Leeds Studies in English

Aesthetic Evaluations of the Sound of Old English: 'About the Anglo-Saxon tongue there was the strength of iron, with the sparkling and the beauty of burnished steel'

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This paper is not about scholarly attempts to find the rules governing the scansion of Germanic alliterative verse, especially of Old English verse. That subject in the history of scholarship leads from Hickes's *Thesaurus* to Tyrwhitt, Ellis, Turner, Conybeare, Rask, Guest, Skeat, Scherer, Rieger, Schipper, Sievers, Kaluza, Graz, Neuner, Heusler, Kuhn, Pope, Bliss, Cable, Obst, Russom, Kendall, Fulk, Hutcheson, Susuki, and others, important, or interesting whether right or wrong.[1]

Elementary courses in Old English traditionally begin with some attempt to teach orthography and pronunciation. Orthography is demonstrable, unlike details of pronunciation. The exact value of diphthongs cannot be determined stage by stage through half a millennium of written Old English. When had the sounds represented by <ēa> and <ǣ> merged so that these spellings became interchangeable? How could <sc> have the pronunciation of Modern English <sh> when *frosc* occurs while *frocs* was metathesized before /sk/ had become /ʃ/; moreover hypocoristic *frogga* is formed from *froc*-? Southern <hw> is thought to be, not /xw/, but voiceless /ʍ/, and <hl>, <hr>, and <hn> are thought to stand, not for <xl>, <xr>, and <xn>, but for a voiceless pronunciation of the liquid or nasal. We do not know how exactly the Anglo-Saxons pronounced these liquids, voiced or voiceless. We do know that their language had more gutturals than Modern English, more like Dutch or German, so that to a civilized Frenchman like Hippolyte Taine,[2] every Old English half-line 'breaks forth like a growl', or 'like a grunt' – 'sort comme un grondement' – that grunting effect perhaps heightened by a glottal catch, if those are right who believe that, since all vowels alliterate indiscriminately with one another, they must have shared in being introduced by a strong glottal catch.[3] Thus details of pronunciation reveal the insecurities of diachronic phonetics. One would like to know more for an aesthetic evaluation of the verse of the Anglo-Saxons. We know that their dialects

manifested differences, and that pronunciation underwent many changes in the five hundred years from *Cædmon's Hymn* in eighth-century manuscripts to the twelfth-century *The Grave*.

It is safer, therefore, to spend one's aesthetics on broader issues, syllabicity and accentuation prominent among them, in comparison with other languages or when compared with later English. The relatively infrequent use of particles was commented on early. Sharon Turner had noted that infrequency in 1805:[4]

> The vernacular poetry of the Anglo-Saxons had not soared far above a peculiar versification when it first appears to our notice. But in this early state we find it distinguished from prose by some marking circumstances.
>
> One of these was the omission of the little particles of speech, those abbreviations of language and thought which contribute to make our meaning to be more discriminatingly expressed and more clearly apprehended. The prose and poetry of Alfred's translation of Boethius will enable us to illustrate this remark. Where the prose says, 'Thee the on tham ecan setle ricsast,' the poetry of the same passage has, "Thee on heahsetle ecan recsast," omitting the explaining and connecting particles the and tham. So 'Thou that on the seat,' is in the poetry, "Thou on seat." The omission of these particles increases the force and dignity of the phrase, but requires a greater exertion of the mind to comprehend the sense, because as it reads it must gain the habit of instantaneously and almost imperceptibly supplying them.
>
> Another mark and practice of their poetry was the inversion of their phrases. Thus where the prose says, 'The darkness extinguishes of the swarthy night,' the poetry is "Of swarthy night darkness extinguishes." This inversion of phrase will always ensue when it becomes a custom to place words in an order different from their natural construction.

Turner had recognized that, by comparing the prose with the verse rendering into Old English of the same piece of Boethius, one could understand better some of the principles of the verse. It is not clear whether he refers to the original audience or the late eighteenth-century reader struggling with Old English verse, when he says the

omission of particles 'requires a greater exertion of the mind to comprehend the sense' and speaks of 'natural construction'.

Conybeare gains better understanding of Old English metre by comparing bilingual verse, the first half-line Old English with the second half-line Latin, in *The Phoenix* and *Aldhelm*.[5] He introduces that comparison with a parenthesized caveat about the limits of modern understanding of the sounds of Old English: '(as far as we are capable of judging with respect to the pronunciation of that which we possess as a written language only)'.

It is obvious that the average length of a native word in late Middle English and Modern English was preponderantly monosyllabic, but in Old and early Middle English preponderantly disyllabic; and disyllables could become trisyllables and polysyllables with prefixes and suffixes (including inflexional increments). There is little difficulty about which syllable of an Old English word bears the accent, namely, the stem-syllable: in verse the metrical accent coincides with the accent on a word in ordinary, that is, unmetrical, speech.[6] These are the issues upon which writers on poetic aesthetics expatiate, from the sixteenth century to the twentieth. My impression is that sweeping generalizations became rarer in the course of the twentieth century, even among scholars who prefer the wide expanse of English writings in general to the restrictive details of Old English linguistics and metrics.

The author of *The Arte of English Poesie* (published in London in 1589), probably George Puttenham, is the earliest writer to concern himself with such fundamental differences as syllabicity between Old English and early Modern English, and with the effect that difference has on the use of rhyme.[7] He does not attempt to discuss 'Saxon' discourse, but how native English words, as opposed to loanwords, affect the sound of contemporary English poetry. He writes,[8] in his chapter 'Symphonie or rime':

> we make in th'ends of our verses a certaine tunable sound: which anon after with another verse reasonably distant we accord together in the last fall or cadence: the eare taking pleasure to heare the like tune reported, and to feele his returne. And for this purpose serue the *monosillables* of our English Saxons excellently well,[9] because they do naturally and indifferently receiue any accent, & in them if they finish the verse, resteth the shrill accent of necessitie, and so doth it not in the last of euery *bissillable*, nor of euery *polisillable* word.

