



Monika Opalińska

To the Rhythm of Poetry

A Study
of Late Old English
Metrical Prayers

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Preface

Recent years have witnessed a revival of metrical studies which help to bridge the gulf between literary and linguistic analysis of poetic language. This approach, founded on the assumption that formal analysis of metre offers means to measure and constrain intuitive statements about poetical style, is close to the tradition represented by Roman Jakobson who successfully combined theoretical linguistic investigations and literary scholarship at the beginning of the twentieth century. Referring to this scholarly tradition Dresher and Friedberg argue in the introduction to the recently published *Formal Approaches to Poetry* that '[i]t is only a matter of time before students of literature rediscover metrical analysis' (2006: 3).

Early Germanic alliterative metre falls within the scope of these current developments. Over the past years it has been subject to many interdisciplinary studies, ranging from historical, linguistics and generative metrics, philological studies of individual texts, and scholarly editing (see, for example, Dresher and Lahiri 1991; McCully and Anderson 1996; Russom 1998; Árnason 2006; Russom 2010).

Virtually all comprehensive analyses of Old English metre are based on *Beowulf* – 'a unique long poem in traditional style dealing with traditional subject matter' (Russom 1998: 8). This is hardly surprising considering its contents, length and internal coherence. The unique *Beowulf* manuscript (British Museum, Cotton Vitellius A. XV) was partially damaged in the fire of 1731 with the loss of

a few words at the top and the outer part of many leaves. However, the reading and punctuation of the uncertain or lost passages, caused by crumbling of the burnt edges, can be verified and, at least, partially restored owing to Thorkelin's transcript (now Copenhagen, Ny Kongelige Saml. 512.4^o) made in 1787, when the text was far more legible. The poem, contained between the folios 132-201v of Cotton Vitellius, and written by two scribes, includes 3182 alliterative lines, which is greater than in any of the extant Anglo-Saxon poetical texts. The span of over three thousand lines is large enough to provide a dependable number of recurrent rhythmical patterns, which makes *Beowulf* a reliable corpus for metrical investigations.¹ As a linguistically and metrically coherent text, it stands out as the standard reference framework for the analysis of all other Old English versified compositions.

However, in order to get a complete picture of the Old English poetic tradition it is necessary to go beyond *Beowulf*. The inventory of Anglo-Saxon metrical texts is heterogeneous both in terms of diachronic relations as well as formal differences but, regardless of their literary merits, they are all part of the same verse tradition. To know them means to get acquainted with different facets of that tradition.

This book aims to focus on a group of religious compositions from the end of the Old English period, in particular, the *Paris Psalter* metrical psalms from Ms. Bibliothèque Nationale Fonds Latin 8824 (Paris), and the metrical paraphrases of *Credo*, *Pater noster*, and *Gloria Patri* from three Anglo-Saxon codices: Ms. 121 Junius, Bodleian Library (Oxford), Ms. 201 Corpus Christi College (Cambridge), and The Exeter Book, Ms. 3501, Library of Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral (Exeter). These unique poetical prayers, in which the indigenous metrical form was adapted to convey the spiritual foundations

¹ Metrists usually emphasize not only the length of an analysed text, but also its contents or theme. Eddic poems on native Scandinavian subjects, written in the form of *fornyrðislag* (the metre of the old sayings), usually regarded as the Norse equivalent of Old English metre, have parallel status to *Beowulf*. On the other hand, much as the length of the Old Saxon *Heliand* is its distinct advantage, traditional metrical strategies sometimes seem to be inconsistent with the sacred theme of the poem (Russom 1998: 9, 136f).

of the Christian faith, fall outside of the recognized verse canon. Regarded as 'second-rate' poems they have been seriously understudied. The following analysis, prescinded from evaluative judgment on the poetic elegance or literary value, outlines the Anglo-Latin background of the poems and provides a descriptive framework of their metrical structure.

Chapter 1 posits the question of how to define Old English verse. An introduction to historical scholarship is followed by an outline of the basic theoretical tenets and standard metrical criteria. The principles of Old English versification draw here on Sievers' *Typentheorie* (1893) and several later developments pertaining to the correspondence between metrical and linguistic categories.

Chapter 2 discusses the relevance of metrical analysis for the interpretation of poetical texts. Examples from various Old English poems are used to show that different components of a metrical line conspire to compose a coherent and semantically cogent grammar of poetry. Diachronic evidence indicates that this aspect of alliterative metre endured as unbroken tradition from early runic inscriptions through late eleventh-century poems. The issues concerned with the relation between a modern typographic editorial format and the manuscript rendition of a medieval text, raised in this chapter, recur throughout the book.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 are monographic analyses of the source texts from the tenth- and eleventh-century manuscripts mentioned above. These two chapters constitute the main body of the dissertation. Each begins with a survey of the existing critical literature and editorial studies, and a description of the manuscript environment. This background is necessary to establish the place of the texts under discussion *vis-à-vis* other vernacular works.

