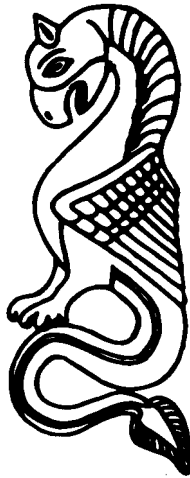# Leeds Studies in English

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Poetic Attitudes and Adaptations in Late Old English Verse

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1. Introduction: Language Change in Late Old English

Throughout most of the Old English period, poets' attitudes towards language change were conservative to a fault. Scholars agree that poetry changed very little during this period and that poetic language probably varied markedly from the ordinary speech of the time, preserving archaic vocabulary and word forms long after they had fallen out of common use. By the tenth century, however, poems began to show the effect of language change, which has allowed scholars to point out clear differences between the composition of these later poems and the earlier ones.[1] I will argue that this necessity bred opposing styles of poetic composition. Some poets took the linguistic changes as an opportunity to be innovative, adapting the verse form to the language and composing poetry that reflected contemporary speech, while others stalwartly preserved the traditional forms and altered their style as necessary to maintain short, contained verses. These various methods of poetic composition suggest that scholars should rethink their mode of analysis for these poems. Rather than judging them primarily on the basis of how well they hold to a monolithic standard of Old English verse, we should examine how and why individual poets develop their style. In the case of late-tenth-century poems, such an analysis demonstrates that as the language changed, poets composed with varying degrees of conservatism and innovation and altered their style to accommodate their view on poetic composition.

For a long time, analysis of late Old English verse has been hampered by critiques on the correctness of the verse; scholars often describe it as defective in one way or another. The defects can be matters of style: Julie Townsend shows that the *Chronicle* poems have been criticized as mechanical, filled with clichés, rambling, doggerel, and generally technically

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[1] While dating poetry has always been controversial, the category of 'late poetry' is less so because many poems can be dated to the tenth century or slightly later on non-metrical grounds: *The Battle of Brunanburh*, *The Coronation of Edgar*, *The Battle of Maldon*, *The Death of Edward*, *The Death of Edgar*, and *The Capture of the Five Boroughs*. *The Meters of Boethius* is also closely related to this group as a late ninth-century work. *The Menologium* cannot be dated as conclusively, but it makes references to the Benedictine Rule, which suggests that it should be dated to a period after the Benedictine Reform became prominent in England (c. 965). Another poem that should probably belong with this group is *Judgment Day II*. Although it cannot be dated conclusively, R. D. Fulk demonstrates that the poem shows many of the metrical features that are peculiar to the externally dated poems, so it was probably written at the same time; see *History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp. 251–68.

correct but lacking literary merit.[2] Other critics focus more closely on metrical defects. D. G. Scragg carefully details several ways in which *The Battle of Maldon*, a poem that is often used to characterize the late Old English period, varies from the metrical standard set by conservative poems such as *Beowulf* : defects in alliteration are prominent; the poem shows more deviation in the drops; the distribution of the types has changed, with more frequent types A and B at the expense of types D and E; the caesura does not appear to be as strong, for frequently phrases can be split between two verses of the same line; and the poet repeats syntactic formulas, verses, or even whole lines verbatim substantially more often.[3]

Recently, some scholars have begun to explore the possibility that the poetic tradition was shifting by the end of the Old English period and that a new paradigm needs to be developed to analyze these verses. Both Thomas Cable and Thomas A. Bredehoft analyze various late Old English poems that have often been considered irregular or unmetrical to argue that they appear reasonably organized if the lifts are no longer subject to resolution and secondary stress and the drops are more loosely organized.[4] While their final scansions differ, both scholars argue that the different conventions illustrate changes to the overall poetic system that result from linguistic change, which ultimately lead to the form that alliterative poetry took during the Middle English Alliterative Revival.[5] These arguments go a long way to showing not only how alliterative poetry developed throughout the Middle Ages, but also how we ought to reconsider some of the standards by which we judge late Old English poetry. I would like to argue further that a shift in the poetic standard can be found before the system needed to be reorganized completely. As the linguistic pressures that ultimately transformed Old English poetry into something new were just beginning to take hold in the tenth century, individual poets began to adapt their methods of composition in response while still for the most part maintaining the structure of the alliterative line.

[2] See *The Battle of Brunanburh*, ed. by Alistair Campbell (London: Heinemann, 1938), p. 36; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, David C. Douglass, and Susie I. Tucker (London: Eyre and Spottiswode, 1965), p.77; T. A. Shippey, *Old English Verse* (London: Hutchinson, 1972), p. 186; Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London: Routledge and K Paul, 1977), p. 65; C. L. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature* (London: Harrap, 1983), p. 189; and F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 258–59. For a summary of these articles, see Julie Townsend, 'The Meter of the *Chronicle* Verse', *Studia Neophilologica*, 68 (1996), 143–76. Cf. Donald Scragg, 'A Reading of Brunanburh', in *Unlocking the Wordhord: Anglo-Saxon Studies in memory of Edward B Irving, Jr.*, ed. by Mark C. Amodio and Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 109–22 (p. 115).

[3] *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. by D. G. Scragg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), pp. 28–35.

[4] Thomas Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), pp. 41–65; and Thomas Bredehoft, 'Ælfric and Late Old English Verse', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 33 (2004), 77–107, and *Early English Metre* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 70–98. Cable focuses specifically on poems of the eleventh and twelfth century that can illustrate the transition between Old and Middle English poetry: *The Death of Edward, Durham, The Grave*, and the Worcester Fragments. Bredehoft looks at a larger corpus that includes some tenth century poems as well. He adds *The Metrical Psalms, Metrical Charms, Judgment Day II, The Battle of Maldon, Instructions for Christians, An Exhortation to Christian Living, A Summons to Prayer*, and the Sutton Brooch inscription.

[5] Additional work on the topic can be found in *Approaches to the Metres of Alliterative Verse*, ed. by Judith Jefferson and Ad Putter (Leeds: Leeds Texts and Monographs, 2009). In particular, see Jeremy Smith ' "The Metre which Does not Measure": The Function of Alliteration in Medieval English Alliterative Poetry', pp. 11–24; Elizabeth Solopova, 'Alliteration and Prosody in Old and Middle English', pp. 25–40; and Geoffrey Russom, 'Some Unnoticed Constraints on the A-Verse in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', pp. 41–58. Cf. Seiichi Suzuki, *The Metre of Old Saxon Poetry: The Remaking of Alliterative Tradition* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), where Suzuki argues that the linguistic changes that differentiated Old Saxon from Old English and Old Norse similarly created a language that was difficult to accommodate in the alliterative line, so Old Saxon poets restructured the system to fit the structure of the language.

R. D. Fulk demonstrates that the Old English poetic form started to change by the end of the tenth century because Old English was experiencing a general lowering in stress levels. For evidence, Fulk cites such prosodic developments as the lowering of unstressed vowels in medial syllables (which occurs when the medial syllables are not strongly articulated), the growth in parasite vowels (which occurs when the root syllable does not receive a high degree of stress), and the decline in poetic compounding (which occurs when the second element of the compound is no longer clearly distinguished).[6] This shift influenced the language in two ways that are particularly important to the meter: it promoted syntactic change and decreased metical subordination.

