

UNLOCKING THE WORD-HOARD:  
A SURVEY OF THE CRITICISM OF  
OLD ENGLISH POETIC DICTION AND FIGURATION,  
WITH EMPHASIS ON BEOWULF

by

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I attempt to trace the development of the criticism of Old English poetic diction and figuration from the earliest general comments to the present detailed analyses. To do so, I have examined as many statements as possible on these two specific areas as well as many on Old English poetic style in general. Because diction and figuration were among the last aspects of Old English poetry to receive serious critical attention, it has not been easy to locate comments made prior to the mid-nineteenth century. Chapter I covers most of these earliest comments, none of which is particularly valuable today. The Anglo-Saxon period left a few vague hints; the Middle English period left virtually none; and although the Renaissance was responsible for the preservation of most of the Old English poetic manuscripts, it was more concerned with the religion and history of the period than with the literature. The late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century witnessed a flurry of important general scholarship, but the rest of the eighteenth century made little significant comment.

Chapter II shows how the study of philology, engendered largely by Continental scholars, was the single most important development in nineteenth century Old English poetic criticism and was responsible for the first adequately edited texts. However, most nineteenth century critics either did not go beyond philology to poetic language or devoted their attention

to the historical and mythological background of the poetry, trends which were in keeping with the neo-classical and historical criticism of the nineteenth century.

Chapter III shows how the study of Old English poetic style gained momentum as soon as English-speaking scholars approached the subject and isolated it from the general study of Old Germanic literatures. However, it was hampered somewhat by the lack of consistent and effective critical terms and methods. Perhaps the most useful accomplishments of this period (1881-1921) are the source lists and catalogues, which supply solid background material, and the noticeable improvement in attitude toward the poetry.

Chapter IV shows how the interest in poetic language after the first was eventually was felt in a number of important studies of Old English poetic diction during the 1920's. On the assumption that Old English poems were conscious literary creations, critics began to study them for their literary merits and to pass some sort of judgment on their artistic achievement. In addition, the work of J. R. R. Tolkien was largely responsible for redeeming the literary reputation of Beowulf, and, by extension, much other Old English poetry.

Chapter V shows how much was learned during the 1950's about the nature of Old English poetic diction. The oral-formulaic theory, once it was modified, provided a reasonable explanation for the development of many identical and similar lines in Old English poetry. Other diction studies, especially



that of Brodeur, showed that in spite of traditional language, originality was more than possible, as witnessed in the compounds and variations of Beowulf. Other studies showed that much of the poetic diction which was earlier called metaphorical is really either literal or, if figurative, metonymical. Yet other studies found in Beowulf the figuration and symbolism of religious poetry. Thus by the 1960's critics were able to approach Old English poetry almost as confidently as they would approach any other period of English poetry.

The two appendices to the thesis concern the development of attitude and comment about two important Old English poetic devices: the kenning and variation. Appendix A shows the growth of precision in the application of Old Norse poetic appellations, and appendix B shows the importance of variation as a key to Old English poetic style. Both these appendices support the general conclusion that methods and information in Old English studies are adequate enough now that the job of full poetic criticism is possible.

## PREFACE

My original intention in this thesis was to present a survey of the criticism of Old English poetic style. However, months of reading revealed the hitherto unsuspected scope of the topic, and I was obliged to prune it rather drastically. First, I restricted it to criticism in English, except for particularly important non-English works (the decision here was also practical in that much foreign criticism, especially of the nineteenth century, is quite difficult to obtain). Second, I excluded criticism of metre, except where it is a necessary part of studies of diction and figuration. Copious amounts have been and still are being written on the nature of Old English poetic rhythm; and since the results are largely inconclusive, and since some excellent summaries of the problem are available,<sup>1</sup> it seemed unnecessary to thrash out the problem again. Finally, I limited the survey to works on Beowulf, except where other poems have been the first to attract new, or relatively new, critical methods. The motive here is largely aesthetic, to avoid as much as possible monotonous reiteration of the same theories, since for the most part new methods were applied first to Beowulf and then to other Old English poems.

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<sup>1</sup>Max Kaluza, A Short History of English Versification, from the Earliest Times to the Present Day, trans. A. C. Dunstan (London: George Allen, 1911).

Jakob Schipper, A History of English Versification (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910).

John Collins Pope, The Rhythm of Beowulf (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1942).

I also wish to thank Dr. P. M. Swan of the University of Saskatchewan for his assistance with Latin translations, and especially my thesis director, Dr. Meredith Thompson, both for his kind advice and encouragement in the preparation of this thesis and for his teaching me through classes and seminars how to love the beauties of Old English poetry.

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## INTRODUCTION

The study of Old English poetic diction and figuration is now a fully developed branch of Anglo-Saxon studies, and it is my intention in this thesis to review the painful process by which it has reached this level of development. Summaries of Old English scholarship are not new. As early as 1807 James Ingram presented a short eulogy on the valuable work of his predecessors.<sup>1</sup> J.M. Kemble presented in 1834 a brief recapitulation of scholarship,<sup>2</sup> as did Isaac Disraeli in 1841.<sup>3</sup> Joseph Bosworth presented a bibliography of work to date in footnotes to his Dictionary, 1838;<sup>4</sup> and most editions and translations during the nineteenth century included some sort of bibliography or review of scholarship. Particularly important works of the late nineteenth century are Richard Wülker's Grundriss zur Geschichte der angelsächsischen Literatur, 1885, which contains valuable bibliographies and summaries of criticism, and the two studies of Old English metre by Kaluza, 1894, and Schipper, 1895. The first part of the

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<sup>1</sup>An Inaugural Lecture on the Utility of Anglo-Saxon Literature (Oxford).

<sup>2</sup>The Gentleman's Magazine, Vol. I n.s., p. 392.

<sup>3</sup>Amenities of Literature, new ed. B. Disraeli, Vol. I (London, 1859).

<sup>4</sup>A Dictionary of the Anglo-Saxon Language (London).

twentieth century saw a fervour of scholarship summary: Tinker's critical bibliography of Beowulf translations, 1903; Eleanor Adams' complete review of Old English scholarship to the nineteenth century, 1917; R.W. Chambers' studies of Widsith and Beowulf, 1912 and 1921, to list only a few of the most significant. But conspicuously absent is any survey of diction and imagery--even annotated bibliographies of the period tended to ignore these subjects, unless a work were predominately devoted to either or both.

Actually, for critical comment prior to 1920 this deficiency in bibliographies has been a serious handicap to research. It has not been possible to look at everything written on Old English poetry, so that much material, ignored or misleadingly described in bibliographies, I have discovered only by accidental cross-reference or by leafing through available books. Heusinkveld and Basche<sup>5</sup> present difficulties in that they tend to list only the most recent, not the original, publication dates. There is a sore need for a full bibliography of Old English poetic criticism.

More recently, especially in the last twenty years, short summaries of diction and figuration have appeared, but none of any scope; the fullest, by Stanley Greenfield, surveys only the

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<sup>5</sup>Arthur H. Heusinkveld and Edwin J. Basche, A Bibliographical Guide to Old English, University of Iowa Humanistic Series, IV, 5 (Iowa City: Iowa Univ., 1931).

broadest developments.<sup>6</sup> Even the work closest in spirit to my thesis, "Critical Estimates of Beowulf from the Early Nineteenth Century to the Present,"<sup>7</sup> is quite different in material and has been of little assistance to me, largely because it attempts to ignore scholarship and to concentrate only on critical appraisal of the whole poem and its larger parts. There is yet to be published any full account of the criticism of Old English poetic language.

In a way, then, my thesis will resemble a crazy-quilt, an arrangement of bits of material--much cut from new stuff, some from old and ready-made items. As for design, it is worth noting that the criticism falls into rather neat chronological blocks. For example, the attitudes and comments regarding Old English poetry until the late nineteenth century group themselves into units closely paralleling those generally assigned to English literary history, even though the opinions within these two groups may differ. Similarly, the criticism since 1880 also divides itself into logical segments, according to certain key publications: F.B. Gummere's 1881 dissertation, The Anglo-Saxon Metaphor; R. W. Chambers' book, Beowulf, an Introduction (with important subdivisions in 1922 with Klaeber's edition of Beowulf, and in 1936 with Tolkien's lecture, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the

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<sup>6</sup>A Critical History of Old English Literature (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 69-79.

<sup>7</sup>William Floyd Helmer, Diss. Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1963.

Critics"); and F.P. Magoun's 1953 essay, "The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry." That there is remarkably little overlapping of these divisions is owing in part, no doubt, to the relative smallness of the Old English critical community and to the fact that Old English scholarship even now seems to rely on the surges of energy generated by certain gifted scholars.

Finally, I wish to indicate somewhat the scope of the terms I have used in the title. "Criticism" I do not use to mean poetic theory in its abstract-philosophical sense. Until recently Old English poetry has been too imperfectly understood to make most theoretical comment more than speculative. Besides, "critical theory" implies larger issues than the machinery of poetry. Thus "criticism" here will consist of much basic scholarship and in the first chapter will also include attitude as well as comment, since the vague remarks scattered throughout the period from 650 to 1786 are almost meaningless without some indication of either why or how they are typical or exceptional in the general development of Old English scholarship and criticism. With the advent of studies of Germanic philology, myth and history during the nineteenth century, diction and figuration gradually came under scrutiny, so that by the end of the century they had more or less established their own critical continuity.

"Diction" I use in its generally accepted sense of selection of words, specifically as they are used in poetry to create images and achieve certain emotional or intellectual effects.



"Figuration" I use as broadly as possible to include all tropes and syntactical figures. On the whole, however, it has been difficult to draw lines between these various elements of style, just as it has been difficult to draw lines between elements of style and other facets of criticism--for example, between studies of diction and pure philology, between larger syntactical phenomena and specifically poetic structures, between figurative language, symbolism and over-all interpretation. In many cases my selection of material may appear quite arbitrary; but I have tried to choose a sufficiently broad and representative range to give as complete and coherent a picture as possible of the development in studies of Old English poetic diction and figuration.

## CHAPTER I

## THE EARLIEST COMMENTS: 650-1786

The Teutonic tribes which invaded and settled England from the middle of the fifth century brought with them a flourishing oral poetic tradition. Unfortunately, one cannot know exactly what this poetry was like, for it is without contemporary record or comment. Only after the Christianization of England and the introduction of the Latin alphabet did the Anglo-Saxons record their native poetry. But Christian-Latin learning also introduced a new rhetoric and a new set of poetic themes to those poets who received a formal monastic education. The exact relation between the native and classical-Christian vocabulary and rhetoric will probably remain an insoluble critical problem (although comparison with Latin poetry and the poetry of other Teutonic languages shows the Old English to be predominately Germanic in its form and devices); for the Anglo-Saxons left only the most incidental of theoretical comment regarding the diction and figures of their native poetry and the adaptation of these characteristics to the poetry of the new faith.

Obviously the native poetic was extremely strong and popular--for four hundred years the Anglo-Saxons produced a body of poetry amazingly homogeneous in its style, and employing the words and figures of the pagan Germanic tradition. They freely

paraphrased and translated into this poetic the Scriptures, Saints' lives and allegories of the new religion, and even adopted characteristics of the alliterative rhetoric to provide the impressive cadences of later homiletic prose, such as that of AElfric (995?-1020). That the native poetry was well-loved and the man admired and esteemed who could compose it skilfully, is seen in the wide-spread practice of the craft of poetry and the particularly honoured position of the scop, or court poet. Widsith, the wandering scop, bestowed with gifts in recognition of his talents; Deor, the unfortunate scop, replaced in his lord's favour by another; the scop of Heorot, singer of songs and chief teller of lays--these are all men who formally practiced the craft of song and story. But others did so informally--possibly the warriors gathered in Heorot after the destruction of Grendel, Caedmon's fellows passing the harp at an entertainment, and even the monks in the monasteries.<sup>1</sup> Also some of the most impressive persons of the Anglo-Saxon period practiced the native poetic art. The learned Aldhelm (640?-709) was skilled in native poetry and used his talents to win the favour of his flock by standing on a bridge and singing in minstrel fashion after Mass.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Native poetry was so popular in the monasteries that in 797 Alcuin (735-804) wrote to Hygebald, Bishop of Lindisfarne: "When priests dine together let the word of God be read. It is fitting on such occasions to listen to a reader, not to a harpist, to the discourses of the fathers, not to the poems of the heathen. What has Ingeld to do with Christ?" (Quoted in H. Munro Chadwick, The Heroic Age [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1926], p. 40).

<sup>2</sup>According to William of Malmesbury, quoting from the now-lost

The Venerable Bede (673?-735) in early eighth century Northumbria and King Alfred in mid-ninth century Wessex are both reputed to have loved and been expert in the practice of vernacular poetry.<sup>3</sup> Finally, of course, the old native verse was sufficiently well-loved to be copied as late as the early eleventh century and to provide models of expression for a poem in the Old English Chronicle as late as 1065 and even for a few twelfth century poems.

But popular as this vernacular poetry was, no one during the Anglo-Saxon period ever committed to paper its poetic rules, the principles controlling its diction and figures.<sup>4</sup> Certainly books were studied and books were written on metre and rhetoric: Aldhelm's Letter to Acircius, 695 (a treatise on Latin metre), and Bede's De Arte Metrica and De Schematibus et Tropis, all of which, although they attest to an interest in the formalities of poetic expression, are concerned with Latin metre and rhetoric, not at all with those of native English poetry. Thus one must conclude that criticism and popular practice involved two entirely different poetic traditions.

Old English writings themselves throw out suggestive hints about the principles of poetic composition. Bede writes

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Handboc of King Alfred (C. E. Wright, The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England [Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1939], pp. 21-3).

<sup>3</sup>The only vernacular poem of Bede's which is extant is the five-line death-bed song recorded by his disciple Cuthbert; although King Alfred is traditionally associated with several poems, none can absolutely be attributed to him.

<sup>4</sup>The Skaldskaparmal part of the Prose Edda of Snorri

of Caedmon, the illiterate stable-hand who would flee entertainments when he saw the harp coming, lest he be called upon to make verses with the rest of the company, and who one night received the gift which made him earliest among singers of Christian poetry in English. From Bede's account we learn that to the words which came to Caedmon in his dream he "sōna monig word in paet ilce gemet. Gode wyrðes songes tōgeþēodde."<sup>5</sup> We also learn that Caedmon was not a lettered poet who translated the Bible, but an oral singer to whom the Scriptures were interpreted, and who in turn ruminated over what he had learned so that the next day he might deliver paraphrased versions of them, divinely inspired and extempore, "mid þā māestan swētnisse ond inbrydnisse geglaencde" in English scopgereorde, the language of courtly poetry.<sup>6</sup>

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Sturlusson (1179-1241) contains the most important early account of the diction and figures of early Germanic poetry, specifically of that ornate (almost baroque) art of the Old Icelandic skald. While in actual practice and effect skaldic poetry differs from earlier Icelandic and Old English poetry, the categories which Snorri determines for the skaldic diction are all found in Old English poetry. However, the actual application of the Old Icelandic terms to Old English has not met with universal critical agreement. See below, appendix A.

<sup>5</sup>The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People, ed. and trans. Thomas Miller, The Early English Text Society, original series No. 96, part 1, section 2 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), p. 344.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 342. For a discussion of Caedmon as an oral singer, see F. P. Magoun, Jr., "Bede's Story of Caedmon: The Case History of an Anglo-Saxon Oral Singer," Speculum, XXX (1955), 49-63; discussed below, chapt. V, p. 166.

The nature of this scopgereorde and the skills valued in a 'lay-crafty' man are best illustrated in the passage in Beowulf in which the warriors entertain themselves while returning from Grendel's mere:

Hwīlum cyninges þegn,  
guma gilphlaeden,      gidða gemyndig,  
sē ðe ealfela      ealdgesegen  
worn gemunde,      word oþer fand  
sōðe gebunden;      secg eft ongan  
sið Bēowulfes      snytttrum styrian  
ond on spēd wrecan      spel gerāde  
wordum wrixlan;<sup>7</sup>

Here a king's thane, apparently, but not certainly, the scop himself, could draw from a traditional body of material and themes and find other words with which to frame a tale of the recent exploits of Beowulf, in the same impromptu manner as Caedmon praising the King of Heaven or Widsith extolling the virtues of the gracious and gold-adorned queen Ealhild. The Beowulf poet here praises the skill involved in linking and varying words-- obviously the most distinctive aspect of the poetic delivery-- but unfortunately he does not tell us what the links and variations are, or how they function. Honoured though the scop was in aristocratic Anglo-Saxon society, and popular though his poetry and its religious counterpart were, we find no further contemporary comment on the principles of Old English diction and figuration; the rest we must deduce from the poems themselves.

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<sup>7</sup>Fr. Klaeber, ed., Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, 3rd ed. (Boston: Heath, 1950), ll. 867-73. All references to Beowulf, Widsith, Deor and Finnsburg will be from this edition. References to all other Old English poems will be from George P. Krapp and Elliott V. K. Dobbie, eds., The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 6 vols. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1931-53);

One wonders how much of the traditional diction and figuration used in the eleventh century, even prior to the Norman Conquest, was fully understood by writers and scribes, since these aspects of the poetry went into rapid decline after 1066.<sup>8</sup> In 1065 the Chronicle poem The Death of Edward still contains the poetic epithet, although much reduced in frequency and effectiveness; but by 1100 the poem Durham lacks the distinctive and varied poetic compound, although it is completely native in other aspects of style. Similarly, two twelfth century poems, Grave (c. 1150) and the Worcester Fragments (c. 1170) are fully in the native alliterative tradition and yet all but lack the poetic and archaic compounds (only eorðhūs, which is found also in Layamon's Brut, is from the Old English).<sup>9</sup> Further evidence of the decline of the diction and figures of Old English poetry is seen in Henry of Huntingdon's claim to present in his History (c. 1125-1130) a word-for-word translation of Brunanburh "so that we may learn from the weight of the words the weight of the deeds and spirit of that race."<sup>10</sup>

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hereafter abbreviated ASPR. Line references will follow each quotation in the text and unless otherwise indicated will be from Beowulf.

<sup>8</sup>It is of interest to note that not only were the more colourful aspects of Old English poetic style--the poetic compound and variation--the first to go out of practice, they were also about the last to be adequately studied and understood by later scholars; see appendix B, below.

<sup>9</sup>J. P. Oakden, Alliterative Poetry in Middle English: A Survey of Traditions, Vol. II (Manchester: Univ. of Manchester Press, 1935), p. 169.

<sup>10</sup>Henrici Archidiaconi Huntindoniensis, Historiarum Libri Octo (London, 1596), leaf 204 [misprint for 203]. All quotations

However, Henry seems reluctant to call Brunanburh a poem, but rather "Somewhat in the manner of song" ("quasi carminis modo"); he remarks on "the strange words and figures used" ("extraneistam verbis quam figuris usi"); and he does not give a word-for-word translation. Instead, he wrongly translates certain expressions (or translates them according to the usage of his day) and generally omits the most distinctive Old English rhetorical device--variation. Examples of faulty interpretation are his translations of secga swāte as 'the men sweated' and glād ofer grundas as 'cheered the depths.' As for variation, "and his broþor eac / Eadmund aepeling" (ll. 2-3) he simplifies to "and his brother Edmund." Similarly, the variation of both subject and object in

Swilce þā gebroþor    bēgen aetsomme  
cyning and aepeling,    cyððe sōhten  
Wesseaxena land. (ll. 57-9)

he simplifies to "afterwards both brothers returned to Wessex." He also reduces the beasts of battle theme to a simple enumeration of beasts, with all variation omitted except hyrned nebban. A kite appears (apparently a translation for earn aeftan hwīt), also a dog (apparently a translation of dēor). Finally, the highly poetic figure for sword, hamora lāfan, is lost completely in some confusion concerning "the survivors of the house of the dead Edward." Thus such difficulties as Henry encountered in his 'translation' bear eloquent witness to the decline in the under-

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from Henry are from the bottom recto and top verso of this leaf; any corruptions of Latin are due to the edition used; the translations are by P. M. Swan, University of Saskatchewan.



standing of Old English language and figuration, especially since Brunanburh is not basically a complex poem.

Although external critical comment on Old English poetry is virtually lacking during the Middle English period, the alliterative poetry which occurs sporadically at this time shows in varying degrees the persistence of Old English poetic characteristics. However, even the highly alliterative Layamon's Brut of the early thirteenth century is quite different from Old English poetry, in spite of the nominal and adjectival compounds. These are much less frequent in Layamon than in Beowulf, are no more colourful often than simple words and are in many cases derived from Old English prose rather than poetry (e.g., aldorfaeder, wunderweorc). The Brut contains some compounds which derive from the Old English tradition (e.g., eorðhus and goldfāh), but it does not contain the kenning type of compound such as beadulēoma.<sup>11</sup> Certain poetic words for 'knight' and 'sea' occur during the fourteenth century alliterative revival: renk, segge, wye, freke, gome, flod and brymme, all of which have poetic equivalents in Old English.<sup>12</sup> But on the whole, the Old English poetic persists longest in basic alliteration (C. L. Wrenn suggests probably as a natural result of persistent language habits and speech patterns<sup>13</sup>), rather than in the diction and figuration.

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<sup>11</sup>Oakden, pp. 131-2.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 183-5.

<sup>13</sup>"On the Continuity of English Poetry," Anglia, LXXVI (1958), 51-2.

Thus Old English poetry as such faded from men's minds as the language was forgotten and as the manuscripts were gradually pushed back further into the dark corners of monastic libraries. Early Anglo-Saxon scholars, to be sure, believed in the legend that the monks of Tavistock Abbey formally tried to preserve an understanding of the Anglo-Saxon language.<sup>14</sup> However, later students dismiss the evidence for such a tradition as too flimsy to be of consequence.<sup>15</sup> It took the combined effects of the Renaissance, the reformation of the English church and the dissolution of the monasteries to see that the manuscripts of Old English poetry were eventually "brought owte of deadely darkenes to lyvely lighte...to recyve like thankes of the posterite,"<sup>16</sup> and to receive the slow processes of scholarship which would eventually make the poetry once more comprehensible.

One must not underestimate the religious and patriotic zeal of the mid-sixteenth century; for in the absence of a purely literary interest in native antiquities, one must give credit to the historical and theological interests of such great

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<sup>14</sup>James Ingram, An Inaugural Lecture on the Utility of Anglo-Saxon Literature (Oxford, 1807), p. 5.

<sup>15</sup>Eleanor Adams, Old English Scholarship in England from 1566-1800, Yale Studies in English, Vol. LV (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1917), pp. 21-3.

<sup>16</sup>John Leland, The Laboryeuse Journey of John Leland, quoted in Robin Flower, "Lawrence Nowell and the Discovery of England in Tudor Times," Proceedings of the British Academy, XXI (1935), 47-8.

antiquarians and collectors as John Leland (1506-1552), Lawrence Nowell (d. 1576), Matthew Parker (1504-1575) and Sir Robert Bruce Cotton (1571-1631), who were responsible for preserving most of the poetic documents we now have. Religion and patriotism (not literary history) being the chief motives for collecting the manuscripts, it is not surprising that the first Old English publications were of a non-literary character<sup>17</sup> and that Henry of Huntingdon's comment on the strange words and figures of Brunanburh apparently passed unnoticed after the 1596 edition of his History.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of the lack of interest in native literary antiquities during most of the seventeenth century, activity in other antiquarian fields resulted in the preparation of various dictionaries and etymologies, in the establishment of an Anglo-Saxon lectureship at Cambridge in 1639,<sup>19</sup> and in the publication in 1643 of Bede's Ecclesiastical History and The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, making available Caedmon's Hymn and the various poems of the Chronicle. Then in 1651 the great Dutch philologist

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<sup>17</sup>The first publication of Anglo-Saxon materials was by Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, A Testimonie of Antiquity (1566 or 1567). The volume contains, all in Old English, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, some Scriptures, some epistles and a homily, and was intended to support Anglican doctrinal views (Harrison Ross Steeves, Learned Societies and English Literary Scholarship in Great Britain and the United States [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1913], pp. 8-9).

<sup>18</sup>See above, pp. 11-12.

<sup>19</sup>Actually, no lecture was ever delivered, probably because no adequate grammar or dictionary was available for the students (Adams, p. 52). Detailed accounts of the scholarship of this period can be found in Adams, chapt. II and Steeves, chapt. II.

Franciscus Junius (1597-1677) discovered in the library of Archbishop Ussher a codex of Old English poems on Old Testament subjects, which he did not doubt were the utterances of the poet Caedmon, to whom Bede had referred. Junius' publication of this codex in 1655 marks the first really significant achievement in the history of Old English poetic scholarship, since it made available one of the largest bodies of Old English poetry.

The relationship between this codex, especially the Genesis B portion, and Paradise Lost, in which are found many parallels of spirit, imagery and elevation of style, has long intrigued scholars;<sup>20</sup> but of greater significance to this present study is the fact that Milton in his History of Britain makes one of the first published comments in English on the diction and figures of an Old English poem, Brunanburh. Milton seems to have understood something of Old English prose, for he refers to the 'Saxon Annalist' as a source for his history. He was also aware of the existence of poetry among the Anglo-Saxons, referring both to Caedmon's miracle and to Alfred's skill in 'Saxon' poetry;<sup>21</sup> but he does not seem to recognize Brunanburh as poetry, although he notices an abrupt change in style at this point in the Chronicle:

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<sup>20</sup>Little can be determined other than the fact that Milton could not have read the published Junius codex and that he and Junius may have been acquainted (J. W. Lever, "Paradise Lost and the Anglo-Saxon Tradition," Review of English Studies, XXIII [1947], 106).

<sup>21</sup>John Milton, The Uncollected Writings, Vol. XVIII of The Works (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1938), p. 139.

The Saxon Annalist wont to be sober and succinct, whether the same or another writer, now laboring under the weight of his Argument, and over-charg'd, runs on a sudden into such extravagant fansies and metaphors, as bare him quite beyond the scope of being understood. Huntingdon, though himself peccant enough in this kind, transcribes him word for word as a Pastime to his Readers. I shall only summe up what of him I can attain....<sup>22</sup>

Obviously Milton's comment on "extravagant fansies and metaphors" is little more than Henry of Huntingdon translated, but it is remarkable that this early comment saw the diction and imagery as basic to the problem of comprehension and that the comment was made by one of the great English poets. One can torture oneself with speculations on what Milton might have said about Old English poetry had he been able to understand the language more fully.

Since the time of Junius, interest was gradually increasing in the literary antiquities of Northern countries; but unfortunately for the study of Old English, the interest began to focus on Scandinavian antiquities, a focus due in large part to the influence of the Danish scholar and physician Olaus Wormius (1598-1654), whose Literatura Runica (1636, 1651) made available names, forms and illustrations of early Icelandic poetry. The prose Edda of Snorri Sturlusson was published shortly thereafter by Resenius, another Danish scholar. Since there was no comparable ars poetica for Old English poetry, it is little wonder that the rule-loving Augustan temperament should be attracted

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<sup>22</sup>The History of Britain, Vol. X of The Works (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1932), p. 233; cf. Henry of Huntingdon above, pp. 11.

to a literature with its own set of rules. In addition, late seventeenth century critics, such as Sir William Temple, were attracted to the heroic spirit of early Scandinavian poetry, especially as displayed in "The Death Song of Ragnar Lodbrog." Since the only Old English poetry published to date (except for the 'incomprehensible' Brunanburh) appeared to be little more than poetical paraphrases of the Old Testament, a subject familiar to everyone, it is not surprising, really, that attention was focused on the more exciting and comprehensible literature of ancient Scandinavia. Thus, significant though the essays of Sir William Temple might be ('Of Heroic Virtue,' 1686 or 1687, and 'Of Poetry,' 1689) in the development of interest in Northern literature, they are of minimal interest here. Temple's comments on poetic style are concerned mainly with the hundred-odd 'Runes' of 'Gothic' poetry (i.e. the various alliterative line patterns of, mainly, Icelandic literature),<sup>23</sup> not with Old English diction and imagery.

It seems ironic that the greatest surge of Anglo-Saxon scholarship between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries should

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<sup>23</sup>Continuing in the error begun by Wormius, Temple believed that all medieval records and sagas were originally in runes (Ethel Seaton, Literary Relations of England and Scandinavia in the Seventeenth Century [Oxford: Clarendon, 1935], p. 229). He also uses the term 'Gothic' in the seventeenth century political sense of all Germanic tribes, not in its eighteenth century aesthetic sense (Samuel Kliger, The Goths in England [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1952], pp. 1-4). He also believed that rhymes were introduced into later Latin by barbaric 'Runers' and that the word 'rhyme' was derived from 'rune' rather than from rhythmus ('Of Poetry,' Five Miscellaneous Essays, ed. Samuel Holt Monk [Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1963], p. 190). On the whole, however, Temple's essays are coloured by his strongly neo-classical outlook.

occur at the height of the Augustan period. But such a coincidence more than explains why the energy of the Oxford group of antiquarians virtually was exhausted with the death of its leader, George Hickes. After all, the quarrels between the 'ancients' and the 'moderns' did not concern the ancient vernacular.

This Oxford group produced an amazing amount of work in most phases of Anglo-Saxon studies, much of which is extremely important to the subsequent history of Old English poetic studies, but little of which is concerned with poetic style, and even less with diction and imagery.

The impetus to this surge of Anglo-Saxon studies was George Hickes' Institutiones Grammaticae Anglo-Saxonicae et Moeso-Gothicae, 1689, a much-needed, comprehensive Old English grammar, which was, although reputedly not great in itself, influential enough to attract to Hickes an ardent group of scholars.<sup>24</sup> But whatever the shortcomings of this book, it provided an important statement of the grammatical rules governing the Old English language, even though nothing is said of the function of this language in poetry. Actually, one of the few comments on poetic language in the late seventeenth century came from Edward Thwaites, who wrote to Hickes concerning Judith sometime between 1689 and 1698:

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<sup>24</sup>Its catalogue of manuscripts lists only four items for Cotton Vitellius A 15, Judith being the only poem (p. 175). Doubtless this one poem was noted because of Junius' early transcript of only this part of the codex (ASPR, Vol. IV, p. xxii). The Old English grammar part of the Institutiones was not appreciably altered for Hickes' 1705 Thesaurus.

I have seen Junius' copy of it, w<sup>ch</sup> seems rather to be a sermon than a fragment of Scripture. The narrative is much of the same nature with Caedmon, in whom I have sometime thought there was an affected obscurity, and a sort of Poetick madness...But I began to suspect it to be the natural unaffected Language of some People...<sup>25</sup>

However, such a passing remark does little more than confirm the Henry of Huntingdon-Milton attitude towards the language of Old English poetry.

Humphrey Wanley is perhaps the best remembered of the Oxford Saxonists, for his skilful paleography<sup>26</sup> resulted in a compendious catalogue comprising the second volume of Hickes' Thesaurus, 1705. It contains not only the basic text of the Finnsburh Fragment,<sup>27</sup> but the famous first notice of Beowulf, "tractatus nobilissimus Poetice scriptus...qui Poetseos Anglo-Saxonicae egregium est exemplum."<sup>28</sup> But Wanley describes the poem as an account of the wars of Beowulf the Dane against the King of the Swedes, a description justifiably blamed for discouraging interest in Beowulf as poetry. It apparently was a dull document

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<sup>25</sup>Quoted in Samuel Kliger, "The Neo-Classical View of Old English Poetry," JEGP, XLIX (1950), 520.

<sup>26</sup>Wanley was the first to notice Caedmon's hymn in Smith's Bede manuscript, and to draw Hickes' attention to 'Beowulph' sometime around 1700 (Kenneth Sisam, "Humphrey Wanley," Studies in the History of Old English Literature [Oxford: Clarendon, 1953], p. 276).

<sup>27</sup>Unfortunately, it was left untranslated and sandwiched between two Icelandic poems that were translated (W. P. Ker, "The Literary Influence of the Middle Ages," Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. X, p. 252).

<sup>28</sup>Quoted in Chauncey B. Tinker, The Translations of Beowulf: A Critical Bibliography (New York; 1903), pp. 7-8.



on Scandinavian history, not an exciting heroic poem.

Hickes' own views in the Thesaurus also had considerable influence for about a century, but his remarks on poetic style were mainly focused on metre. He only indirectly treats diction, by dividing Old English as a language into chronological periods: pure 'British Saxon,' including Caedmon, Bede and the Cotton Gospels (up to the Danish invasion); the degenerate 'Dani-Saxon,' including most of the prose and poetry (from the Danish to Norman Conquests); and 'Semi-Saxon' (from the Norman Conquest until Henry II.).<sup>29</sup> With modern information on dating, it is certain that stylistic differences encouraged this division.

In 1715 Elizabeth Elstob, a niece of Dr. Hickes and an active member of the Oxford 'Saxonists,' produced her English adaptation of Hickes' Grammar<sup>30</sup> with "A Defense of the Study of Northern Antiquities." This constituted the first work in English on the study of Anglo-Saxon; and although it is more concerned with the linguistic value of studying the 'Mother

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<sup>29</sup>It was this division which caused Hickes to challenge the idea that the Junius codex was really the work of Caedmon. He claimed that it was the work of an imitator and he used as argument three points, here summarized by Henry Morley: "the want of verbal correspondence between the lines in Alfred's version of Bede and the opening lines of the Paraphrase; his own impression that the dialect of the Paraphrase is that of extant verses on a victory of Athelstane in 938, and on the death of Edward in 975; and his impression that the Paraphrase was full of Danish idioms, indicating the language of a Northumbrian who wrote after the long occupation of that province by the Danes." (English Writers: An Attempt towards a History of English Literature, Vol. II [London, 1888], p. 110).

<sup>30</sup>Some eight grammars during the eighteenth century can be traced to Hickes' Institutiones (Adams, p. 92).

Tongue' than with the pleasures of the poetry, Miss Elstob's relative sensitivity to the beauty of Old English results in a few remarks on style. Notable is her eloquent and feminine defense of the sound of the language:

I never perceiv'd in the Consonants any Hardness, but such as was necessary to afford Strength, like the bones in a human body, which yield it Firmness and Support. So that the worst that can be said on this occasion of our Forefathers is, that they spoke as they fought, like Men.<sup>31</sup>

Her remarks on Old English Poetic style seem to go further than those of Hickes in showing a feeling for the poetry, but are again mainly concerned with metre and a vague perception of alliteration. However, Miss Elstob also implies that the vivid imagery and inversions, the "many bold Figures and frequent transposition of words," of Icelandic poetry (as described by Wormius) also apply to Old English poetry.<sup>32</sup> Again one can see the dominance of Scandinavian literature in the scholarship of this period.

Aside from this early flurry of activity, the eighteenth century is barer of Old English studies in general than any other period since the rediscovery of the manuscripts. After the death of Hickes in 1715 the Oxford group gradually disbanded,

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<sup>31</sup>The Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue with an Apology for the Study of Northern Antiquities (London, 1715), pp. x-xi.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

and little of interest to this study was produced. In 1726 Thomas Hearne published an edition of Maldon, fortunately, since the manuscript was among those destroyed in the disastrous Cotton library fire of 1731. In 1741 there is one favorable, but vague and unqualified, comment (apparently derived totally from Hickes and Elizabeth Elstob) on Old English poetic style in the anonymous Polite Correspondence. One of the characters in the work speaks of the difficult diction of 'Saxon' poetry and the unsettled metre, but he praises the charm of the 'Poetick Spirit' which is revealed when one is familiar with the poetry.<sup>33</sup> Otherwise, nothing of direct importance to the present study occurred during the mid-eighteenth century.

It is difficult to say why Anglo-Saxon literature was so neglected in the eighteenth century. One cannot help feeling that had the critics of the day understood Old English as well as they did Greek or Latin, perhaps the polite eighteenth century man of letters would have found something to admire in the formulaic sophistication of the heroic society revealed in Beowulf. Or perhaps poets like James Thomson (1700-1748) who could write of the 'circling flood;' 'billowy foam,' 'dark'brown water' or 'trembling stream,' would have found a kindred spirit in the poet who wrote of flōdes wylm, geofon ȳpum weal, flōdȳpum, wado weallende, and fealone flōd--in spite of the different motives for

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<sup>33</sup>Alan Duguld McKillop, "A Critic of 1741 on Early Poetry," Studies in Philology, XXX (1933), 511.

these synonyms and periphrases. But instead, literary interest in things of the past was inspired by thoughts of the Celtic bard, the Scandinavian skald and the middle English minstrel, not the Anglo-Saxon scop.

Particularly pervasive is the influence of Wormius' Icelandic studies. They inspired Thomas Gray's translations from the Old Norse, the paraphrases of Thomas Warton, Sr. (1748) and the Five Pieces of Runic Poetry of Bishop Percy (1763). They also inspired Percy's analysis of Old English metre<sup>34</sup> and Thomas Warton, Jr.'s terribly distorted remarks in the introductory essay to his History of English Poetry. In this essay Warton attempts to attribute almost everything to Scandinavian sources: he says Holofernes in Judith is called Baldor, rather badly mistaking the word baldor (ll. 9, 49, 334) for the name of a Scandinavian god hardly comparable with Holofernes; he says that the Genesis poet "adopts many images and expressions used in the very sublime description of the Eddic hell"; and even the "extraneous words" and "uncommon figures" of which Henry of Huntingdon complained, Warton says, are "all scaldic expressions or allusions."<sup>35</sup> Quite obviously Warton did not know what he was

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<sup>34</sup>Although Percy's statement of the nature of alliterative verse, 1765, is based on the Icelandic, it makes the appropriate analogy to the Old English ("on the Alliterative Metre, without Rhyme, in Pierce Plowman's Visions," Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, Vol. II [Edinburgh, 1858], pp. 216-7). In spite of the brevity and limitations of Percy's scheme for Anglo-Saxon metre, one is inclined to agree with Jakob Schipper

talking about; and in any case, he was apparently hostile to the alliterative tradition and considered that nothing of poetical value remained in Anglo-Saxon literature.<sup>36</sup> Even his famous footnote drawing attention to Beowulf is no more than a translation of Wanley.<sup>37</sup>

As for the diction of Old English poetry, practically nothing was said during these years.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps the most interesting comment comes from Thomas Tyrwhitt, who dismisses early theories of Old English metre and gives the language credit for making the poetry different from the prose:

I confess myself unable to discover any metrical distinction of the Anglo-Saxon poetry from prose, except a greater pomp of diction, and a more stately kind of march...It is plain that alliteration must have had very powerful charms for the ears of our ancestors, as we find that Anglo-Saxon poetry, by the help of this embellishment alone, even after it had laid aside the pompous phraseology, was able to maintain itself, without rhyme or metre, for several centuries.<sup>39</sup>

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that it is "remarkably correct" (A History of English Versification [Oxford: Clarendon, 1910], pp. 20-1).

