

Zakład Języka Angielskiego, Uniwersytet Warszawski, Warszawa

MONIKA OPALIŃSKA

Metre and interpretation of the *Exeter Book* elegies

Metrum i interpretacja elegii z *Exeter Book*

SUMMARY

The present paper is concerned with the relation between the Old English versification system and the meaning of poetical passages written in the vernacular. Selected examples from the 10th-century Exeter Codex elegies (The Library of Dean and Chapter, Exeter, Ms 3501), discussed in the paper, show that the knowledge of the fundamental metrical rules paves the way to the understanding of intricate and semantically challenging poetical cruces. Examination of metrical patterns helps to bridge the gap between the purely literary descriptions and the linguistic analysis of the Anglo-Saxon versification system. Contemporary studies of metre constrain intuitive solutions by establishing underlying patterns common to both poetical composition and language. Close analysis of some ambiguous poetical passages from the *Exeter Book* elegies indicates that such formal approaches offer an objective way to resolve controversial poetical verses.

Keywords: Old English versification system, meaning of poetical passages, metrical rules, semantics of text

Metrical studies of Old English poetry go back to the end of the 19th century when Eduard Sievers proposed a descriptive taxonomy of old Germanic alliterative verse lines. The classification of metrical types and patterns presented in his *Altgermanische Metrik* has served as reference for all the studies concerned with old Germanic metrics ever since 1893 when the book was published.¹ Although

¹ Parts of the book were translated into English by Bessinger and Karl, and published in 1968 in the *Essential Articles for the Study of Old English Poetry*. A comprehensive outline of Sievers' theory, furnished with some contemporary advances in the field, is presented in an introductory essay on versification by R. D. F. Fulk in Pope (2001: 129–158).

theoretical adequacy of Sievers' analysis is debatable, its descriptive accuracy is indisputable. Being so fundamental Sievers' work remains "a book which scholars will continue to use or neglect at their peril".²

In the early thirties of the 20th century a Polish linguist, Jerzy Kuryłowicz, published a number of studies concerned with Indo-European metrics in which he traced the relation between linguistic categories and metre.³ Working on comparative material, he was able to find parallel phenomena in independent traditions, represented by categories as distinct typologically 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 (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), Drescher and Lahiri (1991), Hayes (1983) and Russom (1987, 1990, 1998).

Recent years have witnessed a revival of interest in the formal study of metre in a way that helps to bridge the gulf between literary and linguistic analysis of poetic language. Formal, linguistic studies of metre offer analytical tools to measure and constrain intuitive statements about poetical style. The authors of *Formal Approaches to Poetry* rightly claim that "[i]t is only a matter of time before students of literature rediscover metrical analysis". (cf. Drescher and Friedberg 2006: 3). Early Germanic alliterative verses are within the scope of current developments in the theory of metre (cf. Drescher and Lahiri 1991, Russom 1998, Árnason 2006). In the light of unsettled controversies concerning this poetical tradition the analysis of Old English metrical system becomes an intrinsically interesting issue in itself. As such it has been the subject of numerous and often contradictory studies over the past years (cf. McCully and Anderson 1996).

² This quotation echoes the words of Neil Ker addressed at his grand predecessor – the 18th-century palaeographer Humphrey Wanley, like himself engaged in cataloguing Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. In the Introduction to his *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* Ker pays homage to the achievements of his renowned forerunner and emphasizes the responsibility of his followers (cf. Ker 1957: xiii). Eduard Sievers' 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). Also, 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 is by no means confined to historical data. Some of his linguistic observations, like the fine distinctions in the degree of consonantal sonority, are still recognized in contemporary phonology.

³ 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).

Practically all comprehensive analyses of Old English metre are based on *Beowulf*— ‘a unique long poem in traditional style dealing with traditional subject matter’ (cf. Russom 1998: 8). This is hardly surprising in view of the length and internal coherence of the text. 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 3,182 alliterative lines. The cramped handwriting at the end of folio 201 may suggest scribal effort to complete the text, since this is the verso of the last page of the quire. The compound adjective *loŷfgeornost* (most eager for fame), written at the bottom margin of this folio, may have thus been the last word of *Beowulf*. Yet, even if it were not, the number of attested lines here 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 fairly reliable corpus for metrical investigations.⁴

