged to be lost, either in wolves’ wilderness or somewhere underground, and collocates with the notion of someone’s death. Furthermore, in the last stanza quoted the variation *rógmálmi : arfi Niflunga : valbaugar* implies the equivalency of the determinants *Niflunga*, *róg-* and *val-*, suggesting connotations of strife and death in the name. A second observation is the contrast made between the gold’s (hypothetical) joyful brilliance on the Huns’ hands and its (actual) paradoxical glow in the dark underwater depths, lost to men’s sight — an elaboration of commonplace poetic images which puts into relief the connotations of darkness in *Niflunga*. The echo *Úlfr mun ráða : Rín skal ráða* draws attention to the always latent interplay between darkness symbols, as it is spelled out in the collocation of *Úlfr*, *Niflunga*, *grán-*, and *blac-*. Thus the ‘shadow’ semantics of *nifl-* (darkness, underworld, Hel, death) are activated in the tribal name, particularly here in relation to the cursed and doomed hoard.⁵⁶ Guðrún’s profanation and destruction of the temples and impetuous distribution of Atli’s gold to the servants (39, 42) offers a symbolic parallel to Gunnarr’s reckless obliteration of his own treasure. Furthermore, Guðrún’s solemn offering to Atli of her Niflung-related sons could be seen as a grotesque parody of an imaginary fulfilment of his hungry hope of seizing the Niflung hoard (33.5-8):

‘Þiggia knáttu, þengill, í þinni hǫllo
glaðr at Guðrúno gnadda niflfarna.’

⁵⁶ See further §3.2.4.

[‘You may receive, lord, in your hall rejoicing from Guðrún *nifl*-gone young things.’]

Instead of *arfi Niflunga*, Atli got *gnadda niflfarna* — which are, genealogically speaking, his own ‘treasures’ (heirs) as well as the Niflungs’.

Niflfarna encapsulates well the congruence of two ‘shadow’ themes in the poem, the Niflungs’ contamination by the Hunnish death-world and the Niflungs’ own fate-driven destruction. As has been seen, both owe something to the poet’s playing on their tribal names’ semantic and symbolic associations. On the other hand, Guðrún is the natural link between the Niflungs and the Huns, and this sets her apart in the poem’s structure and symbolism. Her revenge is a restoration of balance between the two worlds she belongs to; by her words and actions she upholds the uncanny parallelism between their respective fates. When Gunnarr arrives virtually unarmed, she realizes the imminent tipping of the scales in Atli’s favour, and wishfully tells her brother he should have brought ‘mail-coats and hearth-*greypr* helmets’ (16.2-3) to wage war and repay for the trickery, so that (16.5-8):

sætir þú í sǫðlom sólheiða daga,
nái nauðfǫlva létir normir gráta...

[you would have sat in your saddle through sun-bright days, made the norms weep over corpses forcedly *fǫlr*]

But what happens is exactly the opposite. Gunnarr does not have the encircling helmets, they are Atli’s, as intimated from the start (3.7), and instead of Atli it is Gunnarr who is tortured and cast into the snake-pit, as Guðrún can easily predict (16.10-14). Not Gunnarr but Atli gloriously sits on his horse (29.1-4), it is the Niflungs who become corpses, and the weeping falls to Guðrún herself. She, however, fights back her tears, and undertakes to accomplish her earlier vision, now amplified with revenge, to the letter. She becomes the one who parades in a radiant glory (if not on a horse); the

sudden brightness she emanates while performing her revenge (35.1, 39.2, 43.8) echoes and somewhat fulfils the vision of *sólheiða daga*; now it is she who towers over the Huns who are in turn tortured with the slow revelation of her atrocious deed, and weep (38.4); and she kills Atli when he is as weaponless (40.3) as Gunnarr had been. A striking way in which ‘shadow’ underscores the plot’s tragic symmetries and replications is in the patterning of half-lines about doom and death (cf. 16.7, 33.8 above). The *nái nauðfǫlva* vision materialises twice but, as it were, in the ‘wrong’ deaths: the fate of Guðrún’s two brothers is replicated in the symmetrical murder of her two sons, *gnadda niflfarna*. She proceeds to tell the Huns their doom, again cryptically and with ‘shadow’ (35):

Scævaði þá in scírleita, veigar þeim at bera,
afkár dís, iǫfrom, oc ǫlkrásir valði,
nauðug, neffǫlom, enn níð sagði Atla...

[the bright-faced darted to bring them drinks, the frightful lady, for the warriors, and chose ale-morsels, forced, for the nose-*fǫlr* ones, and told Atli his shame]

Neffǫlr, as it recalls the corpse-devouring *Vǫluspá* dragon and the corpse-friendly (and corpse-eating?) *Alvíssmál* dwarf,⁵⁷ links the Huns to the death of the *niflfarna* sons on whom they are indeed dining. This compound, furthermore, darkly hints by soundplay at *nifl-*. Indeed, as *nái nauðfǫlva* echoes both *nauðug neffǫlom* and *gnadda niflfarna* through thematic proximity (death), rhythm (metrical equivalence), and paronomasia (*n(-f)-f*), the half-line in effect condemns the Huns to death.⁵⁸ And because *nauðug* actually refers here to Guðrún, it accentuates her feyness and conceivably alludes to her own doom as well.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See §5.1.1 on *Vǫluspá* and §3.2.6 on *fǫlr*.

⁵⁸ The connotations of these words and the import of the collocations are further discussed in the sections on *fǫlr* and *nifl-*.

⁵⁹ Provided the last stanza of *Atlakviða* is original; I discuss it below.

Guðrún's vengeance on the Huns is carried out in a way which insistently brings to mind the death of all the other protagonists (in flashback or anticipation), and the 'shadow' words *fǫlr* and *nifl*- account much for this haunting effect. In the end it is she who can be held responsible, directly or not, for practically all the woeful events that make the stuff of the story. Knéfrøðr is in effect her envoy as well as Atli's, since he shows the brothers the ring she has twisted with a wolf's hair. Hǫgni emphasizes the wolf's hair (8.3, 8.5) and concludes that a 'wolfish' way lies ahead (8.7-8). It is this warning which, taken as a challenge,⁶⁰ spurs Gunnarr's decision to jump into the wolf's den, which he does by first invoking wolves as guardians (or destroyers) of the treasure (11.1-3). Taken together, Hǫgni's and Gunnarr's prophecies would insinuate that wolves stand for Huns.⁶¹ The brothers' fate, however, has been spun in no small part by Guðrún, even though her subtleties seem to have outdone her purpose and turned out to be a 'wolfish' invitation. Her influence on the fate of her people(s) is confirmed during the revenge sequence; she seems to rise almost to the status of a norn ('makes fate grow', 39.5), resolving in passing the weeping norn paradox (38.5-6, cf. 16.7-8), and that of a valkyrie ('bride in mail-coat', 43.3) carefully picking out those to be slain.⁶² In this view, when the author of the last stanza says that she has brought the bane-word to three kings (43.5-7), he is probably again in tune with the poem's symbolic logic, if he means Atli, Gunnarr, and Hǫgni.⁶³ Her designation as 'frightful *dís*' (35.3) and her eerie

⁶⁰ Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, p. 14.

⁶¹ Tempting as it would be, however, to suppose equivalency between the wolves, *gamlir gránverðir*, and the Huns when called *gumar gransíðir* ('long-moustached [lit. 'moustache-long'] men', 34.5), and to take this as one of the poet's echoing pairs by reading the prefix in the former verse as *grán*- ('(wolf-)grey') would perhaps be semantically too problematic ('wolf-grey-large men?'), even in such an echoing text as *Atlakviða* is here demonstrated to be.

⁶² Cf. Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, p. 28, who only stops short of calling her a norn or a valkyrie.

⁶³ Since most of what the last stanza says has been knit together with the interpretation advanced here, suspecting it of representing a later addition due to confusion with other versions of the tradition does not seem necessary. The main arguments for rejection (cf. Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, pp. 73-4) have been countered.

radiance in the context of death indeed lend her a quasi-supernatural, mythical-legendary stature.⁶⁴

Guðrún's double allegiance appropriately enough gives her more control over fate and death than any hero from either side. Accordingly, most of the loci for 'shadow' in *Atlakviða* can be traced back to her. The remainder can be ascribed to the *Myrk*-wood theme. The dark forest interface could even be seen as a topographical equivalent of the human personification of doom that Guðrún almost becomes. Both are 'shadow'-empowered entities, perhaps relatable to mythical places and forces of similar function in *Völuspá* and Ragnarök-related texts, that loom larger and larger until they engulf everything, verbally and thematically, with shadow.

5.2.2 *Atlakviða* in the context of the other heroic poems in the Codex Regius

When one looks for a comparative context in which to read *Atlakviða*, a natural place to investigate is *Atlamál*, the poem which immediately follows in the manuscript and to which the compiler himself indexes the former poem (prose following *Atlakviða* 43). As his note indicates, *Atlamál* is indeed an elaboration of *Atlakviða*, a 'clearer' (less tense and allusive) as well as much dilated text, by a poet who seems to have known *Atlakviða* well.⁶⁵ In stark contrast to *Atlakviða*, however, it contains practically no 'shadow' lexis at all, nor are there any echoic patterns even remotely similar to the findings of the preceding section. Differences of sub-genre, tone, metre, or age and tradition (*Atlamál* is less 'epic', more 'domestic' and ambling, composed in *málahátttr*,

⁶⁴ Here also belongs *in gaglbiarta* ('the gosling-bright', 39.2), especially in view of its possible association with ravens and hence with valkyries (Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, p. 71).

⁶⁵ Cf. Theodore M. Andersson, 'Did the Poet of *Atlamál* Know *Atlakviða*?', in Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason, eds., *Edda: A Collection of Essays* (Winnipeg, 1983), pp. 243-57, esp. at pp. 255-6.

and undoubtedly represents a later compositional stage influenced by South Germanic material) may in some way be accountable for this.⁶⁶ It seems more pertinent and rewarding, however, to relate this situation to the presence or absence of thematic and semantic elements whose importance has been shown in the previous analysis. The most striking discrepancy is that *Atlamá* never mentions the *Niflungar*'s treasure, even though this is an essential theme in the previous poem, where its designation as 'Niflungar's inheritance' has been demonstrated to associate gold and gold-owners to the latent connotative force of *nifl-*. But in *Atlamá* the tribal name *Niflungar* appears only twice (47.5, 52.5) and is likely to be meaningless to the author, who in a third instance uses the alternative/confused form *Hniflungar* (88.5). Accordingly, the *Atlakviða* poet's allusive network of wordplay about corpse-paleness and *nifl-*gone children is absent here, even though Kostbera's foreboding dreams (14-28) do uphold an atmosphere of overhanging doom. Apart from the 'gallows' motif (22, 39, 59), however, these nightmares have no resonance. For example, wolves are invoked only once (24) without the imagery being built up into a thought-provoking theme as is the case in *Atlakviða*, and 'Myrk-wood' is never mentioned. These absences, therefore, insofar as they concern exactly those elements whose interconnections have been argued to form *Atlakviða*'s 'shadow' theme, could be interpreted as circumstantial indications tending to confirm these very interconnections' validity in the latter work.

Despite most heroic poems in the Codex Regius being interrelated and partly overlapping in terms of the narrative sequence they follow, it is hard to find a parallel to the deployment of 'shadow' motifs in *Atlakviða*. One reason for this may be that the *Niflungar*'s hoard which, as the analysis has just shown, is a crucial 'shadow' focus, is not associated in the remaining poems with this 'shadow' name. However, a parallel can be found in *Guðrúnarkviða II*, in which Guðrún recounts her miseries up to her

⁶⁶ For a summary and discussion of the major differences, see Andersson, 'Poet of *Atlamá*'.

marriage to Atli. The hoard is not mentioned here either, but the murder of Atli's children, another key factor for the *Atlakviða* 'shadow', is dwelt upon for four stanzas (40-43) where Atli's premonitory dreams about it are deliberately misinterpreted for him by Guðrún. There is a threatening ambiguity/indirection in her replies that is absent from the corresponding *Atlamá* passage.⁶⁷ The dream-and-explanation exchange ends thus (42-3):

‘Hugða ec mér af hendi hvelpa losna,
 glaums andvana, gylli báðir;
 hold hugða ec þeira at hræom orðit,
nauðigr nái nýta ec scyldac.’

‘Þar muno seggir um sœing dœma
 oc **hvítunga** hofði næma;
 þeir muno feigir fára náttu
 fyr dag litlo dróttom bergia.’

[‘I thought the whelps broke loose from my hand, deprived of joy, they both howled; I thought their flesh became carrion; **constrained**, those **corpses** I was meant to enjoy.’
 ‘That means men will discuss sacrifice and take off the ?**whittings**’ heads; doomed, they will in few nights’ time before dawn be eaten by the host.’]

Both the premonition and the attempt to conceal it have resonances which look forward to the *Atlakviða* tragedy they announce, centered around Guðrún's disguised offering of the boys to her husband,⁶⁸ and the collocation *nauðigr nái*⁶⁹ is a direct parallel to the series *nái nauðfólva : nauðug neffólom*. The designation of the sacrificed sons as if they were something (slightly) different, *hvítunga* (white-haired sacrificial beasts?), corresponds to the similarly coded *Atlakviða* phrase *gnadda niflfarna*.⁷⁰ Further comparison can be made on the basis of *Guðrúnarkviða II* as a whole. The wolf imagery in Atli's dream is part of a pattern recurring throughout the text (cf. 7, 8, 11,

⁶⁷ Cf. Dennis Cronan, ‘A Reading of *Guðrúnarkviða Qnnor*’, *SS* 57 (1985), pp. 174-87, at p. 182.

⁶⁸ Cronan, ‘*Guðrúnarkviða*’, p. 183.

⁶⁹ Although the verse in *Guðrúnarkviða II* is an emendation, the corrupt manuscript reading *nuðigra na* certainly points to some combination of these two words, whatever the original grammatical endings.

⁷⁰ Since in this sequence Guðrún keeps dismissing Atli's forebodings, it is possible that the poet has her use *hvítunga* in deliberate semantic opposition to the kind of darkness imagery that clings to the *Niflungar*, with the result that *hvítunga* stands in direct contrast to *niflfarna* (whether the poet actually knew *Atlakviða* or not).

12, 29). Thematically related to it is the *niðmyrkr* (~‘darkness of waning moon’, 12.2) that weighs on Guðrún when she retrieves Sigurðr’s corpse from the wolves (11.3-4) and wishes the latter could kill her too (12.5-8). Since at that point the ubiquitous wolves could metaphorically refer to the *Niflungar* brothers (who just murdered Sigurðr), a later mention of the latter’s *scarar iarpar* (‘dark hair’, 19.12) could belong to the same loose connection (compare ‘grey-guardians’ and ‘black-coated’ about wolves/bears and/or *Niflungar* in *Atlakviða*). Other themes which in their treatment are reminiscent of *Atlakviða*’s haunting repetitions are gold-giving (1, 18, 20, 25, 26) and horse-riding to Hunland (18, 19, 35). It appears, then, that although this poem, unlike *Atlakviða*, is poor in ‘shadow’ lexis, it nevertheless evinces most of the motifs which elsewhere, and especially in *Atlakviða*, are vehicles for such lexis and which, in the latter poem, all combine to form the ‘shadow’ structure that has been identified. Thus *Guðrúnarkviða II* constitutes important contextual evidence (though circumstantial) for the integrity of the ‘shadow’ relations in *Atlakviða*.

Among the poems whose plot and subject matter are unrelated to *Atlakviða*, one nevertheless finds a few rather remarkable structural analogues, with some accompanying ‘shadow’ vocabulary, which afford a larger perspective on that poem. This concerns mainly *Hamðismál*, the last poem of the manuscript, and the generically hybrid (mythological-heroic) *Völundarkviða*.⁷¹ The action in *Hamðismál* follows a general structure which has a series of parallels to *Atlakviða*. Two brothers, Hamðir and Sǫrli (/Gunnar and Högni in *Atlakviða*), are incited by their mother (/sister) Guðrún to ride to the hall of the evil king Jǫrmunrekkr (/Atli).⁷² They cross *úrig* mountains

⁷¹ On *Völundarkviða*’s generic heterogeneity see Ann C. Burson, ‘Swan Maidens and Smiths: A Structural Study of *Völundarkviða*’, *SS* 55 (1983), pp. 1-19, at pp. 1-2 and 8; Kaaren Grimstad, ‘The Revenge of *Völundr*’, in Glendinning, *Edda*, pp. 187-209, at pp. 192ff; and Lotte Motz, ‘New Thoughts on *Völundarkviða*’, *SB* 22 (1986-9), pp. 50-68.