<sup>35</sup>Thomas Warton, The History of English Poetry, rev. ed. [Richard Price], Vol. 1 (London, 1824), p. xxxix.

<sup>36</sup>A. M. Kinghorn, "Warton's History and Early English Poetry," English Studies, XLIV (1963), 200.

<sup>37</sup>"The curious reader is also referred to a Danish Saxon poem, celebrating the wars which Beowulf, a noble Dane descended from the royal stem of Scyldinge, waged against the Kings of Swedeland" (Warton, p. 2n.).

<sup>38</sup>Thomas Gray mentions certain linguistic aspects in his essay on metre and rhyme (e.g. he sees the Middle English y-prefix as "the old Anglo-Saxon augment" ge- and the Middle English

"Pompous phraseology" and "more stately kind of march" are decidedly vague as critical evaluations, but Tyrwhitt must have been referring to the Old English poetic compound and variation, which eventually declined in frequency and colour toward the end of the Anglo-Saxon period.

Thus from the Old English period until the end of the eighteenth century only the most general of comments had been made on Old English poetry, its style and language. Considering that most of the manuscripts had been available for about 250 years, it is remarkable that little progress was made beyond the collecting and cataloguing of relics, the occasional publication of a poetic manuscript and a few debates about the nature of the metre. Obviously deterrent to the development of interest was the absence of an Old English Snorri or Aristotle; but even more than that, nothing in Old English poetry had fired the imagination of critics and scholars. Maldon and Beowulf, the two works most likely to inspire interest, were either published late or unimpressively described. But in 1786 two widely separated events took place which were eventually to have important effects on the study of Old English poetry, especially of Beowulf: Sir William Jones discovered that Sanskrit and Old

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in terminations as the Anglo-Saxon infinitive ending); but he seems to retain the Saxon-Danish chronological division (Poems, Letters and Essays, ed. John Drinkwater, Everyman's Library, No. 628 [London: Dent, 1955], pp. 328-9).

<sup>39</sup>"An Essay on the Language and Versification of Chaucer," in Geoffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, ed. Thomas Tyrwhitt, Vol. I (Edinburgh, 1860), p. lxii.

Persian were intimately related to Latin, Greek and Celtic, a discovery which started the evolution of the Indo-European theory of race and language; and Grimur Jonsson Thorkelin (1752-1829) travelled to England to make transcripts of the Beowulf manuscript.

## CHAPTER II

EARLY CRITICISM AND THE INTEREST IN BEOWULF:  
1786-1881

Although Thorkelin's mission to England and Jones' linguistic discoveries make 1786 an important year in Old English scholarship, neither event had any noticeable effect on Old English poetic criticism for at least two decades. Generally, Old English poetry remained inactive critically from the time of Tyrwhitt until 1801 when George Ellis published an edition and translation of Brunanburh in the second edition of his Specimens of the Early English Poets.<sup>1</sup> This marks the first attempt to present an Old English poem in an anthology of English poetry and also raises several interesting issues. First, it abandons Anglo-Saxon types and prints the poetry in modern orthography (retaining only the digraph æ), a factor possibly significant in making the topic more attractive to the general reader than the pseudo-manuscript types which were hitherto used. Second, Ellis gives a parallel literal translation, not in Latin but in English, thus showing some language derivations. However, most of his comments on style echo those of Tyrwhitt, Ellis' only addition being to note the inversions and abrupt transitions characteristic of Old English poetry. Unfortunately, rather than try to analyze these devices, he attributes them to 'artificial obscurity.'

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<sup>1</sup>It is found in the "Historical Sketch of the rise and progress of the English Poetry and Language," an introductory essay which is not contained in the first edition of 1790.



When one looks at even the first few lines of Ellis' text and literal translation, one ceases to wonder why no serious work was done on the style of Old English poetry. Nearly all the gross errors in this text and modernization obscure the periphrastic and figurative diction and the device of variation. For example, beorna beah gifa is modernized as, 'of Barons the bold chief,' and eaforen Edwardes as, 'as aforen in Edward's days.' bord weal appears as heord weal,<sup>2</sup> which not only destroys the alliteration with Brunanburh, but obscures the image of a wall of shields. The next hemistich, given as heowan heatho-lindga, with its poetic variation and metonymical compound, is wrongly rendered, 'they hew the lofty ones.' Finally, the well-known kenning hamora lafum is completely ignored, since the text is wrongly printed ha mera lafum and modernized as, 'the marches (borders) they leave.'<sup>3</sup> What Ellis' work does is to illuminate the interdependence of the paleographer, linguist and poetic critic; for until a fundamental question like the frequency of alliteration was decided, a word like heord would seem acceptable. Also, until one knew what to expect of a language grammatically, peculiar readings like ha mera lafum would go unchallenged.

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<sup>2</sup>Most of the anomalous readings in this edition are found in Cotton Tiberius B iv, the most careless and corrupt of the Brunanburh manuscripts and one which Ellis claims to have consulted (ASPR, Vol. VI, pp. xxxiv-xxxv).

<sup>3</sup>George Ellis, Specimens of the Early English Poets, [2nd ed.] (London, 1801), pp. 14-31.

If Ellis encountered such difficulties with Brunanburh, a relatively straightforward poem, it is little wonder that historian Sharon Turner (1768-1847) had trouble with Beowulf, when he first discussed the poem in his History of the Anglo-Saxons (1799-1805), a work which went through many editions. Ellis' treatment of Brunanburh seems to indicate increased attention to Old English poetry; but there is little doubt that the power and grandeur of Beowulf, albeit dimly perceived at first, was really responsible for stimulating the study of Old English poetry. But unfortunately, during the first decades of the nineteenth century Beowulf was approached by men like Turner improperly equipped to deal with the complexity of the poetry, however skilled they may have been in reading prose documents.<sup>4</sup> In the first edition of his History, Turner treats Beowulf only briefly; his remarks on style consist of noting abundant speeches and 'occasional description.'<sup>5</sup>

Before Turner's third edition appeared, Thorkelin's editio princeps of Beowulf was published, in 1815, the result of much hard work and frustration. Commissioned by the Danish government to investigate a supposed monument of Danish history, Thorkelin had travelled to England to make a transcript of the Beowulf manuscript and had also employed a scribe to make a second transcript. Unfortunately, on the eve of publication most

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<sup>4</sup>John Earle, trans., The Deeds of Beowulf (Oxford, 1892), pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>5</sup>Chauncey B. Tinker, The Translations of Beowulf: A Critical Bibliography, Yale Studies in English, XVI (New York, 1903), pp. 11-2.

of the papers were destroyed in the bombardment of Copenhagen (1807), and a greatly disheartened Thorkelin was finally persuaded to resume the work which resulted in the 1815 edition. The text and its Latin translation are notoriously inaccurate, containing nearly all the errors known to scribes and editors and some unbelievable readings like Hwaet wegar Dena.<sup>6</sup> Nor did Thorkelin recognize the sea-burial of Scyld or such obvious names as Hengest (mentioned four times) and Sigemund (mentioned twice). It is quite clear that nothing constructive about poetic diction could come from a text so faulty. Only two kind things can be said about this edition: it was the first edition of the complete poem, and the transcripts provide useful readings for parts of the manuscript which have subsequently deteriorated.

An anonymous review of Thorkelin's edition in Dansk Literatur-Tidende, 1815, by a man apparently using only the Latin translation, presents several points slightly related to style: the critic notes the repetition in the speeches, he suggests the possibility of an English redactor joining several skaldic lays and elaborating on the speeches and on the piety, and he comments on the similarities of verse forms and vocabulary among the Northern languages.<sup>7</sup>

Like Thorkelin, Sharon Turner was motivated in his work by patriotism and the idea of national history. It is a pity

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>7</sup>Franklin Cooley, "Early Danish Criticism of Beowulf," ELH, VII (1940), 52-3.

that the earliest English study of Beowulf should have been included in a work on the history, laws and general culture of the period—such a position tends to emphasize the historical rather than the literary merit of the poem. Although Turner's work on the literature is limited and Turner himself shares the neo-classical historical view that Old English poetry was rude and barbaric, he has a surprising amount to say about the diction and imagery.<sup>8</sup> First, he claims that it is stylistically linked with modern English poetry: "it was preparing to assume the styles, the measures and the subjects, which in subsequent ages were so happily displayed as to deserve the notice of the latest posterity";<sup>9</sup> such a statement apparently reverses Warton's opinion that Old English poetry bears no resemblance to modern English poetry.

Unfortunately, Turner is too often willing to dismiss as obscure the parts which he does not understand, and these parts frequently contain the richest patches of poetry. He also makes such huge errors as calling Scyld's funeral-ship a war-ship and the noun hilde the name of a war goddess. But his few translated portions of Beowulf show some attempt to reproduce the periphrastic character of the original, for example, 'the

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<sup>8</sup>After the third edition, 1820, Turner made no further changes in his History beyond footnotes of recognition (Tinker, p. 10).

<sup>9</sup>Sharon Turner, The History of the Anglo-Saxons, 5th ed. Vol. III (London, 1828), pp. 262-3.

'the well-bound timber' and 'the warrior directed the sea-skilled men.'<sup>10</sup>

In his comments on style Turner constantly mentions the primitiveness of the age that produced it. First, he sees the 'metaphor,' repetition and variation as direct results of the Anglo-Saxon imagination and feeling:

the imagination exerted itself in forming those abrupt and imperfect hints or fragments of similes which we call metaphors: and the feeling expressed its emotions by that redundant repetition of phrases, which though it added little to the meaning of the poet's lay, was yet the emphatic effusion of his heart, and excited consenting sympathies in those to whom it was addressed. This habit of paraphrasing the sentiment is the great peculiarity of the Anglo-Saxon mind.<sup>11</sup>

Thus Turner observes most of the main features of the poetic diction, although he holds a distinctly neo-classical view of metaphor and variation and loads his comments by using such words as 'imperfect' and 'redundant.' And like most historians and literary historians of the nineteenth century he does not pass beyond general comment into specific criticism.

Word arrangement and grammatical peculiarities elicit from Turner the criticism that the poetic language of the Anglo-Saxons is 'barbarous,' 'half-formed' and obscure,<sup>12</sup> and comparable to a child's first utterances--first nouns, then verbs and pronouns. In addition, he claims that Old English poetry is "without particles, without conjugations and declensions, with great

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

contraction of phrase, with abrupt transitions...."<sup>13</sup> Only an ignorance of Old English grammar could result in the conclusion that the poetry lacks grammatical inflections; so it is quite logical, then, that Turner found a hindrance to clarity in the absence of particles, "those abbreviations of language which are the invention of man in the more cultivated ages of society, and which contribute to express our meaning more discriminatingly, and to make it more clearly understood."<sup>14</sup>

It is possibly for this reason also that Turner considers Judith (which he recognizes as a later poem) a more restrained, polished and comprehensible work than most other Old English poems.<sup>15</sup> Certainly, Judith is an example of energetic, coherent narrative verse, as well as being a familiar story; it does not present nearly the problems of interpretation that something as fragmentary and unfamiliar as, say, Finnsburh does. But one suspects that Turner's primary criterion of judgment is his ability to understand the work, a suspicion confirmed in his statement that the characteristic poetic epithets and allusions also thwart clarity and indicate barbarity:

In prose, and in cultivated poetry, every conception of the author is clearly expressed and fully made out. In barbaric poetry, and in Anglo-Saxon poetry, we have

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 309.

most commonly abrupt, imperfect hints, instead of regular description or narration.<sup>16</sup>

Turner even says that the poetic compound and periphrasis show poverty of mind or poverty of vocabulary. The periphrasis, he claims, is merely an extension of a habit of 'piling on' epithets, for instance in greeting a chieftain with the idea of inciting liberality.<sup>17</sup> Although he does not pursue this idea, Turner here suggests that epithets are varied and are meant to describe many aspects of a thing, not merely to repeat the same idea. Of 'metaphor' and diction in general, he says that "until new words are devised, the old names of real things are necessarily, though violently applied,"<sup>18</sup> and that the strong heroic feeling of the poetry is expressed in violent words rather than by real effusion of detail or genuine emotion.<sup>19</sup>

Although Turner was misled and faulty in some of his criticisms, he had more to say on the diction of Old English poetry and less on the rhythm than most early nineteenth century critics; and he implied, even if accidentally, some important evaluations of diction and imagery. However, he was limited by his difficulty with the text and by a condescending neo-classical attitude:

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 270-1.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 275-6.

In thus considering our ancient poetry as an artificial and mechanical thing cultivated by men chiefly as a trade, we must not be considered as confounding it with those delightful beauties which we now call poetry...True poetry is the offspring of cultivated mind...Hence, all that we owe to our Anglo-Saxon ancestors is, that, by accident or design, they perpetuated a style of composition different from the common language of the country....<sup>20</sup>

At least he recognized that the language of Old English prose and poetry were very different, but the negative nature of his recommendation would hardly inspire lovers of old poetry to seek out further poetic beauties in Beowulf. The main implication of Turner's essay is that Beowulf is a valuable source of historical-cultural information, even if hardly worth the name of poetry.

The most encouraging advance in Old English studies in the early nineteenth century is an essay by Richard Price in his edition of Warton's History. Price scorns the preconceived notions of 'confusions and anomalies' erroneously perpetuated by such men as Turner, and he attempts to come to grips with the text. To an ardent philologist, he says, there is nothing more interesting and striking "than the order and regularity preserved in Anglo-Saxon composition, the variety of expression, the innate richness, and plastic power with which the language is endowed."<sup>21</sup> Price is also the first English critic to apply rules of metre to the interpretation of the text. For example,

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 274-5.

<sup>21</sup>[Richard Price], "Editor's Preface," Thomas Warton, The History of English Poetry, rev. ed., Vol. I (London, 1824), p. (112).



he quotes Turner's text and translation of Beowulf, lines 527-8:

"Gif thu Grendles dearst	If thou darest the Grendel
Night longne	The space of a long night
Fyrstne anbidan	awaits thee." <sup>22</sup>

Simply by recognizing grammatical relationship, he is able to make sense of the passage and restore the alliteration:

"Gif thu Grendles dearst	If thou darest Grendles
	(encounter...)
<u>N</u> ight longne fyrst	(A) night long space
<u>N</u> ean bidan	Near abide." <sup>23</sup>

Although the example does not pertain to the imagery or diction of the poem, it shows progress in the study of the text and concern for grammar, without which reasonable stylistic analysis is impossible.

Price's edition of The Battle of Brunanburh (1824) is an almost unbelievable improvement over Ellis'. In his notes Price discusses several aspects of diction and underlines the importance of paying close attention to grammatical inflections, "a practice almost wholly disused since the days of Hickes."<sup>24</sup> He makes specific corrections in meaning, by warning against the unthinking use of 'over-literal translations': for example, swāt means 'blood,' not 'sweat.' His attention to

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. (110)n.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. lxxxv.

grammar also enables him to spot the metaphorical nature of hamora-lafum meaning 'swords' and to point out another instance of this figure in Beowulf (l, 2829): "a similar phrase in Icelandic poetry would occasion no difficulty."<sup>25</sup> In his note on dinges-mere (which he admits he does not fully understand) he suggests the phrase "would then be a 'kenningar nafn' given to the ocean from the continual clashing of its waves," and parallel in construction with wiges-heard.<sup>26</sup> Although kenningar nafn means 'surname,' Price's description seems to suit the traditional idea of kenning. I believe this is the first instance of an Old Norse term being applied to an example of Old English poetic diction, although Elizabeth Elstob had noted parallels of effect and spirit.<sup>27</sup>

An important aspect of Price's work is the meticulousness with which he compares certain lines in Brunanburh with similar terms and hemistichs in other poems, especially Beowulf, Judith and Maldon. He is also the first critic to point out similarities between the 'beast' passages in Brunanburh and Judith and to suppose a common source.<sup>28</sup> In this respect Price seems unconsciously to be laying the foundation for studies of formulaic diction. Also in relation to diction he

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. xcv n.-xcvi n.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. xcvi n.; see appendix A.

<sup>27</sup>See above, chapt. I, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup>Price, p. c n.

notes that it is "a common practice of Anglo-Saxon poetry to unite, by alliteration, lines (i.e. hemistichs) wholly unconnected by the sense...."<sup>29</sup> On the whole, then, Price's approach to Old English poetry is infinitely more systematic and text-centred than hitherto was the practice. He questions matters of text, supports his conclusions with examples from other poems, and uses grammar, syntax and certain figurative devices to explain areas of doubt. Although he still makes errors (he insists that heapo means 'high'), the number of points he clarifies by grammatical and linguistic analysis, make this edition the first useful one, in the modern sense.

In his introduction Price noted that the work of John Josias Conybeare was on the eve of publication. Although Conybeare prepared much of the work in The Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry before 1820, it was not published until 1826, posthumously by his brother. One cannot then look for any influence from Price, nor much from Grundtvig.<sup>30</sup> Although Conybeare's is the first book in English to deal exclusively with Anglo-Saxon poetry, it says very little about diction and imagery. It contains an important early discussion of Beowulf, with partial text translated into both Latin and modern English) and summaries of the parts for which the text is not given. But

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. xc n.

<sup>30</sup>Although Grundtvig's first works on Beowulf appeared in 1817 and 1820, this Danish scholar apparently had little influence on English critics of his day; see below, p. 42.

like Turner, Conybeare relies rather heavily on the accusation of 'obscurity' whenever he is confronted with difficulty. For example, his treatment of the haunted mere passage (half-modernized and half-summarized) only picks up the atmosphere of terror, the details being badly misinterpreted.<sup>31</sup>

As professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, Conybeare had ample opportunity to study the manuscripts of the Bodleian and Cotton libraries and took several trips to Exeter to peruse the poetic codex there. A description of the Exeter Book constitutes an important section of the Illustrations; but, rather typically of first examinations, two of the most interesting poems, The Seafarer and The Wanderer, are overlooked. Also important are his essays on Anglo-Saxon metre, with commentary by the editor.<sup>32</sup> Much of the general information in these essays is still valid, but the errors in detail only go to show how much philological study was needed before the criticism of any area of poetic style could significantly progress.

In his comments on style Conybeare abandons the three divisions of 'Saxon' poetry, particularly the one between 'pure Saxon' and 'Dano-Saxon.' Instead, he sees the difference as a matter of elevation of style:

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<sup>31</sup>John Josias Conybeare, Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, ed. William Daniel Conybeare (London, 1826), pp. 183-4.

<sup>32</sup>Conybeare's essays on metre, with all their faults, represent the first systematic look at Old English scansion and affirm "that Anglo-Saxon poetry does really differ from their prose by the usage of metrical divisions, and that the general rhythm and cadence of their verse is not altogether undiscoverable" (Conybeare, p. vii).

It [pure 'Saxon'] consists in the absence of poetical ornament and diction. When an author from the nature of his subject (as Alfred in the version ...of Boethius) or from his incapacity for any thing better, writes in a style little elevated above the ordinary tenour of prose, they select him as one of the spring heads of 'the pure well of Saxon undefiled.' Thus a tedious description of Durham, which has nothing of poetry except the metrical arrangement, is praised as genuine and sterling; but if the bard should attempt the inversions and figures of a loftier strain, he is immediately set down as a Dano-Saxon.<sup>33</sup>

Not only does Conybeare end forever the artificial chronological division of Old English poetry, he also attempts general evaluations of various poems.<sup>34</sup> In matters of poetic diction and variation he simply gives credit to Turner's 'complete' study, although he considers himself the first to draw attention to "an artificial arrangement of the several phrases or clauses of which the sentence is constituted...termed...Parallelism," (so called by Bishop Lowth in discussing sacred Hebrew poetry).<sup>35</sup> He concludes that the device is too frequently used to be accidental and that it appears most frequently in poems on scriptural subjects; thus he implies a possible influence of the Scriptures on the style of Old English religious poetry. On the whole, Conybeare made an important contribution to the study

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>34</sup>For example, he praises the style of Beowulf: its characters are sustained; the speeches are natural and appropriate; the narrative is not so repetitious, inflated or ambitious as that of the Caedmonian poems, and it is superior to the 'almost unintelligible rhapsodies of the Edda.' (Ibid., p. 81).

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. xxviii-xxix.

of Old English poetry, and his work was consulted by English critics throughout the nineteenth century. He may have missed some important points and had an incomplete understanding of Beowulf, but he obviously had a feeling for the poetry and some insight into its mechanics.

Although the Danish scholar Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) published his first work on Beowulf in 1817 and a Danish translation in 1820, these early works had no serious influence on the English critics mentioned above. He is presented here because his influence is felt much later, and mainly by scholars on the Continent. Grundtvig's remarks on the style of Beowulf are brief; but his discovery in 1817 that Hygelac of Beowulf and Chochilaicus of Gregory of Tours were one and the same, is generally agreed to mark the beginning of modern Beowulf criticism. Although the linguistic knowledge which went into forming this conclusion is essential to an accurate study of poetic diction, the historical emphasis of the discovery was extremely unfortunate to the study of the poetry as poetry, since it set critics to pouring through genealogies, chronicles and sagas for historicity and analogues.

All the same, Grundtvig valued the poetry more highly than did most of his English contemporaries and scorned English critics for neglecting the poetry of their past.<sup>36</sup> The most

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<sup>36</sup>David J. Savage, "Grundtvig: A Stimulus to Old English Scholarship," Philologica, eds. Thomas A. Kirby and Henry Bosley Woolf (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1949), p. 277.

interesting aspect of his 1817 study is the symbolic interpretation he gives to Beowulf, similar to, but antedating by more than a century, that proposed in 1936 by J. R. R. Tolkien.

Grundtvig sees the unity of the poem in the balance between the two great parts of man's struggle,

since Grendel represents the evil spirit of time, the dragon the evil spirit of nature....But if the monster stories are not rooted and grounded, so to speak, in the historical matter which they are meant to carry and lift with them, their worth cannot be reckoned at a very high figure, whereas if they are so rooted and grounded, if we must find it reasonable that Denmark in a special way is linked to history and the land of the Geatas to nature, then the monster stories become temporary shadows, representations of that epic tale which the history of the North, seen in the light of truth, really makes, and then the poem as a whole receives a true mythical meaning.<sup>37</sup>

He also considers the poem the work of a conscious literary artist, whose inferior handling of the dragon episode is due to a characteristic English want of taste.<sup>38</sup>

Nor does Grundtvig's praise for the poem change in 1820, where he refers to it as:

a work of art boldly laid out, beautifully expressed, and in many ways gloriously executed, but nevertheless half-miscarried if taken as a unit....in my opinion the poem deserves and requires...a detailed and thorough study.<sup>39</sup>

Grundtvig's wholehearted praise of the poem's artistic merit is a refreshing change after the begrudging compliments paid by

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<sup>37</sup>Translated and quoted in Kemp Malone, "Grundtvig as Beowulf critic," RES, XVII (April, 1941), 132.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 132-3.

<sup>39</sup>Quoted ibid., p. 133.

more neo-classic scholars. He praises the restraint of the imagery and compares it favourably with that of Old Icelandic poetry:

The poet's style, finally, must be called excellent. The narrative is free and full, without the German prolixity, and without the cryptic brevity so often found in the poems of the Edda; it has the flowers of thetoric [sic] without swarming with far-fetched comparisons like the later Icelandic verse. If one adds to this the poem's restraint, its warmth of feeling in many passages, and its religious fundamental tone, then one must avow that the poem in every way is a remarkable monument of olden times.<sup>40</sup>

Why Grundtvig's early opinions, so sympathetic with modern critical attitudes, failed to become popular is hard to say. Perhaps the fact that he wrote in Danish restricted early availability of his work, but more than likely his voice was too weak in the general clamor of philology and race history.

It was Sir William Jones' linguistic discoveries of 1786 which started the evolution of the Indo-European theory of race and language, with its far-reaching effects in literary and linguistic thought. In addition, Herder, F. Wolf, Lachmann and the Grimm brothers were engaged in explaining and analyzing ballads, epics and myth: studies which readily evolved into the ethnic consciousness which permeated the nineteenth century. The development of comparative philology and other linguistic studies, with which the name Grimm is

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<sup>40</sup>Quoted ibid., p. 134.



especially associated, is of particular interest to this study, since knowledge of cognates and derivations must invariably lead to clearer understanding, not only of the language itself, but of what the artist is doing with the language. Understanding philology, a scholar would see leode as a cognate of the German leute, not as a derivative of 'lad' as Ellis earlier did.<sup>41</sup> It has already been shown how Price's attention to the details of language led to a quite successful version of Brunanburh; but, then, Price often referred to the opinion of Grimm.

Showing the growing interest in philology are R. K. Rask's Angelsaksisk Sproglaere, 1817, the first adequate grammar of Old English,<sup>42</sup> Thorpe's English translation of Rask, 1831, and J.M. Kemble's first edition of Beowulf, 1833, a vast improvement over that of Thorkelin. But the event which really changed English scholarship was the argument engendered by Kemble's review in The Gentleman's Magazine of Thorpe's Analecta Anglo-Saxonica, 1834. This quarrel drew the battle lines decisively between the 'Old' and 'New Saxonists,' that is between the 'amateur' gentleman scholar and the demanding specialist critic. The opinions aired in The Gentleman's Magazine of 1834 are hardly what one would expect of a gentleman. With sometimes

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<sup>41</sup>See Ellis, p. 18 n.

<sup>42</sup>Rask's Grammar also contains the first adequately-edited portion of Beowulf (ll. 53-114) (Cooley, p. 66).

devastating rhetoric Kemble praises the systematic method of Thorpe's book, cries out for a good dictionary and virtually damns the work of the 'illustrious obscures' of Oxford for doing nothing but perpetuate the errors made one hundred years earlier by Hickes.<sup>43</sup> A chorus of irate gentlemen<sup>44</sup> then protest Kemble's harsh words, reminding him of the handicaps in early scholarship and accusing him of overly heavy and unthinking reliance on German and Danish scholars.<sup>45</sup>

Whatever the complaints of the 'Old Saxonists,' the new methods, inspired by German scholars, were to dominate the criticism of Old English poetry for the next fifty years and even beyond. The most important result of these new studies was, of course, the attention paid to the adequate editing of the poetic texts, since no serious criticism can exist if critics do not understand their sources. The most unfortunate aspect of this German-orientated criticism, however, was that it tended to disregard the poetry altogether, to concentrate only on the philological aspects of language, and to become involved in side issues of myth, analogues and historicity.

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<sup>43</sup>The Gentleman's Magazine, Vol. I n.s. (1834), 392; Vol. II n.s. (1834), 602-4.

<sup>44</sup>The articles are signed only by initials: I. J., T. W., K. N. and B. I.J. is probably James Ingram, Rawlinsonian Professor of Anglo-Saxon, 1803-8, Fellow and later President of Trinity; T. W. is possibly Thomas Wright, an early Anglo-Saxon scholar; and B., who tried to mediate in the quarrel, is probably Bosworth; K. N. I have been unable to trace.

<sup>45</sup>Gentleman's Magazine, Vol. II n.s., pp. 140, 364, 483, 594.

The first few years after the quarrel saw the appearance of some important English works. In 1835 Kemble brought out an improved second edition of Beowulf. Although his introductory remarks are mainly concerned with matters of philology and history, his collection and comparison of heapo- compounds, Tinker says, "laid the foundation of all modern studies on the Old English compound."<sup>46</sup> However, by the time of his Beowulf translation (1837), Kemble had embarked on a study of mythological interpretations and seemed to forget that he was discussing poetry.

In 1838 three works were published, all significant for quite different reasons. Edwin Guest's ambitious and comprehensive History of English Rhythms was to become a standard work on metre in the nineteenth century and contains a full account of Old English verse and metre. Its weakest point is Guest's inaccurate understanding of word stress. Joseph Bosworth's Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon was a badly needed aid to the increased understanding of Old English, and has, in revised editions, remained a standard work.<sup>47</sup> Last, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's long essay on Anglo-Saxon poetry, which appeared anonymously in the North

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<sup>46</sup>Tinker, p. 34.

<sup>47</sup>The later revisions and supplements (1882-1920) by T. N. Toller have made this the most comprehensive of Old English dictionaries. Commonly called Bosworth-Toller, it is a basic tool in any criticism of Old English poetic language.

American Review, made the subject widely known in America.<sup>48</sup>

Before taking up his professorial duties at Harvard in 1836, Longfellow journeyed for study purposes to Europe, where he met and received assistance from Bosworth, at that time preparing his dictionary. Longfellow was not a great Anglo-Saxon scholar—his work is nearly completely derivative—but his value lies in his plea for the romantic beauty, "the dark chambers and mouldering walls of an old national literature, all weather-stained and in ruins."<sup>49</sup> He is similarly eloquent on the subject of Beowulf, which he calls 'a simple, straight forward narrative,'<sup>50</sup> and on the subject of its style:

The style likewise is simple,—perhaps one should say austere. The bold metaphors which characterize nearly all the Anglo-Saxon poems we have read, are for the most part wanting in this. The author...is too much in earnest to multiply epithets and gorgeous figures.<sup>51</sup>

Quite obviously Longfellow understood little about the style of Beowulf, although he did notice its restraint, as compared with other Old English poems. As for the style being simple and straight-forward, the scholars on the continent were starting to dissect Beowulf to prove exactly the contrary.

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<sup>48</sup>The first significant mention of Anglo-Saxon in North America consisted of two articles by Henry Wheaton in the North American Review, October, 1831. These were summary-type book reviews of Thorpe's translation of Rask's Grammar and of Conybeare's Illustrations.

<sup>49</sup>Henry W. Longfellow, The Poets and Poetry of Europe, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, 1871), p. 1.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

Back in the late eighteenth century Herder had said, "Read Homer as if you were singing in the streets!"<sup>52</sup> This, combined with the strong influence of 'popular poetry' like Ossian, stimulated critics, especially German, to debate the question of 'folk epic.' Need a poem have a single poet, or may it be the collective composition of a people? From this query eventually arose the theory that folk epics could be dissected to show their ballad origin. Friederich Wolf first applied the method to Homer. Then Lachmann applied it to German literature, notably the Nibelungenlied, and, as James Routh describes it, 'the infection' spread to the study of all Germanic literature.<sup>53</sup> In 1840 Ludvig Ettmüller produced the first study of the 'inner history' of Beowulf, a study enforced in 1869 by Karl Müllenhof's persuasively detailed breakdown of the poem into its constituent lays, additions and interpolations, and finally rendered almost ridiculous by the strophic analysis of Herman Möller. An example of the difficulties created by the dissecting school (or lieder theorie) is Ettmüller's division of the simile in Beowulf, lines 1608ff. He regards the first part, "þaet hiteal gemealt ise gelīcost," as the original and the rest, "ðonne forstes bend Faeder onlāeteð,/ onwinde wāelrāpas...." as Christian interpolation.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Quoted in Francis B. Gummere, ed., Old English Ballads (Boston, 1899), p. xlii.

<sup>53</sup>James Edward Routh, Jr., Two Studies on the Ballad Theory of the Beowulf (Baltimore, 1905), p. 5.

<sup>54</sup>Francis B. Gummere, The Anglo-Saxon Metaphor (Halle, 1881), p. 7.

These studies are only indirectly related to diction, but the analyses of folk epics into constituent parts relied heavily on linguistic evidence to uncover a variety of dialect forms and archaisms. However, useful as this aspect of the lieder theorie may have been, the emphasis on lack of structural unity seriously hampered progress in the appreciation of Beowulf as poetry; who wanted to waste time on a poorly planned poem?<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps the greatest amount of stylistic criticism during the nineteenth century was done on metre. In addition to the 'two beat' theories prevalent in England since the time of Hickes and based on the Icelandic metres made known by Wormius, there developed a 'four beat' theory. This theory maintained that the hemistich originally had four, not two, stresses and that strong syllables which do not carry alliteration are the Old English vestiges of this fundamental Indo-European rhythmic pattern.<sup>56</sup> Actually, metre was so extensively studied during the nineteenth century that by the 1880's Edouard Sievers could present a full analysis and

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<sup>55</sup>William Floyd Helmer, "Critical Estimates of Beowulf from the Early Nineteenth Century to the Present" (diss. Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1963), pp. 18-9. Albert B. Lord (The Singer of Tales [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960], chapt. I) reviews the relation of the ballad theory to diction; Routh, chapt. I reviews the major criticism of this school.

<sup>56</sup>The 'four beat' theory was usually followed by critics endorsing the lieder theorie, the first being Lachmann in his 1833 lecture 'Über das Hildebrandslied.' Lachmann is

classification of five metrical types which have since been only modified rather than fundamentally altered.

But perhaps the most prolific criticism of Old English poetry lay in the extrinsic areas of myth and history. It has already been noted that nationalistic interests were a great stimulus to early Beowulf scholarship; but the race-consciousness of nineteenth century thought, inspired partly by studies of oral and mythic origins of ballad and epic, tended to reinforce the emphasis on external factors and make subordinate the study of the poetry itself. J. M. Kemble, like Grundtvig in his later work, was much concerned with the mythical possibilities of Beowulf,<sup>57</sup> but this line of investigation was pursued more on the Continent than in England. Most English criticism of the mid-nineteenth century seems to reflect the "Germanic conception that literature is the organic creation of a national mind, the expression of a certain society, age, and national

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accredited with the first attempt to explain the rhythmical structure of alliterative verse (Max Kaluza, A Short History of English Versification, trans. A. C. Dunstan [London: George Allen, 1911], pp. 21-2). In addition, the 'four beat' school tended to the idea that the time between stresses was equal, a theory which fitted in well with that of sung ballad origin. The 'two beat' school, on the other hand, tended more to the idea that metre was not regular and singable, a theory which fitted in better with ideas of single authorship, written origin and Christian influence. These are generalizations, of course, but they represent the earliest stages of a schism which has always existed between groups of Beowulf critics.

<sup>57</sup>Most frequently studies of myth saw in the names Beowulf, Scyld and Scefing remnants of old nature myths, and from there it was but a short step to a variety of often fantastic nature allegories.

spirit."<sup>58</sup> The tendency to view old literature as a repository of historical information was not new to English criticism, but throughout the nineteenth century it all but obliterated any other kind of criticism of Old English poetry. Remarks on style are almost totally lacking.

Only Isaac Disraeli is the apparent exception, although most of his brief summary of Old English poetic style (1841) seems to be derived from Turner:

The tortuous inversion of their composition often leaves an ambiguous sense: their perpetual periphrasis; their abrupt transitions; their pompous inflations, and their elliptical style; and not less their portentous metaphorical nomenclature where a single object must be recognized by twenty denominations, not always appropriate, and too often clouded by the most remote and dark analogies....<sup>59</sup>

But Disraeli's remarks are made suspect by his implication that a particularly difficult kenning (which he calls an 'obscure conceit') from the death song of Ragner Lodbrog is of the same order as the Anglo-Saxon 'dark analogies.'<sup>60</sup> In spite of his general inability to discriminate between styles, Disraeli does call attention to the more 'sublime creative power' shown in the Eddas:

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<sup>58</sup>William K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History (New York: Knopf, 1957), p. 531.

<sup>59</sup>Isaac Disraeli, Amenities of Literature, new ed. B. Disraeli, Vol. I (London, 1859), p. 32.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 32 n.



An Anglo-Saxon poem has the appearance of a collection of short hints rather than poetical conceptions, curt and ejaculative: a paucity of objects yields but a paucity of emotions, too vague for detail, too abrupt for deep passion, too poor in fancy to scatter the imagery of poesy. The Anglo-Saxon betrays its confined and monotonous genius: we are in the first age of art, when pictures are but monochromes of a single colour. Hence, in the whole map of Anglo-Saxon poetry, it is difficult to discriminate one writer from another.<sup>61</sup>

Apart from the interesting comment that Old English poetry marks the beginning of art, Disraeli betrays again the neo-classic bend of nineteenth century literary historians, who could see little merit in the devices of Old English poetry. Since Old English was not considered worthy of attention as poetry, then, it is perhaps fortunate that it stimulated interest in other areas.

The remarks which Disraeli directs at Beowulf, interestingly enough, do not get involved in mythological scholarship. Indeed he derides Kemble for radically altering his opinions between his first and second editions.

Beowulf may be a god or a nonentity, but the poem which records his exploits must at least be true, true in the manners it paints and the emotions which the poet reveals—the emotions of his contemporaries.<sup>62</sup>

Disraeli too praises Beowulf as an historical, cultural document.

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

Diedrich Wackerbarth perhaps is more typical of English interests of the time in the preface to his translation of Beowulf.<sup>63</sup> His remarks on style are restricted to a few comments on translation, while his comments on the historical and cultural background take most of the room. Next, Benjamin Thorpe says absolutely nothing about style; but one of his statements, I think typifies the attitude of the major scholars of his day:

As a monument of language the poem of Beowulf is highly valuable, but far more valuable is it as a vivid and faithful picture of old Northern manners and usages, as they existed in the halls of the kingly and the noble at the remote period to which it relates.<sup>64</sup>

A philological monument! an historical document!--but not a poem, even though he calls Grendle's mere 'a highly poetic description.'<sup>65</sup> Only in his notes and glossary does Thorpe seem to recognize the scope of the diction, with the compounds listed accordingly to base-word. However, much as this may represent progress in language study, it seems more like language study for its own sake than for its contribution to poetry.

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<sup>63</sup>A. Diedrich Wackerbarth, trans., Beowulf: An Epic Poem (London, 1849).

<sup>64</sup>Benjamin Thorpe, ed., The Anglo-Saxon Poems of Beowulf, the Scop or Gleeman's Tale, and the Fight at Finnesburg, 2nd. ed. (London, 1875), pp. ix-x.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. xxvi.

Nevertheless, one cannot deny the importance of textual studies; and no matter what extravagances of emendation eventually develop, reliable texts, dictionaries and glossaries are essential to aesthetic criticism. Any bibliography will show the great contribution of German scholars in this field, with the names Grein, Heyne and Wülcker foremost among editors of Anglo-Saxon poetry.<sup>66</sup> The influence of these great scholars and their contemporaries was extensive, particularly so their scholarly methods.

Prior to the 1834 quarrel antiquarian groups in England tended to attract the 'gentleman,' the dilettante, the amateur, and to flourish only as long as the founding members were around to give them energy. But in 1842, strongly influenced by German principles of scholarship, the Philological Society was formed, its primary purpose to investigate the history and structure of language.<sup>67</sup> Most of the significant names in mid-nineteenth century Anglo-Saxon scholarship were among the early and constituent members: Bosworth, Kemble, Thorpe, Ellis, Sweet and Furnival. The Society was also the springboard for the founding in 1864 of the Early English Text Society, a society which has done more than any other to make available and promote knowledge of both Old and Middle English literature. Nor was the

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<sup>66</sup>Indeed the Grein-Wülcker Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie (1883) remained a standard work until the appearance of the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records.

