Leeds Studies in English

THE SPEAKER IN *THE HUSBAND'S MESSAGE*

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The Old English poem *The Husband's Message* (hereafter *HM*) presents
a variety of problems for editors and critics. Many of these stem
from the fact that the one surviving manuscript of the poem – the
Exeter Book – has suffered damage, with the result that parts of the
text of *HM* are irrevocably lost.[1] A further complication is that
the group of verses which precedes *HM* in the manuscript, usually
defined as *Riddle* 60 by editors, is held by some to be part of the
same poem as *HM*.[2] The scribe's presentation of his work is not
decisive one way or the other,[3] and we cannot be sure that the miss-
ing portions of *HM* did not provide evidence relevant to the problem.
Among questions of interpretation, one of the chief difficulties has
been the identity of the speaker of the poem. Some have taken this
to be a human envoy whose mission is to convey and present a rune-
staff (the inscription on which is given in lines 50-51 of the poem)
sent by a man to his wife or beloved from whom he has been separated;
others take the entire poem as a prosopopoeic utterance of the rune-
staff itself. This question, too, is affected by the fact that the
first of the two main damaged sections of the text (lines 2-7) forms
a large part of the passage (1-12) in which the speaker introduces
himself. This essay will reconsider the various objections that
have been raised to the theory that the speaker is a rune-staff, and
suggest some new answers to them in the course of a reinterpretation
of the poem.

As the meaning of the damaged opening of the text has a bearing
on the nature of the speaker, it will be useful to begin with a re-
examination of it. Leslie's arrangement, in his edition, of the
surviving words and letters in verse-lines 2-7 tries to take account
of the size of the gaps in the manuscript in estimating the amount
of text we have lost. There is, of course, room for disagreement
about the amount and meaning of the original material represented by
the larger lacunae; but where the gap is small, as in the first MS
line of the poem, the possibilities are limited, and the character
of the surrounding text limits them further. Leslie's text of verse-
lines 1-3 is as follows:

> Nu ic onsundran þe   secgan wille
> .... (n) treocyn.   Ic tudre aweox;
> in mec æld[a] ....sceal

The final a of ælda is purely editorial; the n preceding treocyn is
little more than a guess; dots represent the approximate number of
lost letters. A hole in the margin after treocyn creates the

possibility of an original inflected form such as treocynne; and so
the word is best quoted as treocyn(-). The editors of the facsimile
edition are more cautious than Leslie in their transcription of the
words of Leslie's third line: they underline in and the æ of æld to
signify that these are damaged letters which are not to be established
beyond all doubt from the manuscript.[4]

The legible text from l Nu to wille makes a complete verse-line
of normal metrical type, and so Leslie's assumption that the first
word in the lacuna was also the first word of verse-line 2 is secure.
But it is also clear from the meaning that verse 2a contained a con-
tinuation of the sentence begun in l, and the question arises of
where this sentence ends. If one takes verse 2b as part of the same
clause as 2a (as those scholars evidently do who place no punctuation
after treocyn[-]),[5] it must, I think, be assumed that verse 2a con-
tained an unstressed conjunction at its beginning.[6] But in this
case, there is a difficulty about 2b ic. Tudre is clearly the head-
stave of the line, forming the first stressed element of 2b; and so
it follows that the preceding ic is unstressed. But according to
the rule ("Kuhn's law of particles") which governs the relationship
between stress and position of personal pronouns (amongst other
parts of speech) in verse-clauses, unstressed ic ought to occur in
the first dip of the clause, which would in this case be at the
beginning of 2a.[7] And so the available evidence seems to point to
2b ic as introducing a new clause which must, given the context,
also be a new sentence, as Leslie's text indicates.

This question of the punctuation and meaning of the first two
lines of *HM* has been drawn into the controversy over the identity
of the speaker. Greenfield, followed by Anderson, notes that the
editorial omission of punctuation after treocyn(-), with its impli-
cation that 2b is part of the same clause as this word, accords with
the interpretation of the speaker as a personified wooden object,
particularly a rune-staff;[8] and it is true that treocyn(-) would
probably have to be taken in this case as referring in some way to
the ic of lines 1 and 2. But that Leslie's punctuation (in all
probability the right one) necessarily implies a human speaker, as
Greenfield seems to suggest, cannot be demonstrated from the text as
we have it.

Several of the letters at the beginning of verse-line 3 are, as
we have mentioned, not clear in the manuscript. Professor Pope has
recently made an important contribution to our understanding of the
poem by his re-examination of line 3's initial word in the manuscript,
Leslie's in.[9] He concludes that what remains of the letter which
previous transcribers have read as n looks more like the top of the
runic letter wynn. Thus he reads iw, "yew" here; and if he is right,
it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the speaker is indeed
the rune-staff, here referring unmistakably to its own substance.
But as iw can probably never be established with certainty as the
scribe's intended word, it is still necessary to consider the various
stated objections to the rune-staff theory which have arisen largely
from undamaged parts of the text; and to these we now turn.