The more noticeable influence is the syntactic change: as unstressed vowels began to fall together, English began to shift from being a primarily synthetic language to a primarily analytic one. In a synthetic language such as Old English, while word order is not entirely free, the syntactic role of each word in the sentence is ultimately determined by its case endings. In contrast, the combination of a set word order and auxiliary words such as prepositions define the syntactic role of each word in an analytic language. Although Old English does have some analytic features, it is primarily a synthetic language. Because the reduction of stress near the end of the tenth century resulted in unstressed vowels becoming centralized, which in turn created ambiguity among inflectional endings, a need for a different way to mark the function of a word in a sentence arose, namely the increase of analytic features. The exact relationship between the phonological stress and syntactic change is debatable. Theo Vennemann argues that first the phonological change creates ambiguity in the morphology, and then word order stabilizes to compensate for the change.[7] In contrast, Elizabeth Traugott argues that it is more of a cyclical process, since the inflections would not have been lost if they were conveying necessary information, but that the two are nonetheless related because the endings could only be generalized if word order was beginning to stabilize, and the stabilization of word order would allow the inflections to be further reduced.[8] Either way, though, the two changes are closely related and just beginning to be seen around the late tenth century. While the language does not become primarily analytic until around 1250, several scholars have noted that the shift begins earlier and that Old English shows an increasing tendency to favor SVO word order by the end of the Old English period.[9]

Although the shift in word order itself would not have had a large effect on the meter, other related features that typify analytic syntax could, and Traugott demonstrates that several of these features began to appear with more frequency in late Old English prose. First, the incidence of function words increased to compensate for the loss of inflectional endings; specifically, prepositions and auxiliary verbs became more prominent. Secondly, the subject position in impersonal statements began to be filled more frequently, which makes for more pronouns.[10] As I will show, the growing number of function words in prose diction put an

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6 Fulk, pp. 252–56.
7 Theo Vennemann, 'Topics, Subjects and Word Order: From SXV to SVX via TVX', in *Historical Linguistics*, ed. by John Anderson and C. Jones (Amersterdam: Nort-Holland Publishing, 1974), pp. 339–76 (p. 357).
8 Elizabeth Traugott, *The History of English Syntax* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), pp. 110–11.
9 See, for example, Traugott, *The History*, p. 110; and Robert Saitz, 'Functional Word-Order in Old English Subject-Object Patterns' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1955), p. 108.
10 Elizabeth Traugott, 'Syntax', in *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, ed. by Richard M. Hogg, 6 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992–2001), I (1992), 285–56. Cf. Veronika Kniezsa, 'Prepositional Phrases Expressing Adverbs of Time', in *Historical English Syntax*, ed. by Dieter Kastovsky (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991), pp. 221–31.

increasing pressure on the poetic line that ultimately caused poets to alter their method of composition.

The difference can be seen most clearly in the way poets organize the drops, both in terms of drop length and the types of words that can appear in drops. Words in Old English can be split into three categories: stress words, clitics, and particles (these terms correspond to the categories *Satzteile*, *Satzteilpartikeln*, and *Satzpartikeln* that were first coined by Hans Kuhn). Stress words, which consist of nouns, lexical adjectives and adverbs, and non-finite verbs, always receive stress. Clitics are the most weakly stressed words, such as definite articles, negative markers, prepositions, or prefixes. They never receive stress unless they are displaced. Particles stand between these two categories and have variable stress. Scholars have debated exactly what words should be considered particles. The most inclusive list encompasses finite verbs, pronouns, conjunctions that join complete clauses, quantitative adjectives (though when they appear attributively, quantitative adjectives are generally treated as clitics), and non-lexical adverbs. Other scholars would prefer to see words that always appear at the start of a clause and therefore must always be unstressed treated differently than the particles that can be displaced.[11]

In traditional verse, drops tend to be relatively short and contain only the most lightly stressed words, if they contain any independent words at all. Poets frequently use only two words in a verse, creating mainly monosyllabic drops that are filled only with the non-root syllables of words, as in *ellen fremedon* (A1: ´×◡×) 'performed deeds of valor' (*Beowulf* 3b).[12] When a verse-medial drop does have a separate word, the word tends to be a clitic, as in *geong in geardum* (A1: ´×´×) 'young in dwellings' (*Beowulf* 13a). Only drops that open a verse frequently contain multiple syllables and particles, though even these tend to consist of no more than three syllables and three separate words. According to Geoffrey Russom's analysis, poets strive for such short verses because poets wanted to keep verses simple so that the audience could understand the metrical patterns. He believes that foot patterns are modeled after word patterns, so the simplest pattern is a verse with two feet filled by exactly one stressed word each. When the poet varies from this norm by including unstressed words in the place of unstressed word-final syllables, he tries to use as few words as possible and only very light words. Only verses that begin with a light foot, or a foot with no stress (these are type B and C verses in Sievers's system), tend to include more words in the drop, which, according to Russom, is because the poet wants to mark this position as an independent foot.[13]

Composing a poem with more function words creates an extra challenge for the poets because the additional words necessitate longer drops. When the additional function words are particles, they can be organized into initial drops, where they would lengthen the verse but still appear rather natural. The placement of clitics such as prepositions and articles is less

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[11] See especially B. R. Hutcheson, 'Kuhn's Laws, Finite Verb Stress, and the Critics', *Studia Neophilologica*, 64 (1992), 129–29 (pp. 133–34).

[12] For my scansion, I have adopted the system of Eduard Sievers, as detailed in *Altgermanische metric* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1893). In this system, ´ signifies stress on a long syllable; ◡ signifies stress on a short syllable, which can be resolved with the following syllable, as in ◡×; half stress, which can likewise be long, short or resolved, is written as either `, ◡ P, or ◡×; and × signifies an unstressed syllable. References to *Beowulf* come from *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, 4th edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008). All other references to Old English poems refer to *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. by George P. Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, 6 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–53) (*ASPR*). The *ASPR* does not include marks of vowel length in the text, but because they are useful for metrical studies, I have added them here. Translations are mine.

[13] Geoffrey Russom, *Old English Meter and Linguistic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

flexible, however, since they are proclitic to the nouns they modify; when numerous clitics occur in the middle of a verse, they create longer drops in more unusual locations. When poets choose to put particles in those medial syllables, the verse can appear even more unusual.

In addition to initiating a syntactic change, the decrease in prosodic stress had a specific metrical effect as well. Winfred P. Lehmann and Geoffrey Russom argue that a strong primary stress can lead to strong metrical subordination, so that the stronger stress a language has, the more the number of unstressed words in poetry will be limited. To illustrate this point, they compare Old English alliterative poetry to the cognate forms in Old Norse and Old Saxon, demonstrating that Old Norse, which has strong stress and the greatest propensity to maintain long vowels, tends to have very short verses in *fornyrðislag*, while Old Saxon, with its weak primary stress and abundance of short syllables, uses long verses in the alliterative line. Old English stands between the two.[14] Lehmann further shows that as stress began to weaken, the Old English line began to include more unstressed words, perhaps in order to compensate for the weakening and create equally heavy lines, moving the poetic form in the direction of Old Saxon poetry.[15] Thus, the weakening stress may have encouraged the poets to include more unstressed words even as syntactic change presented them with more such words to include.