⁷² In *Atlakviða*, despite the verbal instigation being done by Knéfrøðr, it is Guðrún’s message (wolf-hair) that becomes the decisive incitement.

(/Myrk-wood), a wilderness full of foreboding, ‘dewy’ and death-ridden (/‘dark’ and resounding) (11.4, 17).⁷³ There is a battle on arrival. They are killed, and the king as well. A number of minor motifs are also shared: wolves, the doomed warrior towering on his horse, ale-cups in climactic scenes (17.5, 29; 10.7-8, 14.3-4; 20.7-8, 23.2), and a few verbal parallels.⁷⁴ One motif which, though peculiar to *Hamðismál*, nonetheless has revealing implications for *Atlakviða*, is the half-brother Erpr. His name is a variant form of *jarpr* (‘dark’). Hamðir and Sqrli meet him somewhere in the liminal space they must ride across; he is referred to by his name (14.1), but in an evident play on it they call him *iarpscammr* (‘dark-short’, 12.3). They kill him, a fateful act which brings about their death when they fail to behead Jormunrekkr in time: *Af væri nú haufuð, ef Erpr lifði* (‘Off would now be the head, if Erpr were alive’, 28.1-2). While Erpr’s swarthinness may serve to demarcate him from his half-brothers, its function is not confined to that.⁷⁵ It is striking that a few stanzas after Erpr’s killing and just before the battle, there is a mention of *jarpr* hair (20.5), but it belongs to the king’s head, the one that the *jarpr* brother, had he been spared, would have cut off.⁷⁶ On the other hand, just before departing on the ill-fated expedition (which begins with the murder of Erpr), Hamðir reproaches his mother that she ‘meant to harm Atli by Erpr’s murder’ (8.1-2) and thus brought more harm on herself. This Erpr was one of Guðrún’s sons by Atli, and to mention him is logical in the poem’s first part formed by Guðrún’s lament and goading (1-11). But Hamðir’s criticism prefigures the brothers’ own folly, since their murder of Erpr also rebounds on them. The two characters’ shared name, therefore, is not a

⁷³ The term *úrig* (‘dewy, dark or shimmering with dew/rain’) generally evidences ominous associations; the usage in *Hamðismál* can be compared to *Skírnismál* 10 where it interacts precisely with *myrkr* (cf. §3.2.1).

⁷⁴ *í eld heitan, búri svása* (respectively *Atlakviða* 19.4, 42.10, 38.8, *Hamðismál* 24.10, 10.2).

⁷⁵ Cf. Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, pp. 208-9, where she goes to some pains to explain why in *Ragnarsdrápa* 3 Bragi calls the brothers ‘raven-dark’ while also mentioning Erpr. Rather than speculating that Bragi did not know the tradition about Erpr’s bastardy, it seems more accurate to suppose that poets use ‘shadow’ collocations and echoes differently according to local narrative and stylistic demands.

⁷⁶ Just as in the case of *nifl-* in *Atlakviða*, the extreme rarity of *Erpr* and *jarp-* argues against these echoes being accidental.

coincidence but a link between the poem's two narrative parts.⁷⁷ The 'shadow' word *Erpr/jarpr* is thus a visible/audible link in a chain of implicit causality ending in downfall. This is much the type of associative nexus that has been shown to underlie the respective fates of the Niflung brothers, their hoard, Guðrún's *niflfarna* sons, and the Huns in *Atlakviða*, all intertwined through the *nifl-* wordplay and related 'shadow' lexis. This in turn provides grounds to suspect that the occurrence of the boys' names, Erpr and Eitill, in *Atlakviða* 37 immediately following the *nifl-* and *neffql-* 'shadow' wordplays, is part of the haunting pattern there as well.⁷⁸

In *Vǫlundarkviða*, the only evident structural parallel to *Atlakviða* is the smith Vǫlundr's murder of king Níðuðr's two sons. Even there, however, objections could be raised. The boys have no kinship with their murderer, are not offered up as food, the fashioning of their skulls into goblets may resemble *Atlamál* but not *Atlakviða*, and this particular episode shows no lexical trace of darkness, paradoxical or not. On closer analysis, however, a series of structural and thematic parallels emerges which at least raises some interesting questions about the presence of 'shadow' in both poems. For one thing, Níðuðr's children are transformed into treasure and offered as a parody of what was originally intended by the king, namely treasure forcefully processed and given by the prisoner. The idea is highlighted by the sequence in which the boys come to Vǫlundr to gaze at the gold with greedy eyes, and come out as treasure-adorned body parts (20-25). This grim distortion is the last stage of the fate of a treasure which Vǫlundr owns but which Níðuðr claims as his (13, 14), and which is associated twice

⁷⁷ Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, pp. 180ff, sharply separates the two parts, seeing the former as indebted, in its present form, to *Guðrúnarhvot*. However that may be, it is interesting that the latter poem, which never has to name or even mention Erpr the (half-)brother, does mention Atli's sons, but without naming them either. The name is also absent from *Atlamál*.

⁷⁸ The Old English cognate *eorp* ('dark, swarthy') is also very rare. Further similarities are provided by its occurrence in *Exodus* 194a, where it is applied to the Egyptians, it is thought, as a deliberate pun on patristic interpretations of the name (*DOE*, s.v.), and soon followed by a series of other 'shadow' qualifiers ambiguously referring to the Egyptians and/or the Israelites.

with ‘Wolf-dales’ (5.1-6, 13.5-6), where the smith lives. The latter is also associated with bear imagery (9.1-2, 10.1), seemingly a blind motif, and yet perhaps not unrelated to the boys being repeatedly called *húnar* (‘bear-cubs’, 24.2, 32.4, 34.6) *after* he kills them. Secondly, he is an elf (10.3, 32.2), his neck is ‘white’ (2.9-10) (probably insinuating a non-male and/or otherworldly overtone), his eyes shine ominously (qualified by the ‘shadow’ word *fránn* via the serpent image, 17.5-6). Incidentally, the application of *fránn* to both Vǫlundr and his sword — which Níðuðr has taken from him — establishes a lexical link with disquieting (‘shadow’) overtones between the hero (specifically his eyes) and (a part of) his treasure,⁷⁹ a connection then extended to the shining treasure he sends the queen: her sons’ eyes in the form of jewels; the multiple referentiality of *nifl-* would be the *Atlakviða* equivalent. His cunning revenge is adumbrated by the ambivalence of the word used for whatever it is he makes for Níðuðr: *vél* (‘skill’, ‘device’, and/or ‘deceit’, 20.3) can refer to both real treasures and those soon to be made out of the children — an indirection reminiscent of *Atlakviða*’s *gnadda niflfarna*.⁸⁰ The overall implication, therefore, is that Vǫlundr, by possessing a wolf-marked, contested hoard, being himself wolf- and bear-marked, and becoming a gold-greedy king’s prisoner on the one hand, and on the other by possessing an uncanny bright aspect, being partly supernatural, and taking revenge by the beguiling gift-giving of the king’s dead sons, encompasses the characteristics and functions of both Gunnarr and Guðrún in *Atlakviða*; the parallel is completed by a similarly conceived associativity linking hero, treasure, and sons’ murder.⁸¹

A final observation must be made concerning apparently unconnected ‘shadow’ elements in the poems discussed. The motif of crossing and recrossing *Myrk-*wood in

⁷⁹ Cf. §3.2.7.2, and the discussion in the section on mythological poems above.

⁸⁰ Cf. Dronke, *Mythological Poems*, p. 315.

⁸¹ Discussing Vǫlundr’s theriomorphism, Grimstad, ‘Revenge’, pp. 197-8, points out that *dýr* (20.6) could mean ‘animal’ and refer to the smith, rather than mean ‘treasure’. Intentional or not, the presence of an ambivalence here would only encourage the associations just mentioned.

Völundarkviða (1.2, 3.8) is closest to its analogue in *Atlakviða*; yet it appears only in the ‘swan-maidens’ story, the poem’s first part that appears to originate in an independent tale, seemingly precluding any essential connection to the rest of the poem. Still, it is hard to deny its comparative value.⁸² Throughout the poem, the refrain-like recurrence of the place-names ‘Dark-wood’, ‘Wolf-dales’, and ‘Sea-shores’⁸³ insinuates the notion of eerie liminality and impending danger gradually closing in, quite like the disquieting imagery centering on *Myrk*-wood and *Niflungar* in *Atlakviða*. Furthermore, the probability that the *Myrk*-wood motif ‘fits in’ the overall thematic structure is strengthened by other links between the two narrative components of *Völundarkviða*.⁸⁴ Notably, the smith’s being ‘weather-eyed’ (4.2, 8.6) and associated with bears (9.2, 10.1) prefigures the events mentioned above related to *fránn* and *húnar*, respectively; all these motifs, interestingly, are repeated exactly twice.⁸⁵ The situation is similar in *Hamðismál*. Repetitive ‘shadow’ imagery is present in the first section of the poem, which seemingly has more to do with *Guðrúnarhvot* than with the second part, the one which provides the comparative framework.⁸⁶ This occurs when the murders of Svanhildr and Sigurðr are both recalled in ‘shadow’-like terms which, though not identical, follow the same pattern of contrast, respectively white/black/grey and (implicitly) blood-red, and dark/white/blood-red (3.4-8, 7.1-4). This accentuation highlights the fact that Svanhildr’s murder, for which Guðrún demands revenge, only

⁸² Burson, ‘Swan Maidens’, reviews the problems relating to the poem’s integrity and attempts to resolve them through a structural analysis.

⁸³ All three are repeated twice. The latter, *Sævar stöð* (17.10, 20.8), the place of Völundr’s captivity, might echo *sævar strönd* (of similar meaning, 1.5), the place where the swan-maidens land just after crossing *Myrk*-wood and encounter Völundr and his brothers.

⁸⁴ On the portentous/warning effect of repetitions throughout the poem see further Dronke, *Mythological Poems*, pp. 294-5.

⁸⁵ For further links between the two portions of *Völundarkviða*, as well as some ideas on those touched upon here, cf. John McKinnell, ‘The Context of *Völundarkviða*’, in Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington, eds., *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology* (London, 2002), pp. 198-212, esp. pp. 206-9; and Burson, ‘Swan Maidens’, p. 6 and *passim*.

⁸⁶ See above. Indeed, regarding this motif, almost identical wording is found in *Guðrúnarhvot* 2.8-12 and 4.7-10, with further recurrence of similar ‘shadow’ patterns in that poem in stanza 16 (and possibly 17 and 18).

adds to the list of her other losses (like Sigurðr's murder), of which Hamðir reminds her; the brothers understand the unrelenting logic of this pattern which means they are next on the list, as they tell their mother in stanza 10 (transitional between the two parts of the poem). Subsequently, on their journey they come across a sinister reminder of the Svanhildr tragedy (their 'sister's son wounded on the tree', 17.3-4), shed more blood by killing both kin (Erpr) and foes, and perish, only to add to Guðrún's grief and fulfill her vision of herself as a tree with all branches cut off (5). Incidentally, the fact that the (not unrelated) limb/branches theme runs throughout *Hamðismál* (1, 5, 15, 24, 28, 30), further consolidates the possibility of links between the 'shadow' motifs. On the verbal level, the juxtaposition of blood and death with darkness and/or brightness and splendour does recur in the second part (11.4/6, 20.5/6, 28.7/8). Such stylistic tendencies are relatively close to those observed in *Atlakviða*. These gap-bridging elements in both *Völundarkviða* and *Hamðismál* have much the same effect as that which at least one scholar has claimed for *Atlakviða*'s echoic allusiveness, namely that 'by bringing past and present into close relation it suggests that what is now happening is part of a continuous process.'⁸⁷

The picture that emerges, then, is that of *Atlakviða* as the common denominator in terms of 'shadow'; although the few other poems discussed show no signs of connections to each other, they jointly afford a larger context in which to interpret *Atlakviða*. The main finding has been that an intricate interdependency between 'shadow' and particular types of motifs, themes, plot elements, and scenes, is common to several poems even when subject-matter and plot details diverge. As for the nature of the 'shadow' patterns present in the rather loosely connected first parts of *Völundarkviða* and *Hamðismál*, it may be witness to a tendency of mutual attractivity of

⁸⁷ John Stephens, 'The Poet and *Atlakviða*: Variations on Some Themes', in Gabriel Turville-Petre and John S. Martin, eds., *Iceland and the Mediaeval World. Studies in Honour of Ian Maxwell* (Clayton, Australia, 1974), pp. 56-62, at p. 58.

such elements in a given poetic structure. It also raises questions as to the role of ‘shadow’ at the earlier stages of composition and manuscript compilation. The way *Vǫlundarkviða* appears to fit into a larger group of poems in regard to the patterns discussed can have interesting implications regarding the presence in the Codex Regius of this notoriously odd, unclassifiable work.

5.3 SKALDIC POETRY

Although skaldic verse has yielded substantial evidence for ‘shadow’ in the word-studies conducted in Chapter 3, the occurrences are mostly isolated. None of the skaldic poems exhibits a sustained ‘shadow’ theme supported by corresponding lexis to the degree found in some of the Eddic pieces. This is mostly true of the later skaldic poems, for reasons that are left for a fuller discussion to the next chapter. While early skaldic works are still not very rich in the elements under research, a few cases merit attention, and notably *Ragnarsdrápa*, for the ‘shadow’ elements it contains and the patterns of their distribution are meaningful in relation to the poem’s nature.

Ragnarsdrápa is one of the skaldic poems concerned with mythological and legendary subjects and one of a few within that group which claim to describe pictorial subjects, a sub-genre scholars occasionally equate with ekphrasis.⁸⁸ This section, therefore, will unfold as a gradual zooming out from the particular case study through larger generic (and/or authorial) subdivisions to skaldic verse in general, in order to account for those aspects of the poetry that attract ‘shadow’ and those that rule it out.

⁸⁸ Margaret Clunies Ross, ‘Stylistic and Generic Definers of the Old Norse Skaldic Ekphrasis’, *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007), pp. 161-92.

5.3.1 Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa*

Although we know that the Norwegian Bragi Boddason, the earliest skald known by name, probably of the second half of the ninth century, composed a poem called *Ragnarsdrápa* to reciprocate the gift of a shield from his patron (possibly Ragnarr loðbrók) — on the authority of Snorri who quotes verses from it in his *Edda* — editors' attempts to reconstruct the poem in its entirety give us merely that, a reconstruction.⁸⁹ The conventional view, embodied in most of the accessible editions, ascribes to the poem 20 stanzas, structured as follows:⁹⁰

1-2. Introductory stanzas apparently announcing a shield poem. Attributed by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* to Bragi, though not in the context of any poem, but merely as two of several examples of kennings for shields.⁹¹

3-7. Series of stanzas explicitly claiming to depict a scene painted on a shield, the attack by Hamðir and Sǫrli on Jǫrmunrekkr's hall. Attributed by Snorri to Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa* and quoted in *Skáldskaparmál* (in an earlier passage) to illustrate a prose account of the story of Hamðir and Sǫrli.⁹²

8-12. Another series of stanzas, of which the last says they depict another scene on the shield, related to the legend of the never-ending battle sometimes referred to as *Hjaðningavíg*. Attributed by Snorri to Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa* and quoted in *Skáldskaparmál* (in another passage) to illustrate a prose account of the legend.⁹³

13, 14-19, 20. A stanza about the legend of Gefjon and her ploughing giant oxen; half-stanzas referring to Þórr's fishing venture against Miðgarðsormr; and

⁸⁹ Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Bragi Boddason', in Phillip Pulsiano *et al.*, eds, *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1993), pp. 55-6.

⁹⁰ The numbering of stanzas is that used by Finnur Jónsson in *Skj B I*, pp. 1-4.

⁹¹ Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Edda. Skáldskaparmál. 1: Introduction, Text and Notes* (London, 1998), pp. 69-70.

⁹² Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál 1*, pp. 50-1.

⁹³ Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál 1*, pp. 72-3.

a half-stanza concerning Óðinn's casting of the giant Þjazi's eyes into the sky as stars. Attributed by Snorri to Bragi, quoted piecemeal in various places in *Skáldskaparmál* in unrelated contexts.⁹⁴

As this schematized account shows, only stanzas 3-12 can be safely ascribed to Bragi's *Ragnarsdrápa*, with stanzas 1-2 being its plausible but not absolutely certain opening, whereas the remaining reconstructed parts may well belong to one or several different (and not necessarily ekphrastic) poems by this skald. Accordingly, in the following analysis I regard *Ragnarsdrápa* as consisting of the two series of stanzas 3-7 and 8-12 with the conceivable addition of 1-2.⁹⁵ As will be seen, this restrictive approach accords well with the patterns of distribution of 'shadow' in all the stanzas and half-stanzas mentioned.