<sup>67</sup>Harrison Ross Steeves, Learned Societies and English Literary Scholarship in Great Britain and the United States

resurgent interest in literary societies restricted to England. In 1868 the American Philological Society, based on its English equivalent, was founded to investigate the whole field of philology; and in 1884 the Modern Language Association took over the work in modern philology.<sup>68</sup> All these publications, of course, provided a means by which Old English scholarship could be widely disseminated. German principles of scholarship were also responsible for introducing Anglo-Saxon into the curricula of the universities, with an emphasis on philology which has often been lamented.

But historical studies were becoming stronger and more complex too after 1860, while remaining firmly nationalistic and neo-classic. Notable here is the History of English Literature of Hippolyte Adolphe Taine, 1864, which exhibits Taine's dictum that the character and style of a writer grow out of his social and natural environment.<sup>69</sup> However, on the subject of Old English poetry he obviously shares a not uncommon Gallic belief that the Teutonic races are far more emotional and far less reasonable than the Latin races. His whole essay on Old English literature is coloured by his view that the Anglo-Saxons were, like all Teutonic tribes, a race

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(New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1913), p. 148. References to classical philology were abandoned in 1878.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 204-6.

<sup>69</sup> J. Scott Clark, "Introduction," to Hippolyte Adolphe Taine, History of English Literature, trans. Henry Van Laun, rev. ed., Vol. I (New York, 1900), p. viii.

of brutal, blood-thirsty, gluttonous barbarians, with a strong sense of freedom and given to great displays of courage and loyalty.<sup>70</sup> He speaks of 'poetic sentiment' and the lack of art or talent exhibited in the 'confused mass' of details. He remarks on the grotesque, remote and repetitious imagery and the lack of reasonable analysis. But in his comments on variation he introduces some new and extremely interesting insights into the poetic composition:

Time after time they return to and repeat their idea: "The sun on high, the great star, God's brilliant candle, the noble creature!" Four times successively they employ the same thought, and each time under a new aspect. All its different aspects rise simultaneously before the barbarian's eyes...The succession of thought in the visionary is not the same as in a reasoning mind. One color induces another; from the sound he passes to sound; his imagination is like a diorama of unexplained pictures. His phrases recur and change; he emits the word that comes to his lips without hesitation; he leaps over wide intervals from idea to idea.<sup>71</sup>

Taine's perception of the poetry, with its vivid and associative imagery, compressed and allusive style is quite remarkable, but he does not pass from generalization to analysis.

Charles Pearson shares somewhat this view in his history (1869), commenting on the peculiar suitability of imagery (especially personification) to the savage temperament.<sup>72</sup> Only W. W. Skeat seems to ignore this 'mood and gloom and

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<sup>70</sup>Taine, pp. 41, 47-8.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., pp. 54-5.

<sup>72</sup>Charles H. Pearson, History of England during the Early and Middle Ages, Vol. I (London, 1867), p. 296.

passion' outlook in a brief article specifically devoted to the "Poetic Diction of the Anglo-Saxons," (1869). He notices: the inversion of word order; "numerous epithets and equivalent expressions"; "an abundance of names for the same object"; and "a curious chopping up of sentences into pieces of the same metrical length." Much of this has been observed by earlier critics, but never in this clear, reasonable fashion. Regarding the abundance of equivalent expressions, especially for man, sword, and ship, Skeat suggests many were picked only to satisfy alliteration, an attitude still widely held among Old English critics. He is also among the first to recognize that sense as well as sound pauses at the caesure.<sup>73</sup>

Although Henry Sweet (1871) retains the tone of literary history in his comments, he sees value in the poetry as poetry, and vividness and individuality in the nature descriptions, "not inferior to the most perfect examples of descriptive poetry in modern English literature—perhaps the highest praise that can be given."<sup>74</sup> He notices the major features of the style, but his remarks on the simile show considerable progress over earlier work and correctly apply the term 'kenning':

Everything that retards the action or obscures the main sentiment of the poem is avoided, hence all similes are extremely rare. In the whole poem of Beowulf there are scarcely half a dozen of them, and these are of the

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<sup>73</sup>Walter W. Skeat, "Poetic Diction of the Anglo-Saxons," A Student's Pastime (Oxford, 1896), pp. 50-1.

<sup>74</sup>Henry Sweet, "Sketch of the History of Anglo-Saxon Poetry," in Thomas Warton, History of English Poetry, ed. W.

simplest character, such as comparing the ship to a bird. Indeed, such a simple comparison as this is almost equivalent to the more usual 'kenning' (as it is called in Icelandic) such as 'brimfugol,' where, instead of comparing the ship to a bird, the poet simply calls it a sea-bird, preferring the direct assertion to the indirect comparison. Such elaborate comparisons as are found in Homer and his Roman imitator are quite foreign to the spirit of Northern poetry.<sup>75</sup>

This comment certainly applies to Beowulf but with limitations: one should not assume that all Northern poetry is not complex, since the skaldic kenning is as elaborate in its own way as the Homeric simile; similarly, Sweet fails to recognize the retarding effect of variation. (see appendix B).

Generally by the 1870's comment on Old English poetry was reasonably mature, although most of it was still German. In 1875 the first article restricted to matters of style appeared: Richard Heinzel's Über den Stil der altgermanischen Poesie, an analysis of the origins and forms of the various stylistic features of ancient Germanic poetry. Being the first essay of its kind, Heinzel's work became a point of departure for most stylistic studies of the following decades. It is worth noting, however, that it covers all Germanic poetry, not Old English poetry in particular. Later criticism of Heinzel's work indicates that problems arose through too great attention to the common features of Indo-European literatures and inadequate

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Carew Hazlitt, Vol. II (London, 1871), pp. 6-7.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

explanation of the differences. To generalize a bit; German criticism of Old English poetry seemed to be more concerned with pagan Germanic characteristics common to all Teutonic literatures than with the particular national features which made Old English distinctive. The advent of serious English criticism of style overcame this deficiency, although for many years to come, Old English poetic criticism would be restricted by the strong nineteenth century attention to pagan Germanic culture.

Thomas Arnold praises the work of the German scholars in the introduction to his edition of Beowulf in 1876. Arnold's comments are most interesting for their discussion of formulaic diction and their comparison of the language of Beowulf and Homer. He observes the recurrence of several expressions in some or all of the major narrative poems, e.g., bān-loca,<sup>76</sup> and he observes that the paucity of articles in Beowulf and the colourful descriptions of arms, buildings and clothes, resemble the diction of Homer.<sup>77</sup> Arnold also sees Beowulf as much earlier than Icelandic poetry and other Old English poetry, in which occur certain "fanciful and sometimes farfetched synonyms." Finally, he suggests the poem was written by a "churchman in a lay mood. He delights in the concrete; loves persons, places,

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<sup>76</sup>Thomas Arnold, ed., Beowulf: A Heroic Poem of the Eighth Century (London, 1876), p. xvi.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., pp. xix-xx.



things, passions, adventures."<sup>78</sup> Aside from these few comments on diction and imagery, Arnold is mainly concerned with the extrinsic issues of the poem.

The last critic to be noted is Bernhard ten Brink, whose comments anticipate the best work of the last decades of the nineteenth century. Basically, ten Brink endorses the theory that racial characteristics affect the tone of the poetry. He praises the art of "finding sayings rightly bound" and the skill and variety of the oral poetic art.<sup>79</sup> He notices how the poet can dwell on a minor feature such as the coming of winter, and very justly observes the indirect-concrete nature of expressions like 'to bear weapons' instead of the abstract-direct 'to go.' Similarly, he suggests that much of what we consider figurative language was not felt to be such by the Anglo-Saxons, and that the rarity of simile in Old English poetry was due to an absence of repose, since simile requires, according to ten Brink, a more leisured pace than he attributes to Old English poetry.<sup>80</sup>

His discussion of the repetition, variation and parallelism of epithets is particularly clear and concise:

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. xxxiii.

<sup>79</sup>Bernhard ten Brink, History of English Literature, trans. Horace M. Kennedy, Vol. I (London: G. Bell, 1914), pp. 6-7, 13.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-9.

Sensuous and figurative perception seems crystallised in picturesque epithets, and principally in substantive expressions which, making prominent a characteristic, a quality of the person or thing meant, are put appositively beside the real designation, and often take its place. There is an especial abundance of these expressions pertaining to the ocean and the sea-voyage, or to war and the relation of the chieftain to his men.<sup>81</sup>

He also notices that dwelling on a subject tends to slow down the action and that the lack of transition between appositives and the presence of parallelism curtail subtlety of thought and general clarity. Nonetheless, ten Brink praises the poetry:

The style of the Old English epos yields the general impression belonging to this species of poetry. The uniform stately movement of the rhythmical language, the broad, formula-like periods, which recur especially at the designation of time or of the beginning of a speech, the fond lingering over details, the exhaustive description of occurrences that are not essential to the action--all this is strikingly suggestive of Homer. But the lack in the Old English epic of the clearness and fine completeness of the Homeric, is at least partially made good by the greater directness of expression. The poet's excitement is not seldom imparted to the listener; in situations that seem to justify it, this is very effective. Thus the portrayals of battles, although infinitely poorer in cast and artistic grouping, although much less realistic than the Homeric descriptions, are yet, at times, superior to them, in so far as the demoniac rage of war elicits from the Germanic fancy a crowding affluence of vigorous scenes, hastily projected, in glaring lights or grim half-gloom, and makes us feel as if we were in the midst of the tumult. Nor must we forget that the modes of expression we have tried to analyse, are in a high degree adapted to the elegiac mood, which only too often flowed from the soft melancholy of the Old English temperament, and which readily led to digression and reflection. They are also appropriate to the presentation of tragic situations.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

With ten Brink, then, it is obvious that Old English scholarship has reached a stage where moderately reliable evaluations can be made.

René Wellek summarizes better than I possibly could the importance of what has been accomplished since 1533:

One of the first tasks of scholarship is the assembly of its materials, the careful undoing of the effects of time, the examination as to authorship, authenticity, and date. Enormous acumen and diligence have gone into the solution of these problems; yet the literary student will have to realize that these labors are preliminary to the ultimate task of scholarship. Often the importance of these operations is particularly great, since without them, critical analysis and historical understanding would be hopelessly handicapped.<sup>83</sup>

However, it took over three hundred years for the fundamentals of Old English poetry to be dealt with. Should one assume, then, a paucity of acumen and diligence among early scholars? In part, such an assumption would be reasonable; but mainly the neglect was due to lack of interest, lack of knowledge, or a combination of the two. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were interested, rather selfishly, in supporting various religious and political ideals by means of ancient English precedent. The great activity of Hicckes' Oxford group existed almost in spite of the intensely neo-classic taste of the period. The remainder of the eighteenth century seemed to care nothing about Anglo-Saxon literature--even

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<sup>83</sup>René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956), p. 45.

after interest was aroused in other areas of Northern literature. When finally the poems came to critical attention, it is to the great shame of the English that most of the significant early scholarship was accomplished by non-English critics. It is little wonder, then, that these same critics were interested in the poems more as documents of philology, history and mythology, than as relics of a stage of national literary development.

## CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN ENGLISH CRITICISM OF OLD ENGLISH  
POETIC STYLE: 1881-1921

Chapter II showed that Anglo-Saxon studies developed very slowly, that poetry was the last branch to receive attention, and that no book or article specifically devoted to poetic style appeared until 1875, and even this was not restricted to Old English poetry. Nevertheless, much was learned about the poetic diction through studies of structure, metre, dating and text; and one is reminded that observations of style, particularly diction, led Edouard Sievers to propose in 1875 that the Genesis B portion of the Junius Book was a translation from Old Saxon,<sup>1</sup> an hypothesis dramatically verified in 1894 by the discovery in the Vatican Library of an Old Saxon fragment containing some twenty-five lines which correspond to the Anglo-Saxon.<sup>2</sup>

Considering the German domination of nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon scholarship, it is significant that the first work concerned exclusively with Old English poetic diction and figuration should be by an English-speaking person, an American,

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<sup>1</sup>Sievers observed that certain compounds occurred in Genesis B but either infrequently or not at all in Genesis A (e.g., of names for God, 'ruling God' occurs twice in B and not in A, etc.) Sievers also presented parallel Old English and Old Saxon lines as further evidence (e.g., 'weoll him on innan hyge ym his heortan,' Genesis 353, and 'thes uell im an innan hugi um is herta,' Heliand 3688) (summarized in Henry Morley, English Writers: An Attempt towards a History of English Literature, Vol. II [London, 1888], pp. 102-5).

<sup>2</sup>ASPR, Vol. I, p. xxv.

Francis B. Gummere. Basically, Gummere's dissertation, The Anglo-Saxon Metaphor, refutes Heinzel's views about figuration in Old Germanic poetry and about the temperament required for the production of the simile. It also challenges a tendency to compare too closely the literatures of the various Indo-European and Germanic languages. It should be noted that his discussion is not restricted to the metaphor, as the title states, but concerns simile, personification, metonymy and symbolism.

In order to understand Gummere's analysis of the Old English 'metaphor,' one must realize that, like most of his contemporaries, he approaches the subject of figurative language from a classical direction; that is, he begins his discussion from a classical view of simile and metaphor as conscious literary devices. However, he first investigates the type of temperament required to produce the simile. Heinzel believed that the simile (which occurs in the Vedas and Old Norse) and the metaphor were basically vehicles for sensuous expression and were common to the Indo-European languages, and that the restricted use of these figures in Old English was due to the softening effect of Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Gummere, however, refutes this proposition. First, he says, it assumes that the poetic

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<sup>3</sup>H. van der Merwe Scholtz, The Kenning in Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Poetry (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1929), p. 20.

of the Anglo-Saxons was in a period of decline and amenable to change at the time of Christian contact; but since such was not the case (the native poetic remained strong for several centuries), one must conclude that the Teutonic poetry brought to England in the fifth century was already unfriendly to the simile.<sup>4</sup> Second, Gummere notes that similes are more frequent in later Christian Old English poetry, a fact suggesting foreign influence.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, he concludes, one should not assume that the simile was a common Indo-European figure nor attempt to account for its absence in Old English; rather, one should have to explain its presence in Old Norse and the Vedas.

Next, Gummere tries to show the development of figurative language, the key to which is the metaphor, "the cornerstone of all poetical style."<sup>6</sup> It lies at the beginning of all tropes, "between the variation, which is syntactical, and the simile, which is a trope..."<sup>7</sup> At this point he makes a distinction between the conscious metaphor (essentially a shortened simile and involving the conscious recognition of the similarities between ordinarily dissimilar objects) and the unconscious metaphor (one object seen quite naturally in terms of another):

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<sup>4</sup>Francis B. Gummere, The Anglo-Saxon Metaphor (Halle, 1881), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 6-7.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

In this way the deliberate metaphor presupposes a gap between the concrete and the abstract, between animate and inanimate and the like. Before that, one cannot talk of conscious metaphors, but only of picturesque confusion of names. The advanced stages of the metaphor become possible as soon as concrete may be expressed by abstract, and the reverse....But the increase of mental activity is accomplished by a corresponding decrease of poetical vividness.<sup>8</sup>

Early metaphors, then, are intense and brief, e.g., hiorodryncum swealt, 'he died of sword drinks.' Such figuration then came under the influence of Christian literature, especially the hymns, and developed into extended metaphor, simile and allegory.

Gummere classifies Anglo-Saxon metaphors according to their nature, a system which is critically more valuable than formal divisions, and yet which falls short of suggesting their function in poetic composition. However, it was not the critical habit of the day to go beyond analysis into the evaluation of stylistic devices. The four major divisions are: I) one concrete object expressed in terms of another; II) an abstract expressed by an abstract; III) a concrete object expressed by an abstract thought; IV) an abstract expressed by a concrete. These groups are further sub-divided, e.g., 'greater expressed by less,' etc., but these are merely descriptive divisions.

Group I, Gummere says, are used for vividness, but in some cases he feels the terms may not be felt to be metaphorical. For instance, hrof and hleo are generally used literally in

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 13.



Beowulf and figuratively in the religious poems<sup>9</sup> (he does not see hran-rāde as literal); and bānhūs may not be a fully conscious metaphor. Certain figures like naegled bord Gummere sees correctly as synecdoche rather than metaphor, and he observes that frequent synecdoche for certain objects was part of variation. "It was evidently a canon of Anglo-Saxon poetry, necessitated by its many repetitions, to invent all possible names for one and the same thing."<sup>10</sup> Although he does not develop this idea, Gummere has noticed an essential feature of variation. He also claims that a mixed metaphor such as hildelēoma bītan (1523) attests to the short life of the metaphor.<sup>11</sup> He does not consider an expression like flota fāmigheals as personification; but when psychological motivation is added, "the approach to real personification is increased," as in lāðan līges.<sup>12</sup> Finally, he treats the elaborate, sustained metaphors, which, he claims, "betray their foreign origin at sight"; but oddly enough, the sustained 'legerbedde...swefep' metaphor of line 1007, he considers merely fortuitous.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-5.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 25-6.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 27-8.

Group II Gummere dismisses as rare and unimportant; Group III is also fairly infrequent. This latter group, he notes, often approaches personification, since "an abstract thought was almost as vivid and real to the Anglo-Saxon poet as the concrete object itself."<sup>14</sup> Gummere also puts into this group examples of metonymy, e.g., fȳrbendum faest. Group IV is the most numerous, but modern critics would be wont to question the figurativeness of some of the examples, e.g., sīdra sorqa (l. 149), bolgenmōd (l. 709), and sawlberende (l. 1004).<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, of all the examples given, these are the least likely to have been felt figuratively by the Anglo-Saxons.

Since the dissertation is not restricted to the metaphor, Gummere briefly discusses other types of figuration. He sees traces of allegory in Beowulf and notes the immense popularity of the device in sacred Latin literature.<sup>16</sup> Next he discusses and categorizes personification, giving as examples, sefa hwette (l. 490), fyrst forð gewāt (l. 210), and holtwudu helpān (l. 2340),<sup>17</sup> not all of which appear to me to be personification. As for the simile, Gummere is rather like ten Brink in his odd

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 36-44.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 45-8.

belief that simile requires greater control than the Anglo-Saxon poet could bring to his subject. If one adds to this idea his observation that metaphor is frequently mixed and that conscious metaphor is rare, it is little wonder that Gummere concludes:

A mere glance at the above lists will show how little the striving after artistic unity, after consistent carrying out of a metaphor, had place with them....To demand the A. S. poetry to be consistent in this respect is to demand it not to be itself.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, Gummere briefly looks at the metaphorical (or symbolic) use of colour, noting that day and night (the most striking feature of Nature, myth and literature) have no uniform moral connotations. In order to distinguish between the 'heathen' Beowulf and the other epical Old English poems, Gummere explores the moral and psychological connotations of the words for darkness and light. In both Beowulf and the Caedmon poems there is psychological colour distinction, but moral distinction (absent in mythology) is also lacking in Beowulf.<sup>19</sup> For example, deorc in Beowulf is a purely physical term, whereas in Caedmonian and Cynewulfian poems it is associated with death. I cannot agree with Gummere, though, that deorc dēaðscua (l. 160) is a purely literal term concerning Grendel's nocturnal visitations;<sup>20</sup> it is too close to a thoroughly Christian passage for the tone to change so abruptly. However, this Christian passage (ll. 168-88) was in Gummere's

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

day generally thought to be an interpolation.

Aside from its position as a first study, Gummere's dissertation makes important contributions to the understanding of figuration, its scope and type, even though one might wish for a different sort of classification, or for some acknowledgement of artistry in the poetry. However much Gummere is aware of the Christian background of Old English poetry, he basically assumes that Beowulf is heathen and more closely related to pagan mythology than to Christian doctrine. He also gives tacit approval to theories of oral origin through the persistent implication that the poetry is on the threshold of art.<sup>21</sup>

In his 1887 article on Anglo-Saxon poetic style, Albert Tolman, like Gummere, resists Heinzel's tendency to view the Sanskrit Vedas as the prototype of all Indo-European literature.<sup>22</sup> Tolman's long, comprehensive essay represents the first attempt in English, since the improvement of basic texts, to present an appreciative summary of Anglo-Saxon poetic style, though much of it is apparently derived from Heinzel and Wilhelm Bode (Die Kenningar in der angelsächsischen Dichtung, 1886). Although somewhat outside the scope of this study, one should note that

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<sup>21</sup>Such an attitude was common among scholars of the day, but was by no means exclusive. For example, John Earle's little book, Anglo-Saxon Literature (London, 1884), while it says nothing about style, unhesitatingly places all Old English poetry in the Latin-Christian tradition and even suggests that Beowulf could be considered a moderate and unified allegory. (pp. 134-5).

<sup>22</sup>Albert H. Tolman, "The Style of Anglo-Saxon Poetry," PMLA, III (1887), 19.

Tolman lays stress on the importance of metre in Old English poetic style. He does not wish to say that the metre caused the style--he assumes common cause--but he credits the exigencies of stress and alliteration with making the verse intense and vigorous and with giving weight to substantives. "The verse demands strong nouns, adjectives, and verbs; and these, of necessity, state the thought with brevity and power."<sup>23</sup> To this 'remorseless' energy' of the metre he also attributes the necessity for 'repetition of thought with variation of expression' and for the short, forcible metaphor.<sup>24</sup>

In his essay Tolman handles the two main aspects of poetic diction, the poetical synonym and figures of speech. Like Bode, Tolman uses the term 'kenning' broadly to include all synonyms and epithets;<sup>25</sup> however, he tries to correct Bode's unclear distinction between the kenning and the literal expression. Tolman's treatment of the poetical synonym is not particularly satisfying. He tends to see it as a substitution for the metrically-weak pronoun, and his classification of synonyms is according to form rather than function, e.g., for 'ocean' he finds forty-two simple and compound nouns in Beowulf

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 24, 28.

<sup>25</sup>In Bode's study (summarized by Tolman, p. 26) the kenning was divided into five main divisions: those portraying subjects directly and fully, those conveying the idea by synecdoche, those embodying a definition, the metaphorical, and the episodic or allusive. See also below, appendix A.

and ten examples of noun plus genitive.<sup>26</sup> He also observes that this device is restricted to poetry and may be used in a stock manner.

In his discussion of figuration Tolman elaborates only slightly on Gummere (he does, however, emend Gummere's general use of the word 'metaphor' to the more correct term 'trope'),<sup>27</sup> agreeing that the poets were not sufficiently self-conscious to create conscious metaphor, simile and allegory. The mixing of metaphors attests to the fact that the Anglo-Saxons were barely conscious of them.<sup>28</sup> Here I think Tolman has things backwards, since a mixed metaphor is more likely to be a moribund metaphor than an incipient or living one. Certainly, if the poet were barely conscious of his metaphor he would use an appropriate term; and the living metaphor poses no problem of usage since its meaning is fresh.<sup>29</sup>

The next most important study of the compound and epithet, and one which has really not been superseded, is J. W. Rankin's systematic and exhaustive study of the sources of the Old English kenning. Nor does Rankin use the term

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<sup>26</sup>Tolman, pp. 26-7.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>29</sup>I am reminded here of George Orwell's essay, "Politics and the English Language," in which the point is made clear that mixing of metaphors results from laziness and a thoughtless reliance on the ready-to-hand phrase. Also, W. M. Hart makes this point clear in 1907 when he notes the fading of metaphor and personification in an expression like gūð-wine and the approaching decadence of poetic style in the mixed metaphor beado-lēoma bitan.

kenning in a narrow sense, "but simply as a convenient designation of a metaphorical, a periphrastic, or a more or less complex term employed in Anglo-Saxon poems instead of the single, specific name for a person or thing."<sup>30</sup> Rankin tries mainly to find the sources for religious kennings in a wide selection of Latin religious writers. Those for which he finds no Latin parallels and sources he compares with other Germanic languages in an attempt to determine whether they are of native or common Germanic origin. Whatever argument one may direct against such a method of finding sources is answered by Rankin himself:

I need hardly add that such a classification of kennings as borrowed, native, or common Germanic, is necessarily simply tentative and a matter of probabilities. One could not make a definite, sharp classification even if he could determine and should study carefully every bit of Latin that the Anglo-Saxon authors were acquainted with. In the first place, a Latin equivalent does not in every instance necessarily mean a direct Latin source; and secondly, the amount of Germanic poetry which can be positively said to have been uninfluenced by Christian and Latin literature is obviously too small to warrant one in making a strictly categorical classification on the basis of origins.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, Rankin notes the impossibility of determining sources for such common-place objects and ideas as Men, Human

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(Ballad and Epic: A study in the Development of the Narrative Art, Harvard Studies in Philology and Literature, Vol. XI [Cambridge, 1907], p. 177).

<sup>30</sup>James Walter Rankin, "A Study of the Kennings in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," JEGP, VIII (1909), 357.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 366-7; as examples of Latin terms with Old English equivalents he gives: gloriosus rex, omnipotens auctor, caeli dominus, pastor benignus, lux aeternae gloriae, gloriae princeps (pp. 374-86).

Body, Live, Die, etc. Unfortunately for the student of Beowulf, it is these, not the religious kennings, which constitute the bulk of the poetic 'synonyms.'

I do not wish to get too deeply involved in the tenuous problem of sources, but fortunately Rankin makes several useful general observations in his lengthy analysis. For example, over half of a twenty-two page list of Latin terms for the Deity are marked as having an 'equivalent term' or a term of 'similar import' in Anglo-Saxon, quite an impressive list of parallels. As for Anglo-Saxon adaptation of the Latin, Rankin observes that variation from the Latin original may be due to the demands of alliteration, so that weoroda dryhten might become weoroda scyppend were a word beginning in sc required. Rankin considers this type of substitution an extremely plausible solution to much of the variation from the Latin originals.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, he maintains that alliteration would account for many additions to the original; e.g., hēahengla cyning is simply a variation of the simpler engla cyning, and certain added words like sige or bēod become little more than intensives.<sup>33</sup> While this theory might explain the practice in some poems, it implicitly denies the possibility of artistic selection of diction.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 396.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 397; this point is later corroborated by Robert Diamond (The Diction of the Anglo-Saxon Metrical Psalms. [The Hague: Mouton, 1963]).



In Rankin's comparison of two lists of Anglo-Saxon terms, one for the Deity and one for earthly rulers, several interesting points emerge. Even if one presumes the word for earthly ruler was transferred to the Deity, evidence suggests that a Latin equivalent was necessary to sanction the term. Thus bēodcyning, used frequently to designate an earthly king, is applied only once to the Deity. Similarly dryhten wereda, frequently applied to the Deity, only once designates an earthly ruler (Beowulf, l. 2186).<sup>34</sup> Also, one notes that bearn is used more frequently than sunu in epithets for Beowulf, whereas the reverse is true for Hrothgar, Hygelac and Wiglaf. The frequent application of bearn to Christ supports Rankin's guess that the term had special (less commonplace) connotations.<sup>35</sup>

Rankin next presents lists of Anglo-Saxon kennings, indicating the occurrence of similar and equivalent Latin terms. Few of the terms for Deity are taken from Beowulf, but most (logically enough) have Latin parallels,<sup>36</sup> as do all the doctrinal terms. Parallels do exist in Beowulf between terms for the devil and terms for the monsters, but Rankin admits the difficulty of determining influence here.<sup>37</sup> However,

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<sup>34</sup>Rankin, pp. 404-5; Rankin's suggestion that the term applies to God is unacceptable; one must, I think, see the term as a scribal error for Wedera, as Klaeber does in his edition, p. 207.

<sup>35</sup>Rankin, p. 409.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 410-22.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., IX (1910), 59n.

of the terms for Men, Body, Live, Speak, etc. and Sea, Earth, Sun, Stars, very few from Beowulf have Latin parallels.

Finally, Rankin suggests the possibility of Celtic imagination influencing the kennings for 'sea' and notes that Old Saxon non-religious kennings are simpler than those in Old English.<sup>38</sup>

On the whole, Rankin's lists present convincing evidence for the influence of Latin on certain areas of Old English poetic diction. However, the lists also show conclusively how relatively little this influence was felt in the heroic Beowulf.

These, then, are the major works on Old English poetic diction in this early surge of English scholarship, basically descriptive and classifying sorts of studies, but essential to a complete understanding of the poetic diction. One further study deserves passing mention. O. F. Emerson attempts, without much success, to resolve the problem of 'transverse' or 'crossed' alliteration by mathematical probability tests and to see whether it was a deliberate device. However, he is forced to conclude that mathematical proof is hopeless, even though subjective evidence would confirm the device to be deliberate: it would be recognized by the experienced ear.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, the Old English poetic formula was attracting attention, mostly by German critics, and in 1905 Fr. Klaeber

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 75, 82.

<sup>39</sup>Oliver Farrar Emerson, "Transverse Alliteration in Teutonic Poetry," JEGP III (1900-1), 127-37.

notes a few formulas and attempts to explain their function. For example, the 'ubiquitous' gefraegn formulas seem to emphasize fact, introduce sections, point out great persons and events or progress in narrative, or simply add variety (e.g., the adorning of Heorot, l. 74, and Beowulf's swimming endurance, l. 575). On the other hand, hȳrde ic serves practically as a transition, comparable to 'further.' Klaeber also notes that these and other formulas can admit of individualization.<sup>40</sup>

In addition, several general works around the turn of the century mention formulas in conjunction with oral origins. John Earle (1884) sees them as relics of heathen antiquity;<sup>41</sup> W. J. Courthope (1895) emphasizes their Homeric quality;<sup>42</sup> W. P. Ker in his three related works (1897, 1904, 1912) refers to them rather uncharitably as 'well-worn epithets';<sup>43</sup> H. M. Chadwick (1911) points out several cognate parallels in other Germanic languages, and observes at some length that such formulas are characteristic of all oral heroic poetry, from

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<sup>40</sup>Fr. Klaeber, "Studies in the Textual Interpretation of Beowulf," Modern Philology III (1905/6), 243-4.

<sup>41</sup>Earle, p. 68.

<sup>42</sup>W. J. Courthope, A History of English Poetry, Vol. I (London, 1895), p. 89.

<sup>43</sup>W. P. Ker, Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature (New York: Dover, 1957), p. 137; cf. W. P. Ker, English Literature Medieval (London: William and Norgate, [1912]), p. 42, and The Dark Ages (New York: Mentor Books, 1958), p. 153.

Homer to the modern Serbo-Croations;<sup>44</sup> W. MacNeille Dixon (1912) extends this last analogy to include the Russians.<sup>45</sup> But brief notice was all that the formula received in English; critics appeared much more concerned with the historical aspects of literature than with the nature of poetic language.

Perhaps the most interesting studies of Old English diction and imagery are those which derive from the 'mood and gloom and passion' criticism of the mid-nineteenth century. While these studies come closest to a total view of the poetry, they are fraught with the difficulties attending subjective appreciation and are hampered by a lack of critical method for relating poetic technique to the feelings which motivated the poet or which the audience derived therefrom. Such a deficiency shows in part the effect of historical criticism, although occasionally the terms of psychology are introduced.

F. A. March (1882) examines the world of Beowulf by means of its presentation of sense impressions, or images in the broad sense of the word. He notices the absence of taste images, except for the dragon sniffing around the barrow.<sup>46</sup> For sight images March concentrates mainly on those of colour and points out (as Disraeli earlier did, in a slightly different

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<sup>44</sup>H. Munro Chadwick, The Heroic Age (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1926), pp. 75, 102.

<sup>45</sup>W. MacNeille Dixon, English Epic and Heroic Poetry (London: Dent, 1912), p. 34.

<sup>46</sup>F. A. March, "The World of Beowulf," Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association, XIII (1882), xxii.

context)<sup>47</sup> that colour per se is lacking. "It is the great expanse of a white and dark world not yet tinted,"<sup>48</sup> into which man brings the occasional bit of variation in such terms as fāh and blōdfāh. But sound images are the most impressive, March claims; laughter, the bellow of pain, the sound of the harp, the roar of the funeral pyre — and all are sounds which emanate not from the inanimate world, but from men and their creations and from beasts.<sup>49</sup> Such an enumeration of sense impressions shows at least one critic's sensibility and contrasts markedly with earlier remarks about barbarous war-whoops. March even suggests that in parts the poet showed a cultivated, even artificial, love of the picturesque, although his taste and imagination were sporadic.<sup>50</sup>

In 1899 William Mead appears to develop March's suggestions by investigating with some thoroughness the actual frequency of colour words. His results end forever the careless comment that Old English poetry is colourful and show instead that it relies heavily on mixed colours such as fealu and brūn. Green, the favorite Old English colour, is found almost exclusively in religious poetry, especially Genesis.<sup>51</sup> Red, the

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<sup>47</sup>See above, chapt. II, p. 52.

<sup>48</sup>March, p. xxii.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. xxii-xxiii.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. xxiii.

<sup>51</sup>William E. Mead, "Color in Old English Poetry," PMLA, XIV (1899), 201.

next most common colour, is infrequently used and never in heroic poetry (blōd and swāt only suggest the colour).<sup>52</sup>

Yellow, the next most common, occurs only four times as gealo, three of these conventionally; however, gold has some colour sense, and fealo covers a broad range of yellowish-brown colours.<sup>53</sup>

In contrast to the paucity of colour words, Mead lists the plethora of words for light and dark--one line out of thirty-seven he finds contains a light or dark image, with the frequency higher in religious poetry. Mead here expands on Gummere's suggestions about light-dark symbolism. 'Dark' words are about half as frequent as 'light' words, and are more difficult to determine exactly; both are used symbolically in religious poetry. It is interesting to note that he includes fāmiq in the 'white' group, and sees sweart as symbolically applied to the devil in all poems except Beowulf.<sup>54</sup> Mead concludes that Old English poets showed "a fondness for mixed and neutral colours," and that when colour occurs it is used conventionally.<sup>55</sup>

Albert Tolman looks at the spirit of Anglo-Saxon poetry--its freedom from sensuousness, its idealization and its

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 195-7.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 198-200.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 173-86, passim.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 189-206.

seriousness—noting that nothing is gross.<sup>56</sup> Battle is not a delight in carnage, but a delight in the battle preparation, which is depicted in "striking generalities and powerful metaphors." The poet seems more concerned with 'poetical values' than with 'dry facts,'<sup>57</sup> in his descriptions. All this is part of the generalizing tendency which Tolman finds in Old English poetry, a tendency which is compatible with the seriousness and melancholy of the poetry, for example in the large gnomic generalizations. Also, he notes, the epithet and repetition are admirably suited to the caressing of tender and melancholy thoughts, producing such artistic, elegiac pathos as that in The Wanderer.<sup>58</sup>

It is very satisfying to see the attitude to Old English poetry gradually improving and to see critics favorably comparing its best examples with modern works. Although this favorable attitude does not suffuse all the criticism of the period (a literary historian such as J. J. Jusserand, for example, returns to the rather reactionary attitudes of Taine),<sup>59</sup> there is a sufficient amount of genuine appreciation to permit the study to progress. Stopford Brooke (1892), for example,

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<sup>56</sup>Tolman, p. 42.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp.42-3.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>59</sup>J. J. Jusserand, A Literary History of the English People, Vol. I (London, 1895), pp. 42-72.

devotes two volumes to early English literature, one of the fullest treatments of the subject to date. Anglo-Saxon poetry may not be the finest poetry, he confesses, but much of it is remarkable and it is national poetry.<sup>60</sup> Much of Brooke's book covers the familiar ground of myth and history, but it also includes essays on the major features of Anglo-Saxon culture and their relation to the poetry.

Clearly the most interesting and valuable study in the book is Brooke's discussion of terms for 'sea':

A shoal of simple terms express in Beowulf the earliest sea-thoughts of the English. But, still discontent, the singers compounded these simple terms with other words, in order more fully to image forth the manifold impressions they had received of the doing [sic] of the great waters.<sup>61</sup>

This statement of Brooke's contains a wealth of important critical comment: the assumption the poetry was oral; the implication of impressionistic technique; and, above all, the intimation that the language was an expanding and creative thing.

Brooke takes all the simplices for 'sea' in Beowulf, and for each he attempts to determine both the connotation of the word and the aspect of the sea to which it refers. For example, he says that laqu seems to apply to the sea as 'the

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<sup>60</sup>Stopford A. Brooke, The History of Early English Literature, Vol. I (London, 1892), pp.vi-vii.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 224.



great Pool' and is never compounded to suggest agitated water. He also rejects garsecg as a mythical compound equivalent to Poseidon.<sup>62</sup> But in spite of his concentrated attempts to determine individual word connotations and in spite of his conclusion that the terms are more 'pictures' than words, Brooke decides that in a sea passage such as that in Unferth's challenge, the terms are used indifferently: "they have become, it seems, mere poetic interchanges. It is too much the fate of words originally individual and noble."<sup>63</sup> It is interesting here that Brooke is concerned with the potential realism of the terms, and not with their figuration; but one step further might have shown him a sort of development, a progression in poetic intensity, and not a haphazard arrangement of terms.<sup>64</sup>

That Brooke failed to perceive the possibility of artistic variation is remarkable when one considers his attention to the connotations of words in compounds and his opinions

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., pp. 204-5, 226.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>64</sup>Lines 507-15 show a progression in the poetic intensity of 'sea' words (I use here Brooke's own meanings and connotations): the denotative simplex sae followed by the denotative combination dēop waeter; then the poetic simplex sund and the archaic compound ēagorstīeam with its connotations of something living; then the periphrastic merestrāeta with its suggestions of a set distance for swimming; and finally garsecg, the great all-encompassing ocean. A similar progression can be worked out for 'waves' in lines 515-9.

about the importance of the sea to the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>65</sup> However, he makes the first step necessary in the appreciation of the poetic power of the language: he goes beyond glossary meanings into the emotional connotations and subtle shades of meaning with which the language of all serious poetry is endowed. But Brooke is basically a scholar of his time and seems reluctant to penetrate the language deeply enough to determine the existence of consistent artistic merit.

F. A. Blackburn's 1897 article on Christian colouring in Beowulf is mainly concerned with the 'Christian interpolations'; however, Blackburn raises the question of shades of meaning in certain terms. Considering the Christian adoption of heathen terms like Easter and Hell, he says, and the parallels between certain Anglo-Saxon and Latin words (e.g., aelmihtig and omnipotens), it is difficult to determine whether the older or more recent meanings of these terms were foremost in the poet's mind.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, after discussing the Christian allusions in Beowulf, Blackburn concludes that the poem existed as a whole without Christian allusions, and that except for two 'interpolated passages' (ll. 90-113 and 1261-6) all Christian references are of a colourless, Old Testament sort, "made to suggest Christian ideas by slight changes such

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<sup>65</sup>Brooke, pp. 230-40.