Leslie, in his edition, distinguished four main objections to
the rune-staff theory, some of which have been criticized since by

Anderson.[10] These are considered in turn below. As most of them can best be answered in the context of the general interpretation of *HM* which I shall attempt later, I restrict discussion here to the nature and strength of each objection, and to such parallels in Old English verse as have a possible bearing on their validity.

Leslie's first objection is that the speaker has made frequent voyages (6), which behaviour is "not reconcilable with a particular rune-stave". Anderson, Greenfield and Goldsmith all accept this objection as valid.[11] It is certainly true that the "life" of a rune-staff as a usable object would be limited. But we may note that in the Exeter Book *Riddles*, objects with a similarly brief life among men, when personified, sometimes lay claim to a breadth of experience impossible for an individual example. One practical justification for this licence is that the experience of a single example of the riddle's solution is too limited to enable the solver to identify it. But a more important justification lies in the nature of the solution, which is generic rather than particular. Thus the solution to *Riddle* 65, quoted here as the best example of this type of riddle, is properly "The Onion" rather than "An Onion":

> Cwico wæs ic, ne cwæð ic wiht,   cwele ic efne seþeah.
> Ær ic wæs, eft ic cwom.   Æghwa mec reafað,
> hafað mec on headre,   ond min heafod scireþ,
> biteð mec on bær lic,   briceð mine wisan.
> Monnan ic ne bite,   nymþþe he me bite;
> sindan þara monige   þe mec bitað.

> (I was alive and did not speak; all the same I die.
> I have existed before and have come again. Everybody despoils me,
> keeps me in confinement and shears my head,
> bites into my naked body, and breaks my stalk.
> I do not bite a man unless he bite me.
> Those who bite me are many.[12])

Riddle 11 "Beaker of Wine" provides (if this solution is correct) a second example. The possibility that the speaker in *HM* is also generic in this sense will be considered further below.

Leslie's second objection is that the clause se þisne beam agrof (13b) suggests that speaker and staff are not one and the same. Greenfield suggests that "comparison with certain riddles" might reduce the force of this objection, but that in the light of this and the later verse 31b (see p.46 below), the rune-staff theory "seems strained".[13] Anderson seeks to remove the objection by refer- ence to a particular riddle – the Exeter Book *Riddle* 35 – and to *The Dream of the Rood*.[14] The first of these texts is of questionable value for his purpose, however. *Riddle* 35 is one version of an English translation of Aldhelm's Latin riddle *De Lorica*; the *Leiden Riddle*, written in Northumbrian OE, is another. The *Leiden Riddle* translates the Latin quite closely, whereas *Riddle* 35 "omits the last two lines as found in the *Leiden Riddle* (corresponding to the last line of the Latin text), replacing them with a standard riddle formula, 'Saga soðcwidum . . . hwæt þis gewæde sy' ".[15] It seems possible that in these final lines we hear, not the personified

mailcoat, but the voice of the translator who, his riddle complete, invites a solution from the reader. *The Dream of the Rood* contains references by the cross to itself by its own name, in 40 gestah he on gealgan heanne, and 56 Crist wæs on rode, both verses being represented in the Ruthwell Cross inscription as well as in the Vercelli Book text.[16] *HM* 13b is certainly comparable with these verses from the *Dream*, though I shall argue below (p.48) that there may be a special justification for the speaker's naming of itself in this fashion in *HM*.

Leslie's third objection is that expressions used by the speaker of his master (7 mondryhten min, 10 mines frean, 39 min wine) "indicate a lord and retainer relationship with which the limited and temporary nature of a rune-stave appears incompatible" – an objection echoed by Greenfield who would nonetheless allow that all three expressions are "susceptible of a personification inter-pretation".[17] Anderson, by way of reply, points to *Beowulf* 457 and 530 as examples of wine used between men in purely temporary relation-ships.[18] He does not discuss the other two expressions because they occur in a part of the poem (1-12) which he would assign to a human messenger who brings the rune-staff to the woman in the poem. But in any case this would seem to be the weakest of Leslie's objections. It is surely pedantic to insist that the convention whereby an arte-fact may refer to its user as lord or master is appropriate only if the duration of the object's usefulness corresponds with that of a human servant. And it may be noted that in the Exeter Book *Riddles*, frea (cf. *HM* 10) is by far the commonest title given by manufactured objects to their users or owners (*Riddles* 20.2, 24; 44.2; 62.2; 73.8; 91.6; 93.1; 17.5 freo is probably an error for frea). The word mondryhten does not occur in the same kind of context (though dryhtne in *Riddle* 58.6 is emended by some editors to mondryhtne for metrical reasons).