'Shadow' words are to be found in stanzas 3, 4, and 5, with arguably related imagery in the refrain half-stanzas 7 and 12. Although it must remain possible that the rejected stanzas (13-20) in fact do belong to *Ragnarsdrápa*, it is to be noticed (1) that they never mention or allude to a shield (no doubt a key factor for their rejection by Margaret Clunies Ross), and (2) that they exhibit no trace of 'shadow' or related words or imagery. This is in double contrast to the securely reconstructed *Ragnarsdrápa* (3-12)⁹⁶ which is relatively rich in 'shadow' elements *and* contains repeated references to a shield. That the verses are based on pictures represented on a shield is explicitly stated in stanzas 4, 7, and 12. To these could be added much more oblique allusions to a shield in stanzas 3 and 6, to be discussed below. Furthermore, a distinction along the same lines can be made within *Ragnarsdrápa*. Although there can be little doubt that the

⁹⁴ Cf. Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Edda. Skáldskaparmál. 2: Glossary and Index of Names* (London, 1998), p. 499.

⁹⁵ In this I am close to the view expressed by Clunies Ross, 'Ekphrasis', p. 6, and to be reflected in her edition of Bragi's verses in *SkP* III (forthcoming).

⁹⁶ Subsequent references to *Ragnarsdrápa* in this section, unless otherwise qualified, refer to those ten stanzas only.

Hjaðningavíg part (8-12) belongs to the poem (insofar as we can trust Snorri's attribution), there are only two mentions of shields, and the only one which refers to the actual pictorial referent of the poem is in the refrain (12, which partly repeats 7), for the shield-kenning in 11.5-6 is merely an element of the narrative to be expected in the context of the never-ending battle. It is at least interesting, then, if not necessarily significant at this point, that not a single 'shadow' element appears in that part of the poem — except, again, in the concluding refrain, though even there the presence of such an element is much more faint and uncertain than in the version of the refrain that concludes the *Hamðir* and *Sqrli* part. This situation must be contrasted to the double concern with shield and 'shadow' in stanzas 3-7. The fact that among the latter stanzas, the only one which is lacking in 'shadow' happens to also be silent about shields (5) further testifies against mere coincidence in these correlations. These preliminary remarks, therefore, constitute a first indication of an interrelation between 'shadow' components on the one hand and the shield as basis for the poetry on the other.

Ragnarsdrápa contains no more than four 'shadow' words in the strictest sense (that is, such as are analyzed in Chapter 3), but their clustering in three proximate stanzas is suggestive and calls for an evaluation of their immediate context, notably their relationship to other ambivalently articulated signifiers of darkness and brightness (3, 4, 6):⁹⁷

Knátti eðr við illan
 Jǫrmunrekkur at vakna
 með **dreyrfár** dróttir
 draum í sverða flaumi.
 Rósta varð í ranni
 Randvés hǫfuðniðja
 þás **hrafnbliár** hefndu
 harma Erps of barmar.

⁹⁷ 'Shadow' components (and compound words containing them) are signalled by boldface, while 'shadow'-related ones are underlined; all are discussed below. The text is from Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál I*, pp 50-1. These stanzas are also edited in *Skj A I*, pp. 1-2 and *B I*, pp. 1-2; Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, pp. 205-6; cf. also E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 1-4, and the accompanying translation and commentary in Dronke and Turville-Petre.

Flaut of set við sveita
 sóknar álfs á gólfi
 hræva dǫgg þars hǫggnar
 hendr sem fœtr of kendu.
 Fell í blóði blandinn
 brunn ǫlskakki runna
 — þat er á Leifa landa
 laufi **fátt** — at haufði.

Mjök lét stála stökkvir
 styðja Gjúka niðja
 flaums þás fjǫrvi næma
 Foglhildar mun vildu,
 ok **bláserkjar** birkis
 ballfǫgr gátu allir
 ennihǫgg ok eggjar
 Jónakrs sonum launa.

[Jǫrmunrekkur then awoke with an evil dream with **blood-stained** [-*fár*] troops in a torrent of swords. Uproar began in the hall of Randvér's chief kinsmen [Jǫrmunrekkur] when Erpr's raven-dark [-*bláir*] brothers avenged their harms. Corpses' dew flowed over the benches to the floor with the battle-elf's [Jǫrmunrekkur's] blood, where hewn arms and legs could be seen. Men's ale-dispenser fell into the pool blended with blood — this is **painted** [*fátt*] on Leifi's lands' leaf [shield] — on his head. The driver of torrents of steel had Gjúki's kinsmen prodded (with spears) as they wanted to deprive of life Svanhildr's lover, and they managed to repay Jónakr's sons for the harshly-shining forehead-blows of the birch of the **dark-shirt** [*blá-*] [warrior] and his sword.]

The 'shadow' material consists of only two adjectives, *fár* (and the participial form *fáðr*, neut. *fátt*) and *blár*. While the former refers to Jǫrmunrekkur's troops in one instance and to the shield in the other, the latter qualifies the avenging brothers in both instances:

hrafnbláir Erps barmar and *bláserkjar birkis*. Both compounds link the dark/blue/pale/deathly connotations of *blár* to the brothers' external appearance, namely their dark hair (often thought to be implied in the allusion to the raven) and mail-shirt.

On one level of association Hamðir and Sǫrli are probably seen as the 'Men of Darkness', as Ursula Dronke suggests,⁹⁸ i.e. the last of the doomed Niflungs conceived as dark-haired — a trait often used in Old Norse sources to mark people off as peculiar, gloomy, threatening, fate-driven, and the like. We may well have here an analogue to the darkness imagery clinging to these characters in the Eddic *Hamðismál* and to their

⁹⁸ Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, pp. 25 and 209.

kin in *Atlakviða* examined in the previous section. If this is correct, then the collocation with the name of their (?half-)brother Erpr ('Dark') intensifies the menacing atmosphere by setting a 'dark' theme running in the background. This theme, as has been repeatedly shown, tends to include a dimension of foreboding and death, and that is also discernable in *Ragnarsdrápa*. That the raven-*bláir* brothers 'avenged their harms' (3.7-8) signifies their killing of Jǫrmunrekkr which is not explicitly dealt with until the following stanza, while simultaneously alerting to the fateful character of their expedition. They are so irremediably doomed (a point forcefully made in the corresponding Eddic poems) that they are proleptically *bláir* like death,⁹⁹ and the grim associations are further enhanced by the allusions to the raven (carrion-eating) and to Erpr (whose fateful murder by his brothers brings about their own downfall). The relevance of such interpretations of course depends on how much of the *Hamðismál* tradition was known to Bragi's audience; but the skald's swift allusions indicate that he did assume his listeners to have been well acquainted with a version of the legend that in its key elements was very close to its Eddic counterpart.

While the two *blár* compounds can only indirectly evoke the visible markings of death at a symbolical level, the *fár* compound and the related form *fátt* are semantically more concrete; their meaning is somewhere in the range of 'marked', 'stained', 'painted', 'shining', 'darkly glowing' etc, and the source of the marking is a physical one: blood in one case, paint in the other. Nevertheless, as expected from 'shadow' words, in both there is an element of unstabilized referentiality. The ambivalent diction in 3.1-4 would allow the blood-*fár* troops to belong to the king's nightmare (*draum* is linked to *dreyrfár dróttir* by alliteration) from which he awakes (in *vakna við illan*

⁹⁹ On the commonality of this connotation see §3.2.5.

draum með dreyrfár dróttir, við and með are ambiguous),¹⁰⁰ as well as to reality. There is abundant external support for this interpretation in the form of portentous dreams often involving blood-covered characters in Old Norse prose and poetic sources. The remainder of the stanza would appear to confirm that this is in fact reality. However, the reading ‘Uproar began (*varð*)’ further entertains the impression that the events are not necessarily simultaneous but rather that the battle closely *follows* the dream *and* the gory vision. It is only in the following stanza that the focus returns on the Goths and their blood. More precisely, stanza 4 is almost entirely involved in the vision of Jǫrmunrekkr’s gushing blood into which he falls and blends, even by the standards of skaldic poetry a remarkably gory image. The poet’s comment that this story is painted (*fátt*) on the shield, intercalated as it is in this densely packed image,¹⁰¹ is bound to resonate with 1) the connotations of the corresponding verb *fá* with sacrifice or magic and blood,¹⁰² and 2) the earlier appearance of the word *dreyrfár*, a word which actually best embodies the subject of stanza 4. In light of the evidence for pre-Viking Age shields having been often painted and the relative soundness of speculating that they could even have been decorated with naturalistic visual images of mythological and legendary scenes,¹⁰³ the word *fátt* is quite apposite. Given the above remarks, however, it is even more appropriate in context, suggesting that, just as the king’s men are *dreyrfár* in the preceding stanza, the shield itself is now (blood-)*fátt* with Jǫrmunrekkr’s grotesquely gushing gore. As the refrain of the *drápa* reminds us, the poet’s patron gave him both the shield ‘and many stories’ (7.3-4), and *fátt* could aptly express the visually most striking features of both, thus blending the shield into the story.

¹⁰⁰ Faulkes’ rendering ‘in response to an evil dream’ (*Skáldskaparmál* 2, p. 419) preserves the ambiguity. See also Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, pp. 209-10, fn. 6.

¹⁰¹ Note that this is the only instance of an intercalatory verse in *Ragnarsdrápa*.

¹⁰² §3.2.7.1.

¹⁰³ Clunies Ross, ‘Ekphrasis’, pp. 161-2.

One consequence is that in the poem the two *fár/fátt* occurrences parallel the two *blár* words; while the latter designate Hamðir and Sǫrli, the former qualify Jǫrmunrekkr's party (somewhat subliminally so in stanza 4, via the intertwining of references to Jǫrmunrekkr's blood and the shield). A more far-reaching follow-up, however, is the question of the interconnection between the shield and the 'shadow' theme. The marked tendency of this section of *Ragnarsdrápa* to include deictic references to the shield — already remarked upon — may well be even more pervasive than initially observed. In stanza 3, which is replete with 'shadow' imagery, it would perhaps not be too far-fetched to suspect — given this poet's use of semantically pregnant words and the sound-playing character of skaldic verse in general — that the name Randvér is invoked (as Jǫrmunrekkr's ancestor, 3.6) for the sake of its first element, *rand-*, i.e. the base form of most oblique cases and derivatives of *rǫnd*, a frequent word for 'shield' or 'shield's rim' (indeed it is used in the refrain of *Ragnarsdrápa* itself to refer to the poem's shield: *randar* 7.2). Given the parallel construction of the two half-kennings *Randvés hǫfuðniðja* and *Erps barmar*, and if Erpr is indeed introduced for semantic reasons as suggested above, then the other personal name may be expected to contain a pun as well. To take another angle, the way the *helmingr* begins — *Rósta varð í ranni / Rand...* (3.5-6) — could for a fleeting instant impress the idea 'shield' upon the listeners, for *rósta* could have announced one of the frequent battle-kennings of the 'din of weapons', here the 'uproar of shields', had it run thus: *Rósta varð í ranni / randa*.¹⁰⁴ And more subliminally still, the collocation within the line of *Rand-* with *hǫfuð-* (literally 'head-') is uncannily similar to that in the

¹⁰⁴ The battle-kenning *geira rósta* ('uproar of spears') is attested (*LP*, s.v.). See further Meissner, *Kennningar*, pp. 186-91.

following stanza (4.8) of *laufi* (base word for shield kenning) with *haufði* ('head').

None of these insights carries much force individually, but together they are suggestive.

'Shadow' is also present in stanza 6, and not only in *bláserkjar*. The epithet *ballfögr* (6.5) qualifying the 'forehead-blows' (6.6) is translated by Anthony Faulkes as 'harshly shining' or 'evilly fair' (different manuscript readings make it uncertain whether the first element should be *ball-* or *bql-*, but both would imply some degree of brutality or ominousness).¹⁰⁵ The meaning 'shining' is indeed well attested for *fagr*. On the other hand *fagr* is also attested to interact with a potentially ominous meaning which can be carried notably by 'shadow' elements, as in the adjectives *fagrskyggðr* and *fagrbláinn*. Characterizing deadly blows as *ballfögr*, therefore, is analogous to a number of 'shadow' paradoxical expressions found in the corpus. Such expressions, as has been shown repeatedly in the present study, can also be applied to weapons, and are often capable of double referentiality. Interestingly, this *-fögr* is echoed in the following half-stanza where the same adjective qualifies the painted shield in *áfögrum / ... randar botni* ('on the shield's shining base', 7.1-2). The shield is then immediately mentioned again via a kenning whose base word is *máni* ('moon', 7.3), suggesting pale light in the dark. Thus the shield is again qualified by 'shadow'(-related) lexis there (via the implications of *fagr* and *máni*), as it was in stanza 4, and this illustrates how kennings in *Ragnarsdrápa* are not only dense and allusive but also linked to each other.¹⁰⁶ To return to stanza 6, we get another instance of a *helmingr* beginning with indirection: *ok bláserkjar birkis / ballfögr ...* ('and the *blár*-shirt's birch's harshly-shining ...', 6.5-6). At this point the mention of a shield could conceivably be foremost in the audience's realm of expectations, since *fagr* is apparently a fit determinant for shields — apart

¹⁰⁵ Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál 1*, p. 141.

¹⁰⁶ See Clunies Ross, 'Style and Authorial Presence in Skaldic Mythological Poetry', *SB* 20 (1978-81), pp. 276-304, at p. 291.

from the collocation in the refrain, cf. also *fagrrendaðr* ('equipped with *fagr* shields' in Þórbjörn hornklofi's *Haraldskvæði* 19.5)¹⁰⁷ — and the ominous-sounding *ballfǫgr* seems particularly suited to begin a shield-kenning or be a shield-*heiti*. In fact *fagrbláinn* can come to mind; not only is it a *heiti* for shield, but it is constructed precisely with the two words which are this stanza's most connotatively active elements, *blár* and *fagr* (and note their proximity to each other). If the possibility of this connection is accepted, then we have here a third collocation of the ideas 'shield' and 'head' (*enni-* 'forehead-', 6.7). (The prominence of the head motif could have something to do with the importance for the plot and tragic significance of Jǫrmunrekkr's head in *Hamðismál*.)¹⁰⁸ The distribution of motifs in *Ragnarsdrápa*, stanza by stanza, is rather remarkable:

3: 'Shadow'; blood; shield.

4: 'Shadow'; blood; shield.

5: No 'shadow'; no blood; no shield (negative evidence).

6: 'Shadow'; blood; shield.

7: 'Shadow' (indirectly); no blood (unless implied in *fall flotna*); shield.

8-11: No 'shadow'; no blood; no shield.

12: 'Shadow' (faint traces); no blood; shield.

It clearly emerges that Bragi tends to employ 'shadow' structures in places where he gives prominence to the shield, the gift that must be constantly on his mind, and that these two ideas go well with outpourings of blood. The three notions can be more or less independent of each other, but they nevertheless tend to overlap. This undoubtedly furnishes the poem with some internal logic and structure.

¹⁰⁷ Also a ninth-century work; *Skj B I*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Dronke, *Heroic Poems*, p. 208.

But the poet is also able, through this particular deployment of ideas, to compose an original and unforgettable work on account of its appeal to visual images that are striking and even excessive and grotesque. Whatever actually was depicted on the shield, Bragi has enhanced it by transforming it into something more than just a poetic description of scenes possibly painted on the shield or a filling out of available fragments with flamboyant narrative poetry, mythological and legendary anecdotes etc.¹⁰⁹ His end product is a magnificent counter-gift to his patron, literally both shield-poem and poem-shield, since while the object is pulled into the poetry, it is at the same time made alive, teeming, bleeding, *fátt* with the stories it gives rise to, offering images to the mind even more exuberant than those pertaining to the story itself: one that could arise is that of the beautiful shield overwhelmed by the gore rushing from its panels on which the protagonists of the legend slaughter one another, a vision where bright and dark mingle with red. This incidentally alerts one that even in the earliest skaldic verse, subtle elaborations of blood-related imagery and concepts are more prominent than subtle elaborations revolving around the ambivalences of ‘shadow’. On the other hand, the fact that half of *Ragnarsdrápa* shows virtually no interest in any of these motifs (even though the stanzas in questions (8-12) deal with a theme *a priori* perfectly apt to attract ‘shadow’ and imagery of shields and blood) indicates that these motifs, including ‘shadow’, can be very story-specific.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Clunies Ross, ‘Style and Authorial Presence’, pp. 282-3.