Puttenham's use of 'naturally' is part of his belief in 'our naturall Saxon English' concluding his chapter on accent:

> Againe in these *bissillables*, *endúre*, *vnsúre*, *demúre: aspíre*, *desíre*, *retíre*, your sharpe accent falles vpon the last sillable: but in words *monosillable* which be for the more part our naturall Saxon English, the accent is indifferent, and may be vsed for sharp or flat and heauy at our pleasure. I say Saxon English, for our Normane English alloweth vs very many *bissillables*, and also *trissillables* as, *reuerence*, *diligence*, *amorous*, *desirous*, and such like.[10]

Naturall implies no condemnation of *our Normane English* as unnatural: *naturall* in Puttenham's use is like the botanical use, 'self-sown in this island, not imported from outside'. Puttenham does not prefer monosyllables, except for rhymes. Unstressed syllables are needed for sixteenth-century verse, and are provided richly in Romance, Latin, and Greek loanwords.

George Ellis's aesthetic assessment of modern languages, and of Old English in particular, is indebted to Tyrwhitt, inevitably so in 1801:

> [T]he harmony of all the modern languages depends much more upon accent and emphasis, that is to say, upon changes in the *tone* or in the *strength* of the voice, than upon *quantity*, by which is meant the length of time employed in pronouncing the syllables. Upon the whole, it must still remain a doubt, whether the Anglo-Saxon verses were strictly metrical, or whether they were only distinguished from prose by some species of rythm: to a modern reader it will certainly appear, that there is no other criterion but that which is noticed by Mr. Tyrwhitt, namely, "*a greater pomp of diction, and a more stately kind of march.*"[11] The variety of inflection, by which the Anglo-Saxon language was distinguished from the modern English, gave to their poets an almost unlimited power of inversion; and they used it almost without reserve: Not so much perhaps for the purpose of varying the cadence of their verse, as with a view to keep the attention of their hearers

upon the stretch, by the artificial obscurity of their style; and to astonish them by those abrupt transitions which are very commonly (though rather absurdly) considered as Pandaric, and which are the universal characteristic of savage poetry.[12]

Condemnation of polysyllabic words belongs to a later age, when admiration for Dr Johnson was unfashionable, and his style mocked as excessively Latinate. In a review of the first volume of Thorpe's edition of the first series of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*, the reviewer (C.P.S.) launches himself on seas of vapid praise:

> To every Englishman of right feelings, the exhumation of any hitherto hidden fragment, however small, of our national literature, will become a source of interest and delight. But to the Catholic it must always be doubly so; for, in looking upon these offsprings of the nation's mind, as it thought, and spoke, and taught the people, a thousand and more years ago, he cannot fail to behold in them so many witnesses to certify the oneness of that belief which he and his Anglo-Saxon forefathers hold in common, unchanged, unaltered, unabridged, even in an atom, notwithstanding the wide gap of time which parts them.[13]

And further in this vein:

> There are, however, other weighty reasons [than the preservation of, as yet unprinted, Anglo-Saxon texts in perishable manuscripts] why we earnestly wish to bespeak for the Ælfric Society the goodwill of our countrymen, and especially of those to whom is entrusted the charge of the education of our youth. We confess that without slighting other men or other countries, we love above all our own dear mother-land, and we wish our youth to be taught to love her too, fondly, warmly, heartily, and to look with becoming feelings of homage and attachment on everything belonging to her old religion, her old constitution, her old laws, her old glory and renown. As Englishmen we have to think, to write, to speak, in English and with Englishmen. Surely, then, it is a

matter of concern to know and understand well our own tongue. But what is the truth? In all our schools, public and private, with sorrow be it said, much, very much time is thrown away upon learning two dead languages, Greek and Latin, which after all lend little aid to the everyday business of life. The object of learning a strange tongue is not so much to become knowing in new words, but through words to become knowing in the sentiments, opinions, and wisdom of the great, the good, and the holy men of by-gone ages, and other lands, or to tell strangers our thoughts, our wishes, our feelings, in language which they understand. Now of all those who have spent so many years at our schools in the scanning of Homer or Virgil, or stringing words together in the various measures of Latin verse, how many ever take up a Greek or Latin book, have need to write a letter, a speech, an accompt, in Latin or Greek; or use either language as a means of amusements, instruction, or business, in after life? Not one in twenty thousand. How much better then would it be if in our public and private schools as much attention at least were given to the teaching of English, as of Greek and Latin, that our youths might bring home with them a racy idiomatic way of speaking and writing their own language, instead of a smattering of Greek and Latin, which they almost forget, and generally neglect in a few years' time. Let our English youth of both sexes be taught to drink deeply of the well of English undefiled. For this, a study of Anglo-Saxon is absolutely needful; for after all, it has bequeathed to us by far the largest stock of words in our language. About the Anglo-Saxon tongue there was the strength of iron, with the sparkling and the beauty of burnished steel, which made it withstand with success the attacks that the Norman William and his fawning courtiers directed against it as they tried in vain to thrust their French into the mouths of the English people. If the sword of the Normans vanquished the Anglo-Saxons, the Anglo-Saxons' tongue in its turn overthrew the French of the Normans. The greatest harm that was ever inflicted on the English language came from Johnson, who in giving English endings to long-

drawn Latin words, foolishly thought to impart dignity of style to his writings by words, big, not with meaning, but with sounding emptiness. Such silliness and childishness has happily died away; but still our young men have to be taught to follow our best and latest writers, and always to choose an Anglo-Saxon word before a Latin one. When this shall be done, then may we look forward to a bright period in our country's literature. We shall have our ears charmed with a flow of sounds as strong as they are sweet and beautiful, instead of, as often now happens, being wearied with a namby pamby gibberish made up of Greek, Latin, and French words, with English endings.[14]