When analysing the compositional aspects of the poems I made an attempt to reconstruct the methodology adopted by the anonymous authors of these texts. I have tried to show how they managed to reconcile the changing structure of late Old English and the formal constraints of the metrical system which they chose as the medium of their artistic expression. Each of the vernacular compositions has its own characteristic metrical and linguistic traits but, as late and nearly contemporaneous texts, they also share features characteristic

for late verse which foretell gradual disintegration of the traditional versification system.

The major points are summarized in Conclusions. The relevant fragments from the metrical psalms and the texts of the longer liturgical paraphrases are given in Appendices. The short paraphrase of the *Exeter Lord's Prayer* is quoted in Chapter 4, section 4.3.1.

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I have benefited over the years from the encouragement and support of many people. First and foremost, I would like to thank Jerzy Rubach for reviewing the book. I should also like to acknowledge my gratitude to Elżbieta Górńska for her unfailing attention and counsel. I thank Beata Łukaszewicz for her steadfast encouragement throughout this project. Last but not least, I am grateful to Maria Szewczyk and the staff of the Warsaw University Press for their efficiency, patience and kindness. My greatest thanks go to my parents and to my family – Antek, Zosia and Witek, to whom I dedicate this book.

Symbols and abbreviations

< >	–	graphemic representation
/ /	–	phonemic representation
[]	–	allophonic representation; extrametrical units
-	–	vowel length
.	–	syllable boundary
+	–	morpheme boundary
'	–	primary stress
,	–	secondary stress
/	–	metrical lift (arsis)
\	–	metrical thesis (thesis)
x	–	unstressed syllable, metrical dip (drop)
	–	caesura; foot boundary
	–	anacrusis (extrametrical syllables in the on-verse)
(	–	resolution (resolved syllables)
F	–	foot
fol.	–	folio
Ms.	–	manuscript
r	–	recto
v	–	verso
σ	–	syllable

CHAPTER 1

Old English metre – an introduction to historical scholarship and selected theoretical frameworks

1.1. Introduction: defining Old English verse

Systematic studies of Old English metre go back to the end of the nineteenth century when Eduard Sievers proposed a descriptive taxonomy of old Germanic alliterative verse lines.¹ His classification system of five metrical types, presented in *Altgermanische Metrik* (1893), has been taken as a reference theory ever since. Sievers' ideas grew out of his own research on rhythm and poetry but his achievement in the field would not have been so outstanding had it not been preceded by several centuries of scholarly work on Old English texts. Laborious survey of the Anglo-Saxon literary corpus conducted by successive generations of early modern scholars paved the way for efficient analysis of metrical structures undertaken by nineteenth- and twentieth-century linguists.

Anglo-Saxons did not leave any descriptive or prescriptive accounts of the versification rules comparable to the thirteenth-century Old Icelandic *Háttatal* by Snorri Sturluson.² Native authors

¹ Twentieth-century scholarship also owes much to the work of Heusler (1899-1891). His rhythmical theory of metre is mentioned briefly at the end of this chapter (section 1.3.5.) in connection with his later proponents – Pope and Creed.

² The *Háttatal* is a section in the *Younger Edda* which contains a catalogue of metrical patterns used by the Icelandic skalds. Despite its occasionally unclear fragments it has been regarded as a useful authority on early Germanic versification

like Bede or Aldhelm, who composed poems in the vernacular and Latin, wrote treatises on the art of poetic metre but these works were devoted to the elucidation of classical versification rules.³ If we can learn from these authors anything concerning vernacular poetics at all, it is, paradoxically, via the Latin poems they wrote. Both Bede and Aldhelm were versed in Old English poetry and the knowledge of vernacular versification rules seems to have influenced the Latin compositions they so willingly indulged in.⁴ The Anglo-Latin

and a complementary source of information for modern metrists (Fulk 2001: 130); cf. Modern English translation by Faulkes (1987: 165-220).

³ *De arte metrica* by Venerable Bede is 'a systematic exposition of Latin versification fortified by a judicious compilation of examples from Virgil and Christian poets together with selected grammarians' comments' (Brown 2009: 22). The intended readers of the book were Bede's monastic students who, as speakers of a Germanic language, had no sense of classical Latin vocalic quantity or quantitative verse and had to learn it. Bede's important and unparalleled contribution to metrical history is a discussion of accentual metre which, by and large, displaced quantitative Latin verse in medieval poetry (*ibidem*, pp. 22-23). Bede's orderly text is much different from Aldhelm's practical outline of the principles underlying Latin hexameter presented in two short treatises – *De metris* and *De pedum regulis* – and illustrated by a collection of one hundred versified *Enigmata*. Aldhelm's intense interest in versification is discernible throughout all his works (Orchard 1994: 6). For a comparative account of Aldhelm's and Bede's contribution to the study of classical metrics see Ruff (2005).