5.3.2 *Ragnarsdrápa* in the context of pictorial skaldic poetry

There is very little extant verse attributed to Bragi apart from *Ragnarsdrápa*, only a handful of stanzas which contain no ‘shadow’ lexis or relatable motifs anyway.¹¹⁰ This includes what has been traditionally assumed to be stanzas 13-20 of *Ragnarsdrápa* but which, as seen above, may well be a fragment of a different poem, and not necessarily one based on pictured scenes at all. The way in which ‘shadow’ in *Ragnarsdrápa*, as has just been shown, is bound up with the vehicle of the images interpreted by the poet, therefore prompts one to ask whether any light can be shed on this phenomenon by considering it within the subgenre of skaldic poetry concerned with pictorial subjects.

Aside from *Ragnarsdrápa* the chief representatives of this class, which among skaldic verse seems to have been one of the oldest and most highly regarded,¹¹¹ are Þjóðólfr ór Hvini’s *Haustlǫng* and Úlfr Uggason’s *Húsdrápa*,¹¹² and both are also early poems, respectively from the late ninth (like *Ragnarsdrápa*) and late tenth century. Both poems contain ‘shadow’ and related terms which, though numerically limited, are distributed in clearly non-accidental ways; the verbal and thematic patterns thus formed resonate remarkably with the observations made concerning Bragi’s poem.

This is most striking with Þjóðólfr’s poem. Like *Ragnarsdrápa*, *Haustlǫng* claims to describe scenes painted on an ornate shield which had been donated to the poet. The twenty extant stanzas tell two distinct tales, presumably corresponding to two

¹¹⁰ All of Bragi’s surviving poetry can be found edited in *Skj B I*, pp. 1-5.

¹¹¹ Margaret Clunies Ross, ‘A Tale of Two Poets: Egill Skallagrímsson and Einarr skálaglamm’, *ANF* 120 (2005), pp. 69-82, at p. 74.

¹¹² Not treated here are a few very short and/or doubtfully ekphrastic pieces, such as Egill Skallagrímsson’s *Berudrápa* and *Skjaldardrápa* or Eilífr Goðrúnarson’s *Þórsdrápa*; cf. Clunies Ross, ‘Ekphrasis’, p. 167.

separate scenes on the shield. The first tale deals with the abduction and rescue of Iðunn and is concluded thus (13.5-8):¹¹³

Pats of fátt á fjalla
 Finns ilja brú minni:
 baugs þá bifum fáða
 bifkleif at Þorleifi.

[This is painted (*fátt*) on my bridge of the soles of the Lapp of the mountains (> giant > shield): I obtained the ring's colour-cliff (> shield) painted (*fáða*) with tales from Þorleifr.]

The two last lines are repeated in stanza 20, concluding the second tale which concerns Þórr's slaying of the giant Hrungrnir. Stanzas 13 and 20 therefore function as the poem's *stef* or refrain and can be compared to *Ragnarsdrápa*'s half-stanzas 7 and 12 which also allude to the shield's gleam. More striking, however, is the comparison with *Ragnarsdrápa* 4.7-8: *þat er á Leifa landa / laufi fátt — at haufði* ('this is painted [*fátt*] on Leifi's lands' leaf [shield] — on his head'). In both cases, then, the past participle *fáðr*, whose associations include gleam and paint but generally evoke the supernatural or numinous (extending to magic or sacrifice and blood),¹¹⁴ is applied to the shield in a manner that interweaves it with the symbol of the doom of one of the story's main protagonists. Just as *at haufði* refers to the slaying of the king and the fateful failure to behead him in Bragi's poem, so *fjalla Finns ilja brú* in Þjóðólfr's poem alludes to the visually no less memorable slaying of Hrungrnir while he grotesquely stands on his shield, an allusion actually expanded in the second part of the poem (17). Inasmuch as stanza 13 is proleptic,¹¹⁵ the 'shadow' imagery in it is therefore best taken as alluding not to the first tale — where there is no corresponding imagery nor tragic event until stanza 13 itself (the burning of Þjazi) — but to the second one. That this stanza introduces the theme of burning (13.2) which then continues through the next three

¹¹³ This and all subsequent quotations from that poem are from Richard North, ed. and tr., *The Haustlong of Þjóðólfr of Hvinir* (Enfield Lock, 1997).

¹¹⁴ §3.2.7.1.

¹¹⁵ North, *Haustlong*, p. 87.

stanzas (14.3, 15.4, 16.4) in an entirely different narrative context, consolidates the notion that ‘shadow’ and related themes are harnessed onto the specific story of Þórr’s confrontation with Hrungrnir. The burning of the giant Þjazi by the Æsir, sketched in 13.1-3, may have provided the transition. Indeed ‘shadow’ elements cluster in stanzas connected to the second tale (16, 17, and 20, to which can be added closely related imagery in stanzas 14 and 15), thus reinforcing the hypothesis that Old Norse ‘shadow’ may be story-specific. The cosmic conflagration between heaven and earth, with its undertones reminiscent of the Ragnarök myth — heavens aflame (15.4, 16.4), collapsing mountains or cliffs (15.7-8, 16.3) — as Þórr, apparently in the form of thunder and lightning and with much brightness imagery,¹¹⁶ journeys across the sky to meet Hrungrnir, foregrounds the contrastive referencing of the god’s earth-bound and stone-shaped enemy by a kenning involving ‘dark-bone’ (*myrk-*) (16.6), itself a rock kenning. But the giant’s shield is a rock itself too,¹¹⁷ at least metaphorically, as witnessed by the shield kennings based on *kleif* (‘cliff’, 1.4, 13.8, 20.8). It is thus interesting to find the shield qualified by the epithet *ímun-fǫlr* in the next stanza (‘battle-?pale’ (*fǫlr*), 17.3), because this ‘shadow’ determinant would be very appropriate, in context, to the terrified and doomed Hrungrnir.¹¹⁸ The poet’s shield, therefore, subtly diffuses into his poem through a process of associations:

- 1) It is conflated with the shield in the story, Hrungrnir’s ‘bridge of soles’ (13.6, cf. 17.3)
- 2) This conflated shield image closely interacts with that of the giant, not least because of the potential double referentiality of ‘shadow’ determiners *myrk-* and

¹¹⁶ North, *Haustlong*, p. 64.

¹¹⁷ At least according to Snorri; Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Snorri Sturluson. Edda. Skáldskaparmál. 1: Introduction, Text and Notes* (London, 1998), p. 21.

¹¹⁸ Cf. this adjective’s connotations in §3.2.6.

fǫlr; this is likely predicated on the notion that both Hrungnir and his shield were made of stone.¹¹⁹

- 3) The shield being, in this particular episode, the ‘land’ on which the giant stands (cf. ‘battle-*fǫlr* ice’ and ‘island of his shield’, 17.3 and 18.4), it partly coalesces with mentions of rocks and mountains, the more easily as rocky land is the conventional habitat of giants in poetic language. This idea-complex is encapsulated in the shield kenning *bifkleif* (‘colour-cliff’, 13.8, 20.8), but probably also underlies the references to shaking and crumbling cliffs or mountains (15.7-8, 16.3), because Hrungnir, the ‘keeper of mountains’ (17.1, and cf. 16.2), also collapses on his own cliff/shield (18). With this in mind there is no reason to deny the presence of a pun on the normal sense of *bif-* in compounds: *bifkleif* is also the ‘shaking cliff’, one of a series of images of trembling (16.3) or otherwise unsecure (‘battle-*fǫlr* ice’) ground under the giant’s soles and on/from which he is toppled down. The possibility that *bifum* means something more than ‘with images’, perhaps ‘with shivering/terrifying images’,¹²⁰ would accord well with the ominous connotations of *fátt*. Besides, in stanza 20 (which deals with the whetstone lodged in Þórr’s head) the occurrence of *fátt* is preceded by imagery of wounds and red destruction (20.2-4, and cf. ‘blood’ 19.8) in a poem in which blood is otherwise absent.

The sum total of these observations suggests that the ‘shadow’ terms are instrumental in binding up the poem’s narrative with the key idea ‘shield’.

In contrast to *Haustlǫng* and *Ragnarsdrápa*, Úlfr Uggason in his *Húsdrápa* employs no such metalanguage. In the extant stanzas, he in fact never mentions his

¹¹⁹ Further, if indeed there is in stanza 14 a hidden pun on Hrungnir as ‘*hringa*-giant’ as Richard North thinks (*Haustlǫng*, pp. 9 and 58-61), it would chime with the fact that ‘ring’ is used as a synecdoche for ‘shield’ (13.7, 14.4, 20.7).

¹²⁰ Faulkes, ed., *Edda. Skáldskaparmál. 2: Glossary and Index of Names* (London, 1998), s.v. *bifa*.

pictorial source, the paintings or carvings on the walls of Óláfr pái's hall, except in the relatively laconic and vague refrain *Hlaut innan svá minnum* ('Thus [the] inside came to be adorned with (memorial) pictures', 6.8, 9.4).¹²¹ Despite the imagery of half-stanza 9 being heavy with valkyries, ravens, and possibly blood,¹²² 'shadow' is absent there as well as from the whole account of the ride to Baldr's pyre (7-10). It seems that whatever 'shadow' there is in *Húsdrápa* is also story-specific. It occurs only within the story of Þórr's encounter with the World-serpent out at sea (3-6). The cosmic serpent is twice qualified by *fránn*, the adjective which always connotes baleful gleam or eyes and is normally associated with snakes and dragons. In this confrontation the *fránleitr* (5.4) monster glares at the god, before the latter knocks off the head (or ear) *af fránum naðri* ('from the *fránn* serpent', 6.6) into the sea. The theme of terrifying eye-contact is introduced in stanza 4 where *Innmáni skein ennis /ǫndóttis vinar banda* ('The forehead's inner-moon of the terrifying gods' friend shone', 4.1-2). Þórr's 'terror-rays' (4.3) from his moonlike eye match the serpent's frightfully *fránn* gaze and appearance, forming a 'shadow' motif of a kind that was discussed earlier, and whose verbal and thematic repetitions knit stanzas 4, 5, and 6 together. The insistent references to sight, furthermore, appropriately culminate at the end of stanza 6 with the poet's allusion to the pictorial source of his poetic visions. On another level, the specific expression used about the thrusting of the 'ears' *ground to/against the waves*' (6.7) emphasizes the cosmic dimension of the deed and conceivably alludes to some version of the Ragnarök myth whereby, according to *Vǫluspá*, the earth's ground collapses into the sea — a theme of eschatological destruction which has just been seen operating in the

¹²¹ *Húsdrápa* is quoted from *Skskm* 1, verses 39, 64, 54, 316, 55, 56, 63, 8, 14, 19, 242, and 303, except stanza 4 which is found in *Skj* B I, p. 128. Stanza numbering follows the traditional reconstruction of the poem by Finnur Jónsson (*Skj* B I, pp. 128-30).

¹²² *Skskm* 2, s.v. *sylgr*.

background of the Þórr-Hrungnir myth in *Haustlǫng*, and to which imagery of flashing and darkness can attach itself.

In all three skaldic poems discussed, formal similarities are to some extent paralleled by similarities in the deployment of ‘shadow’. The latter tends to cluster in only one section of each poem around one of the (half-) stanzas containing the refrain line(s) at the expense of the other sections that depict other scenes. A key factor in this distribution seems to be the poet’s keenness to weave a web of associations between his visual source and the poetic material of his narrative; depending on the suitability of the elements in the scenes/stories, he can bring in the rich connotative value of ‘shadow’ to such ends. Now the fact that in the case of *Ragnarsdrápa* and *Húsdrápa* comparable associations between story and motifs have been seen to occur in (non-ekphrastic) Eddic verse as well (respectively in *Hamðismál* and *Fáfnismál*) indicates that ‘shadow’ is not an essential or original component of pictorial skaldic poems, especially given the relatively small number of ‘shadow’ words involved in each case. Still, it may be noteworthy that Snorri’s prose accounts of the stories corresponding to the ‘shadow’-marked passages in *Ragnarsdrápa*, *Haustlǫng*, and *Húsdrápa*, though parallel in storyline, are practically devoid of the elements focused on in this study.¹²³ On the other hand, the Þórr-Miðgarðsormr story is problematic, because whereas it is the one providing *Húsdrápa* with ‘shadow’ elements, it is also the subject of six half-stanzas by Bragi which used to be regarded (albeit doubtfully) as stanzas 14-19 of *Ragnarsdrápa*. It can only be supposed, then, that if these stanzas do not indeed belong to that or any other ekphrastic poem, then the acutely visual context of this particular genre may have encouraged the deployment of the motifs under discussion which elsewhere in skaldic verse could be dormant. On the whole *Húsdrápa* stands slightly apart from the other

¹²³ Jǫrmunrekk episode: *Skskm* 1, pp. 49-50; Hrungnir episode: *ibid.*, pp. 21-22; Miðgarðsormr episode: *Gylf*, pp. 44-5.

two poems, and it is difficult to assess the relevance of the fact that its subject is not a shield to the low prominence of ‘shadow’ in it. Concerning that poem’s difference, it may be relevant to note that whereas *Ragnarsdrápa* and *Haustlǫng* are set in the past tense except for the poet’s references to the images on his shield, in *Húsdrápa* the reference to the pictures is in the past tense, while in a number of stanzas (2, 7, 8, 10, 12) — all of them belonging to the ‘shadow’-less sections and notably the story of Baldr — the present tense is used.¹²⁴ Perhaps some of Russell Poole’s thoughts about the function of present vs past tense in ekphrastic poems¹²⁵ could be used to suggest that ‘shadow’ themes are more likely to occur in stanzaic environments where both retrospective past and running commentary in the present are combined, but not where only the present is used; the evidence available, however, is too scant to pursue this far. Finally, the fact that compared to the ninth-century shield poems the patterns observed in the slightly later *Húsdrápa* are only faint and incomplete analogues prompts the question of the interrelations of the phenomenon with chronology and genre within skaldic poetry.

¹²⁴ Cf. Russell Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace. A Study in Skaldic Narrative* (Toronto, 1991), pp. 47-8, 52.

¹²⁵ Poole, *Viking Poems*, *passim*, and esp. pp. 24ff, 54, 195.

5.3.3 *Ragnarsdrápa* in the context of skaldic poetry: questions of chronology and genre

Skaldic verse as a whole contains a rather substantial amount of various ‘shadow’ lexis. Taking the occurrences of only the words analyzed in Chapter 3, and not counting skaldic pieces in Eddic metres, the tally comes to over 150 words, surpassing in number, if not by frequency, the Eddic data (a hundred-odd words). One might therefore think that the very limited scope of the previous case study and discussion is a small drop in a much larger pool of similar evidence. However, the patterns and correlations observed in *Ragnarsdrápa* (and in the comparative material adduced) are in fact hard to parallel in the rest of the extant skaldic corpus. For the most part the evidence is scattered across a great range of poems and isolated *lausavísur* and thus appears to largely transcend time- and genre-based classifications. In other words, the general picture is one in which almost any given poem exhibits at most one or two ‘shadow’ terms whose contexts not only do not link to other poems but even fail to interrelate with the immediately surrounding lexis, motifs, and themes in the poem in which they occur. This picture, however, needs qualification and refinement. For one, chronological and generic considerations are in some cases still relevant; in addition, a few poems do have rather remarkable ‘shadow’ word counts and/or levels of integration of ‘shadow’ lexical sets in their theme and structure, and besides, even isolated instances sometimes provide valuable parallels, or counterparts, or in some way broaden the grounds for the appreciation of motifs discerned in the case study.