Since traditional subject matter is an important factor in the analysis of Old English metre, the *Exeter Book* (The Library of Dean and Chapter, Exeter, Ms 3501), a manuscript which contains poems rooted in the conventional Germanic imagery, seems to be a natural target for complementary studies in the field. The codex is usually identified with the *micel English boŷc be gehwilcum þingum on leŷoDwiŷsan geworht* (a great book in English about many things written in verse), mentioned in the list of donations to the cathedral given by Leofric, bishop of Exeter from 1050 to 1072.⁵ Indeed, the *Exeter Book* is almost unique among the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts in that it contains only poetical texts, the majority of which were composed according to classical versification rules.⁶ Among

⁴ Metrists usually emphasize not only the length of an analysed text, but also its contents or theme (cf. Russom 1998: 8f). Eddic poems on native Scandinavian subjects, written in the form of *fornyrDislag* (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 (cf. Russom 1998: 9, 136ff).

⁵ A copy of the donation list appears on fol. 1v, bound in with *Codex Exoniensis*. An electronic edition of the entire codex along with the critical apparatus, updated bibliography and codicological details was prepared by Muir (2006).

⁶ Notably, the *Junius Manuscript* (Junius 11, Bodleian Library, Oxford) is another major codex of Anglo-Saxon vernacular poetry entirely in verse. In contrast to the *Exeter Book*, Junius 11 contains fewer but longer and thematically akin texts. The first of its four biblical poems, *Genesis*, extends over 2936 verse-lines, which nearly reaches the number of lines in *Beowulf*. However, the

notable exceptions diverging from the standard patterns are *The Riming Poem* (fols. 94r–95v), which combines alliteration and rhymes, and *The Phoenix* (fols. 55v–65v), which contains an Anglo-Latin macaronic passage. A few other texts, for example *Deor* (fols. 100r–100v), *Wulf and Eadwacer* (fols. 100v–101r) and *The Ruin* (fols. 123v–124v) also bear signs of foreign influence and non-indigenous patterns of verse composition. On further inspection, *Codex Exoniensis* turns out to be a miscellaneous collection in which traditional pieces, such as *The Wanderer* or *The Seafarer*, border on prayers, riddles, saints' lives, maxims, religious poems and a number of other poetical texts which elude modern classificatory criteria. The poems vary in length, but none of them may be compared to *Beowulf* as regards the number of verse-lines. Manuscript collation likewise suggests complex history and multiple sources behind the various poems bound in with the *Exeter Book*. Furthermore, the texts may have had heterogeneous dialectal provenance. Although the textual material was filtered through the hands of a single scribe, some traces of its original linguistic features further contribute to the internal diversification of the corpus. Many folios now missing in more than one of the 17 *Codex* gatherings may have contained specimens of an even more varied structure and history.

Clearly, these reasons preclude attempts to treat the poetical texts gathered in Ms 3501 as a corpus equivalent to *Beowulf*, even though the total number of poetical lines in the former grossly exceeds that in the latter. Yet, internal variation, both in terms of theme and structural composition, makes *Codex Exoniensis* an interesting complementary source to metrical studies *vis-à-vis Beowulf*. On the one hand, poems from the *Codex* share enough of the common core to be compared to the British Museum exemplar, and on the other, they exhibit some outstanding features which stray away from the standard patterns and thus provide contrastive material.

In Sievers' analysis of Germanic poetry the fundamental unit 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, embodied by secondarily stressed syllables and unstressed syllables. The three levels of stress define the corresponding metrical grades: lift, half-lift and drop. Each verse comprises two feet which, ideally, coincide with syntactic constituents. The basic verse structure is fairly flexible. In particular, the number of weak positions represented by the unstressed syllables can be multiplied. The distribution of strong and weak positions is represented by a framework of five types (A–E) marked by descending

subject matter of the former text has substantial influence on its lexical structure, which abounds in biblical terms and names. The efforts to accommodate these foreign words to the alliterative contour are clearly visible, but other metrical relations, for example the distribution of stressed and unstressed syllables or syllable weight are hardly consistent with the standard paradigm.

frequency. The simple cases exhibit one-to-one relationship between metrical positions and syllables. However, it is often the case that more syllables fill each position. This extension is by no means confined to the weak ones. A strong metrical position can be filled either by a single heavy (or long) syllable or by a sequence of two light (or short) syllables.⁷ The phenomenon of metrical equivalence, known as Resolution, was first discussed at length by Jerzy Kuryłowicz (1930, 1949) and later by other metrists.⁸ Metrical accents coincide with lexical categories in a way that broadly reflects phrasal stress. Namely, content words occupy strong positions, while function words – the weak ones. This distinction is additionally highlighted by the alliterative contour, which normally ties the metrically salient lexical word(s) of the first verse with an obligatory single alliterative element in the second hemistich.⁹

Even though many aspects of the Old English versification system remain controversial, the basic constituents and internal hierarchy of an alliterative verse-line have been established with some certainty. In the apparently monotonous and repetitive alliterative scansion of Old English verses these metrical elements occasionally act as semantic cues. Metrical coherence of an alliterative verse-line is the signpost to the hidden meaning of some intricate and semantically obscure passages of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Selected examples from the *Exeter Book* elegies discussed below show that metre can interact with the grammar and meaning of poetry in subtle and yet enlightening ways.