A footnote refers to a short book, *Holy Readings*, where similar sentiments are expressed more briefly, and with emphasis on the strength of Saxon words.[15]

High praise is bestowed by Louis F. Klipstein on the sounds of the English language and the rich range of ideas expressed in it; though speakers of a language are hardly impartial judges of its beauty in sound and expressiveness:

It may not be amiss to observe in this place that no language ever possessed greater capabilities, or more powers of development, so as to become fully adequate for all the purposes of human speech, than the Anglo-Saxon; and in saying this we only express a leading characteristic of the Teutonic languages in general. The Anglo-Saxon, too, appears to us as one of the most original forms of language, not only containing words which from their formation and sounds we would be almost disposed to regard as primeval, but constructed throughout of elements definite as well as significant, and combining with such regularity as to constitute one beautiful and harmonious whole. We do not make this assertion at random or from prejudice, but in accordance with a full conviction of the judgment, after close study and thorough investigation, carried as far as our limited opportunities would allow.[16]

From such Anglophone praise of English one turns with relief to what was said in France about the sounds of English and Old English by Taine in the nineteenth century and Émile Legouis in the twentieth. Vigour and strength make themselves felt in the powerful acclamatory gruntings or growlings that Hippolyte Taine associates with the vernacular poetry of the Anglo-Saxons:

> [W]hat remains [*Beowulf* and two or three fragments of 'lay-poetry'] more than suffices to show the strange and powerful poetic genius of the race, and to exhibit beforehand the flower in the bud.
>
> If there has ever been anywhere a deep and serious poetic sentiment, it is here. They do not speak, they sing, or rather they shout. Each little verse [*i.e.* half-line] is an acclamation, which breaks forth like a growl; their strong breasts heave with a groan of anger or enthusiasm, and a vehement or indistinct phrase or expression rises suddenly, almost in spite of them, to their lips. There is no art, no natural talent, for describing singly and in order the different parts of an object or an event. The fifty rays of light which every phenomenon emits in succession to a regular and well-directed intellect, come to them at once in a glowing and confused mass, disabling them by their force and convergence. Listen to their genuine war-chants, unchecked and violent, as became their terrible voices. To this day, at this distance of time, separated as they are by manners, speech, ten centuries, we seem to hear them still.[17]

Some generalizations about the figurative poetic diction of Anglo-Saxon England and of Iceland follow, and then with reference to Old English poetry:

> Four times successively they [the poets using 'variation' for the sun] employ the same thought, and each time under a new aspect. All its different aspects rise simultaneously before the barbarian's eyes, and each word was like a fit of the semihallucination which possessed him [the poet]. Verily, in such a condition, the regularity of speech and of ideas is disturbed at every turn. The succession of thought in the visionary is not the same as in a reasoning mind. One colour

induces another; from sound he passes to sound; his imagination is like a diorama of unexplained pictures. His phrases recur and change: he emits the word that comes to his lips without hesitation; he leaps over wide intervals from idea to idea. The more his mind is transported, the quicker and wider the intervals traversed. With one spring he visits the poles of his horizon, and touches in one moment objects which seemed to have the world between them. His ideas are entangled without order; without notice, abruptly, the poet will return to the idea he has quitted, and insert it in the thought to which he is giving expression. It is impossible to translate these incongruous ideas, which quite disconcert our modern style. At times they are unintelligible [a footnote, 'The cleverest Anglo-Saxon scholars, Turner, Conybeare, Thorpe recognise this difficulty']. Articles, particles, everything capable of illuminating thought, of marking the connection of terms, or producing regularity of ideas, all rational and logical artifices, are neglected [a footnote suggests that the French language 'is too clear, too logical' to do justice to such poetry]. Passion bellows forth like a great shapeless beast; and that is all. It rises and starts in little abrupt lines; it is the acme of barbarism.[18]

The views of an English contemporary, namely, J. R. Green, the highly successful popular historian, accord with Taine's:

It was not that any revolution[19] had been wrought by Cædmon [when inspired to 'this sudden burst of song'] in the outer form of English song, as it had grown out of the stormy life of the pirates of the sea. The war-song still remained the true type of English verse,[20] a verse without art or conscious development or the delight that springs from reflection,[21] powerful without beauty, obscured by harsh metaphors and involved construction, but it is eminently the verse of warriors, the brief passionate expression of brief passionate emotions. Image after image, phrase after phrase, in these early poems, starts out vivid, harsh and emphatic. The very metre is rough with a

sort of self-violence and repression; the verses fall like sword-
strokes in the thick of battle. Hard toilers, fierce fighters, with
huge appetites whether for meat or the Ale-bowl, the one
breath of poetry that quickened the animal life of the first
Englishman was the poetry of war.[22] But the faith of Christ
brought in [. . .] new realms of fancy.'[23]

In America, Francis B. Gummere's views on the original audience of *Beowulf*,
and on the poet who wrote for – or rather sang before – such an audience were no
different: 'we may fancy that some deed of Béowulf, or a member of his kin was sung
amid the enthusiasm of the warriors and their guests, with shouts of applause and
remembered delight of battle, with copious flowings of the ale'.[24] Some years earlier
Gummere had expatiated at greater length upon the poetic art of the Anglo-Saxons,
though flowings of ale had not yet entered explicitly into his *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of
Anglo-Saxon versification: 'The main characteristic of the earliest period [the Anglo-
Saxon period of English verse] in our metre is strength, - a sort of breathless vigor:
the accented syllables are the chief consideration, and they are emphasized not only
by their weight, but also by the use of beginning-rime';[25] more fully:[26]