In contrast to the mythological poems concerned with pictorial subjects, and especially to the shield poems, the remainder of skaldic mythological poetry from the ninth and tenth centuries has almost nothing to contribute to this study except negative

evidence. Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Þórsdrápa* is a tenth-century work which presents a number of similarities to the pictorial poems — comparable length, preservation in manuscripts of Snorri's *Edda*, composition for a pagan ruler (presumably), focus on a mythical narrative (though nothing indicates a pictorial subject) — but it does not yield any 'shadow' element. Perhaps this is again story-specific; but a myth which so far has been found to attract 'shadow', namely Þórr's fight with Miðgarðsormr, fails to do so in early skaldic verse other than *Húsdrápa* — as far as we can judge from the fragments by Eysteinn Valdason and Gamli Gnævaðarskáld.¹²⁶ The other mythological *drápur* (Kormákr Qgmundarson's *Sigurðardrápa*, Einarr skálaglamm's *Vellekla*, Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld's *Hákonardrápa* and Tindr Hallkelsson's *Hákonardrápa*) are also virtually devoid of 'shadow' elements. The only exception, a kenning containing *myrk-* in *Vellekla* 27.3, presents some interest regarding the semantics of *myrkr* in general,¹²⁷ but, unlike a comparable kenning noted in *Haustlǫng*, has no thematic connections within the poem. It would be tempting to use this distribution pattern to further highlight the correlation between poetic dark/bright indirection and a pictorial subject conveying stories (especially a painted shield). Arguments from absence, however, are especially risky in an area like mythological poetry whose fragmentary state of preservation is a notorious problem for assessing its contexts. It is probably more useful to contextualize the observed pattern of distribution of 'shadow' within the evolution of what Margaret Clunies Ross terms the 'double focus of skaldic mythological verse'.¹²⁸ The earliest poets' double focus on both praising the visual object and narrating myths appears to quickly take on a more political aspect; as a result, encomium becomes the essential focus while the mythological ingredient, though still important, is used as a formal

¹²⁶ *Skj* B I, pp. 131-2.

¹²⁷ §3.2.1.

¹²⁸ Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Style and Authorial Presence in Skaldic Mythological Poetry', *SB* 20 (1978-81), pp. 276-304, at p. 276.

background and as a means for achieving the encomiastic purpose in a highly traditional manner.¹²⁹ If indeed the shield poems represent the earliest type of skaldic verse, then the ‘oblique association’ between object/patron and mythic stories in which the former serves as a pretext for the latter evolves into one in which this relationship is reversed.

The four non-pictorial *drápur* mentioned above were composed for the jarls of Hlaðir, a circle where this politicization of mythological poetry seems to have taken place. The foregrounding of the encomiastic purpose seems to go hand in hand with a simplification and normalization of mythic allusions into a more codified system of mythological kennings yoked to the expectations of the panegyric.¹³⁰ Their lack of the ambivalent lexis and themes under research can be put into a larger perspective by noticing that the same is also true about most contemporary (and subsequent) praise poetry, and by relating this genre to war poetry — the two can hardly be disentangled within skaldic verse. Poems praising rulers through accounts of their battles, despite necessarily involving highly ‘shadow’-encouraging elements like swords and doomed fighters, do not seem to attract ‘shadow’ at all, a fact which tallies with a similar absence in Old English military poetry. Already in the first recorded non-pictorial praise poem (from around 900), Þórbjǫrn hornklofi’s *Glymdrápa*, ‘shadow’ is confined to one pair of lines only, for the ambivalence of the phrase ‘*svartskyggðr* sword’ (7.3-4), as has been seen, can only be appreciated by reference to external evidence; and while the preceding stanza invokes serpents twice (6.5-8), which could have attracted the adjective *fránn* for example, no other ‘shadow’-related lexis is deployed there nor in the rest of the poem.

¹²⁹ Cf. Clunies Ross, ‘Skaldic Mythological Poetry’, pp. 279-80.

¹³⁰ On this shift from a mythic/human to a more human and earthly perspective in mythological poetry cf. Clunies Ross, ‘Skaldic Mythological Poetry’, pp. 283-8.

Similarly in Goðpormr sindri's *Hákonardrápa* the only 'shadow' element, *blárǫst* (1.2), is of little interest except as general semantic evidence for *blár*. This Hlaðir-court poem, even more than the other ones mentioned so far in connection to that circle, shows how courtly poets come to utilize mythology only to elaborate on their kennings for concepts like king, warriors, land, and battle. The presence of 'shadow' lexis, if any, is at best of a piecemeal nature. References to beings like giants or valkyries and to themes like fear or doom, which in the more overtly mythic and legendary material interact with the 'shadow' words and themes, in the warlike courtly poetry tend to become, semantically speaking, loose ends, more decorative flourishes than structurally or thematically interconnected building blocks.

Courtly poets composing in the wake of the conversion to Christianity, as is well known, for a time tend to avoid overtly mythological kennings.¹³¹ This turn, coupled to the tendency in the new religious climate for less indirection in the poetic diction did not contribute to a rise in 'shadow' elements. Thus in the eleventh-century verse of Sigvatr Þórðarson, one of the most prolific skaldic poets, 'shadow' is scattered very scantily across his many compositions (between none and two in each of the on average twenty stanza-long poems) and thematically tends to relate to ships and the sea or to the sharpness of swords and eyes, but again, in none of the poems is there any detectable focus on these themes and the connotative richness of ambivalent words. Even when poets eventually come to indulge again in occasional mythological allusions, this does not seem to make any sizeable difference in terms of 'shadow' content. The formal requirements of the main verse-form, *dróttkvætt*, are by then much stricter than was the case for its prototype in *Ragnarsdrápa*, notably in terms of syllable-counting and

¹³¹ Bjarne Fidjestøl, 'The Contribution of Scaldic Studies', in Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins, eds., *Viking Revaluations* (London, 1992), pp. 100-20, at pp. 100-3 and 115.

rhymes,¹³² and the interactions between form and content have reached a high degree of conventionality. Whereas ‘shadow’ often comes with patterns of sound and sense in Eddic verse (e.g. the *n*-alliteration involving *nifl*- or the *døkk*-*døgg*-*dalr* association), such recurring formal-semantic structures are absent from skaldic instances of ‘shadow’. This cannot be explained solely by the lower degree of formulaicity in skaldic verse, since a number of skaldic motifs are often anchored phonologically to the metrical structure of *dróttkvætt* stanzas, particularly in *aðalhendingar*. Examples include the frequent full rhymes based on *land/bönd* and *rjóða/blóð* corresponding to the concepts of, respectively, the conquest/defence of ‘land’ with the support of the ‘gods’, and the ‘reddening’ of swords (or carrion beasts) with ‘blood’.¹³³ The only equivalent involving a ‘shadow’ word is the partial rhyme realised with *myrkr/mörk*, connectable to a ‘shadow’ motif,¹³⁴ but it occurs only three times before being replaced, from the twelfth century onwards, by a new rhyme involving *styrk*- (‘strength’ etc) which, however, does not seem to have any underlying connotations.¹³⁵ On one occasion *skyggðr* rhymes with a form of *hoggva* (‘to strike’) which, given the connotative value of this and other ‘shadow’ adjectives, is of potential interest,¹³⁶ but in all remaining instances *skyggðr* rhymes with different words. This unconnectedness between idea and form is actually there already in the shield poems, where practically none of the key words discussed is involved in prominent sound-patterns, often not even in alliteration. On the whole, this situation probably means there was no natural tendency for poets to integrate ‘shadow’ into existing conventional patterns at the stanza

¹³² Poole, ‘Metre and Metrics’, p. 278.

¹³³ For *land/bönd* see e.g.: *Vellekla* 9.2 and 15.4 ; for *rjóða/blóð*: *Glymdrápa* 5.3, Hallfreðr’s *Hákonardrápa* 9.3.

¹³⁴ Cf. §3.2.1.

¹³⁵ *Skj* B I, p. 522, and *Skj* B II, pp. 94, 406, and 410.

¹³⁶ *Hoggum hialtvönd skyggðum* in *Egils saga*: see §3.2.2; cf. also §3.2.5.

level (such as the ‘king, battle, carrion beasts’ type of presentation) since other elements (such as redness, blood, or wolves) could be more easily fitted.

It follows, then, that the presence of ‘shadow’ would depend on poets’ experiments with unconventionality. And this is indeed what we have in the few exceptions where ‘shadow’ elements are fully integrated within a stanza and interact with their textual surroundings. One example of this is found in Egill Skallagrímsson’s verse commenting on the very intoxicating beer drunk at the feast which ends with the killing of Bárðr. The multivalent adjective *fólvan* is caught up in an extended soundplay with the name of Egill’s friend (Qlvir), ale (*ól*), and drunkenness (*ólvar*), and further in the interlacement of the ideas ‘intoxicating drink’, ‘poetry’, ‘blood’, and ‘doom’, which also links it back to the preceding stanza.¹³⁷ A similar structuring of associations underlies the verses centering on Egill’s fighting a ‘pale’ enemy named Ljótr (‘ugly’) with his *skyggðr* sword.¹³⁸ Furthermore, in both sets of *lausavísur* the involvement of characters’ names in the ‘shadow’-related wordplay is reminiscent of similar puns detected in *Ragnarsdrápa*. Here we are far from the conventional expectations of encomia or battle poems; the prose narration at these points constructs a slightly magic-imbued, larger-than-life picture which the poetry takes further into the grotesque.

A rather different but ultimately comparable example of ‘shadow’ is furnished by the first verses attributed to Kormákr Qgmundarson, at the moment when the hero of *Kormáks saga* is lovestruck as glances and stares are exchanged between him and Steingerðr.¹³⁹ The peculiar position of the two characters and a play of light and darkness, mentioned in the corresponding prose, acquire an even more eerie aspect in

¹³⁷ Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga*, ÍF 2 (Reykjavík, 1933), verses 9 and 10, pp. 109-10. See §3.2.6.

¹³⁸ Sigurður Nordal, *Egils saga*, verses 39 and surrounding, pp. 203-6.

¹³⁹ Einarr Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Vatnsdæla saga*, ÍF 8 (Reykjavík, 1939), pp. 207-13.

the verses.¹⁴⁰ The scene unfolds as an emphatically visual confrontation opposing a woman presented (conventionally) as an *allhvít* ('all-shining') necklace-goddess and (less conventionally) as 'hawk-*fránn*' to an *allfǫlr* ('all-?pale') man with 'black eyes' and a 'sallow complexion' — and the almost threefold assonance in *allfǫlr ok lǫ sǫlva* (6.4) recalls Egill's ominous ale-verse. The 'shadow' elements play a key role and interact across verses 1-7 with other sharply visual cues. Furthermore, a whole set of details, particularly the linguistic ones in verse 3 (eye as shining moon; *fránn*; kennings using 'land' and 'necklace' (*men*)), transform the scene into a veiled analogue of Þórr's confrontation with the Miðgarðr-serpent (especially as presented in *Húsdrápa* 4-6), complete with an explicit sense of doom for both characters (3.5-8). By introducing, rather surreptitiously, this second perspective, Kormákr's verses enlarge the peaceful, static picture of this falling in love with cosmic overtones and an implication of violence and tragic ending; but the subtlety and ambiguity of the verbal and situational parallels allows the two perspectives to merge.¹⁴¹ The process is perhaps not unlike that of Bragi enlivening his shield by blending it into his tragic and blood-ridden poetry. Like the shield poems and like Egill's verses, then, Kormákr's love poetry makes us glimpse a picture bordering on the grotesque, and hence an extremely memorable one. This point is interestingly illuminated by recent research on contrastive, bizarre, and grotesque skaldic kennings by Bergsveinn Birgisson who suggests that the earlier, less codified forms of skaldic verse allowed for the expression of memorable events and important concepts through the medium of visually jarring, grotesque images, precisely

¹⁴⁰ For the relationship between the saga's verse and prose see Heather O'Donoghue, *The Genesis of a Saga Narrative. Verse and Prose in Kormaks Saga* (Oxford, 1991). See also Russell Poole, 'Composition Transmission Performance: The First Ten *lausavísur* in *Kormáks saga*', *Alvíssmál* 7 (1997), pp. 37-60, esp. at pp. 43-5 on the authenticity of the relevant verses.

¹⁴¹ O'Donoghue, *Saga Narrative*, p. 185, argues that the 'central, unified theme of the saga' is 'the struggle of [Kormákr] with the power of supernatural forces'.

because such images remain longer in memory.¹⁴² This approach, if harnessed to the issue of the distribution of ‘shadow’ in skaldic verse, would accord with most of the salient material discussed above, and may also be a track to pursue in regard to the phenomenon in general.

Although it is difficult to assess the extent to which the large social, religious, and historical transformations during the skaldic period impacted on such a subtle and elusive aspect as the linguistic/thematic ‘shadow’ phenomenon in skaldic poetry, a few provisional conclusions or remarks emerge from the present assessment. One is that the presence of a mythological perspective, at least at some level of understanding of the poem, is generally a favourable factor. Another is that ‘shadow’ tends to only have a very local presence and effect, that is, only on the level of one or a few stanzas, never permeating an entire poem or group of poems as it does in some Eddic pieces or in some of the Old English material. In this respect *Ragnarsdrápa* and the other pictorial poems discussed are no exceptions. Furthermore, ‘shadow’ is not an expected ingredient of kennings and has almost no ties to the structure of skaldic metres, and its chances to appear therefore depend on specially elaborated kennings and more generally on poets’ will to engage in ambivalence and in marginal, superfluous additions to their subject matter. The fact that such ambivalence seems to become undesirable both in post-conversion military/courtly verse and in poetry concerned with Christian subjects probably has a negative effect on the preservation of ‘shadow’ features, while the relative scarcity in the earliest material is compounded by the latter’s poor transmission and preservation. But as has been seen, the existence of active ‘shadow’ themes in the shield poems makes ‘shadow’ more the exception than the rule even among the earliest works. A final factor which has been conjectured in discussing *Ragnarsdrápa* and

¹⁴² Bergsveinn Birgisson, ‘What Have We Lost by Writing?’.

Haustlong and which is confirmed within the extended perspective taken by this section, has to do with originality and daring — which is in a way paradoxical, given the concomitant impression given by the sources that the phenomenon is ultimately grounded in ancient poetic tradition. At any rate, a correlation seems to exist between the cultivation of ‘shadow’ effects and the presentation of stories in an exacerbatingly visual manner that tends to the theatrical and the grotesque.

CHAPTER SIX:

CONCLUSIONS

The degree of correlation between Old English and Old Norse ‘shadow’ words is one of the important (and surprising) outcomes of this thesis, despite important divergences in the nature of the evidence and formal differences. However, because they are not all superficial, the discrepancies should perhaps be reviewed first. Conspicuously, Old Norse ‘shadow’ is only to a small extent genetically cognate with Old English in terms of lexis, while in many instances cognates of an important ‘shadow’ word play only a little role, if any, in the deployment of ‘shadow’ in the other language. This largely precludes any viable reconstruction of a proto-‘shadow’. The other implication is that direct influence of either poetic language on the other is an unlikely explanation for the similarities observed, as one would expect cognates being used or, failing that, key words being loaned. Another difference is the range of referents to which the words tend to attach themselves. Such essential bearers of ‘shadow’ in Old English as fire and gold, are rare in Old Norse ‘shadow’ constructions while the reverse distribution obtains for ships, forests, and mountains. This no doubt reflects formal, thematic, and generic differences; one thinks specifically of the profusion of kennings in Old Norse, or of the biblical motifs and story-patterns adopted and adapted early on into traditional Old English verse. It is important to stress these distinctions in the context of the concomitant observation that both poetries share a considerable amount of traditional vocabulary and poetic diction. If ‘shadow’ were to be explained as a common Germanic poetic legacy, one would expect more congruence in terms of lexis and referents. Yet it does seem plausible to advance that many aspects of the phenomenon have roots in a common past. This partly follows from what lexical

and referential resemblance there actually is; but the inference can also be made on the ground that most of the evidence, and in particular that which evinces the most readily comparable patterns, is found in texts which in both literatures tend to be identified as belonging to the earliest stages available.

Accordingly, the formal specialisation of skaldic verse seems to preclude ‘shadow’, and it is only the earliest, formally and thematically less specialised poems that afford meaningfully comparative evidence. Although this observation correlates well with the impression that Old English ‘shadow’ is also at its highest in the earliest or most archaic verse, and although it provides a paradigm for grounding ‘shadow’ partly in developments that must have arisen with old Germanic metre and diction, it also relates back to the situation-specific nature of Old Norse ‘shadow’ in actual texts and underscores its distinctiveness from Old English.

That said, despite or thanks to these differences the Old Norse case studies illuminate the Old English material from angles that are not available internally in the latter, thus encouraging discussion of ‘shadow’ in a larger perspective. One such angle is the mythological context of at least some of the evidence. The archetypal confrontation, enhanced and dramatised through the means of ‘shadow’, between gods and their monstrous opponents, and the more or less implicit reenactment of this confrontation in heroic poems, provides an extended framework for envisioning some Old English presentations of dramatic struggles that are similarly reinforced with ‘shadow’. This does not have to mean that a *Ragnarøk* context lurks behind Beowulf’s and Guthlac’s battles,¹ but it does suggest that myth-related ‘shadow’ was available both before and after conversion to encode terror and mystery into tragic confrontations and endow them with a greater than situational impact. The almost total absence of

¹ The ‘shadow’ approach nevertheless makes the possibility attractive; and see Dronke, ‘*Beowulf* and *Ragnarøk*’.