Significantly, the types of innovations that poets actually employed are not the same across the board. The composition of *Maldon* and *Judgment Day II* appears much as we might expect in light of the syntactic changes. The poets are far more willing to expand each drop, including drops that are restricted in more conservative poetry, and frequently include one or more separate words in at least one drop of the verse. In this way, they show an innovative adaptation of traditionally structured verse forms into a more fluid line that can replicate their own syntax. In contrast to these two poems, some of the *Chronicle* poems retain particularly short verses. To do so, they rely very heavily on the unique Old English poetic feature of variation, adapting it specifically to increase the number of short, noun-heavy verses,

To examine the stylistic choices of late Old English poets, I analyzed *The Battle of Maldon*, *Judgment Day II*, *The Battle of Brunanburh*, *The Death of Edward*, and *The Death of Edgar* and compared them to a sample from *Beowulf* that consists of three fifty-verse sections. I have chosen these poems as the most representative and statistically relevant of poems composed in the late Old English period. I excluded *The Meters of Boethius* because it is an adaptation of a complex philosophical tract, possibly by the amateur poet King Alfred, and therefore displays many atypical metrical patterns.[16] Although not as unusual as the *Meters*, the calendar form of *The Menologium* also puts some constraints on the language and creates metrical patterns that might not otherwise be present. I excluded *Capture of the Five Boroughs* because, at only thirteen lines, it is not long enough to provide reliable statistical data.

For my analysis, I focused on the structure of the drop, which I investigated through a detailed comparison of the length, filler, and adherence to specific metrical regulations among the different poems. Unstressed positions typically receive less attention than lifts in metrical studies because they do not have the same clear constraints; poets seem to be able to expand the drops at will. However, most scholars agree that certain unstressed positions, namely anacrusis and the first drop of a D* verse, are limited in specific ways. Thomas Cable

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[14] Winfred P. Lehmann, *The Development of Germanic Verse Form* (New York: Gordian Press, 1971), pp. 80–123; and Geoffrey Russom, *Beowulf and Older Germanic Metre* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1998), *passim*.

[15] Lehmann, pp. 97–101.

[16] See Fulk, pp. 251–52.

and Edwin Duncan also show that all drops are restricted in some ways, and such attention to the unstressed positions is what ultimately led to a clearer understanding of the form of Middle English meter.[17] The development of the drop therefore seems as significant to the metrical development of the line as the placement of the lifts.

The analysis shows that *The Battle of Maldon* and *Judgment Day II* are particularly innovative in terms of verse form, adapting it to language change as needs be, while *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Death of Edward* use a style of variation that allows them to maintain conservative features. *The Death of Edgar* stands in between these two groups of poems. Thus, the poems demonstrate that when the language began to change, poets needed to choose between incorporating those changes into the poetic line and trying to hold on to a more conservative style. Some chose to take a middle road, but many reacted quite strongly, either taking the opportunity to adapt and expand the verse form in innovative ways or turning to a style of variation that would allow them to hold onto the form of the past.

2. The Structure of Late Old English Poems: Composition of the Drops

To analyze the adaptations late poets made to accommodate the additional words that result from the incipient analytic features, I have compared how closely they adhere to various restrictions on the drop that earlier poets maintain and in what ways they break from the conservative verse forms. The restrictions I cite are, of course, not actual rules that poets would have felt obliged to follow as such, since Anglo-Saxon poetry was presumably structured through practice and convention rather than explicit guidelines. Instead, I am referring to "laws" and "rules" that modern scholars have made in order to describe what they have observed about the poetry. While poets would not have conceived of the rules as modern scholars construe them, the poetic conventions cause conservative poets to compose within the limits of these observations most of the time.

2.1 Innovative Composition: *The Battle of Maldon* and *Judgment Day II*

Two poems in this study, *The Battle of Maldon* and *Judgment Day II*, appear the most innovative, eschewing the traditional conventions of Old English composition quite a bit. The most often-cited break in late poetry is probably freer use of anacrusis. Anacrusis is an extra drop that can be added to the beginning of type-A or type-D verses, which normally open with a stressed position, creating a verse with five positions. It is used only rarely in conservative poetry; in *Beowulf* it occurs in fewer than 1% of the verses.[18] It also appears to be a highly restricted position. Most metricists agree that anacrusis comprises no more than two syllables, though normally it is only one. Other restrictions have been proposed, though they are not as universally accepted: all verses with anacrusis ought to have double alliteration, and the subtype of the verse should be one that prefers double alliteration in the on-verse; material that fills the position of anacrusis can only be a prefix or the clitic *ne*; and (though this restriction is the most debatable) anacrusis should only appear in the on-verse.[19]

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17 Cable, *English Alliterative Tradition*, pp. 6–40, Russom, *Old English Meter*, *passim*; and Edwin Duncan, 'Weak Stress and Poetic Constraints on Old English Verse', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 92 (1993), 495–508.
18 See Jeffrey Vickman, *A Metrical Concordance to Beowulf*, *Old English Newsletter*, Subsidia 16, 1990.
19 See especially A. J. Bliss, *The Meter of Beowulf*, rev. edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967); Thomas Cable, *The Meter*

Certainly these tendencies should not be considered an inviolable set of rules, because even the most conservative poems contain instances of anacrusis that do not conform. However, since most instances of anacrusis are so restricted, it is probably true that conservative poets attempted to keep the position short and that repeated instances of anacrusis that fall outside of these norms would have been noticeably unusual in classical verse.

Both the *Maldon* poet and the *Judgment Day II* poet compose with much more relaxed restrictions on anacrusis. Overall, they employ anacrusis more frequently: it occurs 30 times (4.62% of the verses) in *Maldon* and 37 times (6.12% of the verses) in *Judgment Day II*.[20] Furthermore, some of the possible restrictions seem to no longer apply. In *Maldon*, 46.67% of the instances of anacrusis appear in the off-verse, and in *Judgment Day II* the incidence is even larger at 64.86%. Because these numbers are both around half, it would appear that the poets have no preference about which verse should receive anacrusis. The filler of the anacrusis seems to be likewise unrestricted. In *Judgment Day II* almost half the instances of anacrusis consist of an independent word and in *Maldon* over three quarters of the instances do. Hence, the poets seem to have no compunction about putting an independent word in the position. Similarly, neither poet restricts anacrusis to verses with double alliteration. Because so many of the anacrustic verses appear in the off-verse, the poets often cannot use double alliteration on many of them. In *Judgment Day II*, the on-verses with anacrusis are almost evenly split between verses with single and double alliteration. Again, the even split suggests that the poet did not have a preference about what sorts of verses could take anacrusis.

While the *Judgment Day II* poet seems completely unconcerned about double alliteration, however, the *Maldon* poet was not. All of the on-verses in *Maldon* with anacrusis do have double alliteration, showing at least a partial desire to employ the more conservative preferences for anacrustic verses. In other ways, as well, both poets restrict the way they use anacrusis to a degree, suggesting that anacrusis is not equivalent to other drops in the line. Although it can occur anywhere, it still has to be relatively short. In the combined 68 verses that contain anacrusis, only one instance has more than one syllable: *and þær stænt āstīfad* (aA1: ××–́×–́×) 'and stand there stiffened' (*Judgment Day II* 174a). All the rest have only one. In addition, while the poets do not seem averse to using independent words in anacrusis, they mostly use clitics. Particles appear in anacrusis in less than 20% of the instances. By including any particles in this position at all, the poets are demonstrating more flexibility than particularly conservative poets, but they nevertheless show a preference for clitics.

Overall, then, the evidence suggests that poets still restrict anacrusis more than they do other drops, but that they do not maintain the same level of restrictiveness that more conservative poets prefer. The change is not at all surprising given what scholars have shown about the effect of language change on the shape of the line. Jeremy Smith shows that Old English tends toward trochaic rhythm because most phrases are formed from a lexical word plus the inflection, while Middle English tends to prefer iambic rhythm because the phrases

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and Melody of Beowulf (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974); and Seiichi Suzuki, 'Anacrusis in the Meter of *Beowulf*', *Studies in Philology*, 92 (1995), 141–63.