Alliteration, the most conspicuous element of old Germanic verse structure, often accentuates the words which are important to the understanding of the message or appreciation of a poem's internal composition. The most noticeable cases involve passages in which strict alliteration rules are in some ways relaxed. The repetitive phrase of *Deor, þæs ofereode, þisses swa mæg*, which serves the function of a quasi-refrain, is a salient example of such intentional extension of metrical constraints. Here, the alliterative scansion hinges on the repetition of an interdental fricative in two function words: *þæs* and *þisses*. The emphasis laid

⁷ The issue of syllable weight is, in fact, more complex. For the sake of the present paper suffice it to say that in Germanic languages a heavy syllable may be implemented by a long nucleus (V̄) or a short vocalic nucleus followed by a consonant in the coda (VC). For details see, for example, Katamba (1989), Lass (1994: 35ff), Dresher and Lahiri (1991).

⁸ Resolution, which has its correlate in Old English phonology (i.e. the process of High Vowel Deletion, which deletes high vowels after a single heavy syllable or after two light ones), shows affinities with similar phenomena in other metrical systems, and, crucially, is supported by a number of compelling examples from Anglo-Saxon vernacular verses (cf. Dresher and Lahiri 1991). Nevertheless, it is still regarded as controversial by some metrists.

⁹ It is commonly assumed that the first hemistich may contain maximally two alliterative accents, whereas the second – only one. While the principle is true in the majority of cases, the examples discussed below show that in residual instances the constraint may be suspended in the a-verse.

on these deictic pronouns introduces contrast between the past and the present, drawing a subtle boundary between bitter resignation and patient endurance of human vicissitudes in the light of Christian order.

In addition to such outstanding examples, there are many others in which aural cues coincide in a discreet and natural way with the structural and semantic organization of verses. Among such semantically challenging and structurally coherent passages are some lines from *The Wanderer*, an *Exeter Book* elegy. The alliterative pattern of the opening line of *The Wanderer* accentuates the initial syllable of the noun *aŷnhaga*, one of the key words designating the principal persona of the poem (see 1a). A parallel structure occurs also in line 40 where vocalic alliteration draws attention to the same initial component of the compound noun *aŷnhogan* (see 1b).¹⁰

(1) *The Wanderer*, lines 1, 40: *aŷnhaga*–*aŷnhoga*

a. line 1 Èoft him ÈaŷnÇhaga || Èaŷre geÈbiŷdeD

b. line 40 Èearmne ÈaŷnÇhogan || Èoft geÈbindaD

The exact meaning and origin of both forms, *aŷnhaga* and its much more rare variant *aŷnhoga*, are uncertain.¹¹ The first constituent, *aŷn*, often acts in Old English as a function word ('a, an, one') and is outside the alliterative scansion. In many cases, however, *aŷn* (and its feminine form *aŷna*) acquires the sense analogous to the Latin terms *unus* and *solus*. This equivalence emerges in Old English translations of biblical passages. For example, the Latin passus *Et ipse solus in terra* (And he [was] all alone in the land) is rendered in Old English as *Ond he aŷna wæs on lande*, while *Deus unus scit* (lit. God is the only one who knows) becomes *Metod aŷna wat*. The aspect of solitude, expressed via the adjectival constituent *aŷn-*, is present in *Beowulf* (line 2356) where the hero becomes *earm aŷnhaga* as the sole survivor of Hygelac's raid on the Franks. In the Old English *Phoenix* (lines: 87, 346) the bird is called *aŷnhoga*. Being *unica avis* – the only one of its kind, it is truly unique. So is the cruel death – *enge aŷnhoga* from *The life of St. Guthlac* (line 997).