The fourth and final objection which Leslie raised to the rune-staff theory is that the verb sægde in 31 þæsþe he me sægde is "much more appropriate to a human messenger than to a rune-stave whose function is essentially the conveyance of a written message". Greenfield, as we have seen, agrees. Anderson cites *Riddle* 60.9, where "the *verbum dicendi sprecan* is used to suggest the conveyance of a written message".[19] However, if it is accepted, with Anderson, Leslie and others, that the speaker in this *Riddle* is a reed made into a pen, the analogy is not at all close. For in *HM*, sægde would have to be taken as a metaphorical expression for the carving of the runes on the staff by the human inscriber, whereas in *Riddle* 60 it is the pen itself, not the human writer, which apparently "speaks" by writing. Anderson's second parallel, *Riddle* 48.4, where cweðan "suggests the conveyance of a message apparently engraved on a Chrismal or chalice"[20] is similarly inexact.

It was emphasized above (p. 45) that satisfactory replies to Leslie's objections to the rune-staff theory depend on a fresh interpretation of *HM* as a whole. And so I now return to the poem's opening. Some editorial problems connected with the first two lines formed the starting-point of this investigation. Other problems in them remain. Elliott, followed by Goldsmith, thinks that the use of

Nu and onsundran in 1 "points stylistically to an obvious connection
with what immediately precedes", that is, with *Riddle* 60.[21] But Nu,
"Now", is open to a different interpretation. The most appropriate
time for a personified rune-staff to speak would be on its receipt
as a message. Here we may take it that its tongue, so to speak, is
loosened the moment the woman's eyes fall on the runes; hence "Now".
There is reason to suppose that the brief message contained in the
runes is impenetrable to all but her;[22] thus onsundran, which can
mean "especially" in OE, may be taken as a sign that the staff may
speak only to her.[23]

      The suggestion that the woman's perception of the runes releases
the power of speech in the staff brings us to the nature of the
speech itself. How is it possible for the staff to speak to the
woman beyond its runic message? There are two ways in which this
might be explained in terms of its personification. First, there is
no reason why a text should not itself be personified so that it may
say something about, for example, whó wrote it; and this is what
happens in the *Metrical Preface to the Pastoral Care*, in which the
text (1 Þis ærendgewrit) speaks in words independent of Gregory's
message. We may also note here the speaker's reference to itself
as if to a separate object. Second, the runic message is brief –
so brief that it seems possible that it is little more than a pre-
arranged signal whereby the man may tell the woman that all is well
and that she should join him.[24] It is noticeable that the speech
contains nothing which the woman could not know or reasonably sur-
mise on this basis; nothing, in particular, about the man's
experiences since his exile (36b-40a, 45b-47) which is specific
enough to force us to assign it to a human messenger who has recently
spoken with his lord. And so the speech may be, not so much an
expansion of the runic message, but more an expression of what it
was meant to imply to the recipient. More will be said about this
possibility below.

      Not all of the speech, however, can be accounted for in this
way. The portions of lines 1-8a which remain are sufficient to
suggest that the speaker here says something of his origins and of
his previous travels by sea; and 8b-9a may perhaps imply that the
speaker's present mission is in some ways typical of his usual work.
The speaker's account of his origins in 2b is in a sense natural
enough if the speaker is a rune-staff. Such an object is not a
disembodied message but a manufactured, material thing which could,
like the personified tools and weapons in the Exeter Book *Riddles*,
be invested with an elaborate "personal" history. However, if the
speaker is a staff, why does it feel the need to identify itself at
all? We can assume that the woman would be in no doubt about the
general nature of the object delivered to her. But there is no
explicit reference as far as we can tell, to a rune-staff until 13b
se Þisne beam agrof. Does the rune-staff theory, then, involve the
assumption that lines 1-8a represent the poet's clumsy device for
providing the reader with vital information about the speaker which
the woman herself, ostensibly addressed here, would have no need of?

      A possible answer to this question lies in verse 2b. The range
of meaning of tudor in OE means that we may translate this verse
either as "I grew up from a child" or as "I grew up from a shoot",

depending on how we envisage the speaker. Goldsmith suggests that
"the poet is being deliberately enigmatic" by "choosing a word
(tudor) which might fit either a plant or a human being".[25] This
in turn suggests the possibility that the poet is consistently
enigmatic about the speaker's nature. But this is unlikely in view
of the probable reading iw, "yew", in line 3 (see above, p. 44). It
is difficult to see how the sequence: iw mec could, in the context,
be any other than a clear reference by the speaker to its own
material nature. And so a sustained attempt to puzzle the audience
in the manner of a riddle can probably be ruled out. Yet the
ambiguity of tudre is striking enough to suggest another, related
hypothesis: that the poet, though from the first quite unmysterious
about the inanimate nature of his speaker, is for some reason push-
ing the figure of prosopopoeia to the limit by realizing the person-
ification of the object in every way open to him.