[20] The verses in question are *Maldon* 7a, 11b, 14a, 23a, 32b, 49b, 55b, 66b, 68b, 72b, 84b, 90a, 96b, 136a, 138a, 146b, 179a, 182a, 185a, 193a, 200a, 202b, 212a, 223a, 228a, 240a, 240b, 242b, and 282b, and *Judgment Day II* 6b, 11b, 12a, 20a, 22b, 57a, 66a, 70b, 75b, 77a, 87b, 92a, 110b, 122b, 123b, 134b, 138b, 144a, 170b, 174a, 184a, 191b, 224b, 232b, 233b, 234b, 236b, 243b 262b, 267a, 267b, 271b, 275a, 289a, 297a, and 285b.

consist of a lexical word preceded by an article, preposition, or auxiliary.[21] Verses in Middle English alliterative meter therefore frequently start with an unstressed position. The more flexible form of anacrusis in these late Old English poems appears to be the precursor of that fully realized position.

Even drops that are not limited to the same degree as anacrusis seem more variable in these two poems than in *Beowulf*. First, the late poems permit a longer drop, as Table 1 shows. In *Beowulf*, just under half the verses contain polysyllabic drops, while in *Maldon* and *Judgment Day II* the number of polysyllabic drops increases sharply. The drops in *Maldon* in particular stand out because a large number of them are quite long. Although *Beowulf* has long drops with up to six syllables, drops over three syllables long are relatively rare. *Maldon* contains one drop that is seven syllables long, and it also has substantially more verses with four and five syllables in the drops. Thus, polysyllabic drops become more commonplace in these two poems.

Syllables	2	3	4	5	6	7	total
Beowulf (sample)	33.33	12.00	1.33	1.33	1.33	0.00	49.32
Maldon	40.22	13.71	7.24	4.01	0.62	0.15	65.95
Judgment Day II	53.05	12.24	2.15	0.50	0.33	0.00	68.27

Table 1: Percentage of verses with a polysyllabic drop in *Beowulf*, *Maldon*, and *Judgment Day II*

Secondly, the late poems differ from *Beowulf* because they tend to use more separate words in each drop. As a rule, conservative poets try to keep the number of separate words in each drop to a minimum, so that the stress words predominate in the verse. Of course all poems must employ separate words to some degree, and in individual instances *Beowulf* can have as many words in a single drop as any of the late poems. More frequently, though, when the *Beowulf* poet uses unstressed words in a verse, he includes just one or two, while the *Maldon* and *Judgment Day II* poets frequently use more, as is evident in Table 2.

Words	1	2	3	4	5	total
Beowulf (sample)	27.33	14.67	7.33	1.33	0.67	51.33
Maldon	17.26	29.28	12.94	5.24	0.31	65.02
Judgment Day II	40.50	18.68	6.94	1.32	0.50	67.93

Table 2: Percentage of verses with drops containing one or more unstressed words in *Beowulf*, *Maldon*, and *Judgment Day II*

Maldon has fewer drops with a single independent word than *Beowulf*. However, in contrast, *Maldon* has almost twice as many verses with two and three independent words in the drop and almost four times as many verses with four. *Judgment Day II* has fewer verses with more than three independent words in a drop, but regarding drops with one or two independent

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[21] Smith, p. 12–14. Cf. Larry Benson, *Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1965), pp. 112–14; and Geoffrey Russom, 'The Evolution of Middle English Alliterative Meter', in *Studies in the History of the English Language II: Unfolding Conversations*, ed. by Anne Curzan and Kimberly Emmons (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 279–304 (pp. 296–97).

words, it has more instances than *Beowulf* in both cases. Overall, the number of verses with independent unstressed words is much higher in both of the late poems. These differences follow logically from the language change in process; the larger number of lightly stressed words in the language and greater motivation to put them in the poetic line would encourage poets to compose longer drops that can contain multiple unstressed words.

Perhaps because of the lack of tight restrictions on the drops, neither of these poems organizes the particles according to the two so-called laws set out by Hans Kuhn, a set of metric-syntactic properties that describe the treatment of particles within the verse clause. Kuhn's first law states that all particles must be stressed unless they appear in the first metrically unstressed position (which can occur either before or after the first stress) of a syntactic clause.[22] His second law states that a clause upbeat, by which he means an unstressed position that opens a clause (not all clauses necessarily have one), must contain at least one particle.[23] Not all verses organize particles as Kuhn describes, which has led to some controversy over whether or not Kuhn's laws are in fact valid, as well as proposals for alternate ways to explain Kuhn's observations.[24] However, even if Kuhn was wrong about the motivation, scholars do agree that his observations are largely accurate, particularly where the first law is concerned. Conservative poems tend to adhere quite closely to Kuhn's first law: in *Beowulf*, fewer than 1% of the verses contain a violation.

In contrast, 22 verses (3.39%) in *Maldon* and 23 (3.64%) in *Judgment Day II* are not composed in accordance with these principles.[25] Exceptional verses in these poems can take many forms. Kuhn himself explains that violations of his first law commonly occur when the first lift falls on a particle, especially a finite verb; he in fact does not even consider these verses problematic. Therefore, Kuhn would not consider a verse such as *hē līehte þā mid lēodum* (B2: ×–́×××–́×) 'he alighted then with the people' (*Maldon* 23a) a violation of his law, even though *þā* falls outside of the first drop, because *līehte* is a particle. Five of the verses

[22] Hans Kuhn, 'Zur Wortstellung und -betonung im Altgermanischen', in *Kleine Schriften 1* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969; repr. from *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 57 (1933)), pp. 1–109 (p. 8).

[23] Kuhn, p. 43.

[24] Haruko Momma reviews the consistency and applicability of both laws to test their validity. She supports Kuhn's first law because she argues that it applies equally to all particles, affects a large number of verses, and is violated relatively infrequently, but argues that Kuhn's second law is too inconsistent to be considered valid; see *The Composition of Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 56–75. Due to the number of exceptions, other scholars have tried to explain the patterns Kuhn observed with alternate methods, most of which advocate abandoning the combination of meter and syntax that characterizes Kuhn's laws and explaining the phenomenon through constraints posed by either one or the other. For purely metrical solutions, see Geoffrey Russom, 'Purely Metrical Replacements for Kuhn's Laws', in *English Historical Metrics*, ed. by C. B. McCully and J. J. Anderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 30–41; and Thomas M. Cable, *The English Alliterative Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), pp. 16–26. For purely syntactic solutions, see P. R. Orton, 'Anglo-Saxon Attitudes to Kuhn's Laws', *Review of English Studies*, n. s., 50 (1999), 287–303; Robert P. Stockwell and Donka Minkova, 'Kuhn's Laws and Verb-second: On Kendall's Theory of Syntactic Displacement in "Beowulf"', in *On Germanic Linguistics: Issues and Methods*, ed. by Irmengard Rauch and others, Trends in Linguistics Studies and Monographs, 68 (Berlin: Mouton, 1992), pp. 315–37; and Rachel Mines, 'An Examination of Kuhn's Second Law and its Validity as a Metrical-Syntactical Rule', *Studies in Philology*, 99 (2002), 337–55. Daniel Donoghue reviews several alternate solutions in 'Language Matters', in *Reading Old English Texts*, ed. by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 59–78. He argues that while each of the theories can explain part of Kuhn's observations, it takes a combination of meter and syntax to explain them in their entirety.