‘shadow’ from later heroic/military texts in both traditions (*Maldon* and the Chronicle poems; praise- and war-poetry) whose main concerns seem situational and political, consolidates the argument that ‘shadow’ is bound up with doubleness of perspective, an extended temporal dimension, and references to the numinous.

This relates to another important theme which I have often addressed explicitly or implicitly in this thesis: ‘shadow’ and Christianisation. While ‘shadow’ is found in Old Norse early and (in terms of composition or at least in outlook) pre-Christian verse, it is absent or inactive in later and overtly Christian poems. The picture is complicated, however, by the observation that post-eleventh-century poetry participating in the revival of secular and mythological themes is largely devoid of ‘shadow’, while a few late works that are to some extent syncretic in religious outlook (*Grógaldr*, *Sólarljóð*) do show traces of ‘shadow’. Even though Old English literature does not lend itself well to pagan/Christian categorisation or any such binary approach, the material is not homogenous and the distribution of ‘shadow’ can be problematised along the lines of poets’ and audiences’ outlooks, as well as historically. My comparative evidence, then, shows patterns of continuity and change, and supports a two-tiered argument about ‘shadow’. On the one hand, ‘shadow’ belongs essentially to the early stages of our records, dwindling and disappearing as its main lexical elements, many of which from early on were already archaic, lost their connotations and fell out of use. On the other hand, texts that cultivate a double perspective, in which both traditional matter and new religious ideas are allowed to coexist in some kind of ‘disquieting apposition’,² or in which one is an alternative backdrop or remote reference for the other, constitute a fertile field for ‘shadow’ not only to endure, but presumably also (on the strength mainly of Old English evidence and *Vǫluspá*) to grow and sprout in new directions.

² Robinson, *Appositive Style*, p. 82.

Both chronology and religious stance, then, are important parameters that impact change and variation in the evidence for ‘shadow’.

Insights drawn from ‘shadow’, then can be useful in debates about chronology and changing beliefs; to take another angle, however, ‘shadow’ is also a window affording insights into the shared allegiances of disparate texts and discourses, shedding more light, by the same token, on compositional practices. The contribution of the Old English case studies in Chapter 4 is most significant in respect to the latter point. The presence of ‘shadow’ in prose, although comparatively marginal, is remarkable. The evidence does not imply that ‘shadow’ can be generated by prose as well as by poetry; it remains a poetic phenomenon, but it alerts us that prose can locally exhibit poetic features to the point where it can meaningfully be called poetic, without being necessarily able to take the form of metrical lines. Such prose does not behave like the so-called ‘metrical prose’ or ‘rhythmical alliteration’ of Ælfric’s homilies. It does not have any metrical regularity, but what it does have is a dose of verse-compatible lexical elements combined with verse-like (albeit irregularly occurring) sound-patterning and verse-like echoic networking. This can serve to further question our methods of drawing dividing lines between prose and poetry. But a more important consequence is that some prose works, when scrutinised under the ‘shadow’ lens, are locally poetic, and further, that they are in their entirety traversed by a poetic mode or attitude to the subject matter; yet, they remain prose. Recognising this ‘shadow’-poetic prose in turn reveals new levels of helpful comparison between texts, whereby similar formal and thematic systems of ‘shadow’ features are found to connect a series of texts together more closely than previously thought.

A more decisive aspect, however, and one that underwrites virtually all the evidence, is a dialectic engagement with words and ideas relating to splendour, doom,

and an underlying instability. To this the Old Norse comparative material also helpfully contributes. Its consolidating evidence for double referentiality, transfer of attributes, parallelism in antagonistic forces, reversals, and doom/destruction of both treasure and humans, serves to delineate more sharply what appears to be a common aspect of Old English-Old Norse ‘shadow’ which I identified on several levels, from language to motifs to text to the tradition or world-view behind the text. Here ‘shadow’ situates itself at the crossroads of fundamental ideas and scholarly frameworks old and new, such as treasure, transience, death, indeterminacy, liminality, or nostalgia; but what it effects on the linguistic and textual levels and beyond in the realm of poetics has never been described before, and this study therefore allows me to draw new inferences.

An essential feature of ‘shadow’ and one abundantly documented in both the Old English and the Old Norse evidence is the structure ‘shadow’ adjective + noun. An illustrative set of examples is Old English *sweart* + *hræfn* and Old Norse *døkkkr* + *hrafn* and their variants, for the ‘shadow’-marked raven provides a springboard to reflect on ‘shadow’ and, beyond, on its relevance to the meaning and function of poetic language in the literary and cultural tradition. The fact that the blackness of ravens is an evident commonplace, when correlated with the tendency in Old English and Old Norse poetic language to economy and the avoidance of naturalistic descriptions, alerts one that the seemingly uninformative phrase carries a significant metaphorical message.

Furthermore, the adjective usually receives full and sometimes extraordinary prominence in its textual context, and this type of phrase has a high rate of recurrence (whereas ravens occurring without such an adjective are rare). On the other hand, more than half of the instances actually have adjectives that do not unambiguously signify blackness (Old English *wann* or *blæc/blāc* instead of *sweart*, Old Norse *døkkkr* or *blár* as opposed to *svartr*). Arguably the insertion of a word for raven alone is enough to evoke

the beasts-of-battle typescene and its implications, so the black raven and the ?dark/pale raven inject something more into the text, a quality and a relationship to the thing qualified. The combination of quality and relationship, in both its basic uncontextualised sense and its paradoxes in the context of poetic language, corresponds to the added value here called ‘shadow’. If such expressions were not merely dead metaphors, and the topical and original ways of their deployment suggest they were not, then this ‘shadow’ value destabilises the familiar; in fact it oddly defamiliarises an image which, though familiar, is already potentially odd and disquieting by association with its underlying typescene. Beyond conceivably begging to contemporary audiences the question of why one should be insistently reminded of the black raven’s blackness while also being invited to ponder the possibility of it being after all quite un-black, this kind of ‘shadow’ dialectics opens up fruitful avenues for discussing any number of other interpretative problems. One thinks for example of the (mainly Old English) ‘green plains/ways/streets of paradise’ controversy, or the (mainly Old Norse) characterisation of things like gold and blood with words for ‘red’. Beyond *grēne* and *rauðr*, however, reassessments of the somewhat neglected field of adjectives and modifiers in general, whose importance and significance in poetic language, despite a few localised debates, remains underestimated, should lead to a reconsideration of the ways in which many meanings which we think we understand may actually elude us because we have not paid due attention to possible layers of ambiguity and of disquieting associations and dissociations in the landscape of meaning.

Although I have stressed and upheld ambiguity and argued for it in places it had not heretofore been much registered (including Old English prose and Old Norse verse), the results of this research also stride beyond the critical concepts of ambivalence and indeterminacy as they are usually applied in the field. In the ‘shadow’ situations

analyzed, the parameters of the alternatives are not limited to two conflicting meanings, nor to a dualistic semantic entity remaining ever unresolved and inseparable.³ The ‘shadow’ element, caught in a larger intratextual ‘shadow’ web with ramifications extending beyond the text into the tradition underpinning it, is usually polyvalent rather than ambivalent. More crucially, at a higher level of abstraction, the ‘shadow’ element is the epicentre of an upheaval within the texture of meaning, a disturbance which is the more prodigious as it is situated, as ‘shadow’ tends to be, at the heart of an emphatic, locally climactic utterance. Through its inherent mind-challenging oddness and otherness and as a result of its plural signification, the ‘shadow’ locus has the potential to disrupt mental/visual representations of the surrounding narrative content and throw them off balance. Thus when Grendel steps on *fagne flor* (*Beowulf* 725a), the image of a multicoloured floor, too prosaic, yields under the weight of pressing associations. The floor, then, is awash with fresh, shining blood — but that cannot be either, as the gore-staining has yet to happen. It mirrors Grendel’s *fāh*-ness, contaminated by his hostility to humans and sinful enmity to God — but the floor cannot really (visually) be sin-stained. It shines, as gloomily as all *fāh* treasures shine, because like they, it is doomed — but doomed to what? And is it not Grendel who is doomed, rather? How can doom shine, or stain, anyway? The visions are vivid but somewhat vague (a hallmark of ‘shadow’), and perception cannot stabilise itself and keeps breaking down, undermined by the visions’ paradoxes.⁴ Similarly, when Sigurðr and his sword become as *fránn* as Fáfnir, any distinctive and naturalistic mental representation of the protagonists of the dragon-fight partly dissolves.

³ See e.g. the claim for not-to-be-resolved ambivalence in Köberl, *Indeterminacy*, esp. pp. 1-10.

⁴ This aspect of ‘shadow’ could conceivably be seen as a linguistic-literary manifestation of broader early medieval Germanic artistic tendencies: for instability in cognitive perception in Anglo-Saxon manuscript art, see Emmanuelle Pirote, ‘Hidden Order, Order Revealed: New Light on Carpet Pages’, in M. Redknap *et al.*, eds., *Pattern and Purpose in Insular Art* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 203-7.

‘Shadow’ draws attention to itself, and does so perhaps more conspicuously than any other poetic feature (because of its highly visual as well as paradoxical nature and appeal). When this self-emphasis is accompanied by the simultaneous failure of cognitive perception, which is due precisely to the thus highlighted aesthetic artificiality, the resulting tension has the potential to question face-value interpretations of the semantic content. For the floor to be *fāh*, or for the sword to be *fránn*, in their particular contexts fraught with ambiguities and paradoxes, is simply too much for normal mental representation.

This observation would intersect with a strand of skaldic scholarship concerned with the aesthetic impact and function of Old Norse kennings, notably represented by Hallvard Lie’s studies in the style of skaldic verse from which he abstracts the concept of ‘a-naturalistic’ images.⁵ Unnatural, supernatural, or otherwise odd mental images are also induced by ‘shadow’. On the level of aesthetics and perception, then, the poetics of ‘shadow’ would be somewhat cognate to the poetics of visually challenging kennings. Lie’s concept has recently been revived and developed by Bergsveinn Birgisson who finds that bizarre, grotesque, contrast-based mental images (‘contrast-tension aesthetics’) are created chiefly by the earliest recorded skaldic kennings — interestingly a similar observation can be made about ‘shadow’ — and proposes that their function had to do with poetic stimulation and memorization (a grotesque image leaves a more lasting impression).⁶ It would be problematic to try and transfer this last point to the interpretation of ‘shadow’, whose distribution range encompasses many literary domains where memorisation is presumably not an essential issue, and whose presence in skaldic verse is very limited and localised. But one of the metaphor categories Bergsveinn discusses is relevant to ‘shadow’, namely what he terms ‘non-verbal

⁵ Lie, ‘*Natur*’ og ‘*unatur*’.

⁶ Bergsveinn Birgisson, ‘What Have We Lost by Writing?’.

allusion'. The half-kenning *glóða garmr*, 'fire-wolf', which imprints the blended visual image of a fire and a wolf, refers to fire in the concrete world of the narrative, but its imagery alludes to the mythological wolf Fenrir. This metaphorical type bears a partial likeness to 'shadow' words. The eyebrow-raising expressions with which the *Atlakviða* poet refers to both a meaty meal, *gnadda niflfarna* ('shadow-gone young things'), and those for whom it is served up, *neffólom* ('to the nose-pale ones'), also allude to myth (via such associations as *Niflhel* and the *neffólr* eagle/serpent of *Völuspá*) and suggest the existence of a circumscribing mythological dimension able to enrich the heroic story's significance.

Where 'shadow' parts company with such kennings is, firstly, in the degree to which 'shadow' elements are semantically far less concrete, so that their visual images and the referents of their allusions lack clarity, and the 'contrast-tension', therefore, is less pronounced. The tension lies in the oddness, sometimes bordering on, and thus suggesting, what we would call the numinous or fabulous or fairy-tale-like; this distancing and distorting effect is what turns 'shadow' words into markers of the presence of an additional dimension beyond the more concrete world of the text. Through these shafts of 'shadow', something hitherto half-hidden, a barely implied outer edge can leap into the explicit content of the text. Thus the poet's startling statement that Grendel is a *feond on helle* ('enemy in hell', *Beowulf* 101b) is ultimately consistent with his surrounding 'shadow' characterisations; these, by referring to the monster as a *deorc deapscua* ('dark death-shadow', 160a) hovering *in bystrum* ('in darkness', 87b) and *sinnihte* ('eternal night', 161b), become windows through which hell is ushered in, up to the text's surface and the hall's floor.

My underlying assumption is that medieval audiences would have been discerning enough to grant empirical concepts, like halls or heroes, a different truth-

value from that which they would assign to less empirical, odder, experientially more borderline concepts like giants or dragons (even though they would have presumably believed in there being some truth about the latter group, too). By extension, I submit that, as a result of the paradoxical, liminal, and otherwise odd associations of ‘shadow’ words, a *fāh* or *fránn* sword for example would have been apprehended on a different plane of ‘reality’ or ‘truth’ than, say, a *scearp* or *hvasst* sword, and perceived as belonging in a different perceptual dimension. The same kind of distinction would obtain with *nifl-* and *fōlr*. Similarly, the form and semantic associations of *deorc* *deapscua* give an intimation of something less ‘real’, less tangible and comprehensible, but more pregnant with abstract significance than just a monster and darkness.

‘Shadow’ can be viewed as part of a larger meaning-making process that uses language and form to construct frames of (potential) reference that orbit around the directly experienced text and can share with the latter a dialectic relationship. A good example of such a process is one that has recently been argued to inform Old English historical verse: Renée Trilling finds that the way in which versified accounts of contemporary events in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle are set in a heroic form conjures an imagined remoter past, heroic and glorious, ready to be resurrected by the reader’s response and juxtaposed to the historical events recounted.⁷ As a corresponding mechanism in Old Norse one could invoke the suggestion through kennings and *heiti* of a world of myth and legend revolving behind the real and contemporary exploits recounted in encomiastic verse.⁸

Just as, through language and style, poetic accounts of contemporary historical events incorporate a double perspective by conjuring another, further removed but contextually meaningful temporal dimension, so by an analogous mechanism the

⁷ Renée R. Trilling, *Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse* (Toronto, 2009).

⁸ See e.g. Diana Whaley, ‘Skaldic Poetry’, in McTurk, pp. 479-502.

‘shadow’ texts, through the complex play of words and larger structures studied in the course of this thesis, conjure and gesture to a further-lying, circumscribing dimension, an implicit outer frame against which socially and culturally important stories are played out. The nature of this outer dimension, or how it can be conceptually localised, depends on the subject-matter of specific texts. The possibilities for localisation in respect to the explicit content are: further back in time on a temporal axis and/or further up or down on an axis of the numinous (human-underworld, human-divine); and, taking a broader, more general perspective, further on along an axis running between the real(istic) and what we could call the imaginary, the metaphysical, or the dreamlike/nightmarish. Distinguishing between these, however, is often impossible or unimportant. In the Guthlac texts, ‘shadow’ opens windows looking out on Heaven and Hell and locally bridges the gap separating the saint’s life from biblical time; but through such highly aestheticised motifs as the cyclical gliding of the edge of darkness through the skies, it also implies some sort of a fairy-tale aspect behind the story, thus highlighting the possibilities of symbolic significance. In explicitly mythological texts as well as in biblical narratives, ‘shadow’ images engage the conceptual limits of the mind as if to gesture to ineffable mysteries and impart, through language, a liminal experience (*Völuspá*, *Exodus*, *Christ and Satan*).

What I have been charting, then, is a poetics of remoteness, of estrangement and otherworldliness, of the far and the unknown. Ultimately, it is a poetics of the edge and the extreme, the outer edge of time, of religious experience, of perception. A privileged point of contact is afforded with that which, in the outermost frame of reference, is most numinous, fabulous, dreamlike or nightmarish. As such, the uses and function of ‘shadow’ and its significance for Old English and Old Norse poetics intersect or partly overlap with some recent directions in research, such as the engagement of Anglo-

Saxon literary communities with distance, danger, and the unknown (Bolintineanu),⁹ or the ‘psychology of terror’ and the *Beowulf* poet’s interest in perception (Lapidge).¹⁰ But what is especially worth stressing in ‘shadow’ as I have identified and described it, is that it can always be traced to formal features, and, ultimately, to a finite number of specific, isolatable words. While this philological grounding pre-empts the dangers of literary over-interpretation and over-generalisation, it also affords a robust reconstruction, not of a proto-Germanic ‘shadow’ theme, but of the remarkably subtle ways in which poetic language was used to outline conceptual or psychological frontiers.