⁴ Aldhelm expressed his predilection for composing Latin verse in a boastful remark typical of his style: *neminem nostrae stirpis genitum et Germanicae gentis cunabilis confotum in huiusmodi negotio ante nostram mediocritatem tant opere desudasse* (No one born of our race and nourished in the cradles of the Germanic people has laboured so greatly in this kind of pastime before our humble self; Latin quotation and Modern English translation after Orchard (*ibidem*, p. 45). As for Bede, he composed Latin hymns and inserted shorter poems, distichs and single lines in his prose works (Brown 2009: 88 and references to the editions of Bede's Latin verse there). A longer meditative poem *De Die Iudicii* has been attributed to Bede but the evidence for his authorship is not entirely conclusive. This poem is closely linked with the vernacular via its Old English paraphrase *Judgement Day II* (formerly *Be Domes Dæge*) registered in Ms. 201 CCC (see below, Chapter 4). As for vernacular compositions, there are, apparently, no extant Old English poems composed either by Bede or Aldhelm but we have evidence that such pieces had been written by both (see Bede's *Letter to Cuthbert* and the *Letter on the Death of Bede*; for references see Brown *ibidem*, p. 93; and *Vita Aldhelmi* by William of Malmesbury; cf. also King Alfred the Great's testimony in Asser's *Vita Ælfredi regis Anglo-Saxonum*; see Orchard, *ibidem*, p. 5).

metrical interference can be traced especially in Aldhelm's works. According to Orchard (1994) 'he packed his octosyllabic verses with an unparalleled degree of alliteration, and may be credited here (as in his hexameters) with writing verse stylistically reminiscent of vernacular Old English poetry. [...] His lead was followed in his own lifetime by eager students such as Æthilwald, who again changed the form, and, at times, can almost be said to be writing Old English verse in Latin' (p. 71).⁵ Alliteration is also ubiquitous in Aldhelm's prose (cf. Orchard *ibidem*, p. 45), which raises the question of the boundary between the two genres.

Undoubtedly, Anglo-Saxons must have distinguished between verse and prose. A description of the *Exeter Codex* as being *on lēodwīsan geworht* (lit. in song-manner made) in a contemporary donation list to the Exeter Cathedral implies that the distinction was viable for the vernacular (Lass 1997: 101).⁶ However, medieval categorization of

⁵ Orchard (1994: 71-72; 119-125) claims that this aspect of Aldhelmian work has been understudied. The analysis of his metrical compositions in which he blended native and foreign elements together in a typically Anglo-Saxon way may yet prove more relevant to the literary history of the language than it has been thought. William of Malmesbury, Aldhelm's twelfth-century biographer, gives a testimony to his proficiency in Old English vernacular poetry and notes that 'he combined native and Christian elements in his verse to delight his audience at a time when in Northumbria an illiterate cowherd called Cædmon was attempting something similar, according to Bede' (*ibidem*, p. 5); see also Lapidge (1979) for an analysis of Aldhelm's compositions and traces of vernacular poetic techniques in his extant Latin verse.

⁶ The assumption that the entry in Leofric's donation list refers to the *Exeter Book* has never been ascertained, though most scholars give it the benefit of the doubt. Krapp and Dobbie (1936: ix) argue that the brief description quoted above refers almost positively to *Codex Exoniensis*, though they admit that 'the ground of the proof is limited to the fact that no other book is known to have been among the Leofric's donations to which the description in the list would apply' (*ibidem*, p. ix). Other scholars working on the history of the codex are more cautious in giving their opinion on that matter. Notwithstanding, the research on the Exeter *scriptorium* indicates that the *Exeter Book*, composed and written approximately between 965 and 975, belonged among a group of manuscripts held in the cathedral library at least from the mid-eleventh century (Muir 2000: 1-3; Muir 2006, and references given there). The list itself has been later bound in with the manuscript (Muir 2006). For further details concerning Leofric and his donation list see the introductory chapters to the *Facsimile* by Chambers, Förster and Flower (1933: 1-9; 10-32).

literary works need not necessarily coincide with modern classificatory criteria. Crucially, the distinction may not have been binary. It seems plausible that contemporary Anglo-Saxons regarded literary texts as a continuum in which the boundaries of highly rhythmical prose and verse could partially overlap (see McIntosh 1949).⁷ It seems that ‘modern conceptions of form and genre are, at the very least, rather more fixed than they appear to have been for Old English scribes at work in the many manuscripts that survive from the period, 890-1200’ (Treharne 2009: 95).

Regrettably, scribes seem to have left few unequivocal hints crucial for the reconstruction of the underlying structure of the earliest vernacular verse. With few exceptions early medieval texts, both vernacular and Latin, were represented in the same format of continuous lines running from margin to margin and covering the entire writing space on a manuscript folio.⁸ As Lass (1997) puts it: ‘lineation of an Old English (putative) poem as ‘verse’ is essentially a second-order construct. [...] For Old English we don’t actually know what constituted a ‘poem’ as opposed to a piece of a highly alliterative prose, for instance; lineation of poetry to show what it is comes later in the English tradition’ (p. 101).