[25] The verses in question are *Maldon* 7a, 23a, 40b, 41a, 55b, 66b, 72a, 72b, 85a, 98a, 136a, 138a, 173a, 179a, 212a, 240b, 242b, 254b, 276a, and *Judgment Day II* 12a, 15a, 17a, 24a, 49b, 57a, 65a, 73a, 77a, 80a, 92a, 95b, 110b, 123b, 187a, 195b, 213b, 216a, 224b, 243b, 273a.

in *Maldon* and six in *Judgment Day II* take this form.[26] However, Kuhn argues that such verses conform to his laws because the verb is a more lightly stressed word that can be considered part of the initial group of particles, and many of his supporters, following Bliss, argue that the particle need not be stressed at all, even though it alliterates, and the verse can be realized as another verse type. In the case of *Maldon* 23a, the verse could be realized as a type A3: ×××××-́×. However, for seven of the eleven verses with a particle in the first lift in these two poems, such a reanalysis would not be possible because of the alliteration. For example, in the verse *hē lēt him þā of handon* (aA1: ×-́×××-́×) 'he caused it [to fly] then from his hands' (*Maldon* 7a), the alliteration is on *l*, so the verb *lēt* must be stressed.[27] Such verses are highly unusual since they violate Sievers's law of precedence, which describes the convention that a particle should not alliterate in preference to a stress word, yet they occur frequently enough in these poems to suggest that the poets were comfortable putting a high degree of stress on these alliterating verbs, making them stand out from the group of particles around them. Thus these instances of unstressed particles that appear outside of the first drop do not show a particularly strong break with more conservative poems, but they do suggest a slightly different treatment of particles overall.

Furthermore, although some of the exceptional verses are those regularly explained away by Kuhn, which even the most conservative poets allow in their verse on occasion, others are less typical. First, a large number of verses have a stress word rather than a particle in the first lift, such as *and þæt ēce ic ēac* (B2: ××-́××-́) 'and I also [fear] that eternal [anger]' (*Judgment Day II* 17a).[28] This verse in fact presents particularly unusual particle placement because the particle appears in the second drop of a type-B verse. Particles do not often appear there because the second drop tends to be short and contain only very light words or syllables, while the opening drop is an ideal place for particles. In this case, the poet could have put the pronoun in the first drop with the rest of the particles; by not doing so, he shows that he does not seem to have a particular concern for any principles that might have governed the placement of particles in earlier verses. Secondly, a large number of the verses in *Judgment Day II* have a particle in a verse that does not open the clause.[29] Typically, when conservative poets include unstressed particles outside of the first drop of the clause, they appear in the second drop instead, still in the first verse. Using unstressed particles in later clauses shows that the *Judgment Day II* poet organized the particles in his poem much differently.

Similarly to the use of unstressed words overall, the treatment of unstressed particles can be related directly to language change and the willingness of these poets to include more function words in their poetry. A large number of unstressed words makes limiting the drop in any way difficult. In this regard, late Old English poets were facing some of the same difficulties as the *Heliand* poet in the Old Saxon tradition. Kuhn argues that one reason the

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[26] The verses in question are *Maldon* 7a, 23a, 136a, 212a, and 240b, and *Judgment Day II* 12a, 15a, 24a, 65a, 77a, and 80b.

[27] See also *Maldon* 240b and *Judgment Day II* 12a, 15a, 65a, 77a, and 80b.

[28] See also *Maldon* 55b, 66b, 72b, 138a, and 254b, and *Judgment Day II* 57a, 92a, 123b, 187a, and 243b.

[29] The verses in question are 49b, 73a, 95b, 110b, 195b, 213b, 216a, 224b, and 273a. *Maldon* might also have one such verse in the line *wē willaþ mid þām sceattum* (A3: ×××××-́×) | *ūs tō scipe gangan* (C2: ×× ‿×-́×) 'we wish with the coins to take to our ships' (*Maldon* 40). In this case the particle *ūs* is unstressed in the second verse of the clause. However, Fulk and Pope propose a different verse division for this line: *wē willaþ mid þām sceattum ūs* (B1: ×××××-́×-́) | *tō scipe gangan* (C2: × ‿×-́×). If the line is divided this way, the poem would not contain any such verses (*Eight Old English Poems*, ed. by John C. Pope and R. D. Fulk, 3rd edn (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 16).

Heliand poet does not observe the same careful placement of particles as Old English poets is that the function words create additional drops that would not have appeared in a more metrically conservative poem.[30] The late Old English poems show some identical patterns. For instance, one pattern Kuhn points out is the increased use of determiners. In a verse such as *þā flotan stōdon gearwe* (aA1: × ◡× × × ´×) 'the sailors stood ready' (*Maldon* 72b), the verse opens with a definite article in anacrusis, and then *stōdon* stands unstressed in the second drop of the clause. More conservative poetic syntax would not have required that article, so the poet might have left it off, creating a type A1 verse without anacrusis and shifting the first drop to the other side of the first lift. By composing verses such as this one, the *Maldon* poet is showing a preference for using the natural syntax that is familiar to him over maintaining the conventions of particle placement. Ultimately, then, all of the changes to the organization of the drop lead to this same conclusion: late Old English poets chose to allow contemporary linguistic change to appear in their poetry and adapted the structure of the verse in various ways in order to fit the necessary function words in the line.

2.2 Conservative Composition: The Poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

While *Maldon* and *Judgment Day II* show some clear differences as regards the organization of the drops, the *Chronicle* poems as a group compose the drops with the same standards as more conservative poets. Bliss's study of the meter of *Beowulf* describes different verse patterns in such minute detail that he is able to posit a set of restrictions on such metrical patterns as what types of verses could appear in the on- or off-verses, which verses were apt show double alliteration, and what types of verses could receive anacrusis. Townsend (1996) argues that, as a whole, the *Chronicle* poems are very regular because they follow the conventions of traditional poetry that Bliss posits. Not only do they contain very few remainders (i.e., verses that cannot be categorized as any type in Bliss's metrical system), they also place the different verse types within the line and follow the trends for double alliteration that Bliss records in *Beowulf*. Townsend notes that this feat is quite impressive because many of the lines include place names and other words that make it impossible for the verses to be wholly borrowed from earlier formulas, so the poets must have had a solid understanding of the principles of versification.[31] The significance of these findings is not just that the poets follow the particularly conservative practice of the convention, but that they must have made a concerted effort to do so in this linguistic context that would make employing those conventions difficult. As I will show, the poets not only organize the different verse types in conventional ways, but also reproduce the succinct verse structure that most conservative poems exhibit and other late poems do not. The distinction between the *Chronicle* poems and other late poems suggests that the *Chronicle* poets valued the conservative conventions of the Old English poetic tradition and composed with the conscious goal of maintaining that form in the face of linguistic change.

In a manner similar to more conservative poems, the *Chronicle* poems show a trend towards strict regulation of the drops. Anacrusis in these verses is rare, perhaps not as rare as in *Beowulf*—two of the three *Chronicle* verses, *Brunanburh* and *The Death of Edgar*, each contain two examples and *The Death of Edward* contains one, which puts the incidence of anacrusis between one and three percent in these poems—but still rarer than in poems such

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30 Kuhn, pp. 15–16.
31 Townsend, p. 153.

as *Maldon* and *Judgment Day II*. In most cases, the anacrusis is also more strictly regulated: it appears in the on-verse, it occurs on verses with double alliteration, it consists of exactly one syllable, and it is formed by a verbal prefix. The one exception is the verse in *The Death of Edward*, *befæste þæt rīce* (aA1: × -́ × × -́ ×) 'established that kingdom' (29b), which occurs in the off-verse with single alliteration. *Beowulf* likewise has a few verses that do not follow all the general tendencies that verses with anacrusis exhibit, so anacrusis in these poems is treated almost exactly as it is in *Beowulf*.