<sup>66</sup>F. A. Blackburn, "The Christian Coloring in the Beowulf," PMLA, XII (1897), 206-7.

as a copyist could easily make."<sup>67</sup> Of course, this is not possible: wyrd seems to be the only word for 'fate' in Old English poetry; and since epithets for God are numerous and participate in many alliterations, it would be impossible to substitute wyrd without altering both the meaning and the alliterative patterns of the poem. One must conclude that the Christian colouring is more fundamental than mere scribal substitutions.

Two articles of 1905 deal with nature in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Elizabeth Hanscom seems only to elaborate on the studies of Brooke and Mead, but her case for the 'feeling for nature,' offers some insight into Old English poetic imagery. She observes particularly the objective character of the nature imagery, and, like Gummere, she concludes that an awareness of resemblances led to much concrete figuration.<sup>68</sup> She also notices that winter is the only season which elicits from the Anglo-Saxons really forceful and vivid descriptions, so much so that the word itself became a synecdoche for 'year'.<sup>69</sup> She notices that descriptions of vegetation are either derivative (as in Phoenix) or indefinite (except for the apple in Genesis); that a few trees are named specifically, but that woods (especially that overhanging the mere) are usually

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>68</sup>Elizabeth Deering Hanscom, "The Feeling for Nature in Old English Poetry," JEGP, V (1903-5), 461.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., pp. 440-6.

described in little detail. Similarly, little is said about hills or mountains, but a great deal is said about storms, mists and foul weather.<sup>70</sup> On the whole, an article like this is of limited value in a discussion of diction and imagery, but it serves the important function of classifying and defining certain areas upon which later critics can erect their glittering structures of poetic analysis.<sup>71</sup>

The most remarkable study during this entire period is W. M. Hart's Ballad and Epic, a systematic and sensitive appraisal of Beowulf, disguised as a study in the development of literary form. Hart's thesis is that Beowulf, as an epic, "stands at the beginning of the poetry of art."<sup>72</sup> This statement summarizes, more effectively than most lists of facts, the peculiar position which Beowulf holds in English literary history, its delicate position between a fluctuating oral tradition and a permanent lettered tradition. In his essay Hart studies in detail those features of literary style which distinguish the

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., passim.

<sup>71</sup>The other article on nature (Frederic W. Moorman, "The Interpretation of Nature in English Poetry from Beowulf to Shakespeare," Quellen und Forschungen, XCV [Strassburg, 1905]) is almost entirely derivative; however, it treats Beowulf as part of English literature and emphasizes the imagination and close observation in the descriptive passages; Moorman compares the art in the mere description with the art of Homer, but says that it lacks the simplicity and succinctness of the classical master.

<sup>72</sup>Hart, p. 2.

epic type from the ballad; principally, the slower narrative pace, emotional appeal and the emphasis on realism and detail.<sup>73</sup> However, one should note that Hart has reservations about Beowulf's position at the start of the poetry of art: "it is clearly unsafe to insist much upon the conscious narrative art of the poet."<sup>74</sup> It seems to me that critics of this period insist too much on the consciousness of the poet's method, approaching the subject with an intensely classical view of artistic creation. A more romantic view would consider the possibility of artistic ends achieved by un- or semi-conscious inspiration, whether of the Muse or of Caedmon's angel.

What makes Hart's study different from the other history and genre studies of his day, is its concentration on style and structure rather than on content (although content is not ignored) and its constant reference to the actual language of the text. Thus instead of saying simply that the sword was the most important weapon to the Anglo-Saxons, Hart constructs an elaborate composite description of an Anglo-Saxon sword from nearly every descriptive epithet in Beowulf: its chain hilt (l. 1563), its gold adornments (ll. 1677, 1900), its runic markings (l. 1695); the use of the file in its manufacture (fēla lāfe, l. 1032); its individual name (Hrunting, Naegling), its role as a battle-friend (l. 1810); its value as an heirloom

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 197.

or relic of mysterious origin (enta aēr-geweorc, l. 1681), etc.<sup>75</sup> Although Hart's essay does not methodically discuss: 1) diction, 2) figuration, it makes clear that figuration occurs occasionally, that most of the language is directly descriptive and that the various terms are not repetitious.

Hart's discussion of emotional appeal in Beowulf leads to several important observations on diction and figuration. First, the feature of the comitatus most emphasized is that of friendship, as seen in the frequency of the word wine in phrases and compounds dealing with the relationship between the leader and his men.<sup>76</sup> Next, the constant mention of father-son relationships, particularly before speeches, Hart suggests, may have an aesthetic function, "not so much to convey information as to enhance the dignity and formality of the dialogue, and to add to its sonorous effect by giving each time the speaker's whole name."<sup>77</sup> Such a love of sonorous names may also be seen in the repetition of Aeschere's name, in what Hart calls an 'envelope figure' (i.e., the enclosing of a logical thought group by the repetition of a key word or idea).<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 176-7.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 164; however, Hart fails to consider the possibility of wine being used ironically by Beowulf of Unferth.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 164; see also Adeline Bartlett, The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1935); discussed below, chapt. IV, p. 132.

Hart also observes that "the idea of an inner, spiritual part of man was continually in the poet's mind," a fact seen in the frequent use of such words as sāwol, heorte and mōd.<sup>79</sup> The poet's concern with mental states is noticeable, for example, in lines 710-90 (the fight with Grendel), a passage apparently concerned with action. Of the 162 half-lines in this passage Hart notes that 65 deal entirely or predominately with the mental states of either the antagonists or the on-lookers. This, Hart concludes, is part of the poet's method—to describe something by its effect on others.<sup>80</sup> The most frequent method by which the poet presents these mental states is by direct epithet (e.g., gryre-lēoð), by using an adjective as a noun,<sup>81</sup> by parentheses (e.g., him waes sefa gēomor, l.2632) or occasionally by a sentence or clause. Hart even admits, cautiously, that among these various expressions there is a "possibility of nicety of application";<sup>82</sup> for example, on mere staredon (l. 1603) he considers poetically appropriate and comparable in emotional impact with Keats' use of the word 'stare' in the sonnet on Chapman's Homer; wyn-lēas wīc (l. 821) he

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<sup>79</sup>Hart, p. 170.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp. 214-7.

<sup>81</sup>Hart's example (p. 219), sāe-mēpe (l. 325) is glossed by Klaeber as an adjective, and there seems no reason to suppose it to be used otherwise.

<sup>82</sup>Hart, p. 219 n.

considers akin to the pathetic fallacy of the romantics.<sup>83</sup>

Also contributing to the emotional impact of the style is the poet's ability to transfer his mood to the reader by enumeration of external objects, as in the lament of the last survivor, in which the poet "enumerates results merely, known causes, attendant circumstances."<sup>84</sup> There is also rich suggestiveness in the sight and sound details as the Geats march to Heorot.

What Hart finds most remarkable is that this emotional impact occurs in spite of the conventional and general nature of the language. For example, the hero is seen in typical terms of valour, e.g., eafoð and ellen; character is described by vague epithet, e.g., frōð and gōð; the great antagonists are seen in vague, but effective terms, e.g., māere mearc-stapa and fēa-sceaft guma. "What mystery there is, then, in the conception of Grendel is not due to the conscious effort of the poet; it is rather the mystery of the vague and ill-defined."<sup>85</sup> This last statement is exceedingly illogical, since the vague and ill-defined may indeed be the poet's intention and can be an effective literary device. In his comments on the 'formal' description of the mere Hart once more emphasizes the vagueness and mystery.

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., pp. 220-1.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., pp. 179, 181.



Only slightly more specific and concrete, he says, is the description of the journey to the mere, which, like most of the descriptions, is impressive for its unity of effect rather than for its logical order.<sup>86</sup> Oddly enough, Hart has elsewhere commented on the fact that the epic as type is never in a hurry, that it lingers over and elaborates items and presents a series of tableaux rather than rapid action.<sup>87</sup> But in the mere set-piece he finds no system; in the journey to the mere he finds a hurried collection of unordered details; and in the journey to Denmark he finds the embarkation repeated three times, instead of which it is a graphically visualized description of the various stages in setting sail. Such an oversight does not seem in keeping with criticism that can recognize the variation of both facts and phrases in repetition of the same incidents.<sup>88</sup>

Hart also finds that repetition and dialogue reveal some important aspects of style. First, repetition can be used to anticipate things--a sort of dramatic irony, since the characters themselves are kept ignorant.<sup>89</sup> Second, even when dialogue repeats the narrative, the details are changed and given in briefer and more general terms.<sup>90</sup> (Similar distinction

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., pp. 223-4.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

is made between all primary and secondary material, a strong case against the ballad theory of epic origin: primary passages are given in relatively concrete and elaborate terms, secondary passages in relatively general and brief terms.)<sup>91</sup>

Specific matters of diction and figuration are not Hart's concern in this essay and receive only passing notice. However, this study is obviously an important step in the increased appreciation of Beowulf. Hart has made significant progress in pointing out various types of expression and especially in seeing a relation between the form and content of the poem. What weaknesses the essay possesses, are due, I feel, to Hart's apologetic caution lest he give the poem more credit than is due for artistic success.

Old English syntactical figuration has never attracted a great deal of critical attention, in spite of its importance. Albert Tolman is the first English critic to present a systematic review of the various figurae in Anglo-Saxon poetry, but as usual his discussion tends to be merely descriptive. Parallelism, he states quite obviously, is created by repetition and variation and occurs frequently enough to be considered a deliberate device, for example in the ship's getting ready to sail to Denmark.<sup>92</sup> Like most of his predecessors Tolman bemoans the paucity of transitional devices

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>92</sup>Tolman, p. 32.

and notes several grammatical peculiarities which contribute to disconnectedness, not the least of which is parataxis (by which the poet expresses in independent clauses what we are used to expressing subordinately).<sup>93</sup> Perhaps one reason neither Brooke nor Hart could detect development or climax in certain highly descriptive passages is found in Tolman's blunt statement that absence of logical sequence is a feature of the style:

A mass of striking details are brought out in consecutive sentences, which details are not consecutive in their appearance or occurrence....It is always the total effect that is sought, and this is often secured to a wonderful degree.<sup>94</sup>

Finally, Tolman does not seem to appreciate the parenthetical remark as a stylistic feature when he notes the jarring effect of the abrupt transition at line 1605,<sup>95</sup> where the action shifts in the middle of the line from the watchers on the shore to the melting of the magic sword.

This slowness to accept syntactic peculiarities, as compared with other aspects of style, was probably responsible for the slow development of total appreciation. But gradually critics began to understand the features of poetic syntax. In 1892 John Earle argues that inversions are a particular

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.,

syntactical device. However, he attributes the poet's tendency to insert a parenthesis between announcing a set speech and giving the speech, to what he calls the 'rambling' character of the "genuine and unsophisticated Epic."<sup>96</sup>

In 1905, a year of intensive work on syntactical rhetoric, George Krapp examines in detail the characteristics of this parenthetical device alluded to by Earle, and blames poorly edited texts for obscuring a clearly defined feature of Old English poetic style.<sup>97</sup> He notices two types of parenthesis: the type noticed by Earle, and a type of which healwudu dynede (l. 1317) is an example. He calls them exclamatory because their brevity, position and content suggest emphatic recitation.<sup>98</sup> Krapp finds thirty-nine instances of this device in Beowulf, ten of which precede direct discourse, and all but one of which (l. 3056) begin with the second hemistich.<sup>99</sup> He logically concludes that to place such a parenthesis in the first hemistich was considered bad style:

and this rule, it may be observed, was quite in harmony with the general feeling for metrical effect which always

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<sup>96</sup>John Earle, trans., The Deeds of Beowulf (Oxford, 1892), p. L.

<sup>97</sup>George Philip Krapp, "The Parenthetical Exclamation in Old English Poetry," Modern Language Notes, XX (1905), 33.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., pp. 34-5.

strove to make the second half-line fixed and emphatic, the first half-line relatively free and light.<sup>100</sup>

The device, he concludes, was a regular feature of the style and may have originated in the supposedly energetic oral delivery of the scop: "as an occasion for a gesture or a shout, as a stimulus to arouse the flagging attention, or as an indicator of something important to follow."<sup>101</sup> Krapp has thus presented a full, self-contained study of a poetic device and has presented it with the cautious meticulousness of a good editor.

In the same year another future editor, Fr. Klaeber attacks a number of editorial-stylistic problems. However, of the seven syntactic peculiarities he observes none is what would be called a 'figure,' except insofar as any rearrangement of words for special effect might be so termed. He notes the use of the comparative when no comparison takes place, and also the accumulation of comparatives for emphasis (e.g., ll. 951 ff.).<sup>102</sup> Variation he calls "the very soul of the Old English poetical style,"<sup>103</sup> and he explains certain of its characteristics: a general noun can vary with a specific

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>102</sup>Klaeber, "Textual Interpretation," p. 257.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

infinitive phrase and be governed by the same verb (e.g., 'bearhtm ongēaton,/ gūðhorn galan,' ll. 1431 f.); equivalent terms in variation may be in different grammatical forms (e.g., 'mēarum rīdan,/ beornas on blancum,' ll. 855 f.); variations may be accumulated for emphasis; it is often difficult to tell the number of separate items; etc.<sup>104</sup> This does not begin to cover the rhetorical and syntactical notes which Klaeber makes; but they are extremely important, text-oriented observations of stylistic peculiarities and a necessary foundation for a complete understanding of style.

Although the larger problems of structure are not the concern of this paper, James Routh briefly shows in his 1905 attack on the ballad theory, how the larger elements are related to the smaller elements of style. Aside from maintaining that the digressions and episodes are artistically justified, Routh claims that transition between episodes was as unnecessary as between sentences:

As he massed sentences, and even parts of the same sentence paratactically, so he put in his narratives whole sections which to us appear irrelevant, but which to his audience were clear enough in import.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., pp. 237-42.

<sup>105</sup>James Edward Routh, Jr., Two Studies on the Ballad Theory of the Beowulf (Baltimore, 1905), p. 56.

Thus 1905 has seen improvement in the attitude to and understanding of syntactic devices, particularly the parenthesis.

It should be clear, however, that although critics and scholars have by this time discovered a number of interesting things about Old English poetic style, there is no sense of their having any consistent method or approach to the study of Old English poetry. It is also worth noting that they are not, for the most part, the source of the mainstream of critical opinion. That is to be found in literary histories and genre studies, as well as in prefaces to editions and translations of Beowulf. In most cases, especially up until 1910, the historical emphasis in Beowulf criticism continues.

The earliest of these literary histories, Henry Morley's English Writers (1888), is perhaps the most complete and best informed. It seems primarily a review of the major scholarship and critical debates to date; but happily, although he spends most of his time on the historical environment of the literature, Morley realizes the literary value of Old English poetry:

A student of geography might wisely study with the keenest interest its [Widsith] long recitals of the names of tribes. But in doing so he would be studying geography, not literature. The student of literature asks how the old gleeman shaped it to delight and teach; out of what forms of life it arose; and to what forms of life it added strength and pleasure. He does not sit at the table of a poet bent upon destructive distillation of the banquet spread on it.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Morley, Vol. II, p. 31.

However, antagonistic as this statement is to the excesses of extrinsic criticism, it is obvious that Morley regards the historical-cultural background as of first importance; he devotes only a few pages to the craft of the scop.

Sounding rather like Matthew Arnold ('On the Study of Celtic Literature') Morley writes of the practical mind and plain speech of 'First-English' and notes the absence of the gay wit and ornament which characterize Celtic literature.<sup>107</sup> Even the five similes which occur in Beowulf are, Morley says, 'natural expressions' rather than 'added ornaments.'<sup>108</sup> Finally, Morley's comments on the poetic compound seem to derive almost completely from Gummere's Anglo-Saxon Metaphor, with its distinction between the unconscious and conscious metaphor.<sup>109</sup>

The great scholar, W. P. Ker, in his 1897 book Epic and Romance has little to say about diction, etc., and even that is almost as uncharitable as accusing Beowulf of having a cheap fairy-tale plot.<sup>110</sup> Unfortunately, Ker mentions the weak rather than the strong points of Old English poetic style: "the decline of Old English poetry is shown by an increase of diffuseness and insipidity";<sup>111</sup> "the tendency in England was to

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., pp. 43-4.

<sup>110</sup> Ker, Epic and Romance, p. 134.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 136.



make use of the well-worn epithets...the duller kind of Anglo-Saxon poetry is put together as Latin verses are made in school, --an old-fashioned metaphor is all the more esteemed for age."<sup>112</sup> Not even to suggest that all poems were not the same is unfair to Beowulf. One might suggest that the theoretical approach of this book was not concerned with style. However, Ker does not appreciably modify his attitude in either The Dark Ages (1904) or English Literature Medieval (1912), in both of which he speaks disparagingly of the ready-made diction and unoriginal ornaments.

Three general literary historians at the turn of the century are either reserved and hostile to or ignorant of the subject. W. J. Courthope (1894) believes in an oral genesis and considers metaphor and formula are influenced by the demands of a verse to be chanted.<sup>113</sup> George Saintsbury considers Old English poetry vastly overrated and describes the caesura and parallelism as "the most natural note of half civilized poetry."<sup>114</sup> Richard Garnett (1903) seems to enjoy the powerful description of Grendel, but says that the poet "labored under the disadvantages of paucity of impressions and ideas, diction unrefined

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>113</sup>Courthope, p. 89.

<sup>114</sup>George Saintsbury, A Short History of English Literature (London: MacMillan, 1913), pp. 9, 36.

by study and practice, and a cramping system of versification."<sup>115</sup>

And so the attitude continued into the new century and into the major works. Not one of the five critics who submitted articles pertaining to Old English to the Cambridge History of English Literature--Saintsbury, Chadwick, Bentinck Smith, Westlake or Bradley--has more than a passing generalization to make on style. Nor does Henry Bradley correct this deficiency in his article on Beowulf for the eleventh edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. To him Old English criticism begins with the discovery of the identity of Hygelac: "the criticism of the Old English epic has therefore for nearly a century been justly regarded as indispensable to the investigation of German antiquities."<sup>116</sup> Finally, it has already been seen, H. M. Chadwick's interest (1911) lies in the concept of oral poetry.<sup>117</sup>

But not all comment is so negative; most of the translators and editors of Beowulf approach their subject with greater interest and enthusiasm. Only Clark Hall in the first edition of his prose translation (1901) echoes some nineteenth century attitudes in his preference for the greater lucidity and sense of sequence of later Old English poems.<sup>118</sup> Most of

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<sup>115</sup>Richard Garnett, English Literature: An Illustrated Record, Vol. I (New York, 1903), p. 16.

<sup>116</sup>Vol. III.

<sup>117</sup>See above, p. 79.

<sup>118</sup>John R. Clark Hall, trans., Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg: A Translation into Modern English Prose (London, 1901), p. xviii.

Clark Hall's introduction is derivative, but he notes that litotes and metaphor are the favorite figures (he calls a kenning a poetical synonym) and comments that some of the variations for death are very beautiful. Three years later C. G. Child praises the literary value of Beowulf and significantly remarks: "the study of myths...while of great interest and value, contributes little or nothing toward increased appreciation of the interest and beauty of the poem."<sup>119</sup> He draws attention to specific meaning, praises the variety of expressions for king and warrior. His attitude to the poetical synonym is moderate and objective; and above all, he considers Beowulf a piece of conscious art "to satisfy a definite artistic ideal."<sup>120</sup>

F. B. Gummere in 1909 also states; "its art is highly developed."<sup>121</sup> Like Hart, Gummere sees Beowulf as a literary creation at the start of the poetry of art.<sup>122</sup> As support for this theory of artistic intent, Gummere elsewhere observes that variation of repeated or parallel elements marks the beginning of artistry in poetry.<sup>123</sup> It is also worth noting that he has clarified his terminology since 1881 and now sees

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<sup>119</sup>Clarence Griffin Child, trans., Beowulf and the Finnesburh Fragment (Boston, 1904), p. x.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. xx.

<sup>121</sup>Francis B. Gummere, trans., The Oldest English Epic (New York, 1909), p. 3.

<sup>122</sup>It is interesting to note that most of the unfavorable criticism above came from critics endorsing the oral theory of

kennings as a particular branch of metaphor.

Finally, W. J. Sedgefield (1910) maintains a favorable attitude to the poem. In the introduction to his edition of Beowulf he devotes reasonable attention to poetic diction and style and gives less space to myth and history. However, like many introductions, it is quite derivative. Sedgefield merely elaborates on the emotional quality of the poem; but he is the first critic (examined here) to draw explicit attention to the Anglo-Saxon preference for allusion over direct statement and for negative over positive statement (consequently, Sedgefield concludes, litotes is a frequent figure and simile rare).<sup>124</sup> He finds that the large store of equivalent expressions, the stock phrases (which he calls kennings) and the periphrases are all used with moderation in Beowulf.<sup>125</sup>

Between 1914 and 1921 work on Old English was much reduced, doubtless because of the war, although a moderate amount of textual criticism continued to appear. One should note here that in matters of text some critics (especially

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origin (doubtless heirs of the lay-theory dissectors), whereas the emerging favorable criticism comes from those who consider the poem a lettered work.

<sup>123</sup>The Beginnings of Poetry (New York 1908), p. 214. As a point of interest, Gummere finds one hundred different appellations for Beowulf and fifty-six for Hrothgar (Translation, p. 18).

<sup>124</sup>W. J. Sedgefield, ed., Beowulf, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Univ. of Manchester, 1913), p. xxiii.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., pp. xxiii-xxiv.

German) were enthusiastically making rather extravagant emendations, a 'rage' which Klaeber earlier attacked.<sup>126</sup> Frederick Tupper, Jr. indicates some of the startling abuses made by "destructive critics eager to replace the version of the manuscript by [their] own arbitrary suggestions."<sup>127</sup> For example, as late as 1910 Trautman could emend the highly imaginative dēaðwang ruddon (Andreas, l. 1003) to the almost incomprehensible and certainly unnecessary dēaðwōman budon,<sup>128</sup> which, if nothing else, shows the editor's insensitivity to the poetry. And it is just as impossible to discuss poetry properly with a faultily emended text as with an improperly understood one.

It is hard to generalize about this period, 1881-1921, but perhaps the most important thing is that the study of Old English poetry gradually became repatriated to English speaking countries and that consequently (or coincidentally) the emphasis on literary features gradually increased as English and American critics took over from the Germans. The metaphor, kenning and variations received the most attention; but none of the terms was very clearly or consistently defined or applied. Attempts were made to determine word connotation, and a considerable amount was discovered about sources and analogues, but no consistent method controlled these studies. Finally, however,

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<sup>126</sup>"Textual Interpretation," p. 235.

<sup>127</sup>"Textual Criticism as a Pseudo-Science," PMLA, XXV (1910), 166.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., pp. 172-3.

after the long reign of the historical critics, with their tacit approval of oral theories of origin, came critics who emphasized style and assumed that Old English poetry came of a lettered background. With this encouragement and support, by 1921 critics no longer felt obliged to apologize for the study of Old English poetry.

CHAPTER IV  
STANDARD TEXTS AND THE BEGINNINGS OF  
LITERARY EVALUATION: 1921-1953

The foregoing chapter showed how a lack of co-ordination in scholarship resulted in sporadic studies and inconsistent attitudes from 1881-1921, even though by the end of the period praise of style was becoming more common. The most distinguishing characteristic of this next period is a collecting and synthesizing of scholarship and the production of standard reference works and especially of standard texts. All six volumes of The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records appeared between 1931 and 1953, an indispensable, scholarly edition of all Old English poetry, with textual matters of prime importance. The period is also bordered by two of the most important editions of Beowulf, those of Klaeber (1922) and Wrenn (1953) with their full notes, bibliographies and critical apparatus. In addition, the Methuen Old English library published a series of carefully edited texts, with glossaries, for students. Finally, books appeared on several aspects of poetic criticism; most have not been superseded; many are still being printed.

The work which signals the beginning of the period is R. W. Chambers' Beowulf: An Introduction (1921). Like Chambers' earlier work on Widsith (1912), this book is an admirable and valuable account of the history, mythology, dating and structure of the poem (complete with original texts of analogues), but what little is said about diction, imagery and figuration

is merely incidental to discussions of dating and structure and not significant enough to review here. Nor do the second and third editions of the book (in spite of C. L. Wrenn's recent contributions) overcome this deficiency (1932, 1959). As an introduction to 'Beowulf the Poem' it is extremely limited. Not so, however, are the two influential works which I have chosen to head the sub-sections of this chapter.

A. Klaeber and the Concentration on Text and Style:  
1922-1935

Although much of what Klaeber says about style in the comprehensive introduction to his edition of Beowulf (1922) is basically not new, it is nevertheless an admirably clear and concise presentation of the most important aspects of Old English poetic style, with some new suggestions and evaluations. For example, most of what he has to say about the art of the epic (e.g., the generalizing allusive style of episodic and subordinate material, the formal dignity of the speeches) seems indebted to Hart's monograph Ballad and Epic; however, Klaeber notices that speeches begin and end with a full line,<sup>1</sup> unlike most sentences which end with the caesura. Similarly, his statements about the subjective impact of the poem (e.g., mental states, the emotional quality and lack of clear visualization in descriptions) echo those of Hart; however, Klaeber goes

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<sup>1</sup>Fr. Klaeber, ed.; Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, 3rd ed. (Boston: Heath, 1950), p. lv.



further to suggest that aspects of nature may be symbolic of certain emotions.<sup>2</sup>

Much of what Klaeber has to say about diction is also not basically new, but many of his judgments are. First, he emphasizes "the creative possibilities of the alliterative style," as testified in the abundance of compounds, which are the most significant element of the diction.

Indeed, by reason of its wealth, variety, and picturesqueness of expression the language of the poem is of more than ordinary interest. A host of synonyms enliven the narrative, notably in the vocabulary pertaining to kings and retainers, war and weapons, sea and seafaring. Generously and withal judiciously the author employs those picturesque circumlocutory words and phrases known as 'kennings,' which, emphasizing a certain quality of a person or thing, are used in place of the plain, abstract designation, e.g., helmberend...or such as involve metaphorical language, like rodores candel....<sup>3</sup>

The note of approbation here, particularly Klaeber's awareness of both the restraint and the creative possibilities of the language of Beowulf, establishes a new tone for the criticism of Old English poetic diction. One should also note that he uses the term 'kenning' to denote any poetic periphrasis and that he observes its usual form to be the compound.<sup>4</sup>

Klaeber also draws attention to the conventional nature of the diction of Beowulf, a subject hitherto merely alluded

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. lx.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. lxiii.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. lxiv; see appendix A.

to, usually by unsympathetic critics. He observes the "large stock of formulas, set combinations of words, phrases of transition, and similar stereotyped elements."<sup>5</sup> His remarks here mainly repeat the conclusions of his own 1905 article.<sup>6</sup>

Although Klaeber sees the gefraegn formulas as unmistakable evidence of the oral origins of the poetry, he obviously considers the formulas to be part of a "vast store of ready forms" which could be "added to and varied at will," and the poem to be the work of a lettered artist.<sup>7</sup>

Most of Klaeber's material on figuration is also derived from earlier scholarship, except that he places greater emphasis on the figure of litotes. In addition, he observes that "there is an organic relation between the rhetorical characteristics and certain narrower linguistic facts as well as the broader stylistic features and peculiarities of the narrative." Thus tautological compounds like dēaðcwealm, redundant combinations like bēga gehwæþres, variation, and repetitions in telling the story are, he claims, "only different manifestations of the same general tendency."<sup>8</sup> Similarly the indirectness of litotes is "similar in kind to the author's veiled allusions to the conduct of Hrothulf and to the remarkable reserve practised in the Christian interpretation [sic] of the story."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. lxvi.

<sup>6</sup>Fr. Klaeber, "Studies in the Textual Interpretation of Beowulf," Modern Philology, III (1905/6), 235-65, 445-65; discussed above, chapt. III, p. 79.

Klaeber does not suggest the poet sat down and deliberately arranged this balanced style, but he does say that the style of Beowulf "goes far beyond the limits of primitive art" --in spite of the 'natural' expression evidenced in the frequent parataxis.<sup>10</sup> Evidence of artistic judgment, he says, can be seen in the effective grouping of compounds, even in a single line (e.g., 'nȳdwracu nīþgrim, nihtbealu mǣst,' l. 193); in the repetition of significant lines (e.g., ll. 196f. and 789f.);<sup>11</sup> in the accumulation of variation for emphasis; and in the possible Latin influence of such figures as antithesis (e.g., ll. 183 ff.); and so on.<sup>12</sup>

Obviously Klaeber thinks highly of the range and versatility of the poetic art of Beowulf, and his study marks a significant stage in the development of the appreciation of Old English poetry.

Our final judgment of the style of Beowulf cannot be doubtful. Though lacking in lucidity, proportion, and finish of form as required by modern taste or by

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<sup>7</sup>Klaeber, Edition, pp. lxvi-lxvii.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. lxv.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. lxvi.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. lxvii; cf. S. O. Andrew, Postscript on Beowulf (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1948); discussed below, p. 146.

<sup>11</sup>se waes mancynnes      maegenes strengest  
on þāem daeg      bysses līfes (ll. 196 f.)

se þe manna waes      maegene strengest  
on þāem daeg      bysses līfes (ll. 789 f.)

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. lxviii.

Homeric and Vergilian standards, the poem exhibits admirable technical skill in the adaptation of the available means to the desired ends. It contains passages which in their way are nearly perfect, and strong, noble lines which thrill the reader and linger in the memory. The patient, loving student of the original no longer feels called upon to apologize for Beowulf as a piece of literature.<sup>13</sup>

Nor is value judgment all Klaeber has to offer. I have left to the last one of the most important contributions of this edition, a glossary in which words predominantly or exclusively poetic are marked, in which words exclusive (and almost exclusive) to Beowulf are marked, and in which parts of speech and line references are given for every occurrence of a word. One cannot underestimate the value of this to efficient and reliable poetic analysis.<sup>14</sup>

With general information having gone about as far as it could for the present, the next few years see a concentration on particular issues of style, predominantly on matters of diction. One should note in advance that all the critics assume that Beowulf is a lettered rather than an oral composition, all seem influenced to a greater or less degree by Klaeber and none seem constrained to apologize for the poetry — that day seems gone, one hopes, forever.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>cf. J. B. Bessinger, A Short Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1960); discussed below, chapt. V, p. 190.

Henry Cecil Wyld (1925) is unreserved in his praise of the imagination and sensibility in Old English poetry, and concludes that the poets "are in the true great line of English poets."<sup>15</sup> He finds part of this continuity of the national genius in the poet's use of words or phrases deliberately because they differ from everyday words (e.g., 'zephyr' and 'steed,' to use two modern examples). Nor does Wyld consider that the use of traditional or conventional diction precludes poetical value--even cliches may express genuine emotion and produce delight.<sup>16</sup> However, where ancient poetry is concerned, he says, the difficulty lies in grasping the precise shade of meaning, in understanding what emotional effect the word may have had for the Anglo-Saxon audience.<sup>17</sup> Thus he tries to derive help from etymology: for example, holm occurs in place names usually near or surrounded by water and holmr in Norse means 'sea island,' so that the Old English word carries with it the idea of a lofty, mounted slope. However, Wyld admits that this method may be misleading since the poet may have used a word ignorant of its origin.<sup>18</sup> Wyld then states that usage

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<sup>15</sup>Henry Cecil Wyld, "Diction and Imagery in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," Essays and Studies, XI (1925), 91.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

and association must reveal much about the life of the words, and that grouping words into associations must be a necessary step in interpretation.<sup>19</sup> Of course, such a method requires a great deal of subjective judgment; but considering the trends of modern Beowulf criticism, I believe Wyld was working in a profitable direction.

Wyld's second concern is with the Old English metaphorical expressions, which Quiller-Couch had called (1916) "the besetting sin of the Anglo-Saxon gleeman":<sup>20</sup>

Now the Anglo-Saxon poet undoubtedly does very often avoid calling a spade a spade. The question therefore arises whether a spade is, under all possible circumstances, the best name for a spade, or whether in a particular passage a poet does or does not secure a better poetical result by calling it something else.<sup>21</sup>

Wyld here seems to ignore a characteristic of variation: that a spade is often called a spade, as well as many other descriptive and poetic things; e.g., in lines 207-28 a ship is called a bāt, sundwudu, flota, nacan, wudu bundenne, flota fāmigheals, wundenstefna, sāewudu--an impressive collection of names ranging from the literal simplex bāt to the highly poetic flota fāmigheals.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>20</sup>Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, On the Art of Writing (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), p. 195.

<sup>21</sup>Wyld, p. 57.

Using rather debatable and unreliable subjective criteria of judgment, Wyld finds two distinct classes in the Anglo-Saxon 'metaphor'; poetic set phrases which lack vitality and add nothing to the stock of beautiful images, e. g., ganotes baeb and swanrād; and those whose beauty and truth are impressive, e.g., sealtȳða qewealc and wāegholm.<sup>22</sup> He praises the descriptive value of certain adjectives like fealu or sīdne (with sāe) and the 'poetic genius' of a sustained metaphor such as weallfaestan and meretorras multon in Exodus.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Wyld finds "nothing of great poetic value" in terms like wāegflota and brimwudu, but praises expressions like īsiq and ūtfūs and fāmiq scip, as well as all the language and devices used to describe the crossing to Denmark. If one may draw conclusions from these evaluations, it would appear that Wyld basically prefers, to use Gummere's divisions, the conscious rather than the unconscious metaphor. That is, he admires an Old English figurative compound if it is a sustained metaphor or appropriately modified, for example, "se brimhengest bridles ne gymed" (Runic Poem, l. 66),<sup>24</sup> in which the image of the ship as a stallion is sustained beyond the single compound. However, he criticizes brimhengest used alone, considering it a lifeless periphrastic epithet. Even here one can see the

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 50-60.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

persistence in scholarship of classical concepts of figuration. Nonetheless, Wyld's study is valuable in its attempt to evaluate Old English poetry as poetry and in its attempt to use word connotations and realistic detail as principles of evaluation. Whether or not one agrees with Wyld's particular judgments, one must admit that he is evolving potentially useful methods for approaching Old English poetic diction and imagery.

The section on Old English literature which Emile Legouis contributed to the History of English Literature (1926) also shows the growing interest in poetic language. In his observation that Old English is an inflected language and lacks logical grammatical particles, Legouis is somewhat like French critics of the nineteenth century; but in his attempt to relate the peculiarities of the language to the peculiarities of style, he goes far beyond their limited judgments. First, he notes that the effect of an inflected language

is to cause the place of words to be strictly governed by the needs of the alliterative line or the exigencies of emphasis. There is an abundance of separate, disconnected words in apposition, with something of the effect of superimposed interjections.<sup>25</sup>

Second, he shows that the absence of suffixes and prefixes permits the abundant compounding of words, such as the prosaic

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<sup>25</sup>Emile Legouis, The Middle Ages and the Renaissance: 650-1660, trans. Helen Douglas Irvine, Vol. I of Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, A History of English Literature (London: Dent, 1926), p. 10.



rōd-faestnen for 'crucify' and staef-craeftig for 'a man learned in letters.'<sup>26</sup>

In poetry per se Legouis remarks on the use of compounds for ornament and recognizes the aesthetic function of 'accumulated periphrases,' or variation: "to show a quality of the subject-matter and throw it into relief, or, more frequently, for pure love of these terms, or again, for the sake of alliteration."<sup>27</sup> He also limits the meaning of the term 'kenning' to metaphorical expressions, such as 'jewels of the head' for 'eyes,' in which the identity of the object must be guessed, somewhat in the manner of a riddle.<sup>28</sup> However, Legouis observes, as did many of his predecessors, that Old English metaphors "hardly ever make the consecutive and extensive comparisons which are born of imagination and reason."<sup>29</sup> He also notices that the similarity of style in all the poems can be monotonous and that the traditional form can "give an air of grandeur to particular poems, but imprison and restrict individual initiative."<sup>30</sup>

Although Legouis retains the rather neo-classic attitude frequently held by literary historians, he has, like Wyld,

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.; see appendix A.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 11

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

suggested that the same poetic style may be used with varying degrees of success. W. W. Lawrence expands on this idea in his brief remarks on the style of Beowulf (1928). Old English poetic style, he says,

far from being in any way primitive...was over-elaborate, on its way to decadence. Variation and repetition were too freely and too mechanically employed; set epic phraseology too often took the place of inspiration. The art of the singer was coming to resemble that of a worker in mosaic, placing in new combinations pieces ready to his hand...Beowulf, the finest example of this poetry, shows less exaggeration in rhetorical artifices, but enough to bear witness to their dangers. Although derived to a large extent from popular sources...it is...the product of an ars poetica of settled principles and careful development.

Moreover, it is highly sophisticated and aristocratic, essentially a courtly epic.<sup>31</sup>

Lawrence has here summarized and judged the most salient features of the Old English diction.

In the Klaeber Miscellany of 1929 are several extremely important essays on diction. The first, by Helen Buckhurst, is a response to Wyld's plea for a whole article on the sea and ships.<sup>32</sup> Her article concerns only the words for sea, and some of her conclusions and methods are remarkably 'modern.' For the twenty-four simplices which she gathers (including garsecg and the doubtful eolet) she states that in choosing a synonym for 'sea' the poet could choose one of broader meaning

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<sup>31</sup>William Witherle Lawrence, Beowulf and Epic Tradition (New York: Hafner, 1963), p. 4.

<sup>32</sup>Wyld, p. 63.

(water in general) or one of more specific meaning (channel or wave) and that in most cases the original meaning of the word is still discernible, if only through a cognate language like Old Norse.<sup>33</sup> Such a study certainly opens up the possibility of finding artistic description in Old English poetry, for language analysis is basic to a full appreciation of the device of variation.

Like Wyld, Miss Buckhurst shows how effectively adjectives can be used in description. For example fealu, she says, is frequently used, both conventionally and vividly, to describe "heaving water under a rainy and sunless sky."<sup>34</sup> And, like Legouis, she sees the 'kenning' in its narrow metaphorical sense: when the adjective rather than the noun carries the idea of the sea (e.g., dēop gedraeg or fāmge felds) "the phrase is a true 'kenning!'"<sup>35</sup> Miss Buckhurst also divides the compounds and phrases for sea according to function, not to form: 1) those simple and numerous terms which singly denote sea (e.g., laqustrēam) and which retain their original, non-figurative force; 2) terms in which a new element is introduced (she

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<sup>33</sup>Helen Thérèse McMillan Buckhurst, "Terms and Phrases for the Sea in Old English Poetry," Studies in English Philology in Honor of Frederick Klaeber (Minneapolis: Univ of Minnesota Press, 1929, pp. 106-8; e.g., strēam originally meant 'current' but in Old English the plural is used to mean 'sea' (cf. Old Norse straumr); brim and its plural are commonly used for 'sea' and originally had the sense of 'surf' or 'surge' (cf. Old Norse brim) (ibid.)