The accented syllables were (in recitation) further marked by a
stroke on some instrument. The importance of marking these
four accents [that is, 'accented syllables'], the carelessness
about unaccented syllables, are the chief characteristics of the
Anglo-Saxon verse. The presence of such unaccented syllables
and the consequent need to hurry over them so as to come to
the strong ones, gave a sort of irregular but powerful leap to
the rhythm. It is all weight, force, – no stately, even, measured
pace, as in Greek epic verse. Our old metre inclines, like our
ancestors themselves, to violence. It is at its best in describing
the din of war, the uncertain swaying of warriors in battle; – a
verse cadenced by the crashing blows of sword and axe. But
we do not move forward. As was pointed out when we spoke
of the parallelisms and repetitions of the Anglo-Saxon
diction,[27] there is an eternal leaping back and forth, but there is
little actual advance. As Scherer says,[28] the Germanic nature
was fond of raining its blows on the same spot.

The context of Scherer's statement about the Germanic fondness 'of raining its blows on the same spot' is interesting. Scherer, a distinguished linguist, was in the forefront of those who believed that a nation's language is governed by that nation's character:

> Innate in our entire language was therefore the style which we can recognize in the oldest poetic compositions of the nation. The Germanic poet is less concerned with the plenitude and palpability of the various imagined moments which he seeks to represent, than with their force. For that reason he always executes several strokes on one and the same spot. He depicts nothing other than the subject itself, but not so much by means of the most appropriate word but rather by means of a number of synonyms. He never seems satisfied and he struggles in vain to achieve total expression of his inmost representation.
>
> This distinctiveness may arise from the passionate natural disposition of the Ancient Germanic peoples which vents its fury in war, play, and deeds of violence.[29]

And a little later:

> But the passionate reiteration of the same thought, the struggle to achieve a forceful designation of the subject could induce the poet to stress that part of the word which preeminently designated the subject, namely, the stem-syllable. This was a new means to achieve the same end.[30]

Violence, strength, vigour, weight, and force, the emphasis on the root-syllables, treating the unaccented syllables without attention, hurrying over them to get to the sounds that matter, these are the characteristics of Germanic metre. They have their origin and reflect the temperament of the Ancient Germanic peoples themselves, and therefore of the Anglo-Saxons and their poetry, in the admiring eyes and ears of writers like Green, Scherer, and Gummere.

In France, Émile Legouis's popular history of English literature goes into details of Anglo-Saxon pronunciation. He judges the sound of Old English verse in contrast with Modern French:

[I]t might be said, of the essence of the English language, that in its Teutonic elements it surpasses French by its vigorous strokes, but that it speaks with a less melodious voice. What the French weakly call *force*, has an English name, *strength*, from the Anglo-Saxon *strengtho*, in which seven muscular consonants strangle a single vowel, but in the French word *oiseau*, a solitary consonant hums among soft vowels and diphthongs, which such effect that it makes the English *bird* (A.S. *bridd*) seem to have little power of suggestion.

The primary character of the Anglo-Saxon language derives from the predominance of its consonants. Not only are syllables introduced by a consonant or group of consonants (*h, sp, st, str, hr, thr*, etc.), but these consonants form the vital part of the syllables. The are explosive, not quiescent, and their noise drowns the neighbouring vowels, a characteristic of which the persistence is proved whenever any French word passes through an English throat, as when *donne* becomes *ddonne* or *plaine, pplaine*. The value given to the initial consonant, together with the tonic accent, which throws the root syllable into relief, and with the emphasis on the essential word of a sentence, make up the law of Anglo-Saxon versification. The comparative insignificance of vowels is shown in the rule that vowel sounds, which may be substituted for alliterations or repetitions of initial consonants, need not be identical. For here it is not the sound of the vowel but the absence of the consonant which is important. The effect is produced by the momentary softening of the line.[31]

One may disagree with the supposedly explosive nature of the predominating consonants of Old English, or with 'its vigorous strokes', *coups de vigueur*, but Legouis is justified in thinking that nominals have greater weight in verse than finite verbs or function words unless exceptional stress is given them for exceptional emphasis.[32]

Taine, Gummere, and Legouis are not alone in thinking Anglo-Saxon poetry the utterances of barbarians, and its contemporary reception noisy, as is only to be expected from ale-swilling warriors. Their view is far from Kenneth Sisam's imaginary picture of the world of heroes, but he too thinks the audience

unsophisticated: 'A great man's hall was particularly suited for the display of noble conduct which contributes so much to the dignity of *Beowulf.* We are shown the best side of the life of heroes as it was imagined in Anglo-Saxon England'.[33] And the audience? It is difficult to tell if Sisam is thinking of the audience in the Danish court of Heorot or of the poet's audience at court in Anglo-Saxon England; perhaps he thinks they are much of a muchness, since the Anglo-Saxon poet is likely to have bodied forth the Danish and Geatish courts such as he (like Sisam) imagined the English court in days of yore:

> the main audience would be the king's bodyguard, who shared his hearth and table (*heorðgeneatas, beodgeneatas*) and in battle formed the core of his army. These men were not chosen mainly for intellectual qualities. They should not be thought of as learned in legendary history or theology, and quick to interpret any difficulty of expression or allusion. Bold rather than delicate effects would suit them best.[34]

Sisam is not concerned with the sound of poetry: Michael Alexander is, and he invites modern readers to think their progress in assimilating the poetry of *Beowulf* is like the Anglo-Saxon apprentice singer's progress in acquiring the art of composition. Bold rather than delicate effects suit such beginners best, and so, as they declaim half-line upon half-line, each phrase becomes the sequence of sword-strokes in the thick of battle that J. R. Green heard as he declaimed, and like Gummere's 'crashing blows of sword and axe':

> Anyone who will speak aloud, or, better, declaim vigorously the lines quoted above [his verse translation of *Beowulf* lines 867b–874a], will soon get by ear the characteristic Anglo-Saxon rhythm. It is a formalized version of the rhythm of emphatic speech, derived originally from the rhythm of the heart and the rhythm of the breath. Reduced to its crudest form, it might be represented by
>
> BANG . . . BANG : BANG . . . CRASH
>
> The placing of the weak syllables among the heavy stresses may give five types of half-line [. . .] But the ear soon gets a grasp of the 'permissible' moulds.