The length and filler of the rest of the drops in *Brunanburh* and *The Death of Edward* also appear to be regulated as strictly as, if not more strictly than, in *Beowulf*, though they are less so in *The Death of Edgar*. In terms of polysyllabic drops, both have fewer instances than *Beowulf* does overall, with the number in *Brunanburh* significantly lower, as Table 3 illustrates. Similarly, the filler of the drops is limited. Again, *Brunanburh* and *The Death of Edward* are comparable to *Beowulf* in terms of the overall number of verses with unstressed words, with *Brunanburh* using even fewer. In particular, both poems avoid two or more unstressed words in a single drop to a greater degree than the *Beowulf* poet does, as Table 4 shows.

Syllables	2	3	4	5	6	7	total
Beowulf (sample)	33.33	12.00	1.33	1.33	1.33	0.00	49.32
Brunanburh	30.13	6.16	2.05	1.37	0.00	0.00	39.71
Death of Edward	42.42	3.03	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	45.45
Death of Edgar	55.41	8.11	0.00	1.35	0.00	0.00	64.87

Table 3: Percentage of verses with a polysyllabic drop in *Beowulf* and the three *Chronicle* poems

Words	1	2	3	4	5	total
Beowulf (sample)	27.33	14.67	7.33	1.33	0.67	51.33
Brunanburh	28.08	10.96	4.11	0.68	0.00	43.84
Death of Edward	48.48	1.52	1.52	10.00	0.00	51.52
Death of Edgar	39.19	20.27	5.41	1.35	0.00	66.22

Table 4: Percentage of verses with drops containing one or more unstressed words in *Beowulf*, *Maldon*, and *Judgment Day II*

As might be expected, this close regulation of the drop makes for much more tightly regulated verses in terms of the placement of unstressed particles. *The Death of Edward* has no violations of Kuhn's laws. *Brunanburh* has one: *mid hira herelāfum* (C2: × × × ◡ -́ × -́ ×) 'with their group of survivors' (*Brunanburh* 47a). This verse opens a clause with a clause upbeat, and so according to Kuhn's second law it should have at least one particle in that unstressed position, but it does not. Of the two, however, Kuhn's second law is the more contentious, and many scholars argue that the tendency to include at least one particle in a clause upbeat is a byproduct of other poetic and syntactic regulations and therefore nothing that poets might have striven for. Including only this one, minor violation, then, means that the *Brunanburh* poet regulates the placement of the particles carefully in his poem.

While rigid verse construction seems like a general trend for the *Chronicle* poems, it is not absolute, because *The Death of Edgar* looks more like *Maldon* than the other two poems in the *Chronicle* group. Significantly, the change in style is not simply a result of further language change over time. *The Death of Edgar* was written for the year 975, which is later than the year of *The Battle of Brunanburh* (937) but earlier than that of *The Death of Edward* (1065). Although anacrusis in this poem is well regulated, other drops are longer and contain more words. Polysyllabic drops occur approximately as often as they do in *Maldon*. In terms of words per drop, *The Death of Edgar* does not have as many particularly long verses as *Maldon*, but it does have as many verses with independent unstressed words overall. Still, the poem is not as relaxed as the other late poems, for in spite of the longer drops, it does not show any violations of Kuhn's laws. Together with the stricter application of anacrusis, the adherence to Kuhn's laws suggests that the *Death of Edgar* poet, like the other *Chronicle* poets, valued the traditional form of the poems to a greater degree than other late Old English poets. At the same time, the differences illustrate the extent of the diversity of compositional styles in these late poems. Some adapt the lines to suit the change in the language and some remain as strict as possible, but these poems do not represent two distinct options; instead, they create a sort of continuum, on which *The Death of Edgar* stands in the middle.

3. Stylistic Adaptations in late Old English Poems: Syntax and Variation

The differences between the two conservative *Chronicle* poems and the other late poems show that the linguistic changes that were taking place did not have an inevitable effect on the composition of late poetry but instead created an environment in which poets could make a choice about how much they would maintain the conservative stylistic features of the alliterative long line and how much they would adapt it. In terms of style, one of the most salient features of Old English poetry is that it tends to be very heavy in nouns. This trend does not change in late Old English verse. In all cases, the poets try to fill the stressed positions predominately with stress words. For the most part, they succeed in doing so. In the three sections of *Beowulf*, the poet averages a stress word in 67.3% of the lifts. *Judgment Day II* uses fewer stress words, averaging a stress word in only 62% of the lifts, but all of the rest of the poems contain stress words in 70% of the lifts or more. In both conservative and innovative verse, the rest of the stressed positions are filled mostly with particles; only rarely do any of the poems use a displaced clitic to bear stress. The standard usage of the different classes of words therefore seems to have remained, for the most part, intact.

In order to maintain a high number of stress words in stressed positions while also employing more function words, most poets alter a second compositional standard: the tendency to keep the verses short. However, as shown above, the *Brunanburh* and the *Death of Edward* poets go against this trend and manage to use verses with no separate words in the drop over half the time. The ability to construct so many two-word verses does not result from any distinctive linguistic properties of the two poems, but rather a stylistic difference that distinguishes these late poems from *Beowulf* and the other late poems. Specifically, the *Chronicle* poets employ a large number of concise, noun-heavy instances of variation. This controlled use of variation helps them to maintain a high percentage both of nouns and other stress words in stressed positions and of verses with only two words.

Arthur Brodeur defines variation in Old English poetry as 'a double or multiple statement of the same concept or idea in different words, with a more or less perceptible shift in stress: […] the second member, while restating essentially the same concept or idea, may do so in a manner which emphasizes a somewhat different aspect of it'.[32] He analyzes variation in *Beowulf* in depth and notes that it can take a variety of forms, such as multiple words or short phrases with parallel structure to an initial word, entire clauses in variation with each other, or even clauses that stand in variation with individual words. The *Chronicle* poets tend to use a large amount of variation, but they mostly rely on the most common form: noun phrases in variation with each other. While some critics may think that the repeated use of such simple variation is the sign of an inartistic poet, it also serves to create numerous short verses that allow the poets to highlight the noun-heavy diction that characterizes traditional Old English poetry.

The following passage from *Brunanburh* (lines 13b–17a) illustrates the manner in which the *Chronicle* poets typically employ variation:

> siðþan sunne upp
> (B1: × × ´× ´)
>
> on morgentīd,   mǣre tungol,
> (B1: × ´× ´)   (A1: ´× ´×)
>
> glād ofer grundas,   godes condel beorht
> (A1: ´× × ´×)   (D4: ⌣× ´× ̀)
>
> ēces drihtnes   oð sīo æðele gesceaft
> (A1: ´× ´×)   (B2: × × ⌣× × × ´)
>
> sāg tō setle.
> (A1: ´× ´×)
>
> from when the sun in the morning-time, the glorious star, glided up over the ground, the bright candle of God, of the eternal lord, until the noble creation sank to the ground.