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 110; see appendix A.

detects eleven different areas of emphasis), and yet the sea itself, by one of its many names, is still retained (e.g., floda begong or the more pictorial waeteres hrycg); 3) the 'kennings,' "condensed metaphorical, pictorial, or figurative expressions," quite a rare occurrence in Old English poetry, where the poet seemed to prefer the 'half-kennings,' "in which the metaphorical element is for the most part absent...."<sup>36</sup> In this respect, and in the absence of mythological kennings, Old English poetry avoids the elaborateness of Old Norse.

Certainly, this is a significant article in the objective method with which it treats the material, in its drawing together suggestions earlier made by Gummere and Klaeber, and in its clear grouping and definitions. It pursues Wyld's suggestion of using etymology in the appreciation of poetic language, shows how different Old English and Old Norse can be, and emphasizes the possibility that the poet may use his creative imagination.

Three other articles in the Klaeber Miscellany concern diction and imagery, the least flattering being that of F. P. Magoun. Magoun concludes that because Beowulf contains the same word as the first element in more compounds than does the Elder Edda, then the Beowulf poet was less skilful and resourceful than his Scandinavian counterpart(s).<sup>37</sup> W. F. Bryan, on

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 110-18.

<sup>37</sup>Francis P. Magoun, Jr., "Recurring First Elements in Different Nominal Compounds in Beowulf and the Elder Edda" (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1929), pp. 73-8.

the other hand, does not compare the two languages, but instead shows that first elements of compound folk-names in Beowulf (except those for which the poet is in no way responsible, like Healf-Dene) are not used mechanically, but are used appropriately (e.g., both occurrences of Sāe-Geatas, ll. 1850, 1986, concern either exploits or exchange of gifts across the sea), and possibly even ironically (e.g., Gār-Dene, l. 601 and Sige-Scyldingas, l. 597, in Beowulf's cutting reply to Unferth).<sup>38</sup> Bryan also suggests that the demands of alliteration enslaved the Beowulf poet no more than rhyme enslaves a modern poet, and that gēardagum was probably chosen to fit Gār-Dene, not the other way round.<sup>39</sup> Thus Bryan concludes that no aspect of the poet's artistry is "more notable than his sure mastery of such stubborn material as folk and national names."<sup>40</sup>

J. R. Hulbert also advances the case for the artistic merit of Old English poetic diction. In 1932 he sees definite value in Bryan's approach, whether or not one accepts the entire theory,<sup>41</sup> and suggests that the only real conclusion to be drawn from Magoun's article is that Old English and Old

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<sup>38</sup>William Frank Bryan, "Epithetic Compound Folk-Names in Beowulf" (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1929), pp. 127, 128.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>41</sup>Godfrid Storms (Compounded Names of Peoples in Beowulf [Utrecht-Nijmegen: Dekker en van de Vegt, 1957]) praises Bryan's article for its treatment of diction when studies of the poem as a work of art were lacking.

Norse styles are different.<sup>42</sup> Also favoring the view of conscious artistry is Hulbert's own article on the haunted mere in the Klaeber Miscellany. After presenting the evidence for the two cases regarding this descriptive set-piece that the poet visualized nature, and that the account is a compilation from different sources--Hulbert concludes that the latter theory is inadmissible and that the former must be modified:

It is surely obvious that the choice of those details was determined not by the desire to suggest a definite mental picture but by the desire to arouse a certain emotion, to get a certain tone.<sup>43</sup>

Considering the frequent attention given by critics to the emotional impact of the poem, it seems inevitable that the imagery should be studied in detail for its emotional effect.

From some of the above articles one might conclude that there have been tendencies both to compare Old English poetry with its Old Norse counterparts and to make value judgments on the use of the poetic language. H. van der Merwe Scholtz certainly continues in the former tendency in his full work on kennings; but in spite of his claim to treat the kennings according to what they mean, not according to their structure, he really ends up grouping and labeling them in a different way.

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<sup>42</sup>J. R. Hulbert, "A Note on Compounds in Beowulf," JEGP, XXXI (1932), 504, 505.

<sup>43</sup>James R. Hulbert, "A Note on the Psychology of the Beowulf Poet" (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1929), p. 193.

Although van der Merwe Scholtz' study is the fullest account of the kenning in English, it is a strangely unsatisfying work, mostly because Scholtz seems to be more concerned with sources than with actual practice and with knocking down other critics' theories than with clearly formulating his own.

However he makes several points that are new and important. First, he emphasizes the importance of the psychological attitude to language which denies that two words can be absolute synonyms. Cyning and bēodcyning may mean the same thing, he says, but one should not ignore the significance of emotional colouring of words--think of a foreigner trying to speak English and the amusement he frequently causes.<sup>44</sup>

Admittedly, some words may be chosen only for their ability to fit alliteration, but such a conclusion is valid only after examining the kenning in its context. For example, he says, the expressions sinces brytta and goldwine gumena (ll.1169-74) may have been chosen because they alliterated, but they could hardly have been better chosen to show the Queen's appeal to Hrothgar's liberality.<sup>45</sup> Scholtz also firmly denies that the great number of synonyms in the language led to their use by the poet: "it is more likely that a great many of them are

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<sup>44</sup>H. van der Merwe Scholtz, The Kenning in Anglo-Saxon Poetry (Oxford: Blackwell, 1929), pp. 8-10

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-15

indebted for their existence to the requirements of the poet."<sup>46</sup>

In his definition of the kenning Scholtz takes Snorri's three categories for substantives and interprets them thus: 1) words in their literal sense, 2) the ukennt heiti (also called nafn and heiti), 3) the kenning, heiti and kennt heiti. He notices the ambiguity of the term heiti, and defines the kenning as a periphrastic expression of at least two words either compounded or separate.<sup>47</sup> He has apparently, then, used the authority of Snorri to confirm the traditional definition of the term, although to do so he seems to have gathered all the terms in group 3 together as kennings. But Scholtz also counts certain single words as kennings, since he claims that unity of meaning is the distinguishing feature of the kenning and that in some cases there is no semantic difference between compound and simple expressions (e.g., hyrde is a simple version of folces hyrde).<sup>48</sup> Nor does Scholtz agree that the component parts of every kenning must be used in a figurative sense: "it would...be more correct to regard kennings as words and phrases used in a figurative or specialized, as opposed to the literal or general sense of such words and phrases."<sup>49</sup> Thus it is not absolutely clear what Scholtz does mean by 'kenning.'

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 37; see Appendix A.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 47.



The matter is somewhat clearer when he shows that the kenning is a substitute for a noun which stylistically goes beyond apposition and variation. Apposition, he says, probably began in the poet's wish for clearer designation of his referent, whatever the specific motive; in apposition the syntactic relation is clear: both words refer to the same object and stand in juxtaposition, whether in normal or inverted order.<sup>50</sup> Variation marks the next stage; here the apposition is separated from its relative word by one or more intervening words, these too in either normal or inverted order. Finally the one word is omitted and the other carries the entire meaning of the conception, standing alone as a kenning. This happens over a period of time, since "if two expressions are repeatedly used in the same syntactic relation, the one gradually assimilates the meaning of the other."<sup>51</sup> Really what Scholtz is proposing here is a gradual accretion of associations to a word.

In his classification of the kennings themselves, Scholtz groups them according to concept (i.e., sea, ship, etc.) but sub-classifies them according to form. For one word kennings for 'sea' he lists grund and holm, since their poetic meanings differ from those of prose. For compound kennings he lists wāegholm, garsecg, hronrād, etc. For phrases he finds three formal types: substantive plus substantive (e.g., ganotes baep), adjective plus substantive (e.g., sēo fealu flōd), and substantive

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-8, 115-23.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

plus participial phrase (e.g., earde yðum ðeaht), etc.

Waeter compounds he rejects for being too literal.<sup>52</sup> However, I cannot help wondering why he treats flōd as part of a kenning phrase, yet not as a kenning simplex.

What Scholtz says about the actual comparison of Old English and Old Norse is not of concern here, except for a few conclusions. First, the Old English kenning shows the oldest stage in the development of the kenning. Second, it is usually simple and obvious in both form and meaning. Last, it seems motivated by a desire to express a concept as vividly and emphatically as possible.<sup>53</sup>

In the meantime work was continuing on the relationship between Beowulf and the classical epics and between Old English poetry generally and classical composition. Since the nineteenth century, critics had observed parallels of situation and motif in Beowulf and Homer, but the recent emphasis on lettered rather than oral composition led to increased attention to Latin sources. Klaeber had produced a German article on Beowulf and the Aeneid (1911), and A. S. Cook produced a series of articles on classical parallels, among the last of which were those in 1924 and 1926. In the 1924 article Cook makes a case for the rhyming phrase flōd blōde wēol (l. 1422) being directly influenced by Aldhelm's rhyming phrase of similar

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 65-6.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 179-80.

meaning and context cruenta...fluenta.<sup>54</sup> Certainly such linguistic parallels are the most convincing method of determining influence, if it exists. Cook's 1926 article simply concerns the similarities of speech formularies in Homer and Beowulf.<sup>55</sup>

The whole question of the influence of one work or writer upon another is difficult at the best of times. Finding parallels is an interesting sort of academic parlour game, but with the number of factors involved one usually cannot prove anything. As I mentioned above, indisputable parallels of phrasing are perhaps the only parallels which can indicate positive influence, René Wellek states quite impressively the major pitfalls of parallel-hunting in general:

First of all, parallels must be real parallels, not vague similarities assumed to turn, by mere multiplication, into proof. Forty zeroes still make zero. Furthermore, parallels must be exclusive parallels; that is, there must be reasonable certainty that they cannot be explained by a common source, a certainty attainable only if the investigator has a wide knowledge of literature or if the parallel is a highly intricate pattern rather than an isolated "motif" or word.<sup>56</sup>

T. B. Haber ostensibly bears in mind such cautionary remarks as he compares Beowulf with the Aeneid: "it must always be admitted that any specific point referred to may find its

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<sup>54</sup>Albert Stanburrough Cook, "Beowulf 1422," Modern Language Notes, XXXIX (1924), 79.

<sup>55</sup>Albert Stanburrough Cook, "The Beowulfian Maðelode," JEGP, XXV (1926), 1-6.

<sup>56</sup>René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956), p. 248.

explanation in unadulterated Germanic tradition."<sup>57</sup> However, at times he either ignores or denies the Germanic tradition. For example, he considers that Beowulf's funeral shows non-Germanic influence, but he seems to forget that it has many resemblances to Attila's funeral as described by Jordanes. Also the absence of the definite article in both Latin and Beowulf does not necessarily prove a non-Germanic influence.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, perhaps the length of Beowulf was inspired by the length of the Aeneid: there is no poem of comparable length and theme extant in the Germanic tradition, and Haber supplies copious evidence for the wide availability of Virgil (much moreso than Homer) in England during the seventh and eighth centuries.<sup>59</sup> However, widespread knowledge and imitation of Virgil in the early Middle Ages no more proves influence than the supremacy of Shakespeare today proves his influence on modern drama.

The Latinisms in the poetic style are potentially more convincing of Latin influence, although these could come from other than the Aeneid and could even be common Germanic language features: the use of the passive voice where the active would be appropriate, the use of litotes, anaphora, polysyndeton,

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<sup>57</sup>Tom Burns Haber, A Comparative Study of the "Beowulf" and the "Aeneid" (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1931), p.viii.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., chapt. III, passim.; Lichtenheld's test shows that the definite article is more frequent in later Old English poetry.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., chapt. II, passim.

Latin loan words, etc.<sup>60</sup> Haber also weakens his argument considerably by suggesting that kennings and the tendency to stock phrases, two characteristics of diction most firmly rooted in the Germanic oral tradition, show Virgilian influence: "the possibility that Old English kennings may derive from classical models is strengthened by the fact that many Latin authors in England showed an especial relish for the decorative value of separate compound words."<sup>61</sup> Also potentially more convincing of influence are actual parallels of phraseology, of which Haber notes the following: īren and ferrum for 'sword'; rūmheort and magnanimuus; garsecg and Neptune; 'fāmigheals flota fugle gelīcost' and a similar bird simile in Aeneid Book IV, lines 211-6.<sup>62</sup> This last being one of the rare Beowulf similes, the possibility of influence here is quite strong. On the whole, however, isolated words and phrases prove little.

Even less do the larger issues of motif and sentiment show conclusive influence. Certainly, the Beowulf poet may have come in contact with the Aeneid, but I prefer to see it working a more subtle influence on Beowulf than Haber implies: that

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 33-44.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 66-67 n. Here Haber seems to ignore that the classical device of pronominatio (or antonomasia), a device used with some frequency in the Aeneid, is inspired by a wish to avoid mention of the referent, a rather precious motive and quite different from the Anglo-Saxon desire to describe in detail as many aspects of the referent as possible; see [Cicero], Ad C. Herennium de Ratione Dicendi (Rhetorica ad Herennium). trans. Harry Caplan (London: Heinemann, 1954), p. 335.

<sup>62</sup>Haber, pp. 72-5.

certain Latin figures and phrases, similar to those already in the native poetic or appealing especially to the Anglo-Saxon poet, would gradually enter the vocabulary and rhetoric of a sensitive and creative artist. Like J. R. R. Tolkien, I prefer to see the imitation and reminiscences due to fundamental similarities in poetic temperament.<sup>63</sup>

Of course a study such as Haber's assumes that Beowulf was a lettered rather than an oral composition, as does John Beaty's study of the 'echo-word.' This technique Beaty describes as the "repetition of a word for the pleasure of echoing its identical sound in a different meaning, connotation or association"; like alliteration, variation and epithet, it is just another way in which 'word oþer fand sōðe gebunden....'<sup>64</sup> Beaty finds five types of echo words in some sixty examples in Beowulf (no further than seventeen lines apart and not including natural repetition). One type, for example, entails the repetition of a word with a different meaning, connotation or association, such as on bearm scipes (l. 35) and him on bearm laeq (l. 40). Another type involves a word being the name, or part of the name, of a person, such as qāras (l. 328) and Hrōðqāres (l. 355).<sup>65</sup> Such a device is certainly quite

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<sup>63</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1963), p. 74; hereafter this volume will be referred to as Beowulf Anthology.

<sup>64</sup>John O. Beaty, "The Echo-Word in Beowulf with a Note on the Finnsburg Fragment," PMLA, XLIX (1934), 366.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp. 367-71.

impressive. I prefer, however, to view it as a mark of the poet's natural sensitivity to sound associations than to a deliberate setting down of similar sounds. Indeed, it is not the sort of device which would appeal to the eye anyway.

Adeline Bartlett also examines the text carefully for what she calls 'larger rhetorical patterns,' i.e., certain patterned repetitions of sound or of matter. In justifying her topic she observes, quite correctly, that the work on Old English poetic style since 1880 has been concerned with one work, one figure (usually the kenning) or one aspect (mainly metre), and that often the writers have been preoccupied with sources or comparisons with other languages.

But of Anglo-Saxon poetry as a relatively homogeneous and relatively independent body of verse it is perhaps true that little has been written; and even less has been written that is concerned primarily with its style.<sup>66</sup>

This is basically so, except that in the same year (1935) Edith E. Wardale published her Chapters on Old English Literature, the first comprehensive work on Old English for a number of years and the first to abandon the historical-ethnological orientation and to treat all the literature as a body, poetry and prose. Unfortunately, the section on style is extremely brief, and is completely derivative.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Adeline Courtney Bartlett, The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1935), p. 5.

<sup>67</sup>E. E. Wardale, Chapters on Old English Literature (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 14-8.

Although Miss Bartlett claims not to be concerned with the sources of the devices of her study, it is obvious that she leans to the idea of classical influence. Her book isolates and describes those verse paragraphs in Old English poetry which have a recognizable rhetorical structure, most of which is apparent when the poetry is read aloud. The design of the poem, she says, may at times be arbitrary and whimsical, but it is there. In this 'book epic,' as she calls Beowulf, "each verse pattern is a panel or section of the storied tapestry."<sup>68</sup>

In Anglo-Saxon poetry Miss Bartlett discovers six main patterns: the Envelope pattern, the Parallel pattern, the Incremental pattern, the Rhythmical pattern, the Decorative Inset and the Conventional Device. First, the Envelope pattern is one which has words and/or ideas repeated at both beginning and end of the unit, simple examples being lines 767-70 ('Dryhtsele dynede...Reced hlynsode') and lines 1323-9 ('Dēad is AEschere...swylc AEschere waes').<sup>69</sup> In addition, she finds chiastic patterns and verbal echoes and concludes: "Anglo-Saxon verse is genuine poetry, written by men who knew what they were doing. It is quite true that Anglo-Saxon verse is full of verbal trickery, echoes, puns of a sort, crisscross

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<sup>68</sup>Bartlett, p. 7. By 'book epic' I take Miss Bartlett to mean that Beowulf was a conscious artistic creation composed by a lettered poet, and not simply the record of an oral performance.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., pp. 9, 10.



patterns of phrasing."<sup>70</sup> On evidence from the Anglo-Saxon period itself, we know there was a great fondness for riddles and puns, in Latin at least.

A Parallel pattern Miss Bartlett limits to complete sentences at least three lines in length.<sup>71</sup> The 'Repetition parallel pattern' seems to be found only in religious poetry, and contains a series of repeated thoughts. The more common 'Balance pattern' has members which are not even approximately similar in content, but which are parallel in form and which constitute a related group of thoughts or images. Most came only in pairs (e.g., 'Ðā wæs on ūhtan.. þā wæs æfter wiste,' ll. 126-9), but those groups with anaphora, especially hwīlum and sum have more members.<sup>72</sup> Not only is a passage such as lines 2016-24<sup>73</sup> marked by anaphora, it is full of other verbal tricks, Miss Bartlett points out: the neat parallel of Wealhtheow cheering the geonge (l. 2018) and Freawaru bearing

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., pp. 17-8.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., pp. 33-4.

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	Hwīlum māeru cwēn,
friðusibb folca	flet eall geondhwearf,
bāedde byre geonge;	oft hīo bēahwriðan
seġge (sealde),	āer hīe tō setle gēong.
Hwīlum for (d)uguðe	dohtor Hrōðgāres
eorlum on ende	ealuwāeġe baer,
þā ic Frēaware	fletsittende
nemnan hýrde,	þāer hīo (nae)gled. sinc
haeleðum sealde.	(ll. 2016-24)

the ale cup to the duquðe (l. 2020); and the echoes in geonge - gēong (ll. 2018, 2019) and flet - fletsittende (ll. 2017, 2022). In all cases other words could have been chosen, but the poet chose to play with words.<sup>74</sup> She concludes the chapter with the 'Antithesis parallel pattern,' a most elaborate example of which is found in lines 183-8 ('Wā bið pāem...Wēl bið pāem...').<sup>75</sup>

The remaining patterns are all related to over-all structure more than to matters of diction and figuration. The 'Incremental pattern' treats such devices as the repetition of com in the stages of Grendel's coming. The 'Rhythmical pattern' is the name Miss Bartlett gives to the patterns of expanded, or hypermetric, lines. The 'Decorative Inset' is akin to the dilation of decadent classical rhetoric, she claims, is not an intrinsic part of the narrative, and may be homiletic, elegiac, runic, etc. (e.g., 'Wyrd oft nereð/ unfāegne eorl, þonne his ellen dēah!') (l. 572 f.). Last, the 'Conventional device' includes such devices as the opening formula in the first line of Beowulf.

All these patterns, Miss Bartlett concludes, are chosen for the sake of ornament and often fit content. She also defends the right to find Latinisms in Old English style, by the rather weak argument that no one objects to the fact in Milton:

My assumption would stress the position of Anglo-Saxon at the head of the long line of English literature, and would not admit her position as simply that of a

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<sup>74</sup>Bartlett, p. 35.

renegade daughter of the Germanic family who unfortunately married a decadent Mediterranean.<sup>76</sup>

Thus Old English poetic criticism has virtually reversed the trends of the nineteenth century, as an increasing number of critics unearth the immense potential of the poetic language and bring to bear modern critical methods.

#### B. Tolkien and Literary Evaluation: 1936-1953

However, J. R. R. Tolkien found a great gap in the appreciation of Old English poetry, at least in the appreciation of Beowulf—no one seemed to think it had the substance of a poem, even though it had the trappings. Thus Tolkien's famous British Academy lecture of 1936 is not directed so much at resuscitating the reputation of the style (or form) but at resuscitating the reputation of the poem itself, to show that it is worthy of the form. Such a work is of direct importance to the diction and imagery, since studies of poetic mechanics can become futile unless they are directed toward the total appreciation of the poem.

Tolkien's chief point where style explicitly is concerned, is to state that fundamentally all Old English poetry has the same dignified verse:

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 44-5.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

In them there is well-wrought language, weighty words, lofty sentiment, precisely that which we are told is the real beauty of Beowulf. Yet it cannot, I think, be disputed, that Beowulf is more beautiful, that each line there is more significant (even when, as sometimes happens, it is the same line) than in the other long Old English poems.<sup>77</sup>

Logically, then, the merit of Beowulf must lie in its theme and spirit: "Beowulf is indeed the most successful Old English poem because in it the elements, language, metre, theme, structure, are all most nearly in harmony."<sup>78</sup>

Thus Tolkien emphasizes Beowulf's importance not as an historical document, but as poetry quite independent of such things as the identity of Hygelac.<sup>79</sup> Basically Tolkien returns to Gummere's idea of a poet-monk, imbued with the new learning and conditioned by the old culture, creating the long poem Beowulf. For Tolkien sees the poem as a balance between Christian and pagan. To him the Grendels and the dragon are still actual physical foes against which the hero must struggle and which he must slay; but they also take on the symbolic cast of the forces of darkness and unreason against which mortal man tragically struggles to maintain himself in light and reason. But it does not, Tolkien insists, over-balance into the abstraction of medieval allegory.<sup>80</sup> He also tries to determine the

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<sup>77</sup>Tolkien, pp. 61-2.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., pp. 83-4.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

degree of symbolism which can be attached to certain words which have both pagan and Christian associations. Grendel is partly an accursed outcast of Cain's kin, almost a Christian devil, enemy of God (a fēond on helle, hellish enemy); but he is also enemy of man, a mere-dwelling monster which skulks about the moors.<sup>81</sup> Other terms like lof and dōm also have not quite assumed full Christian connotation. Actually, one might extend Adeline Bartlett's tapestry metaphor here: the warp threads were spun in Germania and some of the woof in the Christian cloister.

This symbolic approach ultimately had influence on Beowulf criticism, but of more immediate influence was Tolkien's theory of the poem's structure, its balance "of two moments in a great life, rising and setting; an elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and age, first achievement and final death."<sup>82</sup> The poem's two halves, he states, balance like the halves of a metrical line.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., pp. 88-91.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 83. By 1938 the influence of Tolkien is felt in Joan Blomfield's essay, "The Style and Structure of Beowulf" (Review of English Studies, XIV, 396-403) in which style is used as a key to the discussion of structure. Miss Blomfield notices the parallels between the larger and smaller stylistic elements (cf. Klaeber), and in her praise of the "sure construction of the poem" she reaches virtually the same conclusions as Tolkien. A further and almost radical extension of Tolkien's attitude towards artistic unity lies in a series of articles by Adrien Bonjour (see Twelve 'Beowulf' Papers: 1940-1960 [Geneva: Droz, 1962] and The Disgressions in 'Beowulf,' Medium AEvum Monographs, V [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1950]). These

C. C. Batchelor, however, appears to be unfamiliar with Tolkien's essay and states his intention to show "from the internal evidence of the vocabulary and style in the Beowulf that the whole is essentially Christian," and that Klaeber did not go far enough.<sup>84</sup> Unlike Tolkien, Batchelor considers that the large border-line vocabulary is used in its Christian rather than its pagan sense:

When we consider how much of the poem is taken up with heroic episodes, the vocabulary is far more deliberately, more professionally, Christian than would be supposed. It is the language of a tolerant enthusiast, an earnest convert to a simple faith....<sup>85</sup>

But this religion, Batchelor argues, is Pelagian rather than Augustinian (which he uses as an argument for northern composition).

Batchelor believes that a good ten percent of the vocabulary (excluding dēofel and epithets for God) are conditioned by Christian compassion, and that many of these words take on Christian connotations when used collectively but remain uncoloured when used separately. It is unfortunate, I think, that he illustrates his case by means of the highly Christian and confusing passage, lines 170-88, using it to show how the

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deal mainly with the larger problems of Beowulf: suspense and foreshadowing, repetitions in the narrative, and the artistry of the episodes and digressions.

<sup>84</sup>C. C. Batchelor, "The Style of the Beowulf: A Study of the Composition of the Poem," Speculum, XII (1937), 331.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 332.

tone depends on such words as wraec, gastbona, helle sawle, frofre, etc.<sup>86</sup> But I think Batchelor has made an important point in observing the cumulative effect of word connotations and also in noticing how this vocabulary of Christian compassion decreases as the poem progresses. Possibly, Batchelor suggests, in trying to write an epic modelled on Homer or Virgil, the poet simply grew tired before reaching the end.

Also of interest here is Batchelor's observation that the epic variation, "hardly one of the graces of the poem," is also reduced as the poem progresses. This fact leads Batchelor to conclude that the decline in variation marks the growing skill and restraint of the poet.<sup>87</sup> However, I think Batchelor is relying too much on personal taste in this evaluation, since his statistics show the greatest amount of variation in the passages of greatest poetic interest: the visitation of Grendel, the Unferth intermezzo, the coming of and battle with Grendel's dam, etc. And besides, as Batchelor himself acknowledges, it is difficult to differentiate at times between variation and enumeration.

The interest in Christian and classical influence<sup>88</sup> continues through the spotty criticism of the 1940's; and in

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., pp. 337-8.

<sup>87</sup>Batchelor, pp. 341-2.

<sup>88</sup>James R. Hulbert ("Beowulf and the Classical Epic," Modern Philology, XLIV [1946], 65-75) shows the extent to which the reputation of Beowulf has developed. Here Hulbert favourably compares it with Homer, because of the allusive complexity which he finds in the Beowulf episodes and the

spite of Tolkien's reluctance to call Beowulf an allegory, critics begin to investigate the possibility of treating the poem as an allegory in the medieval, patristic tradition of symbolic interpretation of Scriptures and classical writings. Many of the interpretations gained strength from Levin Schücking's iteration of Bernard Shaw: "the existence of a discoverable and perfectly definite thesis in a poet's work by no means depends on the completeness of his own intellectual consciousness of it."<sup>89</sup>

Hrothgar's sermon, Heremod's pride, the mere as hell, Grendel as the foe of God, Beowulf as the saviour and deliverer — all lead justifiably to such suggestions as Marie Hamilton makes in 1946: the figurative conception of Grendel and his abode owes much to semi-Biblical monsters and is part of the medieval tradition, related to St. Augustine's City of God.<sup>90</sup> However, she continues, in spite of the blend of Christian element and adventure story, Beowulf is still not an allegory,<sup>91</sup> an opinion substantiated in 1951 by Morton Bloomfield. Bloomfield examines the possibility of Unferth ('un-peace') being equated with Discordia; but although he rejects the idea of seeing the Beowulf-Unferth relation purely as an allegorical contest between Concord and Discord, "such concepts were in the greater dignity of the speeches and motivation of the northern hero."

<sup>89</sup>Quoted in Levin L. Schücking, "The Ideal of Kingship in Beowulf," Beowulf Anthology, p. 35.

<sup>90</sup>Marie Padgett Hamilton, "The Religious Principle in Beowulf," Beowulf Anthology, pp. 114, 118-9.



poet's mind...The story was coloured by the allegorical pattern."<sup>92</sup>

Reluctant as one might be to accept Christian interpretations of Beowulf, D. W. Robertson claims in his article on medieval garden imagery to clear up a number of 'inconsistencies' in the description of the haunted mere by extending the idea of psychological fear to include moral fear in the theological sense. Grendel's mere contains many of the images of the evil garden (Cupidity) deprived of the warmth and light of Christian Charity. The evidence is remarkably convincing: the mere suddenly becomes light (ll. 1570 ff.) when the source of evil is slain, the trees are frost-covered although it is probably not winter, there are moral implications in the hart preferring death to the eternal damnation of refuge in evil, and finally there are serpents around the mere.<sup>93</sup> Certainly these few articles show the modifications of Tolkien and the successful inroads being made by the figuration of Christianity.

To return to narrower aspects of figuration: in 1937 the figure of litotes, long alluded to, finally receives the attention of a full article. Frederick Bracher attempts to define, describe and suggest sources for this characteristic

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>92</sup>Morton W. Bloomfield, "Beowulf and Christian Allegory: An Interpretation of Unferth," Beowulf Anthology, p. 162.

<sup>93</sup>D. W. Robertson, Jr., "The Doctrine of Charity in Medieval Literary Gardens: A Topical Approach Through Symbolism and Allegory," Beowulf Anthology, pp. 184-6.

Old English device. First, he observes that it takes the form of understatement by negation rather than by the use of a weaker word, and that it is frequently 'adjectival.' But all negatives are not understatement; and since the context must determine the intention, Bracher treats only clear cases of understatement (e.g., 'nō his līfgedāl / sārlic þūhte secga āenegum,' l. 841 f.) and omits cases in which a negative word has its own positive force (e.g., undyrne).<sup>94</sup>

Bracher argues that a comparison of the prose and poetry versions of Boethius shows that only the poetic version contains clear examples of understatement, the original Latin having none.<sup>95</sup> Bracher concludes that "understatement is a definite characteristic of Old English poetic style."<sup>96</sup> He also gives a frequency table for the figure, which roughly shows it to be greater in the early pagan and heroic poems, their later imitations, and in Christian epics.<sup>97</sup> Both these factors, as well as the presence of understatement in Old Saxon and Old Norse, lead Bracher to the conclusion that it was a common device in Germanic alliterative poetry. Also suggesting pagan Germanic origin of understatement, is that it can produce

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<sup>94</sup>Frederick Bracher, "Understatement in Old English Poetry," PMLA, LII (1937), 915-7.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., pp. 918-9.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 920.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 921.

striking rhetorical effects, but that in later poetry it often appears mechanical and conventional.<sup>98</sup>

In determining the function of understatement, Bracher modifies all previous suggestions and tries to find the chief reason for each incidence, the most striking being those directed with hostile intent against villains (e.g., 'ne gefeah hē pāere fāehðe, l. 109). Nor does Bracher entirely dismiss the possibility of humorous understatement, although admittedly what might be so considered is of a very grim and unsophisticated sort, as in line 84lf. (quoted above). Most commonly, understatement is of the 'not so bad' sort and is used for emphasis (e.g., Beowulf's not needing to be ashamed of the gifts, l. 1025 f.).<sup>99</sup> Finally, Bracher concludes that for the most part, understatement is "motivated by a regard for politeness and decorum" and is occasionally used euphemistically.<sup>100</sup>

For the most part the years during and immediately following the war produced little Old English scholarship. The only major work on style during the period was J. C. Pope's Rhythm of Beowulf,<sup>101</sup> a serious reappraisal of Sievers' five types,

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., pp. 122-5.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., pp. 925-6; see also B. J. Timmer ("Irony in Old English Poetry," *English Studies*, XXIV [1952], 171-5) who rejects the idea of litotes being taken humorously by the Anglo-Saxons. He also points out the dramatic irony in Wealhtheow's speech to Hrothgar.

<sup>101</sup>(New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1942).

which Pope fits into an isochronous system of scansion. It has received wide, though not complete, acceptance as an explanation of poetic rhythm and exerts some influence on subsequent diction studies.

Two works on syntax also appear during the 40's, both technically oriented, but of importance to style. In 1943 Kemp Malone shows the three main stages in the historic development of the run-on line. The thulas of Widsith are, he claims, an example of the oldest linear verse, which consists of end-stopped lines and one-or two-line sentences.<sup>102</sup> Beowulf is an example of the classic or middle style, which consists of three to seven-line units and many natural divisions coming at mid-line (fits, however, end with the full line).<sup>103</sup> Judith is an example of the final stage, in which there are no very clear-cut units and sentences begin and end in mid-line in all but a few cases.<sup>104</sup> Malone later uses these stylistic observations as part of his article in Albert C. Baugh's A Literary History of England (1948).<sup>105</sup>

In 1948 S. O. Andrew combines the findings of two earlier studies<sup>106</sup> into a study of the style of Beowulf. The

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<sup>102</sup>Kemp Malone, "Plurilinear Units in Old English Poetry," Review of English Studies, XIX (1943), 203.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., pp. 202-3.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., pp. 203-4.

<sup>105</sup>(New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948).

<sup>106</sup>The Old English Alliterative Measure (Croydon, 1931) and Style and Syntax in Old English (Cambridge, 1940).

emphasis of Postscript on 'Beowulf' is on editorial matters concerning scansion, punctuation and sentence relationships; and many of the views on syntax and metre have not met with general critical acceptance. However, it shows that such a fundamental matter as syntax can influence the style. The difficulty in appreciating differences in Old English word order lies in the fact that most people are not 'fluent' enough in the language to detect the subtleties of changes in word order, a situation aggravated by the relatively small amount of work done in the field.

Andrew re-examines several aspects of style on the assumption that Old English poetic syntax follows the same rules of word order as does prose: the common order (in principal clauses), the conjunctive order (after conjunctives and relatives), and the demonstrative order (in principal clauses headed by a demonstrative adverb).<sup>107</sup> Part of Andrew's attack concerns the ambiguity of an expression like se baet which can be either relative or conjunctive: editors have a habit of punctuating as if they were principal clauses, many clauses which have conjunctive order, particularly when these precede the clauses to which they are (according to Andrew) subordinate.<sup>108</sup> In a pā clause like that in line 461 the subordinate reading seems quite logical (i.e., 'When the

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<sup>107</sup>S. O. Andrew, Postscript on Beowulf (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1948), p. 1.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

Weder folk could not keep Ecgtheow because of his war terror, then he sought the Danish folk'). But the bā clause in line 730 ('bā his mōd ahlōg') gains nothing by being read subordinately.<sup>109</sup> Andrew also points out that lack of subordination causes all examples of the bā...bā correlative to disappear.<sup>110</sup> And so on; he presents many examples.

In spite of the abundant evidence he offers, I wonder whether at times Andrew does not sacrifice sense to a desire for totally consistent syntax and whether it is even valid to expect the syntax of prose and poetry to be the same. I am reminded here of Albert B. Lord's description of the syntax of oral poetry (and whether orally composed or not, Beowulf is close enough to the oral tradition for the singer theory to be pertinent):

the future singer develops a realization that in sung stories the order of words is often not the same as in everyday speech. Verbs may be placed in unusual positions, auxiliaries may be omitted, cases may be used strangely. He is impressed by the special effect which results, and he associates these syntactic peculiarities with the singing of tales.<sup>111</sup>

However, Andrew's whole concept of periodic sentences effectively denies one of the most frequently observed features of oral poetry--parataxis--and seems to place Beowulf within a

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>111</sup>Albert B. Lord, The Singer of Tales (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), p. 32.

developed lettered tradition at some distance from the oral tradition.

In his discussion of co-ordinate clauses Andrew treats both parataxis and asyndeton, although he is mainly concerned with such editorial matters as punctuation; its frequent misuse, he claims, breaks up "a periodic structure into a sequence of short, disconnected principal clauses" and leaves many "supposed principal clauses without a subject."<sup>112</sup> Andrew bases this attack on two 'rules' of co-ordinate ond-clauses: they are normally asyndetic; and if the subject is not changed, it is not expressed.<sup>113</sup> He also maintains that parataxis, "in which a co-ordinate clause is idiomatically used to indicate subordination to the sentence before," is subject to the same rules as other co-ordinate clauses and as well has the verb stand first in its clause.<sup>114</sup> It seems that Andrew ignores the possibility that the poet may have worked for a special effect by repeating the subject in a co-ordinate clause or by omitting it in an asyndetic principal clause. However, this point is minor compared with the close examination of the text which he forces one to undertake.

Andrew briefly applies his syntactical theories to a few aspects of Old English poetic style. Most important, these theories allow for a great variety of sentences and clauses,

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<sup>112</sup>Andrew, p. 58.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

especially an abundance of temporal clauses, which create an interesting and vigorous narrative style.<sup>115</sup> Thus he sees the effective use of periodic sentences at points of transition (e.g., in ll. 99-104 the swa of the principal sentence sums up the previous action, while the oð ðaet of the subordinate clause carries the action forward).<sup>116</sup> This type of sentence, he claims, produces an effect of retardation, whereas "the simple device of a sequence of short asyndetic principal sentences"<sup>117</sup> produces the contrary effect of rapidity (e.g., ll. 320 ff., the Geats' march to Heorot). He also observes that gnomic generalities (e.g., ll. 478 f., 'God ēaþe maeg / þone dolsceaðan dāeda getwāefan!') tend to close and dismiss one incident and form a bridge to the next.<sup>118</sup>

In his remarks on specific figures of speech Andrew mainly describes their syntactical form, not their artistic function. For example, he notes that parallelism, "by which the idea in one sentence is repeated in different words, sometimes with an added definition, in a second," is a common rhetorical device and can admit of several variations (e.g.,

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>116</sup>Swā ðā drihtguman drēamum lifdon,  
ēadiglice, oð ðaet ān ongan  
fyrene fre(m)man feond on helle; (ll. 99-102).

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., pp. 90-1.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., p. 93.



negative second element, chiastic arrangement, etc.).<sup>119</sup>

Last, Andrew treats anaphora, which he claims should always have a sense of climax (lacking in alleged examples of the device in Beowulf). Also, since Andrew maintains that ba...ba constructions are usually correlative and that baet...baet constructions (e.g., ll. 771 ff.) frequently have a subordinate second element, one cannot look for anaphora here. He concludes "that anaphora was not a real figure of speech in Beowulf."<sup>120</sup> Thus, no matter how much one agrees or disagrees with Andrew's theories, they force one seriously to re-examine traditional ideas about style, and they are a reminder that Old English poetic evaluation is not totally free yet from fundamental language problems.