In learning the possible forms of the half-line, the reader is going through the same process as does the apprentice singer. The half-line – a verbal and musical phrase containing two stresses – is the basic unit of Old English metric, and the singer would pause before and after each half-line. The halves are bound together over the mid-line break by an alliterative brace, but the important consideration in this kind of verse is the rhythm, the distribution of the stresses – not the alliteration, as is often thought.

The end of the line – so important in rhymed, end-stopped, or stanzaic verse, or any sort of printed poetry – is the creation of the editors of Old English poems, for in the original MSS. the poems are written as continuous prose, the quill stopping at the edge of the page. The end of the line, indeed, is far less important than in rhymed verse, the last stress actually breaking the alliteration instead of repeating it.

Once the apprentice singer has learnt to 'think in half-lines', he must learn the art of construction – of binding half-lines into sentences, sentences into episodes, and episodes into stories.[35]

As the thoughtful poet of *Beowulf* moves forward in his narrative, often binding the last stress of a second half-line in alliteration to the line that follows, thus shaping his continuities into sentence paragraphs, his lines may not have been felt by him, 'bang, bang: bang, *crash*', like sword-strokes, even when battle against enemies – monstrous, Swedish, or draconic – is his immediate theme. The often subtle wit of the poets who composed the *Riddles*, many bookish, some sexual, is to be relegated to the world of unGermanic activities, as also when biblical and theological themes are the subject, when the sources are Latin, or when, as in the spiritual short poems, among them *The Dream of the Rood*, and others traditionally included among 'elegies', alliterative verse has been attuned to Christianity in sound and spirit by poets whose spiritual progress has perhaps left their bang-bang-bang-crash critics far behind. Some of them may still say with the earliest who wrote on Saxon poetry, that the sound of alliterative verse composed of stem-stressed words, monosyllabic except when inflected or expanded by prefixation or suffixation, always remains inappropriately harsh when applied to peaceful subjects. Praise of God, fear of death, these happen to be the earliest poetry, *Cædmon's Hymn* and *Bede's Death Song*, that

survive in some of the earliest manuscripts from Anglo-Saxon England. Alliterative verse can accommodate all manner of subjects, monosyllables may be shouted or whispered.[36] There are battle-scenes and turbulent voyages, and the sound that expresses them in verse may seem to be in harmony with them. Yet some traditionalists, deafened by the imagined din of battle and the roar of storm and waves in turmoil, will fail to listen to the quiet moments of devout reflection expressed in often excellent alliterative verse. Such readers probably still wonder, *Quod Christus cum Hinieldo?*

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NOTES

¹   Daniel G. Calder, 'The Study of Style in Old English Poetry: A Historical Introduction', in *Old English Poetry Essays on Style*, ed. by D. G. Calder (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 1–65, has a good history of this scholarship. The following are important or interesting. George Hickes, *'De Poetica* Anglo-Saxonum', in George Hickes, *Linguarum Vett. Septentrionalium Thesaurus Grammatico-Criticus et Archæologicus* (Oxford: e Theatro Sheldoniano, 1705, 1703), I, 177–221. Thomas Tyrwhitt, 'An Essay on the Language and Versification of Chaucer', in *The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer*, ed. by Thomas Tyrwhitt (London: for Payne, 1775), IV, 46–63. George Ellis, ed., *Specimens of the Early English Poets* (London: Bulmer for Nicol and Wright, 1801), I, 1–34. Sharon Turner, 'On the Anglo-Saxon Versification', in Sharon Turner, *The History of the Manners, Landed Property, Government, Laws, Poetry, Literature, Religion, and Language, of the Anglo-Saxons* (London: for Longman, and others, 1805), History of the Anglo-Saxons, IV, 409–17. John Josias Conybeare, 'Observations on the Metre of Anglo-Saxon Poetry', and 'Further Observations on the Poetry of our Anglo-Saxon Ancestors', *Archaeologia*, 17 (1814), 257–74, reprinted as part of 'Introductory Essay on the Metre of Anglo-Saxon Poetry', in J. J. Conybeare, *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, ed. by William Daniel Conybeare (London: for Harding and Lepard, 1826), pp. i–lxxv. Rasmus K. Rask, 'Verselære', in Rasmus K. Rask, *Angelsaksisk Sproglære* (Stockholm: Hedmanske Bogtrykkeri for Mag. Wiborg, 1817), pp. 108–29; trans. by Benjamin Thorpe, *A Grammar of the Anglo-Saxon Tongue* (Copenhagen: Møller, 1830), pp. 135–68; 2nd edn (London: Trübner, 1865), pp. 114–25. Edwin Guest, 'Alliteration' and 'Un-accented Rhime', in Edwin Guest, *A History of English Rhythm*, 2 vols (London: Pickering, 1838), I, 140–45, II; chapters 2 and 3 refer to Old English poetry. Walter W. Skeat, 'Essay on Alliterative Poetry', in Frederick J. Furnivall and John W. Hales, eds, *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript* (London: Trübner, 1868), III, pp. xi–xxxix. Wilhelm Scherer, *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache* (Berlin: Duncker, 1868; 2nd edn, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1878). Max Rieger, *Die alt- und angelsächsische Verskunst* (Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1876); also *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 7 (1876), 1–64. Jakob Schipper, *Altenglische Metrik*, Englische Metrik in historischer und systematischer Entwickelung hergestellt, 1 (Bonn: Strauss, 1881), pp. 39–77. Eduard Sievers, 'Zur rhythmik des germanischen alliterationsverses', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 10 (1885), 209–314, 451–545; 12 (1887), 454–82; *Altgermanische Metrik* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1893). Max Kaluza, *Studien zum germanischen Alliterationsvers* (Berlin: Felber, 1894), I-II, Der altenglische Vers, with, III, Friedrich Graz, 'Die Metrik der sog. Caedmonischen Dichtungen' (Weimar: Felber, 1894); Kaluza, 'Zur Betonungs- und Verslehre des Altenglischen', in *Festschrift zum siebzigsten Geburtstage Oskar Schades* (Königsberg: Hartungsche Verlagsdruckerei, 1896), pp. 101–33. Erich Neuner, *Über ein- und drei-*