This passage has three examples of variation: *mǣre tungol* and *godes condel beorht* stand in variation with *sunne*, followed by *ēces drihtnes*, which is in variation with *godes*. In all cases, the concept that is reformulated is a single noun, the variation is formed with a single verse, and the verse consists of only a noun and its modifiers (all stress words). In addition, the verse *glād ofer grundas* is similar to variation in that it provides another verse about the sun, although in this case it describes the sun rather renaming it. Longer phrases or clauses that contain function words like this one do exist in variation in these poems, but, as they do in this passage, the short noun phrases dominate.

This particular style of variation helps the poets to replicate the style of traditional heroic poetry because it creates many short verses and a large number of nouns. Every time the poet uses a verse such as *ēces drihtnes* in variation with a previous noun, he composes a verse with monosyllabic drops and no extra clitics. Because the poet uses many of these, he reduces the number of unstressed words in the poem. While the number of function words in each clause may have increased to some extent, the effect on the poem as a whole is not as noticeable because the function words are spread out over longer clauses, and each clause also contains a large number of short verses. Certainly the variation is not the only reason the drops remain short; even where these *Chronicle* poets do place function words in a drop, the drop tends to be shorter and contain fewer function words than the larger drops in *Maldon* (for example, in

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32   Arthur G. Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 40.

the first 50 verses of each poem, *Maldon* has six times as many pronouns as *Brunanburh* and seven times as many definite articles). Nevertheless, the variation seems to be one tool that the poets rely on to help them compose a large number of particularly short verses that facilitate the noun-heavy diction of poetry.

This particular style of variation contrasts with the style used in *Beowulf*. In his analysis of *Beowulf*, Brodeur explains that although the most common type of variation is likewise multiple noun phrases in variation with each other, the *Beowulf* poet uses a greater variety of constructions of variation as well.[33] For example, the following passage (lines 301–10) contains several different types of variation without any instances of a single noun phrase in variation with another:

> Gewiton him þā fēran;   flota stille bād,
> (A3: × × × × × ⌣́ ×)   (D4: ⌣x ⌣́ × × ⌣̀)
>
> seomode on sāle   sīdfæþmed scip,
> (A1: ⌣́x × × ⌣́ ×)   (E: ⌣́ ⌣̀ × ⌣́)
>
> on ancre fæst;   eoforlīc scionon
> (B1: × ⌣́ × ⌣́)   (A2k: ⌣́x ⌣̀ ⌣ ×)
>
> ofer hlēorber[g]an   gehroden golde,
> (C1: × × ⌣́ ⌣́ ×)   (C2: × ⌣́x ⌣́ ×)
>
> fāh ond fȳrheard;   ferhwearde hēold
> (A2b: ⌣́ × ⌣́ ⌣̀)   (E: ⌣́ ⌣̀ × ⌣́)
>
> gūþmōd grīmmon.   Guman ōnetton,
> (A2l: ⌣́ ⌣̀ ⌣́ ×)   (D1: ⌣́x ⌣́ ⌣̀ ×)
>
> sigon ætsomne,   oþ þæt hȳ [s]æl timbred
> (A1: ⌣́x × ⌣́ ×)   (C1: × × × ⌣́ ⌣́ ×)
>
> geatolīc ond goldfāh   ongyton mihton;
> (A1: ⌣́x × ⌣́ ×)   (C2: × ⌣́x ⌣́ ×)
>
> þæt was foremǣrost   foldbūendum
> (C2: × × ⌣́x ⌣́ ×)   (D1: ⌣́ ⌣́ ⌣̀ ×)
>
> receda under roderum,   on þǣm se rīca bād;
> (A1: ⌣́x × × × ⌣́x × ×)   (B1: × × × ⌣́ × ⌣́)

> They betook themselves to go — the ship remained still, the roomy ship remained on the rope, firmly on anchor. The figures of boars shone over the helmets, decorated with gold, variegated and fire-hardened — the one of warlike mind held guard over life for the grim ones. The men hurried, moved together, until they could see the built hall, splendid and ornamented with gold; that was the most famous of buildings to earth dwellers under the heavens, in which the mighty one resided.

In this passage, the first verse stands by itself. After that, the next four verses are all related. Verse 301b contains a single complete clause, followed by a second clause in variation, which fills a whole line. The subsequent verse provides another instance of variation, but in this case it does not repeat the entire clause, only a prepositional phrase: *on ancre fæst* for *on sāle*. Later on, the poet puts an additional clause in variation: *sigon ætsomne*, which repeats the concept of *Guman ōnetton*. In other places, the poet augments his descriptions, as when he describes the warriors' helmets as both *gehroden golde* and *fāh ond fȳrheard*. These examples are not strictly variation—since they are descriptors that work together to create a whole picture but

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33   Brodeur, pp. 42–44.

are nevertheless distinct qualities, they are what Brodeur would call enumeration[34]—yet they are similar to variation because they add related material that serves mostly to re-emphasize a point. These different examples illustrate the range of content and syntactic structures that the *Beowulf*-poet chooses to employ in variation.

Furthermore, while the poet uses variation repeatedly in the passages, some of the clauses do not contain any element of variation. The poet can compose several concurrent verses without it, as when he says *þæt wæs foremārost | foldbūendum / recede under roderum | on þǣm se rīca bād*. The first three verses form a single clause with no repetition of any noun or action, and the final verse makes up its own relative clause which further describes the hall but nevertheless contains an independent idea. The passage therefore shows a heavy use of variation, which adds to the formality of the moment while also aiding the poet in alliterative concerns, but it also shows that the poet sometimes chooses to form clauses, both long and short, that do not include variation.

Some scholars, including Brodeur, have argued that this complexity of variation makes *Beowulf* a superior poem to the *Chronicle* poems. Certainly it creates more variety. However, while the variety might increase the aesthetic value of the poem in some ways, it does not as readily facilitate increasing the traditional poetic features by creating concise, conservative verses. By using longer phrases and clauses, rather than single noun phrases, the *Beowulf* poet includes more verses that employ unstressed function words. For instance, when he puts *on ancre* in variation with *on sāle* in the passage above, he includes a second preposition, making for an additional verse with an independent word in the drop. When an entire clause stands in variation, there is potential for even more unstressed words, because another verb must be used. In some cases, the verb can be stressed, but in other cases it might appear in the drop. Several subsequent clauses without variation also tend to contain several independent words, since they may employ function words to fulfill grammatical roles such as a subject, a verb, and any number of connectives. For example, *þæt wæs foremǣrost* (*Beowulf* 309a) contains a pronoun for the subject and a copula in the opening drop, and *on þǣm se rīca bād* (*Beowulf* 310b), opens with a preposition followed by a relative pronoun. Although these verses are perfectly regular and well formed, they would not increase the number of noun-heavy verses with short drops the way that the variation in the *Chronicle* poems does.

The effect of the different styles of variation on the shape of the line becomes clearer when looking at late Old English poets who compose variation similarly to the *Beowulf*-poet. Neither *Maldon* nor *Judgment Day II* contains as much variation as the other poems under discussion, but both poems have some, and longer instances, especially clauses in variation, are common. Consider the following short passage from *Maldon* (22–24a):

> Þā hē hæfde þæt folc   fægere getrymmed,
> (B3: × × × × × ´)   (A1: ⌣× × × ´ ×)
> hē līhte þā mid lēodon   þǣr him lēofost wæs,
> (aA1: × ´ × × × ´ ×)   (B1: × × ´ × ´)
> þǣr hē his heorðwerod   holdost wiste.
> (C3: × × × ´ ⌣ ×)   (A1: ´ × ´ ×)
>
> When he had encouraged that host well, he alighted then with the people where it was most pleasing to him, where he knew his most loyal hearth-band to be.