    A useful preliminary measure of the possibility of reading HM
in this way is the degree to which the force of Leslie's objections
to the rune-staff theory is reduced by it; for these objections are
grounded in passages which, to Leslie and others, particularly
suggest the idea of a human speaker. If we can accept, for the sake
of argument, that the poet is anxious to exploit every available
point of similarity between the rune-staff and the persona most
readily suggested by its function - that of a human messenger - then
the speaker's description of his frequent travels (Leslie's first
objection) which line 6 seems to represent is certainly consistent
with his aim. As to the question of similarity, it seems possible
that the degree to which the poet cheats here - that is, by present-
ing a particular rune-staff as participating in the general experience
of its kind - might have been regarded by poet and audience alike as
fair play in accordance with an accepted riddle convention, exempli-
fied by the Riddles cited above in this connection (p. 45), whereby
an object, though as an individual quickly consumed in the natural
run of things, becomes heir, once personified, to the accumulated
experience of its predecessors.[26] Some support for this view may
exist in The Dream of the Rood 87-8: "Iu ic wæs geworden wita
heardost, / leodum laðost", in which it appears that the true cross
arrogates to itself the experience of other, earlier crosses used as
gallows. Leslie's second objection, based on 13b se þisne beam
agrof, is criticized by Anderson, as we have noted (above, p. 45);
and it could also be argued that the composite nature of a rune-staff
means that it may, as a message, legitimately speak of its own
material substance as something distinct, just as a man may speak of
his own body. But here, if the speaker is personified as a messenger,
there is an evocation of just such a human character showing the
staff to the woman. Leslie's third objection, to the speaker's use
of words meaning "lord" of its master, was, as we have argued, always
the weakest of the four. We need only note the appropriateness of
the Riddle parallels already cited if the theory of deliberate
elaboration of the staff's personification as a messenger is enter-
tained. The verse which forms the basis of Leslie's fourth objection,
31b þæsþe he me sægde, similarly presents little difficulty. It
certainly suggests a human messenger as speaker if read in isolation;
but here the staff may be taken as speaking metaphorically: the aspect
of its nature which enables it to "speak" to the woman (1 secgan)

also justifies its presentation of the carving of runes upon it as
oratio obliqua.

It is now possible to say something about the methods whereby
this double characterization of the speaker, which I have suggested
is the poet's conscious aim, is achieved. The main technique is
obviously ambiguity, particularly the kind of stylized ambiguity
best exemplified elsewhere in the Exeter Book *Riddles.* To give an
example, the word frea, "lord", is ambiguous in OE only as an element
of an enigmatic personification of an object, where it refers
obliquely to its owner, user or maker. In this connection we should
also notice *HM* 2 Ic . . . aweox, which is reminiscent of the openings
of *Riddles* 73 "Spear" (1 Ic on wonge aweox) and 88 "Antler" (1 Ic
weox þær ic . . .). Perhaps the unique compound ceolþele (9) should
be mentioned here. Leslie's gloss is "ship", though the analogy
with, for example, wægþel, "wave-plank", hence "ship", is not exact.
A better parallel is *Finnsburh Fragment* 30 buruhþelu, "castle-floor",
literally "castle-plank", which suggests that ceolþele means "ship-
plank", so referring to a part of a ship in which a passenger as
well as cargo might be carried.[27]

It is necessary at this point to confront the difficult passage
49-51, which incorporates the uncertain manuscript form genyre/gehyre
(50) and the runes themselves (50-51). Unlike *HM* 1-2, but like line
3, these lines are crucial for the question of whether the speaker
is the staff or a messenger. Since Kaske's examination of the manu-
script under ultra-violet light suggested that genyre, rather than
gehyre, is the scribe's form, Goldsmith has re-examined the manuscript
and concluded that gehyre is "not positively ruled out" as the true
reading.[28] Those who prefer genyre have differed over the meaning of
such a word in the context. Kaske's own translation, "constrain" (in
the sense of "exhort" rather than "constrict") is, as Greenfield
points out, unattested elsewhere in OE as a meaning of genirwan, the
verb of which genyre is taken to be the first person singular,
present indicative.[29] Greenfield also notes that the commonest sense
of genirwan is "crowd together" or "contract", which in his opinion
"fits the context beautifully if the runic letters are incised on a
piece of wood". His interpretation is that the "probable human
speaker is climactically showing his rune-stave and explaining its
import to the princess he is addressing". However, as Anderson has
shown, that the woman has already seen the staff is indicated by 13b
se þisne beam agrof,[30] and genirwan would be a peculiar choice of
verb in this case. But in any case it seems incredible that an
actual messenger should name the runes to the woman: the whole point
of sending a staff is surely that the woman should make something of
the runes herself. Anderson, in his second article on the poem,
attempts to support the speaker-as-messenger theory of which he had
been so critical in his first by taking genyre . . . ætsomne ofer
as a phrasal verb meaning "superimpose"; but there is no support for
this meaning of genirwan ofer elsewhere in OE, and it seems likely
even that line 49, beginning Ofer, does not begin a sentence con-
tinued by lines 50-51, but is rather the end of the sentence begin-
ning with 44b Nu.[31] A further point against genyre in any sense is
that 51 benemnan, if governed by it, would probably have to be taken
as an infinitive of purpose: "I crowd together (the runes) in order