Modern classification of some Old English texts as verse hinges on reconstructed principles of metre. In spite of many uncertainties concerning metrical parameters, there are some indisputable tenets supported by statistical tendencies which allow an adequate description of the metrical patterns. Such metrical definition underlies the standard current edition of Old English verse collected in the

Despite inconclusive evidence, Bredehoft (2004) takes it for granted that the note in Leofric’s book-list pertains to this codex and argues that the description can be taken as the starting point for a modern understanding of Old English verse since ‘here a nearly contemporary Anglo-Saxon witness specifically identifies the texts of the Exeter Book as poetic’ (p. 143).

⁷ Acknowledging the potential breach in the attitude towards written texts between Anglo-Saxon and modern times Skeat laid out Ælfric’s alliterative prose as verse in his nineteenth-century edition.

⁸ Very few Old English texts were lineated. For a study on lineation in Old English poetry see Plummer (1994). For an analysis of the developing spatial and graphic conventions in Old English verse representation see O’Brien O’Keeffe (1990).

six-volume *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* by Krapp and Dobbie (1931-1953). The selection includes early inscriptions and late compositions and is, inevitably, metrically disparate. Some texts, for instance the *Paris Psalter* metrical psalms, are defined in it as highly irregular as compared to the normative verses of *Beowulf*. Others, for instance some Chronicle poems, have been left out on account of their metrical anomalies.⁹ Recently, Momma (1997) has called into question the efficacy of traditional, current understanding of Old English metre for defining a corpus of Anglo-Saxon poetry:

(1)

When based on more than one poem, Old English metre no longer seems homogeneous; and it ceases to seem unique when compared to other alliterative composition. Unfortunately no previous metrical theories have offered criteria with which to describe Old English poetry as a whole or to separate Old English poetry from other alliterative compositions. (Momma 1997: 21)

Following her lead, Bredehoft (2004) proposes to reconsider and, perhaps, redefine the boundaries of the Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus in the light of manuscript evidence however meagre it may seem. He argues that metrical cues alone are insufficient for defining the poetical canon correctly and explains that some of the irregular poetical texts 'are distinguished from the surrounding prose by precisely the same sorts of markers used to indicate other textual boundaries: the use of textual space or of visually prominent letters' (p. 143). Bredehoft maintains that the pointing used occasionally to mark metrical structure may have been less valuable to readers in initially identifying a passage of verse than the highly visual cue of capital letters and

⁹ Krapp and Dobbie (1942) include several but not all Chronicle poems in volume VI of the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*: 'A number of other passages in irregular metre, in the later years of the Chronicle, have been omitted from this edition' (pp. xxxii-xxxiii). In a footnote they explain further that '[i]t is not always easy to draw the line between irregular metre and rhythmical prose' (*ibidem*, p. xxxiii). There are, presumably, more examples of texts containing embedded poetry or, at least, highly poetic prose, likewise disguised by the Anglo-Saxon custom of writing both verse and prose in continuous lines across the manuscript page; see an analysis of homilies from the *Vercelli Book* (Wright 2003: 245-262).

meaningful space. To put it differently, the evidence of manuscript presentation, so far overlooked, suggests that at least some of the texts demoted as irregular ought to find their way into the published poetic corpus: 'it is not clear that Anglo-Saxons poets or readers would have always agreed with our assesment of individual poems as 'regular' or 'irregular', and while such analytical metrical uncertainty remains in our minds, we should be hesitant to construct our corpus of Old English verse on purely metrical grounds' (*ibidem*, p. 141).

Note that this manuscript-oriented examination of the vernacular corpus readdresses some of the questions concerning the generic identity of extant texts, posed by their early modern readers. In a sense it takes us back to the point when Old English texts were first translated from a manuscript context to a print context, from a continuous script to an interpretive format of a critical edition. The changes in visual formatting and the assesment of the vernacular compositions have come gradually as people struggled to uncover the underlying structure of the texts. To these early attempts at decoding and framing the Anglo-Saxon literary legacy we turn briefly in the following section.

1.2. Constructing poetry – early modern studies of Old English verse

The uniform representation of script on a manuscript folio, lack of lineation or clear indication that a given text is to be read as poetry must have been confusing for the earliest editors of Old English.¹⁰ Indeed, first editions of Old English versified compositions did not use lineation presumably because their authors did not consider them to be poetical, at all. For instance, Matthew Parker's rendition of king Alfred's metrical preface to his Old English translation of Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*, published in 1574, does not provide any clues that its editor recognized it as verse:

¹⁰ This section is largely based on an excellent introduction to the history of early editing of Old English verse and the construction of poetry in early modern times by D.C. Plummer (2000: 243-279).

(2)

The poem, which is given the heading “Liber loquitur”, is not lineated by any metrical principles although it is printed in a shape of a cup. When William Camden reprinted the *Metrical Preface* in 1603 in his *Anglica, Normannica, Hibernica, Cambrica, a veteribus scripta*, he discarded even the shape and printed the preface as ordinary prose.¹¹ (Plummer 2000: 245-246)

In the following years some poems found their way into printed editions of Old English by pure coincidence. Often they were added to other printed items that were of main concern for the editors and the prospective readers. Seventeenth-century scholars were studying Anglo-Saxon manuscripts mainly in hope of finding support for the doctrinal issues of the developing Anglican Church or details concerning legal matters that might bear on English common law and its reforms.¹² Annotations in the margins of the Chronicle manuscripts left over by their sixteenth and seventeenth-century users, Matthew Parker, John Joscelyn and William L’Isle, or, indeed, the works published by John Foxe, William Lambarde or Laurence Nowell, to name only the best-known men-of-letters, leave no doubt that religious and legal problems formed the core of scholarly debate and, accordingly, channelled the manuscript search along the same lines at the time.¹³ Philological studies were to come later.