In a way Caroline Brady's article does the same sort of thing, with regard to the diction. In 1940 J. R. R. Tolkien observed that the 'descriptive compound' swanrād meant 'swan-riding,' not 'swan-road,' that is, the open area, not the beaten path, upon which the swan rides:<sup>121</sup> seemingly a trivial point, but one which makes considerable difference to the figurative or literal nature of the diction. In 1952 Caroline Brady investigates the meaning and use of -rād compounds in Old English prose and verse, discovering five senses for the word, all of which concern journey, riding or rolling movement, none of which means 'road.'<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid., pp. 95-6.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

In defining the several -rād compounds used in poetry, she does not propose to find any one sense for all the compounded uses of this element, either literally or figuratively, but to treat each in terms of its context. Brimrād, she claims, is not a tautological compound, but a word emphasizing "the rising and falling of rushing, rolling water," with no hint of meaning 'road' (cf. strēamrād).<sup>123</sup> Hronrād she calls a defining periphrasis,

a compound having a literal meaning within itself by virtue of the exactness and literalness of the first of its parts, the exactness and literalness of the second of its parts as limited by the first, and the literal and logical relation between its parts, but referring to something which stands outside of itself and depending upon its context for full meaning.<sup>124</sup>

Similarly, both swanrād and seqlrād are literal defining periphrases, one emphasizing the ease of crossing the sea, the other simply stating where ships move about.<sup>125</sup> The growing tendency to view Old English poetic diction as more literal than metaphorical is thus confirmed by an article which pays close attention to both etymology and context.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien, "Prefatory Remarks," John R. Clark Hall, trans., Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment, rev. ed. C. L. Wrenn (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1954), p. xiii.

<sup>122</sup>Caroline Brady, "The Old English Nominal Compounds in -rād," PMLA, LXVII (1952), 548.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., pp. 556, 564.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 560.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., pp. 563-4, 568.

Quite clearly, then, the scholarship since Tolkien, like that of the period after Klaeber, shows concern for the artistry of the poetry, expanding into concern for larger issues. But unlike the period from about 1915 to 1935 (Legouis and Edith Wardale excepted) this post-Tolkien period sees once again the compilation of literary histories and Old English period studies, as well as some fine introductions to editions and translations. Basically these remarks are brief syntheses of earlier scholarship, but their informed and favorable attitude to Old English poetic style contrasts sharply with the attitude of a comparable body of material written between 1880 and 1910.

Renwick and Orton in 1939 make just such a succinct objective account:

Since alliteration requires a rich vocabulary, the exploitation of vocabulary was a great part of Old English rhetoric. The inflected language made possible a rhetoric of parallelism...The effect seems monotonous, but the monotony is due largely to our ignorance of the imaginative heraldry as well as of the imaginative processes of our forefathers. The so-called synonyms of Old English poetry are concise descriptions or allusions, and their choice and their placing in relation to one another can be made to yield expressive variety of tone

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<sup>126</sup>Robert Woodward ("Swanrad in Beowulf," Modern Language Notes, LXIX [1954], 544-6) suggests that swanrād is really a double kenning, by virtue of the extra kenning in 'swan'; for evidence he shows how fugle gelicost follows soon after swanrad in Beowulf; thus the fugle must be a swan, the swan a ship, and all swanrad references must denote the sea.

and that counterpoint of meanings by which figures of rhetoric enrich the sense with crosslights and superimposed images.<sup>127</sup>

In addition to noticing the importance of understanding the people who wrote the poetry, Renwick and Orton notice that the 'synonyms' can both be effectively chosen and ordered, or simply be items of fixed rhetoric.<sup>128</sup>

J. R. R. Tolkien in 1940 is equally enthusiastic about the potential of the poetic language and presents an almost classic review of the major stylistic features. He emphasizes the difficulties involved in determining the full significance and precise meaning of many Old English terms, especially words that are unique or archaistic,<sup>129</sup> and distinctly poetic compounds and expressions such as swanrād and onband beadurūne,<sup>130</sup> expressions of great colour and compactness. Apparently new is Tolkien's clear division of the compound into three classes according to semantic function: those which resolve to a single meaning (e.g. mundbora), natural descriptive compounds in which the two terms retain their individuality (e.g. healsbēag), and

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<sup>127</sup>W. L. Renwick and Harold Orton, The Beginnings of English Literature to Skelton, 1509 (London: Cresset, 1939), p. 77.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>129</sup>Even the earliest Anglo-Saxon criticism drew attention to a number of archaic words in the vocabulary of Old English poetry; but few scholars have gone further than to note the dignified tone, the venerable ring, which these words create and to point out examples, such as mece. Most translators discuss them briefly as a problem in translation. But to my knowledge no thorough or systematic study has been made of the archaisms in Old English poetic diction.

the poetic class of 'kenning' (e.g., beodoleoma, goldwine)<sup>131</sup> (apparently applied to the poetic compound in general).

Gavin Bone, a scholar with a fine ear for Old English poetry, says in 1943 that he likes Old English poetry because of its language (even though he devotes most of his discussion of diction to the poor use of stock epithets).<sup>132</sup> But he praises the diction of Beowulf, finding the kennings and compound epithets better chosen, fresher and more inventive than in other Old English poems. Like Tolkien, he finds the same lines used better in Beowulf than elsewhere.<sup>133</sup> Bone also suggests that the effect of the imagery of Beowulf is 'impressionistic' and that the emotional effect is derived from the rich word rather than what he calls the 'mot juste' (although I wonder if the rich word could not also be the 'mot juste'). Words like 'icy' and 'wan' simply enforce by poetic associations feelings of misery and eeriness.<sup>134</sup> Thus Bone emphasizes the emotional suggestiveness of the vocabulary.

Kemp Malone's chapters on Old English in Baugh's A Literary History of England (1948) may well be compared with the articles in the CHEL to show the change of emphasis from

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<sup>130</sup>Tolkien, "Prefatory Remarks," p. xiii.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., p. xxvi.

<sup>132</sup>Gavin Bone, ed., Anglo-Saxon Poetry: An Essay with Specimen Translations in Verse (Oxford: Clarendon, 1950).

<sup>133</sup>Gavin Bone, trans., Beowulf in Modern Verse with an Essay and Pictures (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), pp. 4-5.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-2.

from 'historical' to 'literary.' Basing much of his comment on his own theory of plurilinear units and run-on lines,<sup>135</sup> Malone tends to view Old English poetic style historically, from its stark beginnings to its decadent conclusion. He also adds a new classification for variation: inner, in which the varied information is given in the same sentence; and outer, in which the varied information is given in another sentence.<sup>136</sup> However, he retains the general definition of a kenning as a two-member circumlocution for a noun, which he distinguishes from the heiti, or "one-term substitute for an ordinary noun."<sup>137</sup> Malone thus emphasizes the difference between the vocabulary of prose and that of poetry, but he maintains at all times a carefully objective view of his subject.

Not so George K. Anderson, who dismisses the whole matter of poetic diction in a few curt and not very flattering words.<sup>138</sup> Perhaps the most useful part of his book, The Literature of the Anglo-Saxons, as far as this study is concerned, is his suggestion that modern sociological, psychoanalytic, economic, historical and literary critical methods may be

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<sup>135</sup>See above, p. 144.

<sup>136</sup>Kemp Malone, "The Old English Period (to 1100)," in Albert C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), pp. 28-9.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30; see Appendix A.

<sup>138</sup>George K. Anderson, The Literature of the Anglo-Saxons (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1949), pp. 49-50.

applied to the poetry, a poetry of which some passages fall into place in the tradition of English letters.<sup>139</sup>

In 1953 appeared the two most recent editions of Beowulf. Elliott Dobbie's edition, like all volumes in the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, is not concerned with poetic style. However, C. L. Wrenn in the introduction to his edition devotes a separate section to 'Verse-Techniques,' two parts of which concern diction and style. His remarks on the wealth of synonyms and poetic language are all familiar, but a few of his statements on the compound and kenning clear up some hazy issues. First, he notices that the bulk of the words unique to Beowulf are compounds. Second, he distinguishes between the descriptive epithet (e.g., hringed stefna) and the kenning, or 'condensed simile' (e.g., mere-hengest).<sup>140</sup> Finally, Wrenn praises the refinement and nobility of tone and the literal appropriateness of the poetic periphrases.<sup>141</sup> His concluding statement that Beowulf is a great poem marks the progression of favorable attitude, even since Tolkien.

These last comments show that critics are fairly fully agreed that Old English poetic diction has potential for truly beautiful poetic expression, potential best realized in Beowulf. However, the basic attitude to the style has not changed radically since Klaeber in 1922, nor the attitude to Beowulf

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid., pp. 407-8.

<sup>140</sup>C. L. Wrenn, ed., Beowulf: With the Finnesburg Fragment (London: Harrap, 1953), p. 81; see Appendix A.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

since Tolkien in 1936. On the assumption that Beowulf was a lettered poem, critics were gradually accumulating more information and discovering more subtle beauties of expression. However, attitudes do not remain constant; and so, after thirty years, critics begin to challenge the precepts of the earlier criticism.

First, T. M. Gang tries to shed some light "on what is legitimate and what is not in literary criticism of Beowulf,"<sup>142</sup> and accuses Tolkien of aiming his critical remarks at twentieth century taste, instead of taking the poem's historical audience into account. He attacks both Tolkien's symbolic interpretation (Grendel and the dragon, he says, are quite differently handled by the poet: epithets and tone are different and moral disapprobation is lacking for the dragon) and also the analogy between structure and metre.<sup>143</sup> Adrien Bonjour, of course, replies with his usual unstinting praise of the poem and a defense of the symbolic theory.<sup>144</sup>

Although J. C. van Meurs' article does not appear until 1955, it makes a suitable end to the scholarship of this period,

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<sup>142</sup>T. M. Gang, "Approaches to Beowulf," Review of English Studies, III n.s. (1952), 1.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>144</sup>Adrien Bonjour, "Monsters Crouching and Critics Rampant, or the Beowulf Dragon Debated," Twelve 'Beowulf' Papers: 1940-1960 (Geneva: Droz, 1962), pp. 97-106; hereafter this volume will be referred to as Bonjour Anthology.



since van Meurs seems unacquainted with Magoun's oral-formulaic theory. The article is a sort of caveat--first against Tolkien's symbolic interpretation and views on structure, which he compares to Mullenhof's nature-allegory theories.<sup>145</sup> Second, it warns that the "over-subtle modern theories of perfect artistic unity" are as inadequate as the old patchwork theories for gaining a true perspective of Beowulf as a poem.<sup>146</sup> Third, although internal evidence is all one can really go on in such an isolated work as Beowulf, external historical factors must be taken into account, as Dorothy Whitelock has done.<sup>147</sup> However, he finds that the Christian element as stressed by Klaeber and Batchelor is 'highly doubtful.'<sup>148</sup> Finally, he states that in the matter of originality of style, diction and imagery, Wyld's study showed "how little can be achieved in this direction," and that critics should consider Chadwick's theories or oral composition instead of trying to analyze the poem according to modern criteria.<sup>149</sup> Here van Meurs has attacked the assumption underlying all the criticism of this period--that Beowulf is a conscious lettered composition which deserves

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<sup>145</sup>J. C. van Meurs, "Beowulf and Literary Criticism," Neophilologus, XXXIX (1955), 155-6.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>147</sup>The Audience of 'Beowulf' (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951).

<sup>148</sup>Van Meurs, pp. 121-2.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., pp. 120-7.

appropriate critical appraisal.

In spite of the improved attitude to the poem as a whole, real appreciation is still perhaps shackled, as M. H. Scargill puts it, by "the dragon's curse of philology."<sup>150</sup> There is still the feeling that much is to be learned about the nature and meaning of the various Old English poetic devices, even though much has been learned about their frequency and appearance. As Wellek and Warren summarize the situation:

medieval literature, especially English medieval literature ...with the possible exception of Chaucer--has scarcely been approached from any aesthetic and critical point of view. The application of modern sensibility would give a different perspective to much Anglo-Saxon poetry....<sup>151</sup>

It really is remarkable that in spite of all the scholarly effort of the preceding 150 years, a close literary view of a text of Old English poetry, with an organized attempt at aesthetic evaluation is still lacking. One might well wonder if the external factors involved in understanding the poetry are so great that full criticism of Old English poetry will ever remain an impossibility.

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<sup>150</sup>M. H. Scargill, "'Gold Beyond Measure': A Plea for Old English Poetry," JEGP, LII (1953), 293.

<sup>151</sup>René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956), p. 34.

CHAPTER V  
DETAILED CRITICISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF  
AN OLD ENGLISH AESTHETIC: 1953-1965

Perhaps the most influential (certainly the most controversial) single essay on Old English poetic diction is that of F. P. Magoun, Jr., "The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry," 1953. The idea of Old English poetry being orally composed is not new--it was fundamental not only to the ballad theory, but basic to the views of such men as ten Brink and H. M. Chadwick. In comparing the literature of various 'heroic ages,' Chadwick observed (1911) that the formulaic poetry of the Anglo-Saxons resembled that of the still-living oral heroic literature of the Serbo-Croatians. He noticed the freedom of variation which the singer enjoyed, and he noticed that certain singers handled certain themes or set pieces better than others.<sup>1</sup>

However, Chadwick's views had little effect on the Anglo-Saxon scholarship covered in the previous chapter, probably because of the prevailing assumption that Beowulf and most Old English poems were literary compositions. Nevertheless, Chadwick continued his investigations; and other scholars entered the field, notably Millman Parry, who studied the oral style of the Homeric epics. Then during the 30's Parry and

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<sup>1</sup>H. Munro Chadwick, The Heroic Age (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1926), p. 102.

his student, A. B. Lord, collected over twelve thousand texts of Yugoslavian oral epics, and the study gained momentum--and documents. Like the Wolf-Lachmann-Müllenhof progression of the early nineteenth century,<sup>2</sup> it was only a matter of time before someone applied the oral-formulaic theory to Old English poetry, and that person was Magoun.

Although critics from Klaeber to Wrenn observed many formulas and repeated phrases throughout the corpus of Old English poetry, and commented on the more skilful use made of them by the Beowulf poet, they did not attempt to explain them or to evolve a theory as to their origin and function. Here lies the greatest achievement of the oral-formulaic theory--its fundamental work in explaining Old English poetic diction and making possible some illuminating criticism. However, it took several years for the oral-formulaic theory and the conscious artistry theory to reach a working compromise.

The thesis of the oral-formulaic theory is that "the characteristic feature of all orally composed poetry is its totally formulaic character," and, conversely,

that the recurrence in a given poem of an appreciable number of formulas or formulaic phrases brands the latter as oral, just as lack of such repetitions marks a poem as composed in a lettered tradition. Oral poetry...is composed entirely of formulas, large and small, while lettered poetry is never formulaic....<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Adrien Bonjour, "Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle," Bonjour Anthology, pp. 135-6.

<sup>3</sup>Francis P. Magoun, Jr., "The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry," Beowulf Anthology, p. 190.

Certainly the last statement appears fallacious when one considers the signatures of Cynewulf, translations such as the Riddles and Psalms, and late heroic poems like Brunanburh and Maldon, presumably lettered imitations of earlier heroic poetry. Nor is Magoun's explanation of Cynewulf particularly convincing:

If...the narrative parts of his poem prove on testing to be formulaic, one must assume that these parts at least he composed in the traditional way. That he subsequently got them written down, whether dictating to himself, as it were, or to another person...is beside the point. In any event there would be no conflict with, or contradiction to, tradition.<sup>4</sup>

What then is a literary poet? Magoun leaves too many terms vague, too many questions begged.

It is not clear whether by oral poetry Magoun means poetry actually orally composed, as a Bosnian coffee-house singer would compose for a recording machine, or whether he means poetry composed in the oral tradition, which merely assumes that oral composition was still strong in the society as a whole and was exerting influence on literate poets, who could, nevertheless, compose at leisure. Given the strength of the oral tradition and the great expense and trouble of manuscript writing (even though fresh ink was 'erasable'), it is possible that even lettered poets would revise little beyond a word or phrase. It is possible too that revision as one thinks

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

of modern poets' revision (e.g., Yeats) would not even be considered.

Parry's definition of a formula, as quoted by Magoun, is also rather vague: "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea."<sup>5</sup> In addition, groups of words which "are of the same type and conform to the same verbal and grammatical pattern as the various other verses associated with them..."<sup>6</sup> are called formulaic phrases, or 'systems.' It also seems too easy for Magoun to assume one hundred percent formulaic construction of Old English narrative poetry and to blame the incomplete corpus of Old English manuscripts for his inability to find parallels. For instance, about seventy percent of Beowulf lines and sixty-one percent of Cynewulf's lines are 'demonstrably formulaic.'<sup>7</sup> The rest, then, he concludes, are formulas for which no parallels have been found.

Certainly one cannot deny that the oral formulaic theory is well substantiated and does not rely on abstract

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 194; in 1955 Magoun revised the definition to read, "a word or group of words..." ("The Theme of the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, LVI, 81).

<sup>6</sup>Magoun, "Oral Formulaic," p. 195; an example of a system is thoroughly handled by Robert Creed ("The Andswarode-System in Old English Poetry," Speculum, XXXII [1957], 523-8); here Creed examines the twelve instances of the him x andswarode system and notes the principal variation of fitting andswarode into a single measure rather than a full hemistich; he suggests that the system served as a sort of quotation mark to the listeners; however, Creed makes the formula seem rigid and uncreative.

<sup>7</sup>Magoun, "Oral-Formulaic," pp. 195, 200 n.

theory, nor deny that it explains the recurrence in various poems of lines that are similar and identical. It even suggests an explanation for the wide diversity of rhythms within Sievers' five basic types. If one assumes that certain patterns of stress and unstress were euphonious to the Anglo-Saxon ear and others were not, then the formula and the five types must have developed simultaneously, each helping to limit and define the other. Magoun explains the development of the Old English formula by using Parry's explanation for the Homeric formula:

If the phrase is so good poetically and so useful metrically that it becomes in time the one best way to express a certain idea in a given length of verse...it has won a place for itself in the oral diction as a formula. But if it does not suit in every way, or if a better way of fitting the idea into the verse and sentence is found, it is straightway forgotten or lives only for a short time.<sup>8</sup>

Carried to extremes this resembles the development of sophistic rhetoric as described by C. S. Baldwin, in which certain devices and effective or harmonious sentence terminations evolved into a sort of formulaic rhetoric.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Quoted ibid., p. 192.

<sup>9</sup>"The improvisation was mainly of style. It consisted in fluency of rehandling of variations upon themes, and in patterns, so common as to constitute a stock in trade. It permitted the use over and over again not only of stock examples and illustrations, but of successful phrases, modulated periods, even whole descriptions. It was the art of the technician, not a composer. Memory, too, thus trained, was no longer the orator's command of his material; it was the actor's command of words. Though a sophist might, indeed, be a thinker, he hardly needed to be for the purposes of his oratory. His fluency was typically not in seizing and carrying forward ideas and images, but in readiness

Although one cannot draw an exact parallel between the classical art of oratory and the Germanic art of story telling, some of Magoun's comments imply Baldwin's conclusions about the lack of thought required in sophistic oratory and rest on the assumption that because oral poetry was impromptu, it could not be original, imaginative or artistic. Granted, he vaguely distinguishes the good 'singer' from the bad:

a good singer is one able to make better use of the common fund of formulas than the indifferent or poor singer, though all will be drawing upon essentially the same body of material.<sup>10</sup>

But he does not show where the distinction lies and essentially contradicts the belief of Tolkien and others that the Beowulf poet could use the same lines better.<sup>11</sup>

Magoun illustrates his theory by presenting formulaic analyses of Beowulf, lines 1-25 and Christ and Satan, lines 512-35, as well as a detailed commentary on the Beowulf formulas. Here he shows that lines 1b, 6b, 11b, 16a and 19a "are something more than mere repeats and form part of larger formulaic systems to express the same, or almost the same, idea or used to fit some larger rhythmical-grammatical pattern."<sup>12</sup> Thus on gēar-dagum is one phase of a system on x dagum (to mean 'long ago')

to draw upon a store." (Charles Sears Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic [New York: MacMillan, 1928], pp. 15-16.)

<sup>10</sup>Magoun, "Oral Formulaic," p. 191.

<sup>11</sup>See above, chapt IV, p. 136.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 195-6.



with āer, eald or fyrn as possible substitutes, and "more than useful in meeting the exigencies of alliteration."<sup>13</sup> Quite possibly in this case there is little difference of meaning between the variable members and that alliteration is the criterion; this would be supported by the fact that the subject of a sentence would be more likely to control alliteration than would part of an adverbial phrase. But I think Magoun under-rates the possibility of artistry among descriptive epithets and kennings.

Kennings, he states, like the rest of oral poetic language, developed slowly and must be traditional.<sup>14</sup> Thus the 'non-Christian' kenning hran-rāde (l. 10a) belongs to the formulaic system on (ofer, geond) x -rāde, x being any monosyllabic first element. However, Magoun sees "no real difference of meaning and none in meter" between on swanrāde, ofer hran-rāde and on seql-rāde:

the singers are presumably concerned not primarily with some refinement of imagery produced by varying the first elements hran, seql, and swan--something for which an oral singer could scarcely have time--but with recalling a formula expressing the fundamental idea in question with availability for different alliterative situations.<sup>15</sup>

If this be the case, the poet is redundant in having both swan and seql, since they alliterate identically. Obviously a case

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

can be made for the role of connotation in such word choice.<sup>16</sup> Nor is the pressure of time so important as Magoun suggests. Here two analogous situations present themselves: the public speaker and the student writing an essay examination, presuming both are talented, creative, well-trained and have not pre-written their material. In neither case is there time for revision, and yet in both cases these good performers will show great skill in diction and rhetoric and present interesting and persuasive material. It is a matter of sensitivity, talent and training. Although Magoun briefly suggests the possibility of distinguishing the styles of individual Old English poets,<sup>17</sup> the oral-formulaic theory as he first presents it in this essay implies a certain rigidity in the style of Old English poetry and discourages theories of artistry, conscious or otherwise.

Understandably enough, Magoun follows up this initial study with a case history of Caedmon (1955), the illiterate stable-hand who overnight learned to turn Scripture into beautiful poetry, and who was obviously an 'oral singer.' Since all but three half-lines of Caedmon's Hymn are demonstrably formulaic,<sup>18</sup> and since formulas take long to develop, Magoun asks if Christian poetry existed before Caedmon,

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<sup>16</sup>See Adrien Bonjour, "On Sea Images in Beowulf," Bonjour Anthology, discussed below, pp.171-2.

<sup>17</sup>Magoun, "Oral Formulaic," pp. 216.

<sup>18</sup>Francis P. Magoun, Jr., "Bede's Story of Caedmon: The Case History of an Anglo-Saxon Oral Singer," Speculum, XXX (1955), 54.

or whether Caedmon invented the formulas he uses.<sup>19</sup> Surely, if Caedmon were as great a poet as Bede says he was, he must have done something imaginative and fresh to have acquired a legendary reputation; he must have created some new phrases which lesser poets would adopt unthinkingly. Furthermore, a study such as Rankin's<sup>20</sup> with its long lists of ecclesiastical parallels suggests how the religious formula may have begun.

Also in 1955 Magoun explores another aspect of oral-poetry--the formulaic theme. Lord defined the theme as "a subject unit, a group of ideas," built up of formulas, regularly employed in all oral poetry, and used as a sort of set-piece for such things as battles and feasts.<sup>21</sup> As illustration Magoun chooses a theme early recognized as recurrent in Anglo-Saxon poetry--the image of the wolf, eagle and raven gathering at the battle-place. He finds twelve examples of the theme in nine poems covering the entire Old English period, and concludes the device to be ornamental rather than essential.<sup>22</sup> However, there are the seeds of contradiction in his final statement that: "the formulas and formulaic systems will be seen to divide up in two ways, those particularly relevant to the subject matter or the theme and those of general usefulness."<sup>23</sup> The line between the essential and relevant can be very vague.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 57-8.

<sup>20</sup>See above, chapt. III, pp. 74-8.

<sup>21</sup>Magoun, "Beasts" p. 82.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

Presumably independently, Stanley Greenfield also studies the formulaic theme in the same year; but he shows, for the first time, that formulaic diction does not preclude aesthetic possibilities:

the importance of ascertaining conventional patterns in Old English poetry lies, of course in the basis such patterns establish for the further investigation of the aesthetic values of individual poems.<sup>24</sup>

The primary value of the formula and convention, Greenfield concludes, is that the associations of other contexts "lend extra-emotional meaning to individual words and phrases," although eventually exact denotation may be lost:

originality in the handling of conventional formulas may be defined as the degree of tension between the inherited body of meanings in which a particular formula participates and the specific meaning of that formula in context.<sup>25</sup>

He reviews the key phrases and rhythm patterns of the exile theme: the status aspect, the key formula being winelēas wrecca (or guma or haele); the deprivation aspect, the formula being a word for 'property' plus the past participle of a verb of deprivation, (e.g., winemāegum bidroren, Seafarer, l.16); etc.<sup>26</sup> In this study of the imagery of exile, then, Greenfield

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>24</sup>Stanley B. Greenfield, "The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of 'Exile' in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," Speculum, XXX (1955), 205.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 201-2.

has made the first steps toward an aesthetic of Old English poetry, based on the oral-formulaic theory.

In 1959 Robert Creed attempts on the basis of oral-formulas to make, or remake rather, an Anglo-Saxon poem. His attitude towards formulas resembles the more rigid aspects of Magoun's original article:

the degree of schematization of his diction suggests that the singer of Beowulf did not need to pause in his reciting or writing to consider what word to put next. His diction was one which...did his thinking and his poetizing for him, at least when he had completely mastered that diction and its ways.<sup>27</sup>

The formula, he emphasizes, is a useful item to the singer, not just a memorable sound; and, as he concludes in a later article, "the singer of Beowulf is a subtle worker not with words but with formulas."<sup>28</sup> By this statement I take Creed to mean that the formula was to the poet what a single word or idiom is to the ordinary prose speaker.

To illustrate his case, that one may examine "the system or entire group of formulas from among which he [the poet] chose at a given point in his poem,"<sup>29</sup> Creed unmakes

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<sup>27</sup>Robert P. Creed, "The Making of an Anglo-Saxon Poem," ELH, XXVI (1959), 446.

<sup>28</sup>Robert P. Creed, "The Singer Looks at his Sources," Comparative Literature, XIV (1962), 52. Here Creed compares the victory song after Grendel's death with that sung about Odysseus in the hall of King Alcinous, in which both poets look to the primary sources of songs and comment on their composition.

<sup>29</sup>Creed, "Making an A. S. Poem," p. 447.

and remakes lines 356-9 of Beowulf, to "approximate what the singer himself might have done in a different performance of the same tale."<sup>30</sup> For example, he suggests that ēode bā might have served as well as hwearf bā, since hwearf anticipates the alliteration for Hrothgar; that ofostlice would have served as well as hraedlice, since speed is incidental to the passage; and that the epithet se ealdor would serve for Hrothgar.<sup>31</sup> Much of this analysis is probably quite justifiable, given the lesser metrical importance of verbs and adverbs, but one can raise the following arguments against Creed's substitutions: there is a slight possibility of ambiguity in se ealdor; the adverb of quickness emphasizes the excitement of Beowulf's arrival; hwearf specifically shows Wulfgar turning from Beowulf to Hrothgar. One also wonders exactly what Creed means when he says eald and unhār as a reim-formel is ornamental only and "can hardly claim to be the type of formula par excellence."<sup>32</sup> After juggling and substituting formulaic elements, Creed emerges with the following remade version of lines 356-9:

Ēode þa ofostlice      þær se ealdor saet  
hār and hige-frod      mid his haeleða gedryht;  
ēode hilde-deor      þaet hē on hēorðe gestōd  
frean Scieldinga;      cūðe hē þaes folces þēaw<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 447-8.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 448-448n.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 450.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 453; the original text runs thus:  
 Hwearf þā hraedlice      þær Hroðgār saet  
 eald ond anhār      mid his eorla gedriht;  
 eode ellenrōf,      þaet hē for eaxlum gestōd  
 Deniga frean;      cūpe hē duguðe þēaw.

In addition to the passages criticized above, one might wish to question the new anaphora achieved by ēode...ēode, the implications of war in haeleða and hilde-dēor, and the rather unaristocratic folces. It is little wonder that Creed prefers the original version, concluding "that simple use of formulaic diction is no guarantee of aesthetic success," and that the Beowulf poet chose the best of all possible formula combinations.<sup>34</sup> In spite of the rigidity and laboriousness implied by Creed's article, it is possible to see a modification of the original oral-formulaic theory to allow for stylistic successes. One can also conclude that the Beowulf poet could think creatively, regardless of the practice of other poets, and could choose the appropriate word.

This modified point of view was probably achieved in part by the critical reaction against Magoun's original article. Among the first and most violent antagonists was Adrien Bonjour, long an extreme advocate of the artistry of Beowulf. Although his 1955 article does not refer to Magoun,<sup>35</sup> it is in effect a reply to Magoun's dismissal of the connotative possibilities of the kenning.<sup>36</sup> Bonjour chooses two pairs of 'sea' words to

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 454.

<sup>35</sup>It is based on Caroline Brady's 1952 Article, "The Synonyms for 'Sea' in Beowulf."

<sup>36</sup>See above, p. 165.

test the possibility of diction discrimination on the part of the Beowulf poet. In both pairs he chooses: swanrād--hranrād, ganotes baep--yð-gewinn, the members (according to Sievers' system) are metrical equivalents (an important consideration in the refutation of Magoun). All these words in Beowulf Bonjour concludes are properly chosen for their contexts: swanrād (l. 200) and ganotes baep (l. 1861) have both connotations and contexts of peace, or at least absence of struggle; yð-gewinn has connotations of turbulence and is associated with the mere (l. 1434) and with the sea near the dragon's barrow (l. 2412); hranrād has connotations of vastness and is associated with Scyld's empire (l. 10). In all these passages "the Beowulf poet delicately varies his synonyms to use their associational powers in accordance with the prevailing mood or tonality of the respective passages."<sup>37</sup> Bonjour even suggests an association between the might and sovereignty of the whale and of Scyld, and proposes that the gannet be considered as a symbol of peace.<sup>38</sup>

Another form of criticism comes in 1956 from Claes Schaar, who attacks as 'dogmatic' and 'unattractive' Magoun's premise that written poetry is never formulaic, and as illogical the conclusion that "all formulaic poetry is oral."<sup>39</sup> Is one

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<sup>37</sup>Bonjour, "Sea Images," p. 119.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 116, 118.

<sup>39</sup>Claes Schaar, "On a New Theory of Old English Poetic Diction," Neophilologus, XL (1956), 302-3.



to assume that formulas went into disuse with the advent of writing? How does one explain the formulaic nature of Cynewulf's signatures, obviously leisured compositions? He reminds critics that the recognizable foreign influence (classical, patristic, apocryphal) and non-formulaic similarities in structure and diction indicate distinctly the possibility of literary imitation by one poet from another.<sup>40</sup> However, the theory of conscious line-borrowing having largely been discredited,<sup>41</sup> Schaar seems to present his article more as a caveat against the potential dogmatism of the oral-formulaic theory than as a definite statement of imitative borrowing.

In 1957 Bonjour replies both to Van Meurs<sup>42</sup> and to Magoun. In the first article it is interesting to see Bonjour's concern with critical methods, as he defends his own method and Tolkien's interpretation against Van Meurs' attack--why should it be illogical for a critic to try to explain why he finds a poem a work of art? Why should not opinion be as profitably divided over Beowulf as over works of Shakespeare? Surely it is better, Bonjour concludes, to attempt bold, stimulating criticism than simply to plod along in well-worn ways "snugly safe from all snares."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>41</sup>See Robert E. Diamond, "Theme as Ornament in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," PMLA, LXXVI (1961), 268.

<sup>42</sup>See above, Chapt. IV, p. 157.

<sup>43</sup>Adrien Bonjour, "Beowulf and the Snares of Literary Criticism," Bonjour Anthology, p. 128.

The other article is also concerned with critical method. Since he recognizes that the singer theory cannot be ignored, Bonjour attempts to reconcile the two points of view by examining the several occurrences of the beasts of battle theme and by maintaining that a great poet will have the universal qualities of subjectivity and imagination (no weaker a premise, he claims, than 'taking a cue' for Anglo-Saxon from modern Serbo-Croatian practice);<sup>44</sup> In order to prove that the beast theme is more than a mere embellishment (as Magoun stated), Bonjour tries to trace its probable development: it begins in the fact that carrion animals clear a wælstōwe; then it becomes associated with the grimness of battle and heightens the realistic element (as in Brunanburh); finally a scop may have the idea of foreshadowing doom by presenting it before the battle (as in Maldon, shortly after Byrhtnoth's proud challenge.)<sup>45</sup> The Beowulf poet, however, never uses the theme in connection with battles actually described, but only once, doubtless to presage doom, in lines 3025 ff. Such restraint shows the poet's originality in "the indirect use of a conventional theme,"<sup>46</sup> a use with aesthetic and emotional effect. "Here, indeed the beasts of battle are briefly turned into a symbol of the ultimate triumph of death, the common

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<sup>44</sup>Bonjour, "Beasts," p. 136.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 138, 140.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

destiny of dynasties, and the final fate of men."<sup>47</sup> A conventional theme gains beauty and originality: "if ever one can speak of the alchemy of genius it is here."<sup>48</sup> So, whether lettered or unlettered, the poet showed either calculated or instinctive aesthetic skill in holding off the beast of battle theme until its associations would have the greatest emotional effect.

Quite clearly critics are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of a word's context and its connotations, although a critic like Robert Diamond is much more cautious and reminds men like Bonjour that Old English poetry is different in kind from modern poetry.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, Diamond returns to the idea of the theme as an ornamental convention, slightly looser and more flexible than the formula, in his discussion of the 'set-pieces' and sub-themes of sea-crossing themes, all of which are heavily formulaic. However, he makes value judgments on the use of this theme, noting especially the detached feeling in St. Helen's crossing to the Holy Land (the details show little close knowledge of the sea) and the masterful control of material in Andreas.<sup>50</sup>

Like Bonjour, Godfrid Storms finds artistry in Beowulf and uses the association of words in context to try to reconcile

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>49</sup>Diamond, "Theme as Ornament," p. 461.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 463-4, 467.

artistic intent with the oral theory:

for if the poet is to be vindicated from the charge of being at times a mere versifier, who chose his compounds to fill the needs of alliteration and metre, every singly[sic] compound must be significant and sensible at every single occurrence.<sup>51</sup>

Storms owes much to Bryan's 1929 article on compound folk-names;<sup>52</sup> and he tries to show, and claims success in so doing, that the twenty-nine occurrences of some fifteen compound names are justified;

not only so far as sense and metre is concerned, but also as to poetic connotation and artistic significance. If we bear in mind that Beowulf was composed extempore, and Magoun's analysis of the making a pre-literary, oral verse is fully convincing, then the author's unflinching choice of the right word at a moment's notice cannot but excite our imagination.<sup>53</sup>

This article shows, I believe, the excesses to which context-association can be carried, for example in Storms' discussion of Norð-Dene. His case for Gār-Dene is persuasive enough: each occurrence (ll. 1, 601, 1856, 2492) appropriately suggests the warlike character of the Danes and may even suggest that the gār was their specific weapon, as the seax was of the Saxons.<sup>54</sup> But the explanation for Norð-Dene (l. 783) seems at best over-subtle. (The North Danes guard the north wall of

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<sup>51</sup>Godfrid Storms, Compounded Names of Peoples in Beowulf, (Utrecht-Nijmegen: Dekker en van de Vegt, 1957), p. 6.

<sup>52</sup>See above, Chapter IV, p. 122.

<sup>53</sup>Storms, Compound Names, p. 22.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

Heorot, the direction Grendel goes to return home, i.e., to hell; Germanic hell and medieval Hell were considered to be in the north.)<sup>55</sup>

It should now be clear that most claims for the artistry of Old English poetic diction apply to Beowulf, and that most claims to the contrary apply to Old English poetry in general. A. G. Brodeur's book The Art of Beowulf is no exception. Brodeur's intention is to examine what makes the Beowulf poet's work incomparable in the corpus of Old English poetry, why it surpasses the others in its dignity, beauty, nobility of thought and mastery of form.<sup>56</sup> In debating Magoun's theory that formulaic poetry cannot be written, Brodeur like others, draws attention to Cynewulf and especially to Brunanburh, which was 'obviously' written by an educated man and yet which is one of the most totally formulaic of Old English poems:

but the language of Beowulf is, in my opinion, not totally formulaic, nor comparable in its load of formula, with most other Old English narrative poems.... The structure and the style of the poem, no less than its incomparably rich and sensitive diction, attest that the poet was a man of cultivated taste as well as an accomplished scop. He possessed a highly developed sense of form, which shows itself in his language as well as in the structure of his work. The traditional scop, unlettered as he was, was a trained and sophisticated

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 14-17.

<sup>56</sup> Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, The Art of Beowulf (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1959), p. 4.

artist: within the brief limits of lay and poetic eulogy he was a finished craftsman. The poet of Beowulf was enabled, by his experience with non-English sacred and profane learning, and compelled by the greater scope and range of his work, to exceed the limitations of the modes and forms which he had inherited from Germanic antiquity.<sup>57</sup>

Thus Brodeur fights Magoun's implication that the vocabulary of Beowulf contains little or nothing original.

Nonetheless, Brodeur recognizes that Beowulf is highly traditional: "it is the element we may safely presume to be original that determines the quality of the diction and style..."<sup>58</sup> Since, says Brodeur, the substantive is the major element of Old English poetic vocabulary, logically this original element lies in the use of the substantive compound. Of 903 'distinct substantive compounds' in Beowulf, 518 occur in no other extant text and 578 occur only once in Beowulf. Also, even though the adjective is second in importance to the noun, some 150 adjective compounds are peculiar to Beowulf. However, most of the numerous noun and adjective simplices are found in prose, except for a few simplex nouns which are restricted to poetic use. The verbs, on the other hand, are rarely restricted to poetic use and rarely carry the poetic effect, although some are effectively chosen.<sup>59</sup> I think here that Brodeur underestimates slightly the poetic potential of the verb. At random I have opened Beowulf at lines 723-75, and I meet several verbs which in context have considerable power: stōd, gefeng,

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp. 4-5.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

slāt-bāt-dranc (especially effective in sequence), flēon, burston, dynede and hlynsode. But Brodeur is nevertheless right in saying that the substantive carries the main load.

Resemblances between the compounds of all long Old English narrative poems, including Beowulf, suggest, says Brodeur, a large traditional vocabulary. But Beowulf's originality lies in its number of exclusive compounds. In Beowulf 115 base-words form more compounds than in all other Old English poems, whereas in all other Old English poems only 143 base-words form more compounds than in Beowulf. Also, 52 base-words have compounds only in Beowulf and have a wide range of concepts, whereas 56 base-words form a much larger corpus of compounds in poems other than Beowulf. However, these tend to be of a more abstract nature (e.g., -craeft, -cwalu, -lifū, -sorg, -ŋrymn) than those forming compounds peculiar to Beowulf (e.g., -hilt, -īren, -spreot, -steng, -sweord). The natural argument here is that Beowulf is the only poem of its size and theme and that there is no other work extant with which it may be profitably compared. It seems logical that it should have more 'weapon' compounds than other poems.<sup>60</sup> The big difference between Beowulf and other Old English poems lies in the concrete precision of its vocabulary: "most of the compounds which designate objects, persons, or actions in sharp, specific terms occur more frequently in Beowulf than

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., pp. 7-8.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-10

elsewhere."<sup>61</sup> Brodeur here develops his argument along the lines suggested by Caroline Brady to show that the vocabulary is large and precise,<sup>62</sup> in spite of the traditional and conventional nature of the poem.