to declare". Though this is good modern English, there seem to have been limits on the type of verb which could introduce such an infinitive construction in OE; and in verse we find only verbs of motion and _sellan_.[32]

Genyre, then, is questionable on grounds of sense and syntax. With _gehyre_, the word which some scholars read in the manuscript, there is no problem with _benemnan_, for the construction can be taken as accusative-with-infinitive of a type well-exemplified in OE,[33] and paralleled in _HM_ 22-3 "siþþan þu gehyrde . . . galan geomorne geac on bearwe". But if the speaker is human, in what sense might he be said to "hear" the runic message? If it were carved on the staff, there would be no reason to entrust it orally to the bearer. However, if the speaker is the staff itself, "hear" makes sense as a metaphorical reference, like 31 þæsþe he me sægde, to the original act of inscription. The present tense of _gehyre_ has never been adequately explained; but it is explicable as a perfective use of the present.[34]

It seems to be generally accepted now that the runes in 50-51 do not together spell a word or name, but that they are to be read in groups as their names. The first and second runes are separated from the later three by the word _geador_, "together", and are accordingly to be joined as _sigel-rad_, "sun-path", i.e. "sky"; the third and fourth runes, separated from the fifth by _ond_, "and", together give _ear-wynn_, probably "lovely earth"; the fifth rune means mon, "man". The variety of constructions which has been placed on this basic interpretation makes it unlikely that the runes can provide a safe basis for a general interpretation of _HM_. For the present interpretation, a good deal of their importance lies in their very presence in what is plainly meant to be read as a speech. I have already touched on the absurdity of an image of an actual messenger naming the runes to the woman (above, p. 49): we do not expect the postman to read our letters out to us on the doorstep. A personified rune-staff, on the other hand, may, and perhaps, logically, must, pronounce the runes carved on it as something it has "heard" by word of mouth. It is tempting to suggest that there is a rather abstruse conceit here, based on the paradox of speaking in what is essentially a literary mode. That runes in verse were intended to be named is shown, here and elsewhere, by the fact that the verses in which they appear cannot otherwise be scanned; but in a poetry clearly meant to be read aloud, this is inevitable. The danger, of course, must always have been that the runes would be misunderstood as standing merely for the words by which they were named, and so disappear from the text. In the Exeter Book _Riddles_ 42 and 58, the names of the runes have in fact been written out, though context ensures that they are understood as runes, here used to spell the solution of the riddles. Cynewulf may well have felt that there was a danger of his signature disappearing by accident from his own works: in _The Fates of the Apostles_ 96-8 he deliberately alerts the audience to the puzzle he is about to set them – a sign, surely, of awareness that recognition of the true nature of runes depends upon the creation of a "silent" visual image in the mind of the hearer. Whatever the poet of _HM_ had in mind, there is certainly a very marked contrast between the poetic eloquence of the naturally dumb staff, developed to a point where the audience sometimes

finds itself envisaging a human envoy, and the terseness - one might
say, the taciturnity - of the text it bears.[35]

Critics have identified a number of themes and ideas connected
with the relationship between the two human characters in *HM*:
fidelity, combined with a slight note of uncertainty on the man's
part about the continuing strength, for the woman, of their old
promises; and the desolation of past separation and exile reviewed
in the light of present prosperity and the hope of reunification.
On some of these, the poem's usual classification as "elegy" rests.[36]
But the interpretation advanced here does not tend to relegate these
aspects of the poem to the position of ornamental detail. On the
contrary, the rune-staff's eloquence, though almost incredible
initially, when the runic passage climactically reveals to the
reader the brevity of its text, becomes, in retrospect, a witness to
the strength and intimacy of the relationship which its arrival con-
firms and advances. I have already mentioned the possibility of
viewing the speech as a reflection of what is implied by the runic
message and the fact of its being sent (p. 47). Two passages will
illustrate this. The woman has no need to be told of her lover that
"Hine fæhþo adraf / of sigeþeode" (19b-20a); she will already know
it well enough. But it is inevitable that her mind should revert to
this time of separation and loss as she gazes at the staff. Her
lover's point of view seems to be reflected in 24-5: "Ne læt þu
siþþan   siþes getwæfan, / lade gelettan,   lifgendne monn"; the
sense of urgency is unmistakably his, but is in any case implicit in
the very sending of the staff. The speech may be read as being in
the nature of what usually exists between the lines of a brief
letter or postcard between old friends or lovers.[37]