By all accounts the first attempts to grasp the nature of Old English verse were undertaken by Sir Henry Spelman (1628), who edited a short poem *Thuereth* along with a Latin translation, and by Abraham Wheelock (1643), a University Librarian at Cambridge. The latter is most renowned for a bilingual Latin-Old English edition of Bede’s *Historiae Ecclesiasticae Gentis Anglorum libri V* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*

¹¹ According to Lucas (1995), quoted in Plummer (*ibidem*, p. 246, ft. 6), other books of the period contain similar features so there is no evidence that this particular typographic representation was copied from a manuscript exemplar.

¹² A few sixteenth and seventeenth-century scholars, notably Robert Talbot, John Joscelyn, Laurence Nowell, were also interested in lexicographical issues and working on Anglo-Saxon glossaries (Graham 2009: 186-203).

¹³ For further details concerning the use of the Chronicle manuscripts in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries and the users’ entries in different codices see Lutz (2000: 1-82); see also Graham (2009: 186-203) for an outline and illustrations of other types of early modern glosses and annotations.

including its four poems now known as *The Battle of Brunnanburh*, *The Capture of the Five Boroughs*, *The Coronation of Edgar* and *The Death of Edgar*. Even though Wheelock noted a difference in style between the poetic and the prose passages in the *Chronicle*, he did not recognize the metrical structure underlying the former.¹⁴ Both Spelman and Wheelock, like their predecessors, focused on the study of Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical and legal matters, and their concern for literary issues proved to be rather incidental (see Plummer 2000: 248-255).

The arduous task of analysing Anglo-Saxon poetical texts, instigated by philological interest rather than by ecclesiastical or legal demands, was initiated by a Dutchman – Francis Junius, a librarian to the earl of the Arundel Library (1621-1651). His extensive palaeographical groundwork in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts led him to the so-called Cædmon Manuscript, later retitled Bodleian Ms. Junius 11. In contradistinction to most medieval codices Junius 11 is distinguished by a very regular system of scribal punctuation. Crucially, scribal points coincide with metrically significant positions. The scribe posited medial points at the end of each half-line identifying the basic metrical units throughout most of the manuscript. Junius interpreted the system correctly and expressed his recognition of its metrical value in his own edition. Not only did he reproduce the scribal punctuation accurately, but he also supplied the points which the anonymous Anglo-Saxon master mistakenly omitted. In addition, Junius introduced stronger pointing to mark the end of self-contained sense units.¹⁵ Junius' work with the codex brought about an edition of the famous *Cædmon's Hymn*, assumed to be the first

¹⁴ Wheelock's annotations at the entry for the year 938, which includes *The Battle of Brunnanburh*, betray his intuitive recognition of the stylistic difference: *Idioma, hic & annum 942. & 975, [is] very ancient and rough* (Wheelock 1643: 555; quoted after Plummer 2000: 254). Both Wheelock and his student William Retchford wrote short poems apparently inspired by the Old English literary tradition. These idiosyncratic compositions, written to the iambic and trochaic rhythm with elements of rhyme, tell us more about current poetical preferences and tastes than about Old English verse itself (cf. Plummer, *ibidem*, p. 251f).

¹⁵ Plummer (2000: 257) provides a sample of a short fragment from Ms. Junius 11 in a semi-diplomatic edition and in Junius' rendition to illustrate the typographical correspondence between the original and its seventeenth-century representation.

Anglo-Saxon Christian poem composed in traditional alliterative metre.¹⁶ The title he gave this short composition in his own edition – *Cædmonis monachi paraphrasis poetica* – indicates that he was fully aware of its poetical character. Several dozen years later another great Anglo-Saxon scholar, Humfrey Wanley, certified the metrical structure of the *Hymn* by rendering it in the form of half-lines.

Junius adopted the same editorial methodology in other works, for instance in his transcription of the *Metres of Boethius* – a late vernacular composition from Ms. Cotton Otho A.vi (British Library) which lacks pointing almost entirely. The system he mastered while working with the Bodleian codex and later effectively conveyed to other texts, uncovered the basic structure of Old English versification and its prime constituent: the verse. ‘By making verse lines visible, Junius revolutionized the study of Old English poetry’ (Plummer, *ibidem*, p. 259). His approach was picked up by other editors, notably by Edmund Gibson whose 1692 reedition of Wheelock’s Anglo-Saxon Chronicle included metrical pointing and thus shed new light on the interpretation of *The Battle of Brunanburh*. It also paved the way for an innovative edition of the *Metres of Boethius* by Christopher Rawlinson, made “ad apographum JUNIANUM”, as the editor explains in his preface (*ibidem*, p. 263). The latter edition is based on distinctive visual formatting of the Old English text into individual verses printed separately, one by one, and concluded by a point.¹⁷