‘Shadow’ consistently and forcefully appeals to both the aural and the visual sense. As such, it was particularly apt to concern and impact on the composers and receivers of these texts; but it is also crucially apt to engage modern interpreters — even when the decoding process stumbles on unresolvable paradoxes and impossible visualisations and fails to yield satisfactory, finite meanings. Approaching Old English and Old Norse with an eye and ear attuned to ‘shadow’ should encourage us as readers and critics to slow down, register, and ponder the complexities of words and features that are not only syntagmatically ambivalent but also paradigmatically double-tiered. We should not therefore explain them away too quickly; they are windows, thresholds, or reflecting and distorting mirrors that lead the mind to a conceptual edge, a limit of language and perception; they give life to the outermost dimension to be appreciated within a text, a frame or margin that is thick with language and that derives its significance from being artfully shadowy.

⁹ Alexandra Bolintineanu, ‘The Land of Mermedonia in the Old English *Andreas*’, *Neophilologus* 93 (2009), pp. 149-64.

¹⁰ Michael Lapidge, ‘*Beowulf* and the Psychology of Terror’ in Helen Damico and John Leyerle, eds., *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.* (Kalamazoo, 1993), pp. 373-402; idem, ‘*Beowulf* and Perception’, *PBA* 111 (2001), pp. 61-97.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Anlezark, Daniel, ed. and tr., *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*
(Cambridge, 2009)
- Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed., *Heimskringla*, ÍF 26-8 (Reykjavík, 1941-51)
- Bjarni Einarsson, ed., *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum. Fagrskinna*, ÍF 29 (Reykjavík,
1983)
- , ed., *Egils saga* (London, 2003)
- Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Vestfirðinga sögur*, ÍF 6 (Reykjavík,
1943)
- Brooks, Kenneth R., ed., *Andreas and The Fates of the Apostles* (Oxford, 1961)
- Clayton, Mary, and Hugh Magennis, eds., *The Old English Lives of St Margaret*,
CSASE 9 (Cambridge, 1994)
- Clemons, Peter, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series, Text*, EETS s.s. 17
(Oxford, 1997)
- Clunies Ross, Margaret, et al., eds., *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*
(Turnhout, 2007–)
- Cockayne, T.O., ed., *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England*, Rolls
Series 35, 3 vols. (London, 1864-6 [repr. Wiesbaden, 1965])
- Colgrave, Bertram, ed. and tr., *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac* (Cambridge, 1956)
- Colgrave, Bertram, and R.A.B. Mynors, eds. and trs., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of
the English People* (Oxford, 1969)
- Crawford, S.J., ed., *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch*, EETS o.s. 160

(London, 1922)

Dronke, Ursula, ed., *The Poetic Edda. I: Heroic Poems* (Oxford, 1969)

—, ed., *The Poetic Edda. II: Mythological Poems* (Oxford, 1997)

Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Vatnsdæla saga*, ÍF 8 (Reykjavík, 1939)

—, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ÍF 12 (Reykjavík, 1954)

Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, ÍF 4 (Reykjavík, 1935)

Faulkes, Anthony, ed., *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (London, 1982)

—, ed., *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Skáldskaparmál. 2 vols.* (London, 1998)

—, ed., *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Háttatal* (London, 1999)

Finnegan, Robert E., ed., *Christ and Satan: A Critical Edition* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1977)

Finnur Jónsson, ed., *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, vols. A I, A II (tekst efter håndskrifterne) and B I, BII (rettet tekst) (Copenhagen, 1912-15)

Fontes Anglo-Saxonici Project, ed., *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register*, accessed from <<http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>>, 29 May 2009

Fulk, R.D., ed. and tr., *The Beowulf Manuscript: Complete Texts and The Fight at Finnsburg* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010)

—, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edn (Toronto, 2008)

Godden, Malcolm, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, EETS s.s. 5 (London, 1979)

Gonser, P., ed., *Das angelsächsische Prosa-Leben des heiligen Guthlac*. Anglistische Forschungen 27 (Heidelberg, 1909)

- Gordon, Ida L., ed., *The Seafarer* (London, 1960)
- Griffith, Mark, ed., *Judith* (Exeter, 1997)
- Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga*, ÍF 7 (Reykjavík, 1936)
- , ed., *Eddukvæði (Sæmundar Edda)* (Akureyri, 1954)
- , ed., *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, 4 vols. (Reykjavík, 1954)
- , ed., *Helgisaga Óláfs konungs Haraldssonar*, Konunga sögur 1 (Reykjavík, 1957)
- Hecht, H., ed., *Bischof Waerferths von Worcester Uebersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, Bib. ags. Prosa 5 (Leipzig and Hamburg, 1900-7 [repr. Darmstadt, 1965])
- Hessels, J.H., ed., *An Eighth-Century Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary: Preserved in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (ms. no.144)* (Cambridge, 1890)
- Heusler, Andreas, and Wilhelm Ranisch, eds, *Eddica Minora* (Dortmund, 1903)
- Irvine, Susan, ed., *Old English Homilies from MS. Bodley 343*, EETS o.s. 302 (London, 1993)
- Jakob Benediktsson, ed., *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, ÍF 1. 2 vols. (Reykjavík, 1968)
- Kemble, J.M., ed., *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici*, English Historical Society (London, 1839-48 [repr. 1964]), accessed from
<<http://www.heinonline.org/HOL/Index?index=beal/codip&collection=beal>>, 28 October 2009
- Krapp, George Philip, and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, 6 vols. (New York, 1931-53)
- Larrington, Carolyne, tr., *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford, 1996)
- Liebermann, F., ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* (Halle, 1903-16)
- Lindelöf, Uno L., 'Die altenglischen Glossen im Bosworth-Psalter', *Mémoires de la société néophilologique de Helsingfors* 5 (1909), pp. 137-230

- , *Der Lambeth-Psalter*, Acta societatis scientiarum Fennicae 35, i and 43, iii
(Helsinki, 1909-14)
- Lucas, Peter J., ed., *Exodus* (Exeter, 1977 [revised edn 1994])
- Machan, Tim W., ed., *Vafþrúðnismál*. 2nd edn (Durham, 2008)
- Menner, Robert J., ed., *The Poetical Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* (New York, 1941)
- Miller, Thomas, ed. and tr., *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 4 vols., EETS o.s. 95, 96, 110, 111 (London, 1890-8)
- Napier, Arthur S., ed., *Old English Glosses* (Oxford, 1900)
- Neckel, Gustav, ed., *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern: I. Text*, 4th revised edn by Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg, 1962)
- Nordal, Sigurður, ed., *Egils saga*, ÍF 2 (Reykjavík, 1933)
- Nordal, Sigurður and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Borgfirðinga sögur*, ÍF 3 (Reykjavík, 1938)
- North, Richard, ed. and tr., *The Haustlǫng of Þjóðólfr of Hvinir* (Enfield Lock, 1997)
- Oliphant, R.T., ed., *The Harley Latin-Old English Glossary* (The Hague, 1966)
- Pope, J.C., *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, 2 vols., EETS 259, 260
(London, 1967-8)
- Roberts, Jane, ed., *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book* (Oxford, 1979)
- Scragg, D.G., ed., *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*. EETS 300 (Oxford, 1992)
- Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga*, ÍF 2 (Reykjavík, 1933)
- , ed., *Vǫluspá*. Tr. B.S. Benedikz and John McKinnel (Durham, 1978 [1923])
- Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Harðar saga*, ÍF 13 (Reykjavík, 1991)
- Whaley, Diana, ed., *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld: An Edition and Study* (London, 1998)

Wright, D.H., *The Vespasian Psalter*, EEMF 14 (Copenhagen, 1967)

SECONDARY SOURCES

Abram, Christopher, 'New Light on the Illumination of Grendel's Mere', *JEGP* 109.2 (2010), pp. 198-216

Acker, Paul, and Carolyne Larrington., eds., *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology* (London, 2002)

Andersson, Theodore M., 'Did the Poet of *Atlamál* Know *Atlakviða*?', in Glendinning, *Edda*, pp. 243-57

Anlezark, Daniel C., *Water and Fire: The Myth of the Flood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 2006)

Ármann Jakobsson, 'Fathers and Monsters: Sigurðr Fáfnisbani Talks to a Dragon', paper presented at the Viking Society Student Conference (Hull, 2009)

—, 'Why Be Afraid? On the Practical Use of Legends', *Preprint Papers of the 14th International Saga Conference, Uppsala, 9th-15th August 2009*. Vol. 1 (Uppsala, 2009), pp. 35-42

Attridge, Derek, *The Singularity of Literature* (London, 2004)

Barley, N.F., 'Old English Colour Classification: Where Do Matters Stand?' *ASE* 3 (1974), pp. 15-28

Barnes, Michael, 'Language', in McTurk, *Companion*, pp. 173-89

Bately, Janet M., 'Old English Prose Before and After the Reign of Alfred', *ASE* 17 (1988), pp. 93-138

Beechy, Tiffany, *The Poetics of Old English* (Farnham and Burlington, VT, 2010)

Bergsveinn Birgisson, 'What Have We Lost by Writing? Cognitive Archaisms in

- Skaldic Poetry’, in Else Mundal and Jonas Wellendorf, eds., *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing* (Copenhagen, 2008), pp. 163-84
- Biggam, Carole, *Blue in Old English: An Interdisciplinary Semantic Study* (Amsterdam, 1997)
- , *Grey in Old English: An Interdisciplinary Semantic Study* (London, 1998)
- Bjork, Robert E., ‘Scandinavian Relations’, in Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne, eds., *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 388-99
- Bolintineanu, Alexandra, ‘The Land of Mermedonia in the Old English *Andreas*’, *Neophilologus* 93 (2009), pp. 149-64
- Bosworth, Joseph, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. and enlarged by T. N. Toller (Oxford, 1908-21), with *Enlarged Addenda and Corrigenda* by A. Campbell (Oxford, 1972)
- Bradley, S.A.J., *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, 1982)
- Brady, Caroline, ‘Weapons in *Beowulf*: An Analysis of the Nominal Compounds and an Evaluation of the Poet’s Use of Them’, *ASE* 8 (1979), pp. 79-141
- Bredehoft, Thomas A., ‘Ælfric and Late Old English Verse’, *ASE* 33 (2004), pp. 77-107
- , *Authors, Audiences, and Old English Verse* (Toronto, 2009)
- Breeze, Andrew, ‘Old English *wann* “dark, pallid”: Welsh *gwann* “weak, sad, gloomy”’, *ANQ* 10 (1997), pp. 10-13
- Bremmer, Rolf H., ‘The Old Frisian Component in Holthausen’s *Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*’, *ASE* 17 (1988), pp. 5–13
- Brodeur, Arthur G., *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960)
- Burson, Ann C., ‘Swan Maidens and Smiths: A Structural Study of *Völundarkviða*’, *SS* 55 (1983), pp. 1-19
- Campbell, Alistair, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959)

- Cherniss, Michael D., 'The Progress of the Hoard in *Beowulf*', *PQ* 47 (1968), pp. 473-9
- Chickering, Howell, 'Poetic Exuberance in the Old English *Judith*', *Studies in Philology* 106.2 (2009), pp. 119-36
- Clark Hall, J.R., ed., *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th edition (Cambridge, 1960)
- Cleasby, Richard, and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd edn by William A. Craigie (Oxford, 1957)
- Clover, Carol J., and John Lindow, eds, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Ithaca, 1985)
- Clunies Ross, Margaret, 'Style and Authorial Presence in Skaldic Mythological Poetry', *SB* 20 (1978-81), pp. 276-304
- , 'Bragi Boddason', in Phillip Pulsiano *et al.*, eds, *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York and London, 1993), pp. 55-6
- , *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society. I: The Myths* (Odense, 1994)
- , *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge, 2005)
- , 'A Tale of Two Poets: Egill Skallagrímsson and Einarr skálaglamm', *ANF* 120 (2005), pp. 69-82
- , 'Stylistic and Generic Definers of the Old Norse Skaldic Ekphrasis', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007), pp. 161-92
- Coatsworth, E., and M. Pinder, *The Art of the Anglo-Saxon Goldsmith* (Woodbridge, 2002)
- Collins, Rowland L., 'Six Words in the Blickling Homilies', in James L. Rosier, ed., *Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature in Honour of Herbert Dean Meritt* (The Hague, 1970), pp. 137-41
- Cramp, Rosemary, 'Beowulf and Archaeology', *Medieval Archaeology* 1 (1957)

- Cronan, Dennis, 'A Reading of *Guðrúnarkviða Qnnor*', *SS* 57 (1985), pp. 174-87
- , 'Alliterative Rank in Old English Poetry', *SN* 58 (1986)
- Damico, Helen, 'The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature', in Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington, 1990), pp. 176-90
- Dance, Richard, 'North Sea Currents: Old English-Old Norse Relations, Literary and Linguistic', *Literature Compass* 1 (2004), pp. 1-10
- Davidson, Hilda Ellis, *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1962)
- Degnbol, Helle, *et al.*, *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (Copenhagen, 1989–)
- Dendle, Peter, *Satan Unbound: The Devil in Old English Narrative Literature* (Toronto, 2001)
- De Vries, Jan, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Leiden, 1977 [first publ. 1961])
- Dictionary of Old English Corpus* (Toronto, 2000), accessed from
 <<http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/>>, 10 January 2010
- Doane, A.N., "'The Green Street of Paradise": A Note on Lexis and Meaning in Old English Poetry', *NM* 74 (1973), pp. 456-65
- Donoghue, Daniel, 'The Philologer Poet: Seamus Heaney', *Harvard Review* 19 (2000), pp. 12-21
- Dronke, Ursula, 'Art and Tradition in *Skírnismál*' in N. Davis and C. L. Wrenn, eds., *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J.R.R. Tolkien* (London, 1962), pp. 250-68
- , 'Beowulf and Ragnarok', *SB* 17 (1968), pp. 300-25
- Earl, James W., 'The Necessity of Evil in *Beowulf*', *South Atlantic Bulletin* 44.1 (1979), pp. 81-98

- Ellis Davidson, Hilda R., 'The Hill of the Dragon: Anglo-Saxon Burial Mounds in Literature and Archaeology', *Folklore* 61 (1950), pp. 169-85
- Ferhatović, Denis, '*Burh* and *Beam*, Burning Bright: A Study in the Poetic Imagination of the Old English *Exodus*', *Neophilologus* 94 (2010)
- Fidjestøl, Bjarne, 'The Contribution of Scaldic Studies', in Anthony Faulkes and Richard Perkins, eds., *Viking Revaluations* (London, 1992), pp. 100-20
- , 'The Kenning System. An Attempt at a Linguistic Analysis', in Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal, eds, and Peter Foote, tr., *Bjarne Fidjestøl: Selected Papers* (Odense, 1997), pp. 16-67
- , 'Norse-Icelandic Composition in the Oral Period', in Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal, eds, and Peter Foote, tr., *Bjarne Fidjestøl: Selected Papers* (Odense, 1997), pp. 303-32
- , *The Dating of Eddic Poetry: A Historical Survey and Methodological Investigation*, ed. Odd Einar Haugen (Copenhagen, 1999)
- Foley, John M., *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1991)
- Frank, Roberta, 'Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Scriptural Verse', *Speculum* 47 (1972), pp. 207-26
- , *Old Norse Court Poetry: The dróttkvætt Stanza* (Ithaca and London, 1978)
- , 'Skaldic Verse and the Date of *Beowulf*', in Colin Chase, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf* (Toronto, 1981), pp. 123-39
- , 'Skaldic Poetry', in Clover and Lindow, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, pp. 157-96
- , 'Anglo-Scandinavian Poetic Relations', *ANQ* n.s. 3 (1990), pp. 74-9
- , 'Poetic Words in Late Old English Prose', in Malcolm Godden, Douglas Gray,