Also like Miss Brady's work is Brodeur's investigation of the nature of the poetic vocabulary and his conclusion that the Beowulf poet tends to apply words more literally and with greater restraint than some other poets. For example, the Beowulf poet uses the literal compound brimwylm (l. 1494) and the figurative brēostwylm (l. 1877), but he avoids an artificial compound such as heafodwylm for 'tears' (Elene, l. 1132).<sup>63</sup> Although the compounds in Beowulf are frequently figurative, they are more often metonymical than metaphorical, with the poetic quality determined usually by the limiting word. Simples, Brodeur states, are primarily poetic or common stock; they may be literal, ~~metaphoric~~ ~~or~~ ~~metonymic~~: mece and sweord are both literal, but the former is an archaism restricted to poetic usage; flota, lind, and aesc tell something of the materials or function of the referent; brand metaphorically suggests that swords give off their own light, a simplex similar in effect to the compound beado-lēoma.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>62</sup>See above, chapt. IV, pp. 149-50.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 15; for Brodeur's discussion of the kenning see below, p. 198 and appendix A.



Critics as early as W. M. Hart noticed the idealizing, generalizing and suggestive nature of Beowulf. Brodeur now shows (by means of many striking and appropriate examples) how these tendencies affect the poetic diction. Although Brodeur does not discount the pressures of metre and alliteration,<sup>65</sup> he finds in Beowulf that the compounds and appellative combinations play a more important role than mere periphrastic synonyms.<sup>66</sup> For example, he shows how the words for 'corslet' in lines 321-328a can achieve special effects: gūðbyrne is a literal compound; hringīren is a metonymical compound telling of the garment's construction; gryregeatwum is also literal but highly emotional; byrnan is a literal simplex; and gūðsearo is also literal, but tells of the skill required in fashioning the corslet and its function as a war garment. Here it is possible to see the poet trying to savor all the typical aspects of a thing.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, the mood of horror surrounding the mere comes, he notes, not from extravagant adjectives, but from adjectives carefully selected, "not so much to portray a particular landscape as to suggest, vividly and powerfully, the peril and horror to which the hero and his companions must expose themselves...."<sup>68</sup> The moor is myrce, the paths nearwe, enge and uncūð; the mere is drēorig and

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

gedrēfed; only wynlēas is at all an unusual adjective. All told, then, the poet kept close to his traditional patterns, but felt free to coin compounds, create images, expand the word-hoard whenever he felt "the need for a language capable of expressing the thought and feeling of poets."<sup>69</sup>

Brodeur is one of the few critics in the past fifteen years to treat variation, the most important rhetorical device of Old English poetry, and again his discussion is well-documented and persuasive. He defines variation as: "a double or multiple statement of the same concept or idea in different words, with a more or less perceptible shift in stress...."<sup>70</sup> He also makes clear the difference between variation (elements in a series which have the same referent) and enumeration (elements in a series which do not have the same referent.)<sup>71</sup> In the approach of the Geats to Heorot, lines 320-31, variation works within enumeration to present a total image, and the last line acts as a summation. The poetry of the passage has a vivid effect, just as the marching men described have an effect on Wulfgar; here the poet shows his great focusing and emotive power.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-4.

Brodeur points out a number of scenes rich in variation: Hrothgar's sermon, the presentation of the golden hilt, the Unferth incident, the terrors wrought by Grendel, all scenes which appeal to the emotions. "The primary vehicle of emotion is variation."<sup>73</sup> Klaeber earlier stated that variation retards action; and Brodeur expands this idea to show that action scenes are among the passages containing least variation. Direct reportage and intimate speeches (e.g., Beowulf-Wiglaf) contain simple and rare variation, whereas formal speeches, (e.g., Beowulf-Wulfgar) are full of variation.<sup>74</sup> Brodeur thus concludes that variation developed as an ornament of style, but was used by the Beowulf poet with skill and imagination to mark a dominant mood, a significant situation, or to link a situation with what precedes and follows.<sup>75</sup>

It is really impossible to underestimate the value of Brodeur's study and the long-range influence it is certain to have on studies of diction and figuration, not only for Beowulf, but for all Old English poetry. He has certainly presented indisputable statistics for the artistry of the diction and especially significantly has observed this diction to be of a precise and rather literal nature, and arranged in variation

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., pp. 60-1.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 69; in the remainder of his book Brodeur discusses structure, design, anticipation, irony, contrast, Christian elements, etc., and shows that all the traditional Old English poetic devices are given fresh life by the Beowulf poet. Also, in appendix C Brodeur discusses the relation of variation to parallelism and enumeration.

for maximum effect. However, Brodeur's emphasis on a written origin, in spite of his acknowledgement of the strong traditional element, met with reaction from some critics supporting the theory of oral origin; and in the following few years critics attempt to resolve the two theories to achieve a workable poetic for the literature.

In a review of The Art of Beowulf, John C. McGalliard points out that the recent publication of Lord's The Singer of Tales (1960) should help resolve many of the differences between the two extreme positions (the wholly formulaic, or the lettered and learned).<sup>76</sup> Certainly, it helps to clarify a number of misunderstandings regarding oral poetry in general. First, it shows that the oral poet, usually illiterate, learns the language of poetry gradually, as a child learns to speak a language: he listens and absorbs, he 'apprentices' or practices, and finally he performs before a critical audience.<sup>77</sup> The language he has learned is the special language of poetry. He has not memorized a fixed form, but has absorbed a long tradition of formulas, which at the end of his training he can combine and remodel. Learning new songs is a matter of learning new names and themes. Some singers can repeat a story (in their own words) immediately after hearing it; others less confident or less skilful require time to think and practice.<sup>78</sup> It is

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<sup>76</sup> John C. McGalliard, "The Complex Art of Beowulf," Modern Philology, LIX (1961/2), 277.

<sup>77</sup> Albert B. Lord, The Singer of Tales (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), p. 21.

clear, then, that artistic intention is not foreign even to the genuine oral singer.

Lord also shows that individual singers have their own styles and that individual style can develop up to a point, as it does in everyday speech. The future singer hears and absorbs the different patterns of syntax and tricks of style; "there is no rigidity in what he hears."<sup>79</sup> He works in "a grammar superimposed, as it were, on the grammar of the language concerned.... The formulas are phrases and clauses and sentences of this specialized poetic grammar."<sup>80</sup> These statements certainly modify earlier implications that oral formulas were mechanical and uncreative things.

On larger issues, Lord points out that the poetic grammar is one of parataxis and that the singer's sense of balance is shown in patterns of alliteration, assonance and parallelism.<sup>81</sup> The oral epic singer must have skill in describing heroes, horses, etc., descriptions which become elaborated into themes and are used with discrimination (i.e., omitted, treated briefly or elaborated) by each individual singer. The most talented singer which Lord and Parry heard could take a tale he had

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., pp. 22, 26.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp. 35-6.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 56; this 'grammar of parataxis' gives weight to the general critical misgivings about the theories of S. O. Andrew; see above, Chapt. IV, pp. 146-8.

just heard and make it much longer and richer by such ornamentation, as well as by adding distinctive human touches for depth of feeling.<sup>82</sup> In all, the singer has the end in mind and has a basic, flexible form for the theme. These themes not only mark a singer's style; they also have strong associative tendencies.<sup>83</sup>

However, leisure is of no advantage to the oral singer; if he has to slow down for dictating he loses his place instead of seeking (as a lettered poet would) the exact word. If anything, time is a hindrance.<sup>84</sup> This leads Lord to discuss the 'transitional' technique between oral and written poetry, a possibility he firmly denies. Oral poetry is predominantly formulaic, written poetry non-formulaic. It is not possible for one poet to think (this seems the key word) in both techniques at once,<sup>85</sup> although it is possible for a poet to compose orally in his youth and to write when he is older, (an interesting possibility for the Beowulf poet). Finally, Lord states that a gifted singer has sufficient mastery over his poetic form to

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<sup>82</sup>Lord, p. 78.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., pp. 93, 96-7.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., pp. 127-8.

<sup>85</sup>I find these ideas hard to reconcile with the findings of Robert E. Diamond (The Diction of the Anglo-Saxon Metrical Psalms [The Hague: Mouton, 1963], p. 6), that a random 305 lines from the Paris Psalter, obviously written compositions, are 49.5% demonstrably formulaic.

break it at will and use non-formulaic expressions. Here he appears to contradict his earlier statement that originality and finesse of expression are not sought after, even though the opportunity exists.<sup>86</sup> It is obvious that among oral singers, as among lettered poets, genius will transcend tradition and 'rules.'<sup>87</sup> With such a justification of the potential in oral poetry for artistry of expression, it seems relatively futile to quibble further about whether Beowulf was a lettered composition or dictated by an oral poet.

Reconciliation of quite a different sort comes in 1961 with William Whallon's article, "The Diction of Beowulf." Studies of appropriateness of diction are untenable, Whallon says, unless one denies that the language is formulaic. What Whallon does is to compare the Beowulf kenning with the Homeric epithet<sup>88</sup> and to emend Magoun's theory by showing that "Beowulf and the Homeric epics are not formulaic to the same extent."<sup>89</sup> Over-all design, he insists, is not incompatible

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<sup>86</sup>Lord, p. 131; cf. p. 44.

<sup>87</sup>Robert D. Stevick ("The Oral-Formulaic Analyses of Old English Verse," Speculum, XXXVII [1962], 382-9) also recognizes the great help of The Singer of Tales. He reviews the various oral-formulaic analyses and makes an interesting analogy with jazz improvisation; it is also interesting to compare the singer theory with Paul Baum's ultra-conservative view of the ivory-towered poet ("The Beowulf Poet," Beowulf Anthology, pp. 353-65).

<sup>88</sup>Both terms are used in their broadest sense.

<sup>89</sup>William Whallon, "The Diction of Beowulf," PMLA, LXXVI (1961), 309.

with the singer theory; formulas can be beautifully used, but they develop to show the ideal and important qualities of things, unlike nonce words which are chosen for distinctive delineation. Formulas are potentially, if not always, accurate.<sup>90</sup> Also, in analyzing Old English and Homeric formulas for shield, sea, boat and hero (Beowulf and Odysseus), Whallon considers inspection of repeated lines only inadequate; "for a stock of line-fragments would be sufficient to permit the poet to extemporize with deftness if they provided for prosodic needs."<sup>91</sup>

Basically Whallon observes that the Homeric epics have a much higher percentage of indispensable epithets (i.e., epithets which fill distinctive metrical functions) than does Beowulf; and he concludes that Beowulf diction "lacks the economy expected from a formulaic language that is highly developed."<sup>92</sup> Similarly, personal epithets in Homer are exclusive to certain characters and vary for prosodic rather than semantic reasons, whereas in Beowulf several epithets have the same metrical function and several characters may share the same epithet. For example, māere bēoden is applied seven times to Beowulf, five times to Hrothgar, and once each to Heremod and Heardred. Similarly fēþecempa (ll. 1544, 2853) is metrically equivalent to folces hyrde (ll. 1849, 2644), but

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 318.



the former applies both to Beowulf and Wiglaf and the latter to Hygelac and Beowulf.<sup>93</sup> Certainly such examples show a difference in type and function of epithet, but Whallon concludes:

the final poet may have shown ingenuity and skill in the construction of the plot and in the characterization, but it appears certain that for the language he relied upon a familiar idiomatic style which had not become so perfected as to become invariable. Further centuries of poetizing in the same tradition might have augmented the language with useful formulas it lacked, and might also have limited the use of certain distinctive kennings for the epic hero; further centuries could at least have cast many replaceable kennings into oblivion.<sup>94</sup>

How accurate Whallon's theory might be as far as the development of poetic language is concerned, I am not prepared to say; nevertheless, it does permit agreement between the oral-formulaic theory and Brodeur's statement that the language of Beowulf is not completely formulaic. Like Lord's view of the oral singer, this theory leaves latitude for the individual and the creative, and virtually resolves the major difference of opinion on Old English poetic diction. Many poets may have used the conventions mechanically and inartistically, but there was ample room for the expression of poetic genius.

Of interest at this point is the publication of J. B. Bessinger's Short Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (1960), a small book based on the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records and aimed

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

at the student rather than the advanced scholar. It is by no means an exhaustive dictionary: it covers only "the crucial 40 percent of the poetic vocabulary"<sup>95</sup> and does not define any compound words but those "which seem important enough to be considered virtually as parent or primary words" (e.g., wīs-dōm).<sup>96</sup> The principle here of listing only the separate parts of compound words is useful, and intentionally so, in helping the student appreciate the creative possibilities of the language and the full effect of any new compound he might encounter. Such an aid to poetic criticism is denied by the blanket definitions given in, say, Klaeber's glossary to Beowulf. Similarly, the frequency ratings which Bessinger gives for each entry are of critical value, although one might wish for line references as well. However, such is the role of a concordance and quite beyond the scope of a short dictionary.

Of particular use and interest is Bessinger's section on compounding and modification. Much of this is purely descriptive, showing the way in which suffixes and prefixes alter the meaning of root words, or showing the way in which various parts of speech compound for certain grammatical functions (e.g., noun plus noun makes a noun, mōd-craeft, etc.).<sup>97</sup> But he also classes the compounds according to function: tautological

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<sup>95</sup>J. B. Bessinger, A Short Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1960), p. v.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. viii.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. ix.

(e.g., dāēd-weorc); rhyming, to intensify separate elements (e.g., word-hord); literal (e.g., drinc-faet); figurative, in varying degrees of elaborateness (e.g., mere-hraegel); ambiguously literal or figurative (e.g., bān-faet).<sup>98</sup>

In spite of the lively concern about the nature of Old English poetic diction, critics still devote time to the study of figurative language: allegory, symbol, simile, metaphor, and, of course, the kenning. The foregoing chapter of this thesis showed that studies of the Christian element increased after Klaeber's suggestions, and yet that studies of allegory were kept cautious by Tolkien's warning. In addition, the early 1950's saw increased output of work on the 'elegiac' poems, The Seafarer and The Wanderer. The most important of these essays, as far as the present study is concerned, is E. G. Stanley's careful study in 1956 of Old English figurative language.

At all times Stanley is aware of the extreme difficulty inherent in Old English figurative diction: "it is not possible to be sure if the figure was not as real to the Anglo-Saxon as the reality that gave rise to the figure."<sup>99</sup> This attitude, which modifies Stanley's treatment of all figures, is strongly reminiscent of such an early critic as F. B. Gummere.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. viii.

<sup>99</sup>E. G. Stanley, "Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of The Wanderer, The Seafarer and The Penitent's Prayer," Anglia, LXXIII (1955/6), 414.

<sup>100</sup>See above, Chapt. III, pp. 66-71.

Stanley begins his study with the simile, since it explicitly makes comparisons and since its 'extensive' use in Old English shows that the Anglo-Saxons were accustomed to figurative thought. He shows how the simile ranges from the rare and simple one-word similes of Beowulf, through the more complex (e.g., the Panther like Joseph's coat) and abstract (e.g., Satan's words like poison), to the long simile which explains the allegory of Phoenix. "This gives some justification to the belief that much of what might appear realistic in their poems was capable of figurative interpretation."<sup>101</sup> Stanley concludes that the Anglo-Saxons showed great familiarity with the simile, both translated and original.

Although some similes may have been original, allegory seems to have been almost completely borrowed (nonetheless the Anglo-Saxons obviously understood the device). Stanley also shows here how close the figurative is to the real, for example in the common image of the wounds of sin (as in Hrothgar's sermon, lines 1744 ff.). The wounds are at once fact and fiction, real and allegorical, seem to be founded in Anglo-Saxon disease charms, and illustrate that the powers of darkness, both pagan and Christian, use the same weapons against humanity.<sup>102</sup> Such a critical remark is very much in keeping with the balance urged by Tolkien. Stanley further queries the relationship between fact and figure, as he discusses the nature of a flower image:

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<sup>101</sup>Stanley, p. 415.

few will deny that with the old poets the processes of nature may be symbols of their moods: but it is not the flower that gives the thought; with the Old English poets it is the thought that gives the flower. And the flower that is born of the mood may take on sufficient concreteness to appear capable of existence without and outside the mood.<sup>103</sup>

Metaphor and the poetic circumlocution also raise questions of literalness: how far, for example, does an expression like frēoðuwebbe retain the figurative sense of weaving?

The word 'weallan' and the related 'wylm' usefully illustrate the nature of some OE. metaphorical diction. The words used literally can refer to either water or fire, the surge of ocean or the surge of flames. Both meanings can be used figuratively, and are often combined. 'Weallan' and 'seopan' are very similar in meaning and usage. Since the surging blood of wounds or flood of tears are literal, it is not always possible to estimate the extent of fact and figure in what may at first sight appear a figurative use; often, however, the device of variation makes it certain that the OE. poet felt he was using an image.<sup>104</sup>

For example, morborbed stred seems related to the common sleep-death figure, but 'fetters of frost' may simply have been an Anglo-Saxon explanation of the fact of water solidifying.<sup>105</sup>

Central to Old English poetry are metaphors for moods and abstraction. But Stanley points out that Old English nature description, even when it provides a setting for action, is not so much a symbol of a state of mind as it is evoked by a state

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., pp. 421-2.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 427.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., pp. 430-1.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., pp. 431, 432.

of mind with which it is associated.<sup>106</sup> Thus, the word 'association' enters the study of figuration, just as it entered that of diction; and Stanley elaborates on its relevance to the metaphor and investigates the possibility of symbolism. For example, the special misery and terror of the early morning finds expression in morgenceald (l. 3022) and morgenlong daeg (l. 2894). This last 'illogical' combination "conveys with great economy how the lonely fear of early morning is extended into the day as the band of nobles sat, grieving in their hearts, waiting for news of Beowulf...."<sup>107</sup> In this way the misery of morning extends the terror of night and shadow, for which the Anglo-Saxons had a large and often symbolic vocabulary (e.g., deorc dēapscua, l. 160, sceaduŋenga, l. 703). Similar associations of misery came from 'cold,' especially when combined with the darkness or connected with the sea. Stanley reviews several scenes of desolation and in all finds the effect of misery predominant over realism, although in many cases it is impossible to say whether the symbolic or factual element was foremost in the poet's mind. "The narrative calls for a description of scenery and the conventions of OE. poetic diction enable the poet to advance out of it and by means of it to the symbolic description of a state of mind."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., pp. 433-4.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 435.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 439.

In such a way īsiq (l. 33) may mean little more than winterceald and be a method of evoking sorrow. Like Bonjour, Stanley also sees a theme like the beasts of battle beginning in fact and gradually accruing associations. Stanley concludes his section on diction by pointing out the concrete nature of poetic imagery.

At first glance it might appear that decision regarding the degree of figuration in Old English poetry had not progressed much since Gummere's inquiries in 1881. Certainly it will always be difficult, if not impossible, to know for certain; but Stanley has progressed considerably in bringing into focus the dividing line between fact and figure. H. G. Wright (1957) indirectly substantiates what Stanley has said, by noting the parallel occurrences of good, light and joy; evil, darkness and sorrow, and the poet's artistic use of these images in contrast to one another,<sup>109</sup> for example, the bright revelry of the mead-hall followed by the stealthy approach of Grendel under cover of night.

Although the old horse of the kenning has been frequently flogged, three more critics take further whacks at it. Isshiki Masako's 1958 study deserves only passing notice of his use of the term. Kennings, he says, are "unusual alternative words or metaphorical expressions"<sup>110</sup>-- a very broad

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<sup>109</sup>Herbert G. Wright, "Good and Evil; Light and Darkness; Joy and Sorrow in Beowulf," Beowulf Anthology, pp. 257-67.

<sup>110</sup>Isshiki Masako, "The Kennings in Beowulf," Studies in English Grammar and Linguistics: A Miscellany in Honour of Takanobu Osuka (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1958), p. 257.

definition. Isshiki's paper is largely derivative, although he does consider the kenning from two angles: the morphological (i.e., according to formal characteristics) and the semantic (according to degree of figuration).

Douglas C. Collins considers the kenning to be essentially a metaphorical expression.<sup>111</sup> On the basis of the oral-formulaic theory Collins attempts to evaluate the kenning, reaching conclusions often similar to those of H. C. Wyld.<sup>112</sup> He reasons that since the Anglo-Saxon probably had no clear idea of what a kenning was, the fairest way of appraising what it meant to the Anglo-Saxon poet is to examine the more pedestrian passages. He is quite right in questioning whether hālgo hēafde gimmas is an honest improvement over hēafodgimmum as a kenning for  
<sup>113</sup>'eyes'; but it seems to me that judging all kennings in this way is rather like judging the heroic couplet by the practice of a third-rate Augustan poet. I also feel that Collins underestimates the possibilities of scholarship when he says:

Whether or not one word in a pair of apparent synonyms has an emotional colouring and was therefore deliberately preferred it is impossible to say since we have no knowledge of spoken Anglo-Saxon.<sup>114</sup>

Doubtless it is impossible to say for certain, but much can be revealed by conscientious literary and linguistic archaeology.

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<sup>111</sup>Douglas C. Collins, "Kenning in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," Essays and Studies, XII n.s. (1959), 1.

<sup>112</sup>See above, chapt. IV, pp. 113-115.

<sup>113</sup>Collins, pp. 2-3.



However, Collins' case is directed mainly at Old English Christian poetry. He questions how much of what Christian poets took over from the earlier poetry was fully understood, how much of it was mere formula. He reminds critics that much of the literature is genuinely of Christian genesis and is not re-worked pagan themes, also that kennings have their foundation in 'colloquial speech' and cannot be judged in terms of 'poetic thought' or 'literary language.'<sup>115</sup> One set of kennings inspires a new; pagan vocabulary is easily adapted to Christian situations. For example, mihtiga cyning, a kenning easily transposed to God, adds tīr to become tīr meahtig cyning (Christ, l. 1165) "without producing so far as one can judge any additional effect."<sup>116</sup> Collins concludes, doubtless with some justice, that the more 'prosaic' kennings have lost their original force and have become simply ready-to-hand synonyms, out of which only a professional minstrel of exceptional ability could make anything.<sup>117</sup>

Of course A. G. Brodeur discusses just such a gifted poet, as has already been shown. He has shown that the Beowulf poet could take a convention and give it new life. Brodeur also shows for Beowulf, as Stanley showed for other poetry, that the figurative language was founded on concrete

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-10; see also Marjorie Daunt, "Old English Verse and English Speech Rhythm," Transactions of the Philological Society, 1946 (London, 1947).

<sup>116</sup>Collins, p. 13.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-14.

imagery. But Brodeur goes further to show that much of the figurative language of Beowulf is actually metonymy not metaphor,<sup>118</sup> and that it is simple and restrained.

We find....that, broadly speaking, many of the compounds in Beowulf are literal, or embody simple figures; whereas a disproportionately large number of the compounds formed on the same base-words in other poems are figurative, and often embody strained figures; the language of Beowulf is richer, and at the same time more temperate, than that of most other [Old English] poems.<sup>119</sup>

It should now be obvious to critics that the various Old English poems are different and that the features of one cannot necessarily be evaluated according to the practice in another poem. It is also patently clear that comparison of poems should yield good results.

Perhaps Brodeur's most satisfying contribution to the study of the kenning is his attempt to define the term. He clearly defines the several categories of Old Norse poetic diction and follows Andreas Heusler in limiting the kenning to

those periphrastic appellations in the base-word of which a person or thing is identified with something which it actually is not, except in a very special and artificial sense: in a specially conceived relation which the poet imagines between it and the sense of the limiting element.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Brodeur, chapt. 1, appendix B.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 18, see appendix A, below.

Old English poetic appellations fit all the Old Norse categories. The great distinction between Old English and Old Norse kennings is the simplicity and transparency of the former.<sup>121</sup>

Brodeur also contradicts former analyses of kennings, compounds and combinations according to formal criteria by stating that Icelandic rhetoricians make no distinction between the compound (e.g., ȳðgewinn) and the combination of noun and limiting genitive (e.g., ȳða gewinn).<sup>122</sup> After such a clear statement of the critical terminology of diction and figuration, it seems impossible that critics will henceforth accept looser definitions.

Figuration of a much broader sort is the concern of Bernard Huppe, who investigates the influence of St. Augustine on Old English poetry. "Aesthetic pleasure derives, according to Augustine [in De Doctrina Christiana], from the very discovery of hidden meanings; the quality of the pleasure has a direct relation to the difficulty of the ambiguities to be resolved."<sup>123</sup> Huppé provides quantities of evidence to show that early Christian-Latin writers endorsed the theory of figurative, allusive, enigmatic and periphrastic literature and that Christian poets expected their audience to be familiar with doctrine and symbol.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., Appendix A, pp. 247-53.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>123</sup>Bernard F. Huppé, Doctrine and Poetry: Augustine's Influence on Old English Poetry (New York: State Univ. of

On the subject of individual poems, Huppé claims that "Bede's contrast between Caedmon's songs and the lying songs of others suggests that Bede thought of Caedmon as the first in England to call the poetic diction of his ancestors out of foreign bondage back into the service of the Master."<sup>125</sup> Huppé maintains that the Hymn is allusive and enigmatic and in the Augustinian tradition. He also concludes from a detailed study of lines 116-125 of Genesis that the "careful employment of figure and epithet" shows that the poet was more than a "writer of verbose paraphrase," and that the poem stands at the beginning of medieval literature with Biblical symbolism at the core.<sup>126</sup> Huppé finally proposes that a systematic study of Beowulf would show that this great poem is closely linked to the Augustinian-Caedmonian tradition.<sup>127</sup>

The beginnings of such a study are seen in Father McNamee's article, "Beowulf—An Allegory of Salvation?" (1960). Here Father McNamee shows that many parts of Beowulf have theological parallels which would place it in the figurative tradition of the times. However, he concludes, it is impossible to know the poet's intention. "But this much at least is true: if one were to invent a story whose every detail was designed

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New York, 1959), p. 24.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., chapt. II, III, passim.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., pp. 147, 209.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., pp. 232-3.

to allegorize the story of salvation, one could not improve very much on the Beowulf as it stands."<sup>128</sup> To an inexperienced critic like myself these patristic-theological arguments are very persuasive, but there is always the uncomfortable feeling that one is being coerced into accepting a 'new orthodoxy' of interpretations as arbitrary and ephemeral as the nature allegories of the nineteenth century.

Kemp Malone's views on symbolism are considerably more secular and moderate, tending rather to the attitudes and suggestions of Grundtvig and Tolkien, although not ignoring recent Christian views. Malone suggests that certain symbols may be interpreted in Beowulf: Heorot becomes a symbol of imperial power and worldly glories (with the paved street and tessellated floor being "symbols of the high civilization that marked the Danish court");<sup>129</sup> Grendel is the outlaw who will not live and let live (as an inhabitant of hell on earth he wars against the earthly paradise of Heorot); the mere itself is modelled on Christian descriptions of Hell; the dragon represents the destructive forces of nature; Beowulf is the ideal hero, a great servant to his people and to others, a man of great physical strength and of great spiritual capacity.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup>M. B. McNamee, "Beowulf--An Allegory of Salvation?" Beowulf Anthology, pp. 349-50.

<sup>129</sup>Kemp Malone, "Symbolism in Beowulf; Some Suggestions," English Studies Today, Second Series, ed. G. A. Bonnard (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1961), p. 84.

Certainly with Malone one feels a much greater sense of critical balance and perspective.

It has thus been shown that artistry is possible in formulaic poetry and that considerable figuration is also possible. But "what kinds of excellence are possible in an art built on formulas?" asks Robert Creed early in 1961. Since invention of theme and formula are rare, according to the formulaic theory, one can hardly praise a particular passage for its singularity of phrasing; so Creed returns to the idea of word-association and connotation, particularly where themes are concerned. Extremely important to oral art is the hypothesis that the poet has an immediately responsive audience. In addition, Creed maintains, there is no real distance between occurrences of a given theme, however far apart they appear in a written text; and herein lies the solution to the problem—there is a significant relationship between all instances of a theme since all are counterpointed against former performances of the same theme.<sup>131</sup> Thus the singer can manipulate both his formulas and his audience.

In analyzing lines 1769-81 (the end of Hrothgar's sermon), Creed points out and names all the formulas and 'systems' in the passage and suggests some interesting possible critical approaches. First, he says, a 'new' critic, "struck by the pattern created briefly but sharply by about half a dozen words in this passage," might interpret as follows:

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<sup>131</sup>Robert Creed, "On the Possibility of Criticizing Old English Poetry," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, III (1961), 99-101.

Hrothgar identifies himself as the householder who has locked his home securely only to suffer house-breaking (hām-sōcn later occurs as a legal term for the offense) and the cares of the bereft householder. What is perhaps more significant than the emerging metaphor itself is the fact that it works out, and works subtly through the passage, controlling it as skilfully as any sub-merged metaphor controls the thoughts of a poet able to chart his course on paper.<sup>132</sup>

In such an interpretation, of course, it is important to understand the associations of the words.

To show how far word-association can enrich the meaning and emotional effect of the poem, Creed notices that certain 'formulas' found in this passage are also found near the beginning of the poem, thereby uniting Beowulf's salvation of the Danes with Scyld's earlier consolation.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, the adverb singāles (l. 1777) announces the change of seasons in the Finn episode (l. 1135) and is again connected with Grendel (l. 190). Such association emphasizes Hengest's savage desire. Creed even suggests that Hrothgar's speech is not only an oral theme

but an archetypal moment, a moment which creates the archetypal rhythm of sorrow followed by joy, of death and birth, of winter and spring. Hrothgar is the king wounded in spirit....who endured twelve long years....<sup>134</sup> to be saved at last by the divinely appointed youth....

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 104; the interpretation is based on such key words as belēac, ebel, ingenqa, sōcne.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p. 105; under wolcnum (ll. 170, 8); manigum mæeqba (l. 1771), monegum mæeqbum (l. 5).

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

The conclusion to be drawn from this present article of Creed's is that criticism of Old English poetry must and can use a combination of methods. Certainly Creed's proposals are no more insupportable than similar studies of modern American literature.

Margaret E. Goldsmith defends (1962) the Christian approach to Beowulf rather as Adeline Bartlett defended the right to find Latinisms in the rhetoric.<sup>135</sup> Her aim is "to show that Beowulf is a poem of the spirit, achieving its effects for the most part by poetic, not homiletic, techniques."<sup>136</sup> The heroic combats, she says, typify man's contest with the forces of darkness.<sup>137</sup> Like many critics of the time, Miss Goldsmith concentrates on what the audience might know, a trend growing since Dorothy Whitelock's The Audience of Beowulf,<sup>138</sup> and supported by studies such as those of Huppé and Lord. Always Hrothgar's sermon serves as fodder for the Christian critic, and Miss Goldsmith uses the spiritual armor described in lines 1724-60 to contradict Tolkien; the tragic irony of the last episode is that Beowulf's shield and byrnie are not of God and are consequently inadequate against the dragon.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>See above, chapt. IV, p. 134.

<sup>136</sup>Margaret E. Goldsmith, "The Christian Perspective in Beowulf," Comparative Literature, XIV (1962), 71.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>138</sup>(Oxford: Clarendon, 1951).

<sup>139</sup>Goldsmith, p. 85. In keeping with the patristic exegeses of the early Christian period, she is able to interpret Beowulf in three ways: literally (historical fight with a giant and a dragon), tropologically (moral fight with envy, hate and



Ralph W. V. Elliott proposes to answer Creed's question about kinds of excellence by showing (1962) the excellence of the highly formulaic Maldon, in which every speech, action and allusion is directed at the theme of heroic obedience.<sup>140</sup> Brodeur noticed how mood influenced the choice and combination of details, and Elliott shows how the Maldon poet creates variation within formulas, and fresh contexts for familiar phrases and images. For example, in

AElnfōð and Wulmāer    bēgen lāgon,  
 ðā onemn hyra frēan    feorh gesealdon.  
 Hi bugon þā fram beaduwe    þe þær bēon noldan:  
 þær wearð Oddan bearn    ærest on flēame, (183-6)

the lines are all formulaic; but there is a sharp contrast, obviously artistic, between the men who fall (ll. 183-4) and the men who flee (ll. 185-6).<sup>141</sup> Above all, Elliott notices the brevity, urgency and lack of the 'grand style' prolixity of Beowulf and concludes that Maldon is the work of a lettered poet working in an old tradition and treating a theme particularly suited to his sensibility as an artist.<sup>142</sup>

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greed), anagogically (eschatalogical fight with Cain and the Ancient Serpent). Even if the poem was not originally intended to have such figurative interpretations, the men who were responsible for recording it may have evolved very similar interpretations to justify the preservation of a favourite poem. The theory is certainly intriguing.

<sup>140</sup>Ralph W. V. Elliott, "Byrhtnoth and Hildebrand: A Study in Heroic Technique," Comparative Literature, XIV (1962) 56.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., pp. 60, 69-70.

James L. Rosier shows what can be done with word association in the criticism of Beowulf by examining the enigmatic Unferth as part of a design for treachery. First he determines what Unferth actually does in the poem. Next he suggests that his title of byle is probably a pejorative one since Latin prose glosses of the word and the Old Norse cognate bulr all have pejorative associations.<sup>143</sup> Finally he examines in detail the six contexts in which Unferth occurs. He notes that Unferth's 'battle-runes' (l. 501) break hall-joys just as the death of Aeschere and the tension regarding the fate of Heorot do.<sup>144</sup> Then the allusion to the treachery of Hrothulf (ll. 1017-9) is reiterated immediately prior to mention of Unferth at the king's feet and of his fratricide (ll. 1154-5). Also by being a kin-slayer and being consigned, according to Beowulf, to Hell (ll. 587-8), Unferth can be associated with Grendel, descendant of Cain, inhabitant of hell.<sup>145</sup> Rosier presents other more subtle parallels, but these are enough to show the results possible by association of images.

Association can work in diction also, as Rosier shows in an article on the use of hands and feasts. He notices that twenty out of a total thirty-five words for 'feast' are concentrated in lines 1-790 and serve to reinforce the design for

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<sup>143</sup>James L. Rosier, "Design for Treachery: the Unferth Intrigue," PMLA, LXXVII (1962), 2-3.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

terror of the Grendel episode: the feasting hall thanes are juxtaposed with the feast of Grendel, who is ironically called a hall-thane; Beowulf's early fight with the nickers is artistically rendered in terms of feasting, and Beowulf's killing them is metaphorically described as a putting to sleep after a feast (ll. 562-4); Hygelac metaphorically dies of sword-drinks (l. 2358).<sup>146</sup> Similarly the naming of Hondscio is possibly a result of association in a context containing several references to 'hand' (including glōf).<sup>147</sup> Rosier also notices the ironic effect of certain similarities of language: the visitation of Grendel (healbeġn) on Heorot (hrōfsele) and that of Beowulf (by association, āqlāeca) on the mere-dwelling (nīōsele); bā cōm is used of Grendel's approach (ll. 710-20) and of the warriors' return from the mere (ll. 1623-44); both the mere and Heorot are cleansed (ll. 825, 1620).<sup>148</sup> One might debate the significance of bā cōm being repeated, but there is little doubt that Rosier has found a profitable method of approaching the diction and imagery of Old English poems, namely by studying the extent and appropriateness of certain image groups and certain repeated expressions.

It has already been mentioned that the various branches of stylistic criticism are beginning to unite to the common end of evaluating the poetry as a whole. No longer is it sufficient

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<sup>146</sup>James L. Rosier, "The Uses of Association: Hands and Feasts in Beowulf," PMLA LXXVIII (1963), 9-10.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-12.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

to make card catalogues of devices and features; they must be viewed as essential parts of the whole poem. Three further studies, two concerning metre, show the results of such united application of principles. It was obvious that the oral-formulaic theory was closely associated with theories of metre (notably those of J. C. Pope)<sup>149</sup> and that the relationship proved fruitful to an understanding of both. In 1963 Lewis Nicholson uses the idea of full-verse and measure formulas (over-lapping, juxtaposed or extended analogously from normal formulas) to explain the 'hypermetric line,' perhaps the most satisfying explanation to date of this stylistic peculiarity.<sup>150</sup>

Randolph Quirk, on the other hand, unites metre and formula with the idea of associative diction to show, rather technically, how 'word ðæ̃er fand.' The formula, he says:

is a habitual collocation, metrically defined, and is thus a stylization of something which is fundamental to linguistic expression, namely the expectation that a sequence of words will show lexical congruity, together with (and as a condition of) lexical and grammatical complementarity.<sup>151</sup>

Quirk argues that certain words, such as mōd and maegen develop strong thematic connections and frequently become alliterative

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<sup>149</sup>The Rhythm of Beowulf (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1942).

<sup>150</sup>Lewis E. Nicholson, "Oral Techniques in the Composition of Expanded Anglo-Saxon Verse," PMLA, LXXVIII (1963), 287-92.