Further steps to widen the rather narrow perspective of the first students of Anglo-Saxon literary heritage were taken up by George Hickes and Humfrey Wanley at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The scholars collaborated to produce a comprehensive

¹⁶ Paradoxically, the vernacular versions of this first English poem are attested in the form of glosses added to the margins of some Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. A prose paraphrase of the poem into Latin is known from Bede’s account of the illiterate cowherd Cædmon contained in Book 4 of his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*; see Kiernan (1990) for a comparative analysis of the Latin and Old English texts of *Cædmon’s Hymn* and a discussion of the poem’s modern editorial history. For a comprehensive edition of all the twenty-one extant examples of the poem, dating approximately 735 to the fifteenth century, see O’Donnell’s book and CD-Rom on the poems (2005).

¹⁷ For an illustration of Rawlinson’s rendition see Plummer (2000: 264).

catalogue of extant Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.¹⁸ Both, *Thesaurus*, published in 1705, as well as private correspondence of the academics offer many clues to their profound knowledge of the sources.¹⁹ Although Wanley's diplomatic rendition of the Old English texts, included in his *Catalogue*, does not display their underlying structure, the titles he provided for some of them (e.g. *Paraphrasis Poetica Orationis Dominicae*, Cat. p. 147; *Paraphrasis Brevior Poetica Orationis Dominicae*, Cat. p. 46) indicate that he could identify versified specimens.

George Hickes declared his concern for the study and editing of Old English poetry in the chapter "De poetica Anglo-Saxonum" in *Thesaurus* where he emphasised the need to examine its formal constituents, metre and rhythm. He tried to draw analogies between rhythmical patterns from classical Latin and Greek poetry, contemporary seventeenth-century prosody and medieval vernacular verse.²⁰ Analysis of Old English metre *vis-à-vis* Virgilian lines helped him recognize alliterative patterns in the former. He compared repetitive sequences from the *Aeneid*: 'Mænia mentum mitra crinemque mandetem', with alliterative lines from *Cædmon's Hymn*: 'Metodes meahte and his mōdgeþanc'. But he also referred to aural effects used for ornamentation by John Donne and John Dryden, thus betraying his ignorance as regards the structural principles of alliteration and the function initial rhymes played in the Anglo-Saxon poetical line. Hickes was

¹⁸ Humfrey Wanley – an assistant to the Bodleian Library in 1696 and later a curator of the Harley Library displayed remarkable skill in palaeography. Collaborating with George Hickes, he produced a catalogue of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts (1705) which was included in the three-part work on the earliest English history inaugurated by the former. Short biographies of Humfrey Wanley and George Hickes and a description of their accomplishments can be found in Douglas (1939), Sisam (1953: 259-287) and Joy (2005). Wanley is also mentioned in a concise history of early modern studies devoted to the Anglo-Saxon literacy by Graham (2008).

¹⁹ In *Institutiones grammaticae Anglo-Saxonicae, et Moeso-Gothicae*, published in 1689, George Hickes comments upon the misunderstanding as regards the poetical nature of the Chronicle poems: '(These [words] are (although very ancient) not rough, as Wheelock avers, but rather poetic, Cædmonian. Yet, that eminent man was to be excused as being one into whose hands had not yet fallen the then unpublished poetic codex that F. Junius justly calls a treasure house of hidden antiquity.' (Plummer 2000: 261 for the original quotation in Latin).

²⁰ In fact, Hickes' knowledge of classical poetry may have biased his assumptions concerning Old English verse (Calder 1982).

aware of the non-isochronous character of Old English metre, but he could neither establish the recurrent patterns nor determine its constituents. He did, however, identify rhythmical units similar to spondaic or dactylic feet. His assessment of Old English metrics was more intuitive than analytical. He believed that '[t]he way in which feet are combined constitutes rhythm, and rhythm [...] is the 'soul' of metre, enabling the life of the poem to manifest itself so that the poem can move its audience' (Plummer, *ibidem*, p. 265).

The illustrations of Old English poetry included in Hicckes' chapter on verse imply that he depended upon metrical pointing heavily and was not always capable of dividing the lines correctly when scribal guiding failed. His representation of selected poetical passages with a capital letter beginning each of the short lines and a point at their end reflects the typographic canon typical of contemporary editorial practice.²¹ 'He therefore completes the circle begun by Wheelock in his *Eadem Anglo- & Scoto-Saxonicé*. Wheelock created a new type of Old English poetry that resembled the poetry of his own time, while Hicckes transformed authentic Old English poetry so that it resembled the poem composed by Wheelock' (Plummer 2000: 268).