- and Terry Hoad, eds., *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E.G. Stanley* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 87-107
- Fritzner, Johann, *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*, 2nd edn (Kristiania, 1886–96)
- Fry, Donald K., ‘Old English Formulaic Themes and Type-Scenes,’ *Neophilologus* 52 (1968), pp. 48-54
- , ‘The Cliff of Death in Old English Poetry’, in John M. Foley, ed., *Comparative Research on Oral Traditions: A Memorial for Milman Parry* (Columbus, 1987), pp. 213-34
- Fulk, R.D., *A History of Old English Metre* (Philadelphia, 1992)
- Gade, Kari Ellen, *The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry* (Ithaca and London, 1995)
- Glendinning, Robert J., and Haraldur Bessason, eds., *Edda: A Collection of Essays* (Winnipeg, 1983)
- Greenfield, Stanley B., *The Interpretation of Old English Poems* (London, 1972)
- Gretsch, Mechthild, ‘The Junius Psalter Gloss: Its Historical and Cultural Context’, *ASE* 29 (2000), pp. 85-121
- Grimstad, Kaaren, ‘The Revenge of *Vǫlundr*’, in Glendinning, *Edda*, pp. 187-209
- Gunnell, Terry, ‘Eddic Poetry’, in McTurk, *Companion*, pp. 82-100
- Hall, Alaric, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England. Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge, 2007)
- , ‘Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity: Tradition, Innovation and Saint Guthlac’, in Debra Higgs Strickland, *Images of Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson* (Leiden, 2007), pp. 207–35, accessed from <<http://www.alarichall.org.uk>>, 6 June 2011
- , ‘The Orality of a Silent Age: The Place of Orality in Medieval Studies’, in Marko

- Lamberg *et al.*, eds., *Methods and the Medievalist: Current Approaches in Medieval Studies* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2008), pp. 270-90
- Hall, J.R., 'Two Dark Old English Compounds: *ælmyrcan* (*Andreas* 432a) and *guðmyrce* (*Exodus* 59a)', *Journal of English Linguistics* 20 (1987), pp. 38-47
- Harris, Joseph, 'Eddic Poetry', in Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, eds, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Ithaca, 1985), pp. 68-156
- Hatto, A.T., 'Snake-swords and Boar-helms in *Beowulf*', *ES* 38 (1957), pp. 145-60
- Healey, Antonette diPaolo, ed., *Dictionary of Old English in Electronic Form A – F*, CD-ROM (Toronto, 1996)
- Hill, Joyce, 'The Soldier of Christ in Old English Prose and Poetry', *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 12 (1981), pp. 57-80
- Hirsch Jr., E.D., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London, 1967)
- Holthausen, F., *Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1934)
- Howe, Nicholas, 'The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England: Inherited, Invented, Imagined', in John Howe and Michael Wolfe, eds., *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe* (Gainesville, FL, 2002), pp. 91-112
- Hume, Kathryn, 'The Function of the "*Hrefn Blaca*": *Beowulf* 1801', *MP* 67 (1969), pp. 60-3
- Irving, Jr., Edward B., *Rereading Beowulf* (Philadelphia, 1989)
- Jesch, Judith, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 2001)
- , 'Poetry in the Viking Age', in Stefan Brink, ed., in collaboration with Neil Price, *The Viking World* (London and New York, 2008), pp. 291-8
- Jóhannesson, Alexander, *Isländisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Bern, 1956)
- Kellogg, Robert L., *A Concordance to Eddic Poetry* (East Lansing, MI, 1988)

- Klinck, Anne L., *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study*
(Montreal and Kingston, 1992)
- Knock, Ann, 'Analysis of a Translator: The Old English *Wonders of the East*', in Jane Roberts and Janet L. Nelson, and Malcolm Godden, eds., *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on the Occasion of her Sixty-Fifth Birthday*
(Cambridge, 1997), pp. 121-6
- Köberl, Johann, *The Indeterminacy of Beowulf* (Lanham, 2002)
- Korhammer, P.M., 'The Origin of the Bosworth Psalter', *ASE* 2 (1973), pp. 173-87
- LaFarge, Beatrice, and John Tucker, eds, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda Based on Hans Kuhn's Kurzes Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1992)
- Lapidge, Michael, 'Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror', in Helen Damico and John Leyerle, eds., *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.* (Kalamazoo, 1993), pp. 373-402
- , 'The Comparative Approach', in Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, ed., *Reading Old English Texts* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 20-38
- , 'The Archetype of *Beowulf*', *ASE* 29 (2000), pp. 5-41
- , 'Beowulf and Perception', *PBA* 111 (2001), pp. 61-97
- Larrington, Carolyne, *A Store of Common Sense: Gnomie Theme and Style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry* (Oxford, 1993)
- , 'Vafþrúðnismál and Grímnismál: Cosmic History, Cosmic Geography', in Acker and eadem., *Poetic Edda*, pp. 59-77
- Laurenson, Arthur, *The Colour-Sense in the Edda* (London, 1882)
- Leech, Geoffrey, *Semantics: The Study of Meaning*, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth, 1981)
- Leisi, Ernst, 'Gold und Manneswert im *Beowulf*', *Anglia* 71 (1953), pp. 259-73
- Lerner, L. D., 'Color Words in Anglo-Saxon', *MLR* 46, pp. 246-9

- Lie, Hallvard, 'Natur' og 'unatur' i skaldekunsten (Oslo, 1957). Repr. in his *Om sagakunst og skaldskap. Utvalgte avhandlinger* (Oslo, 1982), pp. 201-315
- Lindow, John, 'Norse Mythology and Northumbria: Methodological Notes', *SS 59.3* (1987), pp. 308-24
- , *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford, 2001)
- , 'Poetry, Dwarfs and Gods: Understanding *Alvíssmál*', in Judy Quinn *et al.*, eds., *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross* (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 287-305
- Lochrie, Karma, 'Anglo-Saxon Morning Sickness', *Neophilologus* 70 (1986), pp. 316-18
- Lönnroth, Lars, '*Iǫrð fannz æva né upphiminn*', in Ursula Dronke *et al.*, eds, *Speculum Norroenum* (Odense, 1985), pp. 310-27
- , 'The Founding of Miðgarðr (*Vǫluspá* 1-8)', in Paul Acker and Carlyne Larrington, eds., *The Poetic Edda. Essays on Old Norse Mythology* (Routledge, 2002), pp. 5-25
- Lucas, Peter J., 'The Place of *Judith* in the *Beowulf*-Manuscript', *RES* n.s. 41 (1990), pp. 463-78
- , 'Easter, the Death of St Guthlac and the Liturgy for Holy Saturday in Felix's *Vita* and the Old English Guthlac B', *MÆ* 61 (1992), pp. 1-16
- Mallory, J.P., and D.Q. Adams, *The Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and the Proto-Indo-European World* (Oxford, 2006)
- Matschi, Marion, 'Color Terms in English Onomasiological and Semasiological Aspects', *Onomasiology Online* 5 (2004), pp. 56-139
- McKinnell, John, 'Norse Mythology and Northumbria: A Response', *SS 59.3* (1987), pp. 325-37

- , ‘The Context of *Völundarkviða*’, *SB* 23 (1990), pp. 1-27
- , *Both One and Many. Essays on Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism*
(Rome, 1994)
- McTurk, Rory, ‘Variation in *Beowulf* and the Poetic Edda: A Chronological Experiment’, in Colin Chase, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf* (Toronto, 1981), pp. 141-60
- , ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* (Oxford, 2005)
- Mead, W. E., ‘Color in OE Poetry’, *PMLA* 14 (1899), pp. 169-206
- Meaney, Audrey L., ‘Anglo-Saxon Pagan and Early Christian Attitudes to the Dead’, in Martin Carver, ed., *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300* (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY, 2003), pp. 229-41
- Meissner, Rudolf, *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*
(Bonn, 1921)
- Motz, Lotte, ‘New Thoughts on *Völundarkviða*’, *SB* 22 (1986-9), pp. 50-68
- Neville, Jennifer, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry*
(Cambridge, 1999)
- , ‘Hrothgar’s Horses: Feral or Thoroughbred?’, *ASE* 35 (2006), pp. 131-57
- Nielsen, Hans Frede, *Old English and the Continental Germanic Languages*, 2nd edn
(Innsbruck, 1985)
- O’Donoghue, Heather, *The Genesis of a Saga Narrative. Verse and Prose in Kormaks Saga* (Oxford, 1991)
- , *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford, 2005)
- Olsen, Alexandra Hennessey, ‘Guthlac on the Beach’, *Neophilologus* 64 (1980), pp. 290-96
- Ólsen, Björn M., ‘Små bidrag til tolkningen af Eddasangene’, *ANF* 9 (1893), pp. 223-35

- , ‘Til Eddakvaderne. I. Til Völuspá’, *Arkiv* 30 (1914), pp. 129-69
- Olsen, Karin, ‘Metaphorical Density in Old English and Old Norse Poetry’, *ANF* 118 (2002), pp. 171-95
- Orchard, Andy, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the ‘Beowulf’-Manuscript* (Cambridge, 1995)
- , *A Critical Companion to ‘Beowulf’* (Cambridge, 2003)
- Osborn, Marijane, ‘Laying the Roman Ghost of *Beowulf* 320 and 725’, *NM* 70 (1969), pp. 246-54
- , ‘Domesticating the Dayraven in *Beowulf* 1801’ in Helen Damico and John Leyerle, eds., *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period. Studies in honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.* (Kalamazoo, 1993), pp. 313-30
- Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1989); accessed from <http://dictionary.oed.com/>, 5 May 2010
- Pétursson, E.G., ‘Codex Regius’, in Philip Pulsiano *et al.*, eds, *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia* (New York, 1993)
- Pirotte, Emmanuelle, ‘Hidden Order, Order Revealed: New Light on Carpet Pages’, in M. Redknap *et al.*, eds., *Pattern and Purpose in Insular Art* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 203-7
- Poole, Russell, *Viking Poems on War and Peace. A Study in Skaldic Narrative* (Toronto, 1991)
- , ‘Composition Transmission Performance: The First Ten *lausavísur* in *Kormáks saga*’, *Alvíssmál* 7 (1997), pp. 37-60
- , ‘Metre and Metrics’, in McTurk, *Companion*, pp. 265-84
- Powell, Kathryn, ‘Meditating on Men and Monsters: A Reconsideration of the Thematic Unity of the *Beowulf* Manuscript’, *RES* n.s. 57 (2006), pp. 1-15

- Pulsiano, Phillip, 'The Passion of Saint Christopher', in Elaine Treharne and Susan Rosser, eds., *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg* (Tempe, 2002), pp. 167-99
- Quinn, Judy, 'Dialogue with a *vǫlva*: *Vǫluspá*, *Baldurs draumar* and *Hyndluljóð*', in Acker and Larrington, *Poetic Edda*, pp. 245-74
- Renoir, Alain, 'The Old English *Ruin*: Contrastive Structure and Affective Impact', in Martin Green, ed., *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research* (Rutherford, NJ and London, 1983), pp. 148-73
- , *A Key to Old Poems: The Oral-Formulaic Approach to the Interpretation of West-Germanic Verse* (University Park, 1988)
- Ritzke-Rutherford, Jean, *Light and Darkness in Anglo-Saxon Thought and Writing* (Frankfurt a.M.; Bern; Cirencester, 1979)
- Roberts, Jane, 'The Old English Prose Translation of Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*', in Paul E. Szarmach, ed., *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose: Sixteen Original Contributions* (Albany, 1986), pp. 363-79
- , 'Guthlac A: Sources and Source Hunting', in Edward D. Kennedy, Ronald Waldron, and Joseph S. Wittig, eds., *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 1-18
- , 'Hagiography and Literature: The Case of Guthlac of Crowland', in Michelle P. Brown and Carol A. Farr, eds., *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (London, 2001), pp. 69-86
- Robinson, Fred C., 'Lexicography and Literary Criticism: A Caveat', in James L. Rosier, ed., *Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature* (The Hague, 1970), pp. 99-110
- , 'Two Aspects of Variation in Old English Poetry', in Daniel G. Calder, ed., *Old*

- English Poetry: Essays on Style* (Berkeley, 1979), pp. 127-45
- , *Beowulf and the Appositive Style* (Knoxville, 1985)
- Rosier, James L., 'Death and Transfiguration: *Guthlac B*', in *idem*, *Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature in Honour of Herbert Dean Meritt* (The Hague, 1970), pp. 82-92
- Sahlgren, Jöran, 'Sagan om Frö och Gärd', *Namn och Bygd* 16 (1928), pp.1-19
- Schach, Paul, 'Some Thoughts on *Völuspá*', in Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason, eds., *Edda: A Collection of Essays* (Winnipeg, 1983), pp. 86-116
- Schjødt, Jens Peter, 'Völuspá – cyklisk tidsopfattelse i gammelnordisk religion', *Danske Studier* 76 (1981), pp. 91-5
- , *Initiation between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion*. Tr. Victor Hansen (Odense, 2008)
- Scragg, Donald, ed., *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS o.s. 300 (Oxford, 1992), pp. 90-104
- Shepherd, Geoffrey, 'Scriptural Poetry', in E.G. Stanley, ed., *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature* (London, 1966)
- Shippey, T.A., *Old English Verse* (London, 1972)
- , 'Approaches to Truth in Old English Poetry', *University of Leeds Review* 25 (1982), pp. 171-89
- Sigurður Nordal, 'Three Essays on *Völuspá*', *SB* 18 (1970-1), pp. 74-135
- Sisam, Kenneth, 'The Compilation of the *Beowulf* Manuscript', in *idem*, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 65-96
- Skeat, Walter W., ed., *The Holy Gospels in Anglo-Saxon, Northumbrian, and Old Mercian Versions* (Cambridge, 1871-87 [repr. Darmstadt, 1970])
- Sorensen, Roy, *Seeing Dark Things: The Philosophy of Shadows* (Oxford, 2008)

- Stanley, E.G., 'Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* and *The Penitent's Prayer*', *Anglia* 73 (1956), pp. 413-66
- , 'Two Old English Poetic Phrases Insufficiently Understood for Literary Criticism: *þing gehegan* and *seonop gehegan*' in Daniel G. Calder, ed., *Old English Poetry: Essays on Style* (Berkeley, 1979), pp. 67-90
- Stephens, John, 'The Poet and *Atlakviða*: Variations on Some Themes', in Gabriel Turville-Petre and John S. Martin, eds., *Iceland and the Mediaeval World. Studies in Honour of Ian Maxwell* (Clayton, Australia, 1974), pp. 56-62
- Storms, G., 'Notes on Old English Poetry', *Neophilologus* 61 (1977), pp. 439-42
- Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon poeticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis / Ordbog over det Norsk-Islandske Skjaldesprog*, 2nd edn by Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1931)
- Swisher, Michael, 'Beyond the Hoar Stone', *Neophilologus* 86 (2002), pp. 133-6
- Tolkien, J. R. R., '*Sigelwara land*', *MÆ* 1 (1932), pp. 183-96, and *MÆ* 3 (1934), pp. 95-111
- Townend, Matthew, 'Pre-Cnut Praise-Poetry in Viking Age England', *RES* n.s. 203 (2000), pp. 349-370
- , *Language and History in Viking Age England: Linguistic Relations between Speakers of Old Norse and Old English* (Turnhout, 2002)
- Trilling, Renée R., *Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse* (Toronto, 2009)
- , 'Ruins in the Realm of Thoughts: Reading as Constellation in Anglo-Saxon Poetry', *JEGP* 108.2 (2009), pp. 141-67
- Turville-Petre, E.O.G., *Myth and Religion of the North* (London, 1964)
- , *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford, 1976)

- Tyler, Elizabeth M., *Old English Poetics: The Aesthetics of the Familiar in Anglo-Saxon England* (York, 2006)
- Viðar Hreinsson, ed., *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* (Reykjavík, 1997)
- Wentersdorf, Karl P., 'Guthlac A: The Battle for the *Beorg*', *Neophilologus* 62 (1978), pp. 135-42
- Whaley, Diana, 'Skaldic Poetry', in McTurk, *Companion*, pp. 479-502
- Wieland, Gernot R., 'Aures lectoris: Orality and Literacy in Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 7 (1997), pp. 168-77
- Wilcox, Jonathan, ed., *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge, 2000)
- Wolf, Kirsten, 'The Color Blue in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature', *Scripta Islandica* 57 (2006), pp. 55-78
- , 'The Color Grey in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature', *JEGP* 108.2 (2009), pp. 222-38
- Wood, F. A., *Color-Names and their Congeners: A Semasiological Investigation* (Halle, 1902)
- Zacher, Samantha, *Preaching the Converted: The Style and Rhetoric of the Vercelli Book Homilies* (Toronto, 2009)
- Zupitza, Julius, 'Mercisches aus der HS. Royal 2 A 20 im Britischen Museum', *ZfdA* 33 (1889), pp. 47-66