It will be clear that the interpretation offered here implies
a closer relationship between *HM* and the riddle genre than most
recent critics have been willing to allow. But it is scarcely sur-
prising that the old view that *HM* is itself a riddle has found no
recent champion.[38] A riddle merely disguises its solution with a
veil of personification which the solver is invited, though not
always explicitly, to penetrate. But in *HM*, according to the
present interpretation, the equivalent of a riddle's solution is
not, apparently, disguised, while the personification of the object
is developed to such a point as to suggest almost supernatural
powers of communication in the staff and its runes - powers which
mirror the firmness of the bond (12 tirfæste treowe) between sender
and recipient which reaches ofer heah h⌊a⌋fu (8) and is unweakened
by feud, exile and time. No source or close analogue for *HM* has
yet come to light, and so the history of the poem's form is a matter
for speculation. It is perhaps worth noting a tendency, in certain
of the OE *Riddles* in which the speaker is a personified object, to
elaborate the presentation of the persona beyond the requirements of
the solver. A good example is *Riddle 93* "Inkhorn", in which the
object, personified as a warrior, presents its carving by man as a
brutal attack (18 bennade, 24 biton) with weapons (17-18 isern . . .
brun, 20 stiðecg style) which the bloodless warrior (18 blod ut ne
com) endures heroically (20b-21a No ic þa stunde bemearn, / ne for
wunde weop), though revenge is denied him (21b-22 ne wrecan meahte /
on wigan feore   wonnsceaft mine). The effect here is that

concentration on the problem of solution wavers as one becomes
absorbed in the dramatic situation of the persona, as if the speaker
were human. It seems possible that the *HM* poet drew some inspiration
from this kind of effect in riddles to put the enigmatic style to a
fresh and memorable purpose.[39]

1   The facsimile edition of the entire manuscript is *The Exeter Book of Old
    English Poetry* (London, 1933); *The Husband's Message* is on f.123.
    Facsimiles of f.123 are also available in *Three Old English Elegies*, ed.
    R.F. Leslie (Manchester, 1961; rep. 1966), frontispiece (recto only) and
    John C. Pope, "Palaeography and poetry: some solved and unsolved problems
    of the Exeter Book", in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays
    presented to N.R. Ker*, ed. M.B. Parkes and Andrew G. Watson (London, 1978),
    pp.25-65, esp. 46-7, 50-51.

2   Notably by Joseph Strobl, "Zur Spruchdichtung bei den Angelsachsen",
    Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Litteratur 31 (1887), 54-
    64, esp. 55-6; F.A. Blackburn, "*The Husband's Message* and the Accompanying
    Riddles of the Exeter Book", *JEGP* 3 (1901), 1-13; Ralph W.V. Elliott,
    "The Runes in *The Husband's Message*", *JEGP* 54 (1955), 1-8; A.C. Bouman,
    Patterns in Old English and Old Icelandic Literature (Leiden, 1962), pp.61-
    72; R.E. Kaske, "A Poem of the Cross in the Exeter Book; *Riddle 60* and
    The Husband's Message", *Traditio* 23 (1967), 41-71; Margaret E. Goldsmith,
    "The Enigma of *The Husband's Message*", in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in
    Appreciation. For John C. McGalliard*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson and Dolores
    W. Frese (Notre Dame and London, 1975), pp.242-63; Pope, "Palaeography
    and poetry", esp. 54-63. The case for taking *Riddle 60* and *HM* as separate
    poems is put by R.F. Leslie, "The Integrity of Riddle 60", *JEGP* 67 (1968),
    451-7; F.H. Whitman, "Riddle 60 and its Source", *PQ* 50 (1971), 108-15;
    and Stanley B. Greenfield, *The Interpretation of Old English Poems* (Boston
    and London, 1972), pp.152-3.

3   See *The Exeter Book*, ed. G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie, The Anglo-Saxon
    Poetic Records, III (New York, 1936), pp.lix-lx; R.F. Leslie, ed., p.13.
    References to *HM* are to Leslie's edition; references to other OE poems
    are to Krapp and Dobbie, *The Exeter Book* or other A.S.P.R. volumes and,
    in the case of *Beowulf*, to Fr. Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*,
    3rd ed. (Boston, 1950), unless otherwise stated.