Although Hicckes' understanding of Old English metre was far from complete, studies of the earliest vernacular verse had advanced significantly by the end of the seventeenth century due, mainly, to the work of the scholars from his circle. Unfortunately, despite their endeavours the collaborating Anglo-Saxonists failed to popularize Old English poetry at the time.²² Some works on Old English, including reprints

²¹ This typographic format has been maintained in some of the later publications of Old English poems. For instance, Tennyson's poetic version of *The Battle of Brunanburh*, based, as the author explains on his son's prose translation, is represented in half-lines rather than in poetical lines and with a regular initial capitalization (Tennyson 1880, vol. VIII, pp 207-220).

²² Plummer (2000: 271-273) shows that the efforts of the seventeenth-century academics to legitimize Anglo-Saxon studies were unsuccessful. *Thesaurus* did not sell well, nor did Rawlinson's edition of *Boethius*; 'Junius's edition of Cædmon's poems did not become popular until long after his death' (*ibidem*, p. 271). Johnatan Swift's condescending attitude to the Anglo-Saxon literary heritage and its 'vulgar Tongue, so barren and so barbarous', expressed in the *Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue*, certainly did not add to the popularity of Old English.

of *Thesaurus* and individual poems, were published in the course of the eighteenth century, but the real revival of Anglo-Saxon scholarship on a large scale came in the wake of the romantic search for 'der Volk-geist'. Broadly defined philological studies assumed then covered, *inter alia*, linguistic and literary analyses of Old English poetry. Investigations of metrical structures formed a significant part of the project.

1.3. Old English verse in the light of modern metrical theories

Towards the end of the nineteenth century a German linguist, Eduard Sievers, analysed the corpus of Anglo-Saxon poetry looking for recurrent verse patterns. The extant texts formed a collection extensive enough to distinguish between common and rare configurations, and to isolate problematic verses for further examination. Certain types of phrases and formulaic expressions used in prose turned out to be seriously constrained or even absent in poetry. Sievers classified the repetitive verse patterns into five basic metrical types. Even though his classification lacks the necessary explanatory power, it is descriptively precise. Indeed, the accuracy of the system made it the prime candidate for the referential theory in all subsequent metrical studies. As Fulk (2001) put it: '[...] even scholars whose methods of scansion differ widely from Sievers's usually regard his basic metrical types as a touchstone, and the efficacy of alternative systems is generally gauged by their ability to account for the regularities uncovered by Sievers' (p. 130).²³ *Altgermanische Metrik*, published in 1893, in which he presented the results of his analysis, remains 'a book which scholars will continue to use or neglect at their peril'.²⁴

²³ This is not an isolated opinion. According to Hucheson (1995): 'The influence of Sievers's work on OE metrics can scarcely be overestimated: every theory that has departed significantly from Sievers's five types in the past hundred years has been virtually consigned to oblivion, including Sievers's own later theory of *Schallanalyse*' (p. 8). Formal analyses of the Old English metrical-linguistic interface also turn towards Sievers' theory as the common reference point (see, for example, Dresher and Lahiri 1991; McCully 1996: 57).

²⁴ These words were originally used by Neil Ker in an address to his grand

Sievers' descriptive taxonomy was vindicated by Bliss (1958) and modified over the years in the light of subsequent findings. In the early thirties of the twentieth century a Polish linguist, Jerzy Kuryłowicz, published a number of studies concerned with Indo-European metrics in which he investigated the relation between linguistic categories and metre.²⁵ Working on comparative material he was able to find parallel phenomena in independent poetic traditions, represented by systems as typologically distinct as Latin hexameter and Old English alliterative line, and establish correlates between the language used by a given community and the forms of poetry it generated. A Russian linguist, Roman Jakobson, came to similar conclusions while studying Slavic verse forms (see, for example, Jakobson 1979). This novel perspective helped to set metrical studies within a broader domain of general linguistics and paved the way for future theoretical investigations conducted, among others, by Kiparsky (1977), Hayes (1983), Kiparsky and Youmans (1989), Dresher and Lahiri (1991), and Russom (1987, 1998).²⁶

predecessor – the eighteenth-century palaeographer Humfrey Wanley, like himself engaged in cataloguing Anglo-Saxon manuscripts (see Chapter 4.2.2., point (7)). Yet, they are equally adequate for the evaluation of the achievements of Eduard Sievers whose position in the field of historical linguistics is comparable to that of Wanley in the domain of palaeography and documentary studies. Sievers' comparative studies led him to important conclusions concerning the phonology of early Germanic languages (i.e. Sievers' Law). Few later grammarians were able to surpass the insight and the abundance of data which characterize his descriptive *Grammar of Old English*, a book reissued several times. The impact of Sievers' work on general linguistics has also been distinctive.

²⁵ Kuryłowicz presented the results of his theory of metrical equivalence in a few papers, notably: 'Związki metryki z językiem potocznym' (1930) and 'Latin and Germanic metre' (1949). Both papers appear also in *Esquisses Linguistiques* published in 1960. In the 70s Kuryłowicz published another paper and two books concerned with the relations between linguistic categories and poetic metre (*Metrik und Sprachgeschichte*, 1975; 'The linguistic foundations of metre', 1976) and with old Germanic metrics (*Die sprachlichen Grundlagen der altgermanischen Metrik*, 1970).