hebige Halbverse in der altenglischen alliterierenden Poesie (Berlin: Mayer and Müller, 1920). Andreas Heusler, *Deutsche Versgeschichte*, I, Grundriss der germanischen Philologie, 8/1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1925). Hans Kuhn, *Zur Wortstellung und -betonung im Altgermanischen* (Universität Marburg, Habilitationsschrift; Halle: Niemeyer, 1933), also *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 57 (1933), 1–109. John Collins Pope, *The Rhythm of Beowulf* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942; rev. edn 1966). Alan J. Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958; rev. edn 1967). Thomas M. Cable, *The Metre and Melody of 'Beowulf'*, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, 64 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974); *The English Alliterative Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991). Wolfgang Obst, *Der Rhythmus des Beowulf*, Anglistische Forschungen, 187 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1987). Geoffrey Russom, *Old English Meter and Linguistic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Calvin B. Kendall, *The Metrical Grammar of 'Beowulf'*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Robert D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992). Bellenden Rand Hutcheson, *Old English Poetic Metre* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995). Seiichi Suzuki, *The Metrical Organization of 'Beowulf'*, Trends in Linguistics Studies and Monographs, 95 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1996).

[2]   See below. H. Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (Paris: Hachette, 1863), I, 43 and see also note 13.

[3]   Cf. Jakob Schipper, *A History of English Versification* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), pp. 13–14. Klaus von See, *Germanische Verskunst*, Sammlung Metzler, M 67 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1967), pp. 14–15, expresses persuasive doubts. A good account of the inadequacy of the glottal-catch theory is by Susuki, *Metrical Organization*, pp. 307–12.

[4]   Turner, *History of the Manners*, IV, 375-76.

[5]   Conybeare, *Illustrations*, pp. vii-x; Conybeare, 'Further Observations', pp. 258-61.

[6]   That is not to accept the view that 'Old English verse is really the spoken language rather tidied up', which is rejected on, I think, irrefutable grounds by Fulk, *Old English Metre*, pp. 27–28 and footnote 51. The view had been widely advocated, for example, by C. L. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature* (London: Harrap, 1967), p. 26: 'Now, since the prosodic patterns of Old English poetry were primarily a selection of the more dignified and emphasized patterns of actual speech, continuity in form for English poetry, in so far as we may be sure of observing it, must be regarded as very largely due to a fundamental continuity in the actual stress-patterns of the language'.

[7]   Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker, eds, George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), pp. xi–xliv, discuss the authorship of Richard Field's print, whether George or Richard Puttenham, or Lord Lumley: George Puttenham is generally accepted, cf. *STC* nos 20519 and 20519.5. Note, however, the facsimile edition: *(Lord*

Lumley?) The Arte of English Poesie London 1589, The English Experience, 342 (Amsterdam and New York: Da Capo Press, 1971).

[8] *The Arte of English Poesie,* II. v. 76-77 (= facsimile, p. 63).

[9] Puttenham, p. 68 (= facsimile, pp. 56–57), refers to the monosyllables of 'our naturall & primitiue language of the *Saxon English*' in his discussion of classical metres, II ch. 3 'Of proportion in measure'; these require more unstressed syllables than just the one supplied in Old English by inflexions. Similarly, p. 112 (= facsimile, p. 85), when approving, in II ch. 12 (heading), of 'the vse of the Greeke and Latine feete [. . .] brought into our vulgar Poesie'. The whole of this chapter is relevant to the difference in syllabicity of Old English words compared with early Modern English, and the effect this has on metre.

[10] *The Arte of English Poesie,* p. 79 (= facsimile p. 65), II ch. VI (heading, p. 68 = facsimile p. 64) on 'the flowing of a meeter'. This chapter shows Puttenham's grasp of accent in words of more than one syllable, and of the place of stress in metre.

[11] Ellis is quoting Tyrwhitt, *Canterbury Tales* (1775), IV, 48 n. 40 ctd.

[12] George Ellis, *Specimens,* pp. 12–13. D. G. Calder, *Old English Poetry,* quotes Ellis too.