4   *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry*, p.75. On Pope's reading of iw in
    3 instead of in, see below.

5   Krapp and Dobbie, p.225; Bouman, p.61; W.F. Bolton, *An Old English
    Anthology* (London, 1963), pp.38-40; Kaske, "A Poem of the Cross", 42;
    James P. Holoka, "The Oral Formula and Anglo-Saxon Elegy: Some Misgivings",
    Neophilologus 60 (1976), 570-76, esp. 574; Pope, "Palaeography and poetry",
    p.57.

6   Pope ("Palaeography and poetry", p.45) rules out any word beginning with
    a letter with ascender immediately after 1 wille: "Enough parchment
    remains where the first letter would have occurred to have preserved the
    upper portion of þ, b, h or l"; see further footnote 7 below.

7   See Hans Kuhn, "Zur Wortstellung und -Betonung im Altgermanischen",
    Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur 57 (1932),
    1-101, esp. 4-5, 8. *HM*'s first line conveniently illustrates the law's
    operation on personal pronouns. The subject ic falls in the first
    metrical dip of the clause and is duly unstressed; whereas the indirect
    object þe, displaced as it is from the first dip, bears full metrical
    stress in a verse of Sievers' type B. Pope's attempt to join 2a and 2b
    as a single clause casts doubt on his suggested restoration of 2a as
    [of hwylcum] treocyn[ne] ("Palaeography and poetry", pp.45, 48). His
    rejection of Mackie's suggestion: [ymb þisum] treocyn[ne] on grammatical
    grounds (ymb, "about", normally governing the accusative, not the dative)
    is justified, however, and one might add that the Exeter Book scribe

always writes _þissum_ (abbreviated as _þissū_ only in _Wife's Lament_ 41),
never _þisum_. But Pope's objection to _ic tudre aweox_ as a self-contained
clause ("as mindlessly self-evident a statement as can well be imagined"
is his comment) ignores the possible ambiguity of _tudre,_ on which see
pp.47-8 below. Although one may doubt the wisdom of supplying conjectural
restorations to lacunae in a text of _HM_'s difficulty, those who believe
the gaps can be filled without prejudicing interpretation might consider
the possibility of _fram_ (with "low" first graph; see note 6 above),
"about", "concerning", as the first word of 2a. It governs the dative,
and is common with _secgan;_ see T. Northcote Toller, _An Anglo-Saxon
Dictionary_ (Oxford, 1898), s.v. _fram,_ II; Toller, _An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary
Supplement_ (Oxford, 1921; rep. with revisions, 1972), s.v. _fram,_ I (18).

[8]   Greenfield, p.150; Earl R. Anderson, "_The Husband's Message_: Persuasion
and the Problem of _genyre_", _ES_ 56 (1975), 289-94, esp. 292.

[9]   Pope, "Palaeography and poetry", pp.44-5. Pope's attempt to read _Riddle_
60, 1-7a as a yew-tree's description of its own early life (pp.54-5) places
considerable strain on the text. The indications that the speaker here is
a semi-aquatic plant (rather than a tree growing on a ness or island, as
Pope would have it) are probably too strong to be dismissed.

[10]   Leslie, ed., pp.13-15; Anderson, "Voices in _The Husband's Message_", _NM_ 74
(1973), 238-46.

[11]   Anderson, "Voices", 242; "Persuasion", 292; Greenfield, p.150; Goldsmith,
p.248. Goldsmith believes that the speaker is a pen which "'voyages' when-
ever writings done at his lord's command are disseminated across the world".

[12]   Translation from _The Exeter Book_, Part II, ed. W.S. Mackie, EETS, OS 194
(1934), p.205.

[13]   Greenfield, p.150.

[14]   "Voices", 243; Pope, p.52, also refers to _The Dream of the Rood_ in this
connection.

[15]   _The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems_, ed. E.V.K. Dobbie, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic
Records, VI (New York, 1942), p.cviii.

[16]   See _The Dream of the Rood_, ed. Michael Swanton (Manchester, 1970), pp.90
and 92.

[17]   Greenfield, p.151.

[18]   "Voices", 243; see also Goldsmith, p.248.

[19]   _Loc. cit._

[20]   _Loc. cit._

[21]   Elliott, p.2; Goldsmith, p.243.

[22]   See below, p.50.

[23]   Toller, _Dictionary_, s.v. _onsundrum_, III. This meaning occurs only once

(in the Blickling Homilies). Toller's meaning II, "in retirement from others", "apart" is also possible here; for whether or not the woman is literally alone as she reads the runes, her wooden messenger's speech is in the nature of a private communication.