Here the first four verses contain three clauses with no variation at all; the first two verses form a single dependent clause, followed by the single-verse main clause and another single-verse

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34   Brodeur, pp. 41–42.

relative clause. The subsequent line is another clause, but this one stands in variation with *þǣr him lēofost wæs*. This instance of variation might add to the solemnity of the moment, similarly to the way variation often does in *Beowulf*, but it does not create any short, conservative verses. The clause in variation, *þǣr hē his heorðwerod | holdost wiste* (*Maldon* 24a), includes not only the connective *þǣr*, but also the pronoun *hē* and the possessive *his*. Thus the developing syntactic features here become emphasized through repetition. An earlier poet might have included the pronoun *hē*, since it is the subject of this clause but not the previous clause, but then again he might not because the previous clause has an impersonal subject, and it is clear from the context that the subject is returning to the previous subject, Byrhtnoð. Possessive pronouns are even rarer in conservative poems when the context is clear, so it is more likely that *his* would not have been used by an earlier poet. Thus, the contrasting styles of variation have very different effects on the shape of the line, which shows that the choice of style might be a result of the divergent goals of the individual poets.

    The Death of Edgar stands in between the other *Chronicle* poems and the less conservative late verse because the poet mixes the styles of variation. The poem still has more single nouns in variation than *Beowulf*, but it does not always use the variation to fill single verses. Sometimes the original noun and subsequent variation can come in one verse, as in *Ēadgār, Engla cyning* 'Edgar, king of England' (D*4: $\acute{-}\times\acute{-}\times\smile\times$) (*Death of Edgar* 2a). At other times the variation might not fill an entire verse, as in lines 24b–25:

>   *dēormōd hæleð*
>   (A2k: $\acute{-}\grave{-}\smile\times$)
>
> *Ōslāc, of earde   ofer ȳða gewealc*
> (A1: $\acute{-}\times\times\acute{-}\times$)   (B2: $\times\times\acute{-}\times\times\acute{-}$)
>
> the courageous saint, Oslac, [was driven] from the native place, over the rolling waves.

In this case, *Ōslāc* stands in variation with *dēormōd hæleð*, but the verse includes an additional prepositional phrase. Sometimes the variation itself also can contain a prepositional phrase. The poet places *men on moldan* 'men on the earth' (*Death of Edgar* 5a) in variation with *lēoda bearn* 'children of men' (*Death of Edgar* 4b). The turn of phrase is by no means unusual, but the other *Chronicle* poems do not tend to include prepositional phrases in variation. In addition to these different uses of variation, *The Death of Edgar* does not use variation consistently throughout, as the other *Chronicle* poems do. Mixed in with the variation are several clauses that do not include any repetition. Instead the poet uses a larger number of shorter clauses and many more consecutive prepositional phrases. By filling the verses with these other options, the *Death of Edgar* poet uses more verbs, connectives, and prepositions, thereby including a larger number of unstressed words.

    The difference in variation does not account for the different length of the drops entirely. In those places where the *Death of Edgar* poet uses unstressed words in a drop, he uses multiple words more frequently than the poets of the other two *Chronicle* poets, who generally limit the drops to one extra word when they do employ them. Thus, even if the poet did use variation similarly to the other poets, he would still place more unstressed words in each drop. Nevertheless, the style of variation in the other two poems facilitates the shorter drops, so the comparative lack of the same type of single-noun variation in *The Death of Edgar* cuts down on one easy mechanism for composing two-word verses. The difference suggests a different attitude on the *Death of Edgar* poet's part; while he seems to have appreciated the variation that creates a more formal diction, he did not avoid the contemporary speech patterns to the same degree.

Although I did not focus on *The Menologium* for this study, it is interesting to note how it can also show the influence of the style of variation on the organization of the drop. The poem uses a large amount of variation, yet it is similar to *The Death of Edgar* in terms of length of the drops. The poem is not as compact as *The Battle of Brunanburh* or *The Death of Edward* because, as a type of calendar, *The Menologium* frequently uses more function words in the average verse, as in *on þȳ eahteoðan dæg* (B2: ×× ⌣́ ×× ⌣́) 'on the eighth day' (*Menologium* 3b) or *and þæs embe āna niht* (B1: ×××× ⌣́ × ⌣́) 'and one night after that' (*Menologium* 19b). Because the poet must constantly identify on which day events happen, he uses numerous articles as deictics to point to particular days and prepositions to link the day and the event. The frequent use of variation allows the poet to compose more verses with only two words than the *Maldon* poet does, but not as many as the most conservative *Chronicle* poems.

4. Conclusions

The various compositional styles show how all of the poets were adapting to changes in the language and especially how those changes could affect the treatment of unstressed positions in different ways. However, even though poets allowed language change to affect their poetry to differing degrees, the effect is still there in all cases, and the poets all made some sort of allowance to compensate for the change. In a certain sense, the two *Chronicle* poems, *Brunanburh* and *The Death of Edward*, seem to illustrate the simplest adaptation. They both contain only a small number of especially long drops, organize the drops according to conservative restrictions, and use a large number of two-word verses. Yet in spite of these metrical regularities, many scholars have dismissed these poems as inferior and pat. Perhaps the methodical use of variation is what prompted such scholarly opinion of the poems. Because the variation is relatively simple, the poets may not appear as adept as the *Beowulf* poet. Nevertheless, the variation does not seem without thought, since the use of variation as a stylistic adaptation allows the poets to maintain the traditional line length and diction. *Maldon*, though still critiqued by many for its metrical irregularities, has received less criticism because the poem resembles *Beowulf* to a greater degree. The syntax is more varied, and at times the poet uses the more complex versions of variation that give variety to the poem. Because the poet composes with less traditional diction and syntax, however, he does not maintain the shorter lines. He expands the drops in order to fit the extra function words into the line. *Judgment Day II* expands the drops to an even greater degree, with less regard for any conventions that might govern their form.

These different modes of poetic composition reveal the great extent to which poetry was necessarily changing in the late Old English period, as well as the high degree of variability and ingenuity with which the poets adapted to these changes. Clearly the line was variable enough at this point, and the poets adept enough, that a single standard with which to judge all Old English poetry is not sufficient. Therefore, instead of evaluating poems on the basis of how well they adhere to a traditional form, we should analyze why poets fashioned the verse form as they did. In the case of these poems, analysis of the poets' individual styles reveals opposing values towards poetic composition. Certainly the poets of this day were not striving for an individual voice in the same way that modern poets do, but they still could have been motivated by different concerns. Some of them seemed to value natural language and variety of expression and so adapted the traditional structure of the verse accordingly, while others preferred to maintain the traditional compactness of form and manipulated the style of the

diction and variation to adhere to those standards. These motivations must be kept in mind when judging the poem. Certainly the *Chronicle* poems seem to be focused on preserving the past as they record it, showing the respect the authors had for history and their ability to sustain its traditions. As a poem that harkens back to a traditional heroic ethos that had become politically obsolete, one might expect *Maldon* to be equally conservative, yet it is not. Perhaps the poet here was less intent on preserving the past and more focused on bringing his message to the present-day audiences. While he used the Germanic code of loyalty to one's lord to remind the current Anglo-Saxon warriors of their duty, he did so with a modernized syntax that makes the message clearly contemporary.