[13] *Dolman's Magazine,* 2 (August–December 1845) (London: Dolman, 1846), 237–44 (p. 239), review of Benjamin Thorpe, ed., *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: The Homilies of Ælfric, I* (1844). I have not been able to identify 'C. P. S.'; he is not in Richard Wülker, *Grundriss zur Geschichte der angelsächsischen Litteratur* (Leipzig: Veit & Comp., 1885), nor in Stanley B. Greenfield and Fred C. Robinson, eds, *A Bibliography of Publications on Old English Literature to the End of 1972* (Toronto and Buffalo: 1980). C. P. S. appears to have been a Roman Catholic; moreover he recommends the piety of *Holy Readings* (cf. note 15, below). Thorpe referred to the review in the preface of the second and subsequent editions of *Analecta Anglo-Saxonica* (London: Smith and others, 1846), quoting at length C. P. S. on the blessings that might be conferred on the youth at school in England by the study of Old English, and how the influence of Johnson has been wholly deleterious.

[14] *Dolman's Magazine,* 2, pp. 243–44.

[15] *Holy Readings [. . .] In One Hopeful & Good for All Catholics every where by the Author of 'Catholic Hours'* (London: Jones [a 'Catholic bookseller'], 1843), p. vi: 'we have followed a plan which experience urges us to recommend to all teachers of the people, and, especially, to all teachers of youth:- We have never employed a word of Norman derivation when we could readily think of a Saxon word of the same meaning.' p. vii: 'in books and in teachings meant for the people, it is wise to speak their language as much as we can. That language is essentially Saxon: and every Saxon word which we may employ, will not only be better understood by them, but will embody our own meaning more readily and strongly than any foreign word could do'.

[16] Louis F. Klipstein, ed., *Analecta Anglo-Saxonica: Selections, in Prose and Verse, from the Anglo-Saxon Literature* (New York: Putnam, 1849), I, 82–83.

[17]   And he quotes in inaccurate translation at second hand the lines from near the beginning of *The Finnesburg Fragment* followed by lines from the beginning of *The Battle of Brunanburh*. H. A. Taine, *History of English Literature*, trans. by H. Van Laun, (London: Chatto & Windus, new edn 1883), I, 68. See H. Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (Paris: Hachette, 1863), I, 43–44:

> [C]e qui a subsisté suffit et au delà pour montrer l'étrange et puissant génie poétique qui est dans la race, et pour faire voir d'avance la fleur dans le bourgeon.
>
> Si jamais il y eut quelque part un profond et sérieux sentiment poétique, c'est ici. Ils ne parlent pas, ils chantent, ou plutôt ils crient. Chacun de leurs petits vers est une acclamation, et sort comme un grondement; leurs puissantes poitrines se soulèvent avec un frémissement de colère ou d'enthousiasme, et une phrase, un mot obscur, véhément, malgré eux, tout d'un coup, leur vient aux lèvres. Nul art, nul talent naturel pour décrire une à une et avec ordre les diverses parties d'un événement ou d'un objet. Les cinquante rayons de lumière que chque chose envoie tour à tour dans un esprit régulier et mesuré arrivent dans celui-ci à la fois, en une seule masse ardente et confuse, pour le bouleverser par leur saccade et leur afflux. Écoutez ces chants de guerre, véritable chants, heurtés, violents, tels qui'ils convenaient à ces voix terribles: encore aujourd'hui, à cette distance, séparés de nous par les mœurs, la langue, et dix siècles, on les entend.

[18]   Taine, *History of English Literature*, pp. 70–71.

[19]   1902 replaces 'revolution' by 'changes'. This and the notes that follow give significant variants in vol. I of J. R. Green, *A Short History of the English People Illustrated edition*, ed. by (Mrs), [Alice Stopford] Green and Kate Norgate, 4 vols (London: Macmillan, 1902), p. 53. Mrs [J. R]. Green's Introduction is dated December, 1887. Some of her alterations are, according to Mrs Green's introduction, based on her husband's revisions. The changes include references to later Cædmonian scholarship than was available in 1874, the edition quoted for which see note 23, below.

[20]   1902 adds 'accented and alliterative'.

[21]   1902 adds 'a verse swift and direct,' and replaces the words 'powerful without beauty' by 'leaving behind it a sense of strength rather than of beauty'.

[22]   1902 leaves out the sentence about 'appetites', 'the ale-bowl', and 'animal life' and adds: 'The love of natural description, the background of melancholy which gives its pathos to English verse, the poet only shared with earlier singers.'

[23]   John Richard Green, *A Short History of the English People* (London: Macmillan, 1874), pp. 26–27.

[24]   Francis B. Gummere, *Germanic Origins A Study in Primitive Culture* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1892), p. 114.

[25]   Francis B. Gummere, *A Handbook of Poetics for Students of English Verse* (Boston: Ginn, 1885), pp. 174–76. In Stefan Jurasinski's excellent article, 'The Ecstasy of Vengeance: Legal History, Old English Scholarship, and the "Feud" of Hengest', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 55 (2004), 641–61 (p. 648), he refers to Gummere's belief in a 'deep-rooted Germanic love of the feud, of bloodshed and revenge', and he quotes Gummere's 'cadenced by the crashing blows of sword and axe'. Gummere's *Handbook of Poetics* is not listed in R.W. Burchfield, 'The prosodic terminology of Anglo-Saxon scholars', in Robert B. Burlin and Edward B. Irving, Jr, eds, *Old English Studies in Honour of John C. Pope* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 171–202; Gummere's terminology includes: *alternate rimes* 'cross-alliteration' abab (as in *Beowulf* l. 32) and 'transverse alliteration' baab (as in *Beowulf* l. 2982 if *wæron* is thought to be stressed and alliterate); *beginning-rime* 'alliteration'; *rime-giver* 'head-stave'.

[26]   Gummere, *Handbook of Poetics*, p. 176.

[27]   He refers to a similar statement earlier in his book.

[28]   See Wilhelm Scherer, *Zur Geschichte*, p. 87; the passage is quoted more fully in the next note.