<sup>151</sup>Randolph Quirk, "Poetic Language and Old English Metre," Early English and Norse Studies, Presented to Hugh Smith in

collocations. Alliteration also connects half-lines to involve the poet in 'extended collocations,' such as: "Wīd is ðes wēston,  
wræ csetla fela" (Guthlac l. 296) or "mid hondum con hearpan  
grētan" (Maxims I, l. 170).<sup>152</sup>

It may therefore be fairly claimed that an expectation of the congruous and complementary, expressed through recurrent collocations, is built into the poetic system of Old English, and it may be supposed that this is close to the starting point in estimating the original audience's pleasurable experience, as it is close to our starting point in criticism of the poetry today. There is evidently a prime satisfaction in the propriety of like belonging with like, of traditional correspondences being observed.<sup>153</sup>

Thus Quirk attempts to reconcile formula and poetic experience by showing how words 'interanimate' each other; for instance, over half the occurrences of the name Grendel are linked with words of fierceness such as gūð and gryre, so that lexical connection is expected. Thus grimre gūð (l. 527) may be connected with Beowulf's skills in the past, but it is lexically connected with the threat of Grendel.<sup>154</sup>

Although these units are usually expected to be complementary, they may take part in variation; e.g., the metrical dependence of maegnes and Metodes ('mōdgan maegnes Metodes hyldo,' l. 670) attributes Beowulf's might to the Lord's favour. The

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Honour of his Sixtieth Birthday, eds. Arthur Brown and Peter Foote (London: Methuen, 1963), pp. 150-1.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., pp. 155-6.

poet may also exploit the incongruous when congruity is expected, as in goldwine and gēomor ('goldwine Gēata. Him waes gēomor sefa,' l. 2419); or to achieve a poignant effect as in sārigne sang and sunu ('sārigne sang þonne his sunu hangað,' l. 2447); or a sinister effect as in gewēox...willan and waelfealle ('ne gewēox hē him tō willan ac tō waelfealle,' l. 1711); or ironic antithesis as in ferðloca frēorig and foldan ('ferðloca frēorig nalaes foldan blāed,' Wanderer, l. 32).<sup>155</sup>

Also, words, metre, and situation conjoin for powerful effect, as in Byrhtnoth's reply to the Vikings. Quirk supplies many examples of these collocations, which "form a critical undercurrent of a kind which notably enriches Beowulf from time to time and which is prominent among features making it a great poem."<sup>156</sup> The formula, Quirk concludes, is the necessary starting point for the study of Old English poetry, but one must go beyond, to expectations and associations which make the poetry "disturbing and richly suggestive."<sup>157</sup>

Finally, Godfrid Storms tries to arrive at a full connotative meaning for the language of lines 1399-1417, the search for the mere. To do so, he clarifies his attitude to 'tradition' and 'formula,' both of which, he feels, too often imply emptiness and meaninglessness.<sup>158</sup> Less gifted poets need such a tradition,

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<sup>155</sup>Ibid., passim.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>158</sup>G. Storms, "The Subjectivity of the Style of Beowulf,"

but in the Beowulf passage under discussion, "we find many conventional elements but each word fits exactly into the context and adds something to the description."<sup>159</sup> Take away the traditional elements, there is swift movement and a feeling of terror created by highly poetic variation; there is the contrast of brightness and beauty in the description of horse and armor; there is intense emotional colouring in the tracks through the dark woods, with no mention of the monster.<sup>160</sup>

Storms is aware of the difficulties in deciding the emotive connotation of Old English words, but he attempts to determine both the objective emotional meaning (i.e., emotive sense directly conveyed) and the subjective emotional colouring (i.e., from context, in which even the objective quality may alter, as in sarcasm). Thus ofer myrcan mōr has both objective connotations of general darkness and gloom, and subjective connotations concerning the death of Aeschere and the outcome of the journey.<sup>161</sup> Sawollēasne also has both colourings: objectively it denotes an absence of something; subjectively it has an intensifying function. Here Storms reviews all the -lēas compounds in Beowulf and concludes that the poet has shown remarkable sensitivity in the emotional contexts for each.<sup>162</sup>

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Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur ([Eugene]: Univ. of Oregon Books, 1963), 171.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., pp. 173-4.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid., pp. 175-83.

Regarding critical method, Storms attacks the card-indexing sort of studies which were current around the turn of the century. Such studies were too mechanical and ignored the poetic significance of a device such as variation. Storms also shows that etymology can help in poetic appreciation. For instance he notes an etymological connection between enge and the German angst, a Latin root of which means 'to choke' or press together.<sup>163</sup> One is reminded here of Wyld's hesitation about relying on word origins: one must be sure that such meanings were known to the Anglo-Saxons. Nevertheless, Storms has shown that a study of the associative richness of the poetic language can be very rewarding and can help to establish the position of Old English poetry in the history of English literature.<sup>164</sup>

Since 1963 the production in Old English stylistic criticism has been much reduced. The major problems of diction and imagery seem to have been resolved. Certainly the oral-formulaic theory revealed much about the nature of the diction, whether or not one believes that Beowulf is an oral composition. In addition, the drawbacks of this theory have been well modified by the proponents of 'high art.' Actually, the general conclusion which one can draw from the period is that Old English poetry, Beowulf in particular, has at last taken its

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<sup>163</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., p. 186.



legitimate place in English literary history. The texts are reliable, the devices are understood and well-delineated, the history and culture of the period have been quite thoroughly studied. Wellek and Warren say: "The work of art is...a whole system of signs, or structure of signs, serving a specific aesthetic purpose."<sup>165</sup> Recent Beowulf critics now understand the meaning of the signs well enough to advance theories about the aesthetic purpose. They have brought decades of stylistic study together and have emerged with some sound methods by which they can evaluate the artistic achievement of Old English poetry.

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<sup>165</sup>René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1956), p. 129.

### SOME CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing survey is that the criticism of Old English poetic diction and figuration is now sufficiently developed that the results are no longer mere literary curiosities, but aids to the complete appreciation of an important and beautiful body of poetry. But such a level of development has not been attained without much difficulty, since "the ordering and establishing of evidence"<sup>1</sup> necessary before any poetry can be viewed critically has in the case of Old English encountered centuries of obstacles which do not normally obstruct the criticism of other periods of English poetry: Old English poetry lacked the continuity of a living tradition; it lacked an exclusive ars poetica to provide the key of understanding; and it failed, for one reason or another, to inspire early critical-literary curiosity.

In the first place, it took nearly three centuries for the materials to be collected; for, although the bulk of the poetic manuscripts were catalogued by 1705, the beautiful poems of the Vercelli Book were not even discovered until 1822. And even then, most of the manuscripts were quite incidentally collected along with the religious and historical documents which constituted the main antiquarian interest of the

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<sup>1</sup>The terms used by Wellek and Warren in their Theory of Literature (New York: Harvest Book, 1956), chapter 6.

Renaissance. Thus the first essential, the collecting and recognizing of the texts, took an unnaturally long time to accomplish.

Achieving the second essential to criticism, reliably edited texts, took equally long, since the whole corpus of Old English poetry was not adequately edited in English until the final volume of the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records appeared in 1953, almost three centuries after Junius published (1655) the first edition of the codex which bears his name, an edition which itself appeared more than one hundred years after the first Old English manuscripts were rediscovered. In addition, the neo-classical tastes of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries must have recoiled at the clumsy, foreign-looking types in which Old English manuscripts were first published. Finally, prior to the nineteenth century, scholars generally had little idea of linguistic development and were also unable to appreciate the marked difference between the language of Old English prose and that of Old English poetry. The work of such early scholars as Thorkelin and Turner bears witness to this failing.

Although in recent years it has become fashionable in Old English poetic criticism to deplore "the dragon's curse of philology" and the attendant curses of myth and history, philology was nevertheless the key to the Old English word-hoard during the nineteenth century. One cannot deny that these issues tended to dominate Old English poetic criticism and, in

many cases, to ignore the poetry altogether, as Tolkien persuasively discusses in his little allegory about the tower from which the owner could see the sea. But if I may expand this little allegory a bit--certainly pushing over the tower to look at the soil beneath it is rather hard on the tower and probably does not reveal much useful information about it. But the tower had been long deserted and was in a shocking state of disrepair. The few early adventurers who tried to climb it stumbled on broken stairs in the dark, fearing that the damaged stonemasonry, full of cracks, would never hold the weight of their critical methods. The few who made it to the top were so blinded by the dark and choked by the dust they could barely take in the view. Others climbed part way and retreated; and yet others said: "This tower is too shaky; let us leave it to decay as it should. Besides, it is a very crude tower, built by ill-bred barbarians, you know!"

But stonemasons from the neighboring town of Philology were called in and brought with them torches, went inside the tower and by the light of their torches saw that many stones had to be replaced. It took much labor and debate in some cases to put the fallen stones back in their original places; but always the stonemasons proceeded upwards, repairing as they went, occasionally stopping to rearrange stones, since torchlight is not very bright. Some stonemasons, to be sure, became so engrossed in the structure of the stones themselves that they did not ascend far, but instead ran around the neighbourhood comparing them to all the other stones they could find.

Finally, they said: "But what kind of tower is this? It is still rather dark and ugly and dirty." So they called various experts from the neighboring states of Paleography, Mythology and History. They debated a great deal about the stones and took rubbings and scrapings and chipped away at the old mortar and learned much about the people who built the tower, but they did not find out much about the tower itself. Some experts became so fascinated with the sweepings and scrapings that they took them home for a better look, since the light in the tower was still dim. Then finally some architects from the next town, Poetry, who had spent their lives building new towers and refurbishing old ones at home, came on this isolated tower accidentally. Some said: "What an ugly tower. I much prefer a Grecian or Georgian design!" Others stayed and said: "What an interesting tower, how dingy and badly designed, what a challenge!" So they called in electricians, who, with much difficulty, wired the tower so that everyone could see by the new bright light. Then came charwomen with miracle detergents to scrub clean the stones. Finally, the new owners arrived and said: "The view is great, and we never before realized the beauty of the stone-work in this tower--the stones have lovely colours and shapes and are arranged in a subtle and intriguing manner. We like this tower very much." But it is still an old tower, and one wonders just how comfortable the new tenants will be.

To what extent can a modern student enjoy Old English poetry as poetry and to what extent can critical methods evolved for more modern poems be applied? Up to a point,

prevailing tastes through the past few centuries have influenced the speed and direction with which the preliminary operations were accomplished. Certainly the peculiar mixture of classical scholarship, romantic and nationalistic sentiment, the concept of progress, and the taste for regular metre and unextravagant diction in poetry must have influenced the nineteenth century to view Old English poetry as historical documents and linguistic relics which did not really deserve the name of poetry. The romantic attraction of the past drew the scholars of the past, not the critics of literature. In most cases, then, the influence of prevailing culture on Old English poetic criticism until the late nineteenth century tended, if anything, to be negative. Even during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Old English poetic diction came under scrutiny, it suffered from the same conflict which prevailed in most literary fields at the time, that between uncertain new methods and uncreative old methods. Nevertheless, the source studies, analogues, catalogues, classified lists and type studies which appeared at the time constituted valuable, if uninspired, background material to later studies of diction and imagery. And, of course, literary criticism at the turn of the century was by and large historical in emphasis.

However, shortly after the war, the language and imagery of poetry came into its own with such critics as T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards. I do not think one can go so far as to suggest that these critics directly influenced the development

of Old English poetic criticism, but their type of criticism must have had some influence on the way in which scholars approached Old English poetry, a sort of critical Zeitgeist. This critical trend came fortunately at a time when Old English texts were reliable enough to be subjected to concentrated semantic study, so that one finds Wyld, Bryan, and Helen Buckhurst attempting to determine shades of word meanings and to evaluate the style of Old English poetry by means of language studies. In addition, with new theories of poetic craftsmanship emphasizing language rather than metre, it is not unnatural that criticism of Old English poetic style should also focus more on poetic language than on metre, a distinct reversal of nineteenth century tendencies. Finally, the emergence of practical criticism was exactly what was needed for Old English poetry. For, useful as historical criticism is in Anglo-Saxon studies, the danger was that the poetry would be completely swamped by the study of extrinsic matters.

However, Old English poetry, notably Beowulf, had so suffered at the hands of theoretical critics such as W. P. Ker, that Tolkien's British Academy lecture was a well-timed, badly-needed defense which resuscitated the poem as an object worthy of literary attention. Nevertheless, the New Critics of the 30's and 40's, probably because of inadequate background, did not concern themselves with Old English poetry. Even today, the profitable application of some Neo-Critical principles to Old English poetry seems very much second-hand: as if the Old English scholar and the literary

critic were two different types of people. Certainly, W. K. Wimsatt's informed defense of Old English poetic variation (1954) is a remarkable exception to the general trend in comprehensive critical works. Also, Wimsatt's concern with variation as a feature of English literary style contrasts sharply with the prevailing attitude of turn-of-the-century critics, who begrudgingly allotted Old English poetry space, seemingly only because of its historical importance.

The question remains to be answered whether Old English poetry can ever be subjected to the same critical processes as modern English poetry, or whether it must always remain the exclusive concern of Anglo-Saxon scholars. Recent developments in the study of Old English poetic style have helped make Old English poetic principles more generally comprehensible: the oral-formulaic theory helps greatly to explain the origin and development of the kind of poetic language the critic must cope with; Brodeur's Art of Beowulf presents an aesthetic for Old English poetry through an appreciation of the elements of verbal originality and effective variation;<sup>2</sup> and studies of word association increase our awareness of the psychological richness of the poetry. Certainly the New Criticism, at least the more extreme attitudes of that school, would meet with failure if applied to Old English poetry. As early as 1824 Richard Price saw the fallacy of interpreting Old English poetry according to the meaning of derivative words;

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<sup>2</sup>See appendix B.



thus interpretations based on verbal ambiguity could lead to gross distortions of the text. Robert Creed's "On the Possibility of Criticizing Old English Poetry" (1961), shows to some extent the risks involved in applying the New Criticism, which in its extremes ignores all but the poem itself. It takes only a small book like Dorothy Whitelock's The Audience of Beowulf to show just how dependent Old English criticism is on such externals as historical background.

Old English poetry basically demands too much groundwork for it ever to become the property of all general literary critics. For the language, tradition and culture of Old English poetry are so far removed from our own that they must be learned from the beginning, without even the aid of a long tradition of scholarship. A student may pick up Shakespeare, Pope, Eliot--even Chaucer--and derive some sort of poetic experience before he commences a close scholarly analysis. Not so for Beowulf. Herein lies the major handicap to progress in Old English poetic criticism; for the size of the reward, many critics find the quest too difficult.

But the quest is not now so difficult as it once was; and the reward, as Brodeur has shown, can be worth the effort. However, there is still basic work to be done before aesthetic criticism can be fully exercised. Foremost among items required is a concordance to the poetry, which Magoun pleaded for nearly ten years ago. There is also still plenty of room for the more pedestrian jobs of image-counting and word-classifying,

if only to confirm, as some critics have already begun to do for Beowulf, that the poet's talent and skill have provided the poem with the patterns of imagery and patterns of sound which belong to first-rate poetry, quite independent of such questions as when it was composed, how historically accurate it is, and whether it was the creation of an oral or lettered poet (almost as immaterial a question as whether Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare). Critics and scholars have, indeed, reached the point where they can, like the Beowulf poet himself, praise the man who was able "snytttrum styrian / and on spēd wrecan spel gerāde."

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## APPENDIX A

## THE PROBLEM OF OLD NORSE POETIC APPELLATIONS

Since the first flickers of Old English poetic criticism in the late seventeenth century, it has been the practice to apply the stylistic principles of Old Norse poetry to Old English poetry, especially the principles set down in Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda. Although this practice was doubtless reinforced by the absence of an equivalent poetic for Old English, and although metre was the main area of the poetry which concerned the eighteenth century, nevertheless in 1715 Elizabeth Elstob made the vague but correct analogy between the "many bold Figures" which Ole Worm reported existed in Old Norse, and the equivalent expressions in Old English.<sup>1</sup> Later, during the nineteenth century, as Old English language studies became increasingly frequent, greater attention was paid to the terminology for the poetic language, with kenning (the word given to the most characteristic device of the highly substantive skaldic verse) being the first Old Norse term to be applied.

But two questions immediately arise: what does this term mean, and to what extent is it valid to apply Snorri's treatise on skaldic diction to the poetry of a different culture which was earlier by several centuries? The fact that skaldic poetry was different, not only from the poetry of other

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<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Elstob, The Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue with an Apology for the Study of Northern Antiquities (London, 1715), p. 68.

Old Germanic cultures, but from the earlier Old Norse poetry of the Edda should, I think, caution one against a wholesale adoption of the terms. I think also that the discrepancy between verse based, as Old English poetry is, on the device of variation and verse based on nominal tricks and puzzles, as skaldic verse is, has contributed to the unclear application of Old Norse terms to Old English poetry.

Basically, scholars have been unclear as to whether a kenning is so named because it is metaphorical, because it is compounded, or because it acts as a nominal substitute. I propose here to present three views of Snorri's categories, then to look at a few comments on the terms as they are used specifically in Old Norse studies, and finally to list chronologically some of the most important uses of the terminology in Old English criticism. In all cases I shall give the quotations or close paraphrases of each critic's attitude, and in most cases I shall add a summary comment.

## I. Views of Snorri's Categories for the Substantive in Poetic Diction.

### A. Snorri Sturluson, The Prose Edda.<sup>2</sup>

The three types of 'skaldic metaphor' are:

- 1) calling everything by its name
- 2) substitution
- 3) periphrasis (p. 96)

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<sup>2</sup>trans. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur (New York: American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1929).

The Old Norse equivalents are not given in this translation.

B. H. van der Merwe Scholtz, The Kenning in Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Poetry.<sup>3</sup>

Snorri's three categories of the substantive are:

- 1) all nouns or expressions in their ordinary, literal sense.
- 2) úkennt heiti, often called nafn or heiti
- 3) kenning, heiti and kennt heiti (p.35)

Heiti, unlike words of group 1), are found in poetry only. The heiti may be a kenning as well as a general term for group 2). Frequent usage probably caused the heiti to lose much of their figurative meaning, so that they became úkennt heiti, the opposite of kennt heiti. (pp. 36-9)

Kenning seems to be used as a general term for group 3), and heiti is by no means clearly defined.

C. Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, The Art of Beowulf.<sup>4</sup>

Brodeur lists the following appellations:

- 1) ókent heiti, "an unqualified simplex denoting a person or thing." It may be literal, e.g., scip, or figurative, e.g., cēol.
- 2) "compound or combinatory appellations which may substitute for the literal word for a concept or accompany it in variation."
  - a) kenning: calls the referent "something which it actually is not" (e.g., beadolēoma).
  - b) kent heiti: "calls the referent something which it is" (e.g., wēgflota).
  - c) viðkenning: is a variety of kent heiti, in which the base-word is always a term of ownership or family relationship (e.g., maðo Healfdene). (pp. 247-53)

Brodeur has not made separate categories for the prosaic and the poetic simplices, but his definitions are certainly less ambiguous than those of Scholtz.

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<sup>3</sup>(Oxford: Blackwell, 1929).

<sup>4</sup>(Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1959).

## II. Some Statements and Definitions from Scholars of Old Norse.

- A. Lee M. Hollander, The Skalds: A Selection of their Poems, With Introductions and Notes.<sup>5</sup>

The kenning is "always an implied simile." (p. 12)

"The striking difference [between skaldic and other kennings] is that in Skaldic poetry the replacement of nouns by a circumlocution is raised to a principle... so that in extreme cases virtually nothing is mentioned by its own name or designated by an everyday word." (p. 13)

It is not clear whether Hollander really considers the kenning as metaphorical, since he gives as example 'dispenser of rings.' However, he minimizes its importance as a substitute expression in all but skaldic poetry.

- B. Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, An Icelandic-English Dictionary.<sup>6</sup>

Kenning is defined as "a poetical periphrasis or descriptive name...The ancient circumlocutions were either drawn from mythology...or from the thing itself (sann-kenning), as to call the breast the mind's abode..." (p. 336)

Heiti is defined as "a noun, a denomination...úkennd heiti, simple nouns, opp. to kenningar, circumlocutions or metaphors...." (p. 253)

It is not absolutely clear whether 'circumlocutions or metaphors' is to be taken in series with 'kenningar' or in apposition. The decision would make a difference to the actual application of the term.

- C. E. V. Gordon, An Introduction to Old Norse.<sup>7</sup>

"The kenning is logically (although not always in artistic effect) a metaphor; the term is derived from the use of a verb kenna...[which] means 'to express or describe one thing by means of another.'" (p. xl)

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<sup>5</sup>(Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1945).

<sup>6</sup>2nd ed. Sir William A. Craigie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

<sup>7</sup>2nd ed. rev. A. R. Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

The emphasis here is on the figurative, but Gordon does not discuss other Old Norse poetic terms.

From these three sources, then, one cannot derive a consistent meaning for kenning; the term seems to be as vaguely applied in Old Norse as in Old English criticism.

### III. A Chronological List of Definitions by Old English Scholars.

1824 Richard Price, "Editor's Preface."<sup>8</sup>

"If 'dinges-mere' be the genuine reading, it must be considered as a parallel phrase with 'wiges-heard, hordes-heard,' etc., where two substantives are united in one word, the former of which stands in the genitive case with an adjective power.... 'Dinges-mere' would then be a 'kenningar nafn' given to the ocean from the continual clashing of its waves. For it will be remembered that the literal import of 'mere' is a mere or lake, and this could not be applied to the Irish channel, without some qualifying expression." (p. xcvi n.)

Although kenningar nafn means 'surname,' Price emphasizes here the structure and metaphorical nature of what is now known simply as a kenning.

1871 Henry Sweet, "Sketch of the History of Anglo-Saxon Poetry."<sup>9</sup>

"In the whole poem of Beowulf there are scarcely half a dozen of them [similes], and these of the simplest character, such as comparing the ship to a bird. Indeed, such a simple comparison as this is almost equivalent to the more usual 'kenning' (as it is called in Icelandic), such as 'brimfugol,' where, instead of comparing the ship to a bird, the poet simply calls it a sea-bird, preferring the direct assertion to the indirect comparison." (p. 6)

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<sup>8</sup>Thomas Warton, The History of English Poetry, rev. ed. [Richard Price], Vol. I (London, 1824).

<sup>9</sup>Thomas Warton, History of English Poetry, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt, Vol. II (London, 1871).

Thus Sweet emphasizes the metaphorical nature of the kenning.

1887 Albert H. Tolman, "The Style of Anglo-Saxon Poetry."<sup>10</sup>

"The synonyms, epithets, Kenningar, whether replacing pronouns or mere appositions and syntactically superfluous, are a central feature of A.-S. poetry." (p. 25)

Tolman also uses the term generally to include unusual poetic expressions, and he implicitly stresses the substituting function.

1907 Walter Morris Hart, Ballad and Epic: A Study in the Development of the Narrative Art.

"This same personification [gūð-wine] of the sword (and again with faded metaphor or kenning) occurs... when it is said that the battle-gleam refused to bite...." (p. 177)

Hart is quite vague about the kenning, but apparently recognizes it by its figurative nature.

1909 James Walter Rankin, "A Study of the Kennings in Anglo-Saxon Poetry."<sup>12</sup>

"The word kenning is used...as a convenient designation of a metaphorical, a periphrastic, or a more or less complex term employed in the Anglo-Saxon poems instead of a single, specific name for a person or thing." (p. 357)

This can be considered the 'traditional' or broad meaning of the term kenning.

1922 Fr. Klaeber, ed., Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg.<sup>13</sup>

"Generously and withal judiciously the author employs these picturesque circumlocutory words and phrases

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<sup>10</sup>PMLA, III (1887).

<sup>11</sup>Harvard Studies in Philology and Literature, XI (Cambridge, 1907).

<sup>12</sup>JEGP, VIII (1909).

<sup>13</sup>3rd ed. (Boston: Heath, 1950).

known as 'kennings,' which, emphasizing a certain quality of a person or thing, are used in place of the plain, abstract designation, e.g., helmberend ...ȳða gewearc, or such as involve metaphorical language, like rodores candel...beadolēoma." (p. lxiii)

"The kennings very often take the form of compounds." (p. lxiv)

Klaeber thus emphasizes the substituting rather than the figurative function of the kenning.

1929 H. van der Merwe Scholtz, The Kenning in Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Poetry.

A kenning is a periphrastic expression of at least two words either compounded or separate. (p. 37)

'Unity of meaning' is the most distinctive feature of the kenning; thus single words which may be considered elliptical forms of a two-part kenning (e.g., goldwine, hleō, hyrde as terms for 'king') are included as kennings. (pp. 42-5)

"The kenning is a conventional compound or phrase, generally consisting of two substantives the literal meanings of which hardly enter the conscious mind." (p. 57)

That the kenning is a figurative use of a phrase is only partly true (mythological kennings are not so). "Generally speaking, it would..be more correct to regard kenningar as words and phrases used in a figurative or a specialized, as opposed to the literal or general sense of such words and phrases." (p. 47)

"The variation is an expression added to another term for explanatory reasons or purposes of emphasis. This is not the case with the kenning. It is not an auxiliary term placed in apposition to another, but a substitute for that term itself which, accordingly, does not appear at all in the sentence." (p. 52)

The heiti are found in poetry only. There is fundamentally no difference between the kenning and the heiti, except possibly the words under heiti have lost to a large extent their figurative meaning. (pp. 37-8)

Scholtz is simply not clear about either the structure of the metaphorical nature of the kenning or the exact nature of the

heiti. He does, however, emphasize the substituting role of the kenning.

- 1929 Helen Buckhurst, "Terms and Phrases for the Sea in Old English Poetry."<sup>14</sup>

True kennings are "condensed metaphorical, pictorial, or figurative expressions." (p. 110)

The true kenning, i.e., condensed metaphor, is quite rare in Old English. More common is the 'half-kenning.' (p. 116)

- 1940 J. R. R. Tolkien, "Prefatory Remarks."<sup>15</sup>

"In this class [the 'poetic class'], sometimes called by the Icelandic name 'kenning' (description), the compound offers a partial and often imaginative or fanciful description of a thing, and the poets may use it instead of the normal 'name.'" (p. xxv)

Tolkien does not emphasize the figurative nature of the kenning and only suggests that substitution was one of its roles.

- 1948 Kemp Malone, "The Old English Period (to 1100)."<sup>16</sup>

"Stereotypes of another kind were the kennings, a characteristic feature of Old Germanic poetic diction. These arose as variations, but in many cases became so familiar that they could be used without previous mention of the thing varied. A kenning may be described as a two-member (or two-term) circumlocution for an ordinary noun..." (e.g., hronrād, fugles wynn). (p. 29)

The heiti is "a one-term substitute for an ordinary noun," e.g., 'ash' to mean 'spear'; and like the kenning it arose from variation. (p. 30)

Malone's examples are not restricted to metaphorical expressions, and he places great emphasis on the substituting function and two-term structure.

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<sup>14</sup> Studies in English Philology in Honor of Frederick Klaeber, eds. Kemp Malone and Martin B. Ruud (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1929).

<sup>15</sup> John R. Clark Hall, trans., Beowulf and the Finnesburg



- 1953 C. L. Wrenn, ed., Beowulf, with the Finnesburg Fragment.<sup>17</sup>

The kenning is loosely defined as "the poetic interpretation or description of a thing or thought by means of a condensed simile," which in Old English is usually a compound. It is distinct from a 'descriptive epithet' (e.g., hringed-stefna) by the presence of an inherent or condensed simile (e.g., mere-hengest). (p. 81)

- 1959 Masako Isshiki, "The Kennings in Beowulf."<sup>18</sup>

"Kennings are unusual alternative words or metaphorical expressions." (p. 257)

- 1959 Douglas C. Collins, "Kenning in Anglo-Saxon Poetry."<sup>19</sup>

"In essence a kenning is a metaphorical expression." (p. 1)

- 1959 Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, The Art of Beowulf.

"The kenning is indeed a metaphor; but it is not direct or a just metaphor. It depends for its effect not upon the listener's recognition that a given thing is so like that with which it is identified that the identification has immediate poetic truth; it depends upon the hearer's ability and willingness to see likeness within unlikeness, and the unlikeness must seem to be dissipated through the limiting word, which expresses an area, or a condition, within which likeness may be imagined....A metaphor is a kenning only if it contains an incongruity between the referent and the meaning of the base-word; in the kenning the limiting word is essential to the figure because without it incongruity would make any identification impossible." (pp. 250-1)

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Fragment, rev. ed. C. L. Wrenn (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1954).

<sup>16</sup>A Literary History of England, ed. Albert C. Baugh (New York: Appelton-Century-Crofts, 1948).

<sup>17</sup>(London: Harrap, 1953).

<sup>18</sup>Studies in English Grammar and Linguistics: A Miscellany in Honor of Takanobu Osuka, eds. Kazuo Araki et al. (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1958).

"Those periphrases which are not kennings, but which possess the same structure as the kenning, and which identify the referent as something which is is, may best be called by the Old Icelandic term kend heiti." (p. 251)

"Too much emphasis has been placed upon substitution as an essential character of the kenning; it is most commonly a substitution in Old Norse, but not in Old English." (p. 252)

Thus Brodeur narrowly defines the Old Norse poetic appellations, notably restricting the metaphorical meaning of the kenning and minimizing its importance as a substitute expression.

From the above lists one can conclude that it is justifiable to apply Old Norse terms to Old English poetry, that it is necessary to adjust them slightly because of the dominant Old English device of variation,<sup>20</sup> and that precision in their application has paralleled the general understanding of Old English poetic diction. During the nineteenth century scholars only infrequently used the term kenning; and when they did so, they either emphasized the metaphorical nature of the device or used it simply as a convenient appellation for the distinctive Old English poetic compound. This latter use of the term is still convenient; and in spite of later refinements of Old Norse poetic terminology, it remains the 'traditional' or common meaning. However, nineteenth century scholars had other ways of describing Old English poetic compounds and phrases. Sharon Turner, for example, differentiated between the 'eight'

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<sup>19</sup>Essays and Studies, XII n.s. (1959).

<sup>20</sup>See Appendix B.

periphrases' for God in Caedmon's Hymn and the 'metaphorical periphrasis' of calling Noah's ark a 'sea-house',<sup>21</sup> thereby suggesting two different kinds of poetic expression. Isaac Disraeli referred to periphrases and 'obscure conceits',<sup>22</sup> but for the most part nineteenth century critics referred to 'metaphors.' F. B. Gummere's The Anglo-Saxon Metaphor<sup>23</sup> shows that the term was very loosely applied and was little more than a convenient designation for unusual or figurative poetic language.

With the early twentieth century the use of 'metaphor' in this context declined, and kenning came to mean roughly the same thing. At this time the 'traditional' meaning became firmly rooted, the meaning which is used as late as 1959 by Isshiki and 1961 by William Whallon.<sup>24</sup> However, during the 1920's two alternative views of the kenning gained in importance. First, in comparing the Old Norse and Old English kenning, van der Merwe Scholtz emphasized its role as a substitute expression, a role acknowledged by Tolkien, endorsed by Malone, but criticized by Brodeur as being really

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<sup>21</sup>The History of the Anglo-Saxons, 5th ed., Vol III (London, 1828), pp. 267-8.

<sup>22</sup>Amenities of Literature, new ed. B. Disraeli, Vol. I (London, 1859), p. 32, 32 n.; see above, p. 52.

<sup>23</sup>(Halle, 1881); see above, pp. 66-71.

<sup>24</sup>"The Diction of Beowulf," PMLA, LXXVI (1961), 309-19; see above p. 187.

appropriate only to the Old Norse kenning. Then Helen Buckhurst began to differentiate, as Turner had done a century earlier, between literal and metaphorical poetic compounds, applying kenning to only the latter. Caroline Brady's 1952 article on -rād compounds was important in underlining the difference between the literal defining periphrasis and the metaphorical periphrasis, although Miss Brady did not use the term kenning.<sup>25</sup> C. L. Wrenn also distinguished between the kenning and the merely descriptive epithet.

Thus Brodeur's distinctions in 1959 were not really new. What they did primarily was to explain in almost meticulous detail the areas covered by the Old Norse terms, including kend heiti, heiti and ukend heiti, terms only sporadically and inconsistently applied previously. As in all cases when refinements are made in method and terminology, it will be impossible to use kenning loosely without confusing those to whom it means something more specific. (This problem will not likely occur with the terms which have more recently entered the vocabulary of Old English criticism.) Nonetheless, kenning has over a number of years been used loosely--and conveniently so. My only suggestion is that the more pedantic usage be called 'kenning, narrow sense' and the more general be called 'kenning, broad sense.' In this way one might, I believe, overcome to some extent the problem of Old Norse poetic appellations.

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<sup>25</sup>"The Old English Nominal Compounds in -rād," PMLA LXVII (1952), 538-71; see above pp. 149-50.

## APPENDIX B

## A NOTE ON VARIATION

Probably the real key to the Old English poetic word-hoard is variation, which Klaeber calls "the very soul of the Old English poetical style."<sup>1</sup> However, like his predecessors and many of his followers, Klaeber either did not appreciate fully the poetic function of this device, or simply took it for granted. As I have been preparing this paper, the fact has become increasingly clear that variation, its recognition, understanding and appreciation, is basic to the development of Old English poetic criticism. In turn, appreciation of variation depends almost totally on a minute knowledge of language, the emotional and notional meanings of all the words used. For it is impossible to tell whether variation has been made for maximum effect until one understands fully all its parts. Has the poet worked for climax, emphasis, ironic antithesis, hyperbole, etc. in his use of variation? Nor need such an approach result in over-subtle theories, since skilful constructions can be obtained in unrevised or impromptu work by an artist of words, that is, by a poet endowed with an intense and inherent feeling for delicate shades of word connotation, for the impressive ordering of words, and for the subtle way in which words in close proximity interact with one another to produce a cumulative

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<sup>1</sup>Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg, 3rd ed. (Boston: Heath, 1950), p. lxv.

effect. Of course, I am here referring only to the best passages of Old English poetry, since much variation, I am sure, is no more than gratuitous ornamentation.

The history of the criticism of variation is interesting enough to isolate in summary, since development in the appreciation of this device has paralleled the development of Old English poetic criticism in general. The 'classical' style of Beowulf shows the fullest use of variation; even Bede in his Latin version of Caedmon's hymn is able to exploit the richness of variation while ostensibly offering only the sense of the poem. The use of the device declined somewhat by the end of the Old English period, and by the early thirteenth century Henry of Huntingdon, purporting to give a word-for-word translation of Brunanburh, consistently ignores variant expressions and gives almost a straight prose account of the battle.<sup>2</sup>

The earliest critical comments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seem to ignore variation completely and discuss or allude only to metre, metaphor and alliteration. Thus by Ellis' edition of Brunanburh in 1801 little progress had been made in the appreciation of variation. Critics simply did not understand that the multiple expressions

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<sup>2</sup>Historiarum Libri Octo (London, 1596), leaf 204 [misprint for 203]. See above, pp. 11-12.

illuminated different aspects of a thing and were not mere repetition or enumeration. Sharon Turner briefly implies that the piling on of epithets is more than mere repetition, but he does not develop the idea.<sup>3</sup> However, nineteenth century textual criticism and language studies made it possible to find a meaning for and to confirm the grammatical relationships between variant poetic expressions, so that even by 1824 Richard Price's translation of Brunanburh shows progress in the understanding of variation.<sup>4</sup>

As artistic evaluation began to creep into the historical criticism of the later nineteenth century, variation also began to attract comment. For example, Taine sees it as a confused mass of highly visualized but disorganized details, the product of an uncivilized mind.<sup>5</sup> And Ten Brink states that the abundant appositional and substitute expressions describe various aspects of a thing.<sup>6</sup> Thus by the late nineteenth century at least the first level of understanding of variation was reached, even though none of the critics, including Henry Sweet, seemed to recognize that epic variation is a retarding device in Beowulf, just as the epic simile is in Homer.

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<sup>3</sup>The History of the Anglo-Saxons, 5th ed. Vol. III (London, 1828), pp. 270-1. See above. p. 33.

<sup>4</sup>In Thomas Warton, The History of English Poetry, rev. ed. [Richard Price], Vol. I (London, 1824), p. (112).

<sup>5</sup>History of English Literature, trans. Henry Van Laun, rev. ed., Vol. I (New York, 1900), pp. 54-5. See above, p. 57.

<sup>6</sup>History of English Literature, trans. Horace M. Kennedy, Vol. I (London, G. Bell, 1914), p. 19. See above, p. 62.

But the lack of critical method at the turn of the century was paralleled by a misunderstanding of the function of variation and by an inability to distinguish between sequence and variation or between enumeration and variation (not an easy distinction at the best of times). Tolman, like earlier critics speaks of 'a mass of striking details' without sequence.<sup>7</sup> Gummere views it as 'repetition' and 'all possible names for one and the same thing.'<sup>8</sup> Brooke, in spite of attempts to find connotations for variant expressions, still sees them as used carelessly and indiscriminately.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, although Hart is able to appreciate the multiple impressions and details provided by variation and is able to recognize the epic retarding devices in Beowulf, he cannot see the sailing to Denmark as more than a hurried collection of unordered details.<sup>10</sup> Even in the early 1920's Klaeber virtually ignores the application of the device; and Wyld, influenced no doubt by his oddly subjective view of Old English figurative language, seems unaware that Old English variation is more than mere substitution, or not calling a spade a spade.<sup>11</sup> And of course, general critics, such as the antagonistic Quiller-Couch, see it

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<sup>7</sup>"The Style of Anglo-Saxon Poetry," PMLA, III (1887), p. 37. See above, p. 95.

<sup>8</sup>The Anglo-Saxon Metaphor (Halle, 1881), p. 25. See above, p. 69.

<sup>9</sup>The History of Early English Literature, Vol. I (London, 1892), p. 228. See above, p. 85.

<sup>10</sup>Ballad and Epic: A Study in the Development of Narrative Art (Cambridge, Mass., 1907), p. 195. See above, p. 93.



as little more than the 'besetting sin' of calling things 'out of their right names.'<sup>12</sup>

The assorted diction studies of the late 1920's provided some important ground work for studies of variation, but for the most part, a general lack of development in criticism of style (aside from the study of various rhetorical and sound patterns) was paralleled by a lack of significant comment on variation. Even in his introduction to the Clark Hall translation of Beowulf, Tolkien does not give variation its due, splitting it up between his discussions of diction and metre.<sup>13</sup> Kemp Malone also gives variation short shrift in a rather cold and analytical description of its appearance, but not of its functions.<sup>14</sup> However, in the 1950's the great surge of interest in Old English poetic diction was most markedly paralleled by an increased appreciation of and penetration into the whole matter of variation, so that even an important general critic like W. K. Wimsatt can write:

There are places in Beowulf where one might attribute a variation to metrical or alliterative necessity. But surely not here in these eight ways of naming the boat. [ll. 1906-1919]. Nor was the poet here merely afraid of a taboo, scrupulously observing a school-boy's rule against using the same word in so many sentences or lines...

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<sup>11</sup>"Diction and Imagery in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," Essays and Studies, XI (1925), 49-91. See above, p. 114.

<sup>12</sup>On the Art of Writing, new ed. (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961), p. 195.

<sup>13</sup>(George Allen and Unwin, 1963).

He was delighted with the boat. He was eager to tell about it, as much about it as possible while telling what it did.<sup>15</sup>

The oral-formulaic theory also, especially in its discussion of themes, shows something about the nature and development of variation. But perhaps the most important study of variation is found in The Art of Beowulf. Here Brodeur summarizes the nature and occurrence of variation: its focusing power, its retarding effect, its emotional potential, its formality and dignity, etc.<sup>16</sup> With this study of variation and the more recent studies on verbal interaction (mostly influenced by Brodeur), the key to Old English poetic diction and figuration has been found. It is now possible to judge the effectiveness with which the poet has varied words and thus more fully to appreciate and evaluate the poetry as a whole.

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<sup>14</sup>In Albert C. Baugh, ed. A Literary History of England (New York: Appelton-Century-Crofts, 1948), pp. 28-9. See above, p. 154.

<sup>15</sup>The Verbal Icon (New York: Noonday Press, 1964), pp. 190-1.

<sup>16</sup>(Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1959), Chapt. II.