²⁶ A detailed review of Old English metrical scholarship is outside the scope of the paper. A comprehensive history of studies in the field can be found in Hoover (1985) and in Stockwell and Minkova (1997); see also Stockwell (1996: 73-94) for a comparative review of four recent theories of Old English meter.

The analysis of verse forms presented in the following chapters is based on Sievers' framework with some necessary extensions grounded in later metrical findings. The basic theoretical tenets, relevant for the subsequent presentation of Old English metrical compositions, and notational conventions are presented below.

1.3.1. Alliteration and metrical stress

The basic unit in Sievers' descriptive model is a verse or a half-line which has four metrical positions: two strong ones, corresponding to syllables carrying primary stress, and two weak ones, implemented by secondarily stressed syllables and/or unstressed syllables. Each verse comprises two feet which, ideally, coincide with syntactic boundaries. Marked by some degree of syntactic discreteness and bound by initial rhyme the on-verse and the off-verse constitute a poetical line. In modern editions poetical lines are represented with a caesura which separates the half-lines, a convention also applied to the fragments of Old English verse quoted in this book.

Contrary to the assumptions of the early Anglo-Saxonists, alliteration or initial rhyme is not merely an ornamental stylistic device. As a structural component of a poetical line it is strictly correlated with metrical stress. The number and distribution of alliterating elements in verse, either identical consonants or vowels, are subject to constraints.²⁷ The first, strong half-line can contain maximally two

²⁷ It is possible that the rules which govern alliteration are sensitive to the structures generated from syllable weight, stress and metrical constraints. If this is the case, alliteration may be, in fact, a post hoc stylisation, built on the previously assigned structure (McCully 1996: 43-44; but see Hoover 1985 for an alternative view). According to Suzuki (1985), alliteration depends on an association convention which matches initial syllable nodes within an obligatory right-to-left parameter in Old English. To put it differently, given logically prior structures such as syllables and non-linear node-labelling, alliteration spreads from the b-verse to the a-verse. Given this, alliteration is subordinate and secondary to syllabic concatenation. This hypothesis coincides with Sievers' stipulation that the first stave of the off-verse, dominated by higher-level SW labelling, is the strongest, and that alliterative matching spreads from it into the staves within the on-verse. In other words, alliteration begins when stress leaves off (see McCully 1996 for a brief résumé of this hypothesis).

alliterating segments, the second, weak – only one. Moreover, in the off-verse only the stressed syllables of the first foot may alliterate. This implies decreasing metrical strength from left to right. Note that according to Snorri Sturluson, it is an error to go beyond the prescribed limit of three alliterating elements per line. Evidently, this constraint was also valid in Old English poetry.

Another principle specified by the medieval Icelandic scholar states that poets should avoid identical vowels to build the alliterative contour: repetition of the same vocalic elements was considered inelegant.²⁸ Alliteration involved individual segments but there were three exceptions, namely <sp->, <sc-> and <st-> alliterated as clusters.²⁹ Also, the identity condition for alliterating consonants

²⁸ As Minkova (2003) points out: '[t]he interpretation of Snorri's text that non-identical vowels alliterate better can only be taken as a post-hoc summary of the Old Norse tradition' (pp. 136-137). The asymmetry between consonant and vowel alliteration has been a matter of a long linguistic debate. According to Lass (1995): '[...] given the specificity of the system elsewhere, the restrictiveness of consonantal alliteration and the laxness of vowel alliteration suggests that the latter might be misinterpreted, swept under the rug, as an unmotivated 'elsewhere'... This is weak, and may show a facile disrespect for the technical proficiency of the practitioners of a major verse tradition: [...] once they had alliteration, vowels were just a *locus desparatus*' (p. 143). Recognizing the discrepancy, linguists have proposed different hypotheses to account for this lack of perfect assonance in verses with vocalic alliteration. The major proposals include a theory of a shared [-consonantal] feature, a hypothesis of diachronic vowel identity, and an analysis in terms of abstract representation with a null/zero onset. Recently, Lass (1995) vindicated a glottal stop theory, proposed earlier by Hammerich (1948). This theory hinges on the assumption that the vowels are, in fact, preceded by an identical onset segment, namely [ʔ]. This hypothesis minimizes the abstractness embedded in the zero-onset theory. It is based on idealization out of observable phonetic behavior, and seems to be corroborated independently by scribal practice, namely by occasional deletion of <h> before unstressed vowels and insertion of inorganic <h> in apparently onsetless syllables (Minkova 2000).

²⁹ Attempts have been made to account for cluster alliteration by referring to the language-specific phonological constraint on s-onset in English resulting from the unique status of the fricative in Indo-European languages. Kuryłowicz (1966) suggested that the similarity between Gothic reduplication and Old English cluster alliteration may not be accidental: 'Gothic, in spite of a complete lack of poetical texts, completes the evidence of all the other O. Germanic languages represented by alliteration' (p. 196). Suzuki (1996) proposed to explain the phenomenon by positing a rule of adjunction: 'The exceptional status of /s/ as regards