[29]   Gummere provides no bibliographical reference to Scherer's *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache*, 1st edn (1868), p. 159, 2nd edn (1878), p. 87. I quote 1878, giving in square brackets significant variants in 1868. Old English is mentioned only incidentally by Scherer whose book is about the German language, especially Old High German, and, inseparably linked to it by derivation and natural inclination, Proto-Germanic as it manifests itself in the recorded Germanic languages:

> Unserer ganzen Sprache war also der Stil eingeboren, den wir aus den ältesten nationalen Poesien [Dichtungen] erkennen. Dem germanischen Dichter ist es weniger [nie] um die Fülle und Anschaulichkeit der einzelnen Vorstellung zu thun, die er erwecken will, als [sondern nur] um ihre Stärke. Er führt daher immer mehrere Streiche auf einen und denselben Fleck. Er bezeichnet nichts als die Sache selbst, aber nicht durch das [das eine] angemessenste Wort, sondern durch eine Zahl von Synonymen. Er scheint sich nie genug zu thun und vergeblich nach völligem Ausdruck seines innern Bildes zu ringen.
>
> [Not in 1868:] Diese Eigenthümlichkeit mag aus dem leidenschaftlichen Naturell der alten Germanen fliessen, das in Krieg und Spiel und Gewaltthat sich austobte.

The running head in 1868, pp. 156–59, reads 'Nationalleidenschaft und Nationalpoesie' [national passion and national poetry], in part I, 'Zur Lautlehre' [phonology], chapter 5, 'Der Ursprung der germanischen Lautform' [origin of the Germanic phonetic form]. Pages 160–62 have the running

head 'Alliteration und Fatalismus', with much on the inevitability of alliteration in the Germanic tribes given to drawing lots inscribed with runic letters; the whole of this wildly imaginative causation did not survive into 1878, where there are no running heads other than the chapter titles. The contents are analysed; pp. 86–89, 'Erklärung der germanischen Eigenthümlichkeit' [explanation of Germanic distinctiveness].

[30] p. 88, not in 1868: 'Aber das leidenschaftliche Wiederholen desselben Gedankens, das Ringen nach starker Sachbezeichnung, konnte den Dichter veranlassen, den vorzugsweise sachbezeichnenden Worttheil, die Wurzelsilbe, zu betonen. Es war das ein neues Mittel zu demselben Zwecke'.

[31] Émile Legouis, *A History of English Literature, I: The Middle Ages & the Renascence (650–1660)*, trans. by Helen Douglas Irvine (London: Dent, 1926), pp. 9–10. Cf. É. Legouis (and L. Cazamin), *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1921; quoted from the rev. edn, 1933), pp. 16–17:

> On pourrait ainsi, exprimant l'essence de la langue anglaise, dire qu'en ses éléments teutoniques elle excelle, si on la compare à la nôtre, aux coups de vigueur et lui cède pour les émissions de voix mélodieuses. Nous nommons faiblement la *force* que l'anglais avec son unique voyelle étranglée entre sept consonnes musculeuses appelle si bien *strength* (anglo-saxon *strengtho*). D'autre part auprès de notre mot *oiseau* où une seule consonne gazouille entre de douces voyelles et diphthonges, le mot *bird* (ags. *bridd*) paraît bien insignifiant.
>
> Or le caractère premier de l'anglo-saxon est dans la prééminence des consonnes. Non seulement les syllabes nous apparaissent ayant en tête une consonne ou un groupe de consonnes (*h, sp, st, str, hr, thr,* etc.) mais les consonnes sont la partie vitale de la syllabe. Elles ne sont pas tranquilles; elles font explosion, et leur fracas assourdit les voyelles voisines. Comme ce trait subsiste, il suffit de faire prononcer aujourd'hui n'importe quel mot français par un gosier anglais pour le sentir. *Donne* devient *ddonne, plaine* devient *pplaine* etc. C'est cette valeur de la consonne initiale qui, combinée avec l'accent tonique lequel met en relief dans le mot la syllabe radicale, et avec l'accent oratoire (emphasis) qui souligne dans la phrase le mot essentiel, a constitué la loi de la versification anglo-saxonne. L'insignifiance relative des voyelles se marque à la règle suivant laquelle les allitérations ou répétitions de consonnes initiales peuvent être remplacées par des sons de voyelles lesquelles n'ont pas besoin d'être identiques. C'est qu'en pareil cas ce

n'est pas le son de la voyelle qui importe, c'est l'*absence de la consonne*.
L'effet est produit par l'adoucissement momentané du vers.

[32] The general principle, that the order of precedence of parts of speech in the alliterative system, nominals, finite verbs, grammar words, etc., is set out roughly, with examples, by Schipper, *History of English Versification*, pp. 50–54. Exceptions include the 'refrain' in *Deor* and *Beowulf* ll. 197, 790, 806, as well as l. 563; rare prosodic effects are achieved in *Exodus* l. 463b *Flod blod gewod*, and *Christ and Satan* l. 423 (unless corrupt).

[33] Kenneth Sisam, *The Structure of 'Beowulf'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 8.

[34] Sisam, *Structure of 'Beowulf'*, p. 9.

[35] Michael Alexander, trans., *The Earliest English Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966; repr. 1967), pp. 18–19.

[36] Early commentators on Germanic metre might have denied that. Guest, *History of English Rhythms*, has a chapter on 'Accent', I, 76–104, does not believe that an accented syllable is distinguished by sharpness of tone alone, but by loudness (p. 77): 'though an increase of loudness be the only thing *essential* to our English accent, yet it is in almost every instance accompanied by an increased sharpness of tone'. This is quoted by Skeat, 'Essay on Alliterative Poetry', in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript*, ed. by Hales and Furnivall, III, p. xi, and he adds, 'I define a *loud* syllable as that whereon an accent falls, a *soft* syllable as an unaccented one'.