[24]   A suggestion made by Blackburn, "Accompanying Riddles", 3, and echoed by Elliott, "The Runes", 5.

[25]   Goldsmith, pp.247-8. I share Goldsmith's doubt about the possibility of taking this verse simply as the presentation of a human messenger's credentials.

[26]   Cf. Pope's suggestion ("Palaeography and Poetry", p.53, footnote 71) that the implication of lines 1-8 is that the speaker is a palimpsest - a substantial rune-staff from which previous inscriptions for other purposes have been planed away. Though such a practice may well have existed, it is difficult to prove in the absence of contemporary literary references to it.

[27]   Cf. Kaske, "A Poem of the Cross", 54-5 and footnote 36, 71.

[28]   R.E. Kaske, "The Reading genyre in The Husband's Message, line 49", ME 33 (1964), 204-6; Goldsmith, p.251, footnote 35.

[29]   Greenfield, p.152.

[30]   "Persuasion", 290.

[31]   See above, p.44 and footnote 7, and cf. Leslie, ed., note to 49. According to Kuhn's second law (das germanische Satzspitzengesetz, Kuhn, p.43), if a verse-clause opens with a dip, the dip must contain a sentence-particle. If 49 begins a new clause, Ofer constitutes an initial dip which contains no particle. I owe these observations to a correspondence with Professor A.J. Bliss. Krapp and Dobbie (The Exeter Book) print the lines in what is almost certainly their correct form, i.e. with line 50 beginning a new sentence, and 49 closing the previous one. The meaning of 49 ofer calls for reconsideration. Leslie's note records the various suggestions that have been made. Probably the only really close parallel in sense - certainly the closest in terms of the immediate verbal context - is Beowulf 1781, cited by Crawford (MLR 19 (1924), 105): "þæt ic on þone hafelan   heorodreorigne / ofer eald gewin   eagum starige!". Crawford, with Thorpe (Codex Exoniensis (1842), p.475), translates HM's ofer as "after", also Klaeber's gloss of Beowulf 1781. In both contexts a special satisfaction attaches to the action of the verbs (HM 48 beneah, Beowulf 1781 starige) which derives from the sense of resolution of a long-unsettled issue. Though "after" is acceptable in both places, its force is not simply temporal, but emotional and retrospective as well.

[32]   See Hubert G. Shearin, "The Expression of Purpose in Old English Poetry", Anglia 32 (1909), 235-52, esp. 235-8.

[33]   See Jacob Zeitlin, The Accusative with Infinitive and Some Kindred Constructions in English (New York, 1908), Chap. III; Morgan Callaway, Jr., The Infinitive in Anglo-Saxon (Washington, 1913), Chap. VIII.

[34]   Leslie, ed., note to 50, remarks simply that "the present tense for vividness is not unusual", but gives no examples from other texts. Perhaps he had in mind such examples of formally present verbs as in Beowulf 290 Ic þæt gehyre and 411 secgað sæliðend, cited as perfective by E. Nader,

"Tempus und Modus im Beowulf", *Anglia* 10 (1888), 542-63, esp. 550, § 14. This use of the present tense in Modern English has been defined as expressing "the persistence in the present of the effect of a past communication" (R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech and J. Svartvik, *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (London, 1972), p.86) - a definition which accommodates *HM* 50 gehyre perfectly if the original act of inscription is regarded as a still-operative communication to the staff.

[35]   On the paradox of silent speech in *Riddles* 85 "Fish and River", 48 "Chalice" and 60 "Reed Pen", see Marie Nelson, "The Paradox of Silent Speech in the Exeter Book Riddles", *Neophilologus* 62 (1978), 609-15.

[36]   See, for example, S.B. Greenfield, "The Old English Elegies", in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. E.G. Stanley (London, 1966), pp.142-75, esp. 169-71.

[37]   Elliott's view (p.8) that the speech is largely an expansion of the runic message is criticized by Leslie (ed., p.15), partly on the grounds that it makes the runes "simply a summary of what has gone before" rather than a climax. Pope ("Palaeography and poetry", p.53) takes the view, not far from my own, that the poem is "figuratively speaking, a dialogue".

[38]   Comparison of a letter with a messenger is widespread in riddles; see Archer Taylor, *English Riddles from Oral Tradition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951), p.276. The suggestion that *HM* is a riddle was made by F. Hicketier, "Klage der Frau, Botschaft des Gemahls, und Ruine", *Anglia* 11 (1889), 363-8.

[39]   This article has benefited considerably from criticisms and suggestions made by Dr J.M. Hill and Professor T.A. Shippey, though they should not, of course, be held responsible for the views it contains.