¹⁰ Here and below (i.e. in points 2–6) the following notational convention has been used: alliteration is marked by underlining, strong metrical position (i.e. metrical lift) is represented by [/], which corresponds to primary stress [È]; secondary stress [Ç] coincides with half-lift [^], unstressed syllables are marked by an [x]. Resolution of light syllables in a strong metrical position is represented by [⌣]. Foot boundary is marked by a single vertical line: [|], while caesura – by a double vertical line: [|:].

¹¹ According to some sources, *aŷnhaga* and *aŷnhoga* may represent two independent lexemes rather than co-occurring variants of the same word. Yet, Dunning and Bliss (1969: 37ff) who devote much discussion to these forms claim that '[i]t is impossible to discern any differentiation of meaning corresponding to the differentiation of form' and add that 'both forms appear, apparently with identical reference, in *The Wanderer* and *The Phoenix*'.

The adjective appears in a similar compound in *The Seafarer* (line 62) – *aŷnfloga* (one who flies alone, a solitary flier) and another one in *Beowulf* (lines: 165 and 449) – *aŷngenga* (one who walks alone). In both instances, the second defining element of a compound can be derived directly from a related verb, that is *fleogan* (to fly) and *gangan* (to walk), respectively. In the case of *aŷnhaga~aŷnhoga* there is no agreement whether the final constituent should be derived from the verb *hycgan* (to think) or rather from the noun *haga* (fence, enclosure) in the absence of a denominative verb **hecgan* (to enclose) which is unrecorded (cf. Dunning and Bliss 1969: 38). *Per analogiam* to the examples from *The Seafarer* and *Beowulf* given above, the two lexical elements, that is *aŷn-* and *-haga~hoga*, supposedly complement each other semantically. Thus, the *aŷnhaga* may be someone who like Andreas, the saint hermit from an Anglo-Saxon poem by the same title, encloses himself to be all alone, to meditate in seclusion (cf. *Andreas*, line 1351). Solitude, peculiar to eremitical existence, may be also discerned in a Lambeth Psalter gloss to the Latin *solitarius*: *aŷnhoga oððe aŷnwuniende*.¹²

Modern translators of *The Wanderer* often circumvent this aspect of loneliness and isolation. Some translate *aŷnhaga* by the relatively neutral but vague phrase ‘the solitary man’ (cf. Bantock 1972: 14, Gordon 1977: 73, Treharne and Wu 2002: 13) or ‘the man on his own’ (Bradley 1991: 322). Others equate it with the following *eardstapa* (wanderer, line 6; cf. Crossley-Holland 1984: 50, Raffel 1964: 59). Yet, even if *aŷnhaga* and *eardstapa* designate the same person, the terms highlight quite distinct qualities of the Wanderer’s lonely existence. In particular, the term *aŷnhaga~aŷnhoga* used twice in the poem, may define the hero’s ultimate designation. The author draws attention to the term by incorporating it into the alliterative contour of lines 1 and 40.¹³ Thus stressed *aŷnhaga* from line 1 of *The Wanderer* is conjoined with the wise man from the poem’s epilogue who sits apart in secret contemplation: *snottor on mode gesæt him sundor æt rune* (line 111).

¹² Dunning and Bliss (1969: 39–39) claim that the terms *aŷnhoga* and *aŷnwuniende* (present participle, cf. *wunian* ‘to live, to dwell’) need not be synonymous. On the contrary, the editors suggest that the glossator may have first rendered the technical term ‘hermit’ (*aŷnhoga*) and then add the more prosaic and etymological meaning ‘one who lives alone’. Thus, *aŷnhaga~aŷnhoga* may be “someone ‘who is alone’, irrespective of the circumstances of the solitude”.

¹³ It is interesting to note that *eardstapa* in line 6 likewise forms part of an alliterative pattern. As in line 1 and 40, also in this case alliteration involves vowels: Swa cwæD Èeardstapa || ÈearfeDa gemyndig. If the rules of Old Icelandic versification were pan-Germanic, this line lacks the prescribed elegance as the alliteration here involves vocalic elements of identical quality, i.e. the diphthong /æa/. Apparently, the identity condition, essential in the case of consonants, was suspended for vowels, at least in Old Icelandic. According to Snorri Sturlusson, the use of identical vowels in an alliterative line was misbegotten.

Being the clearly discernible element of a metrical line, alliteration alone does not constitute its skeleton. Rather, sound repetition is embedded in the integrated framework of metrical stresses which are, in turn, sensitive to the lexical components of a given line. Among the verses of another *Exeter Book* elegy, *The Ruin*, one comes across an ambiguous passage, the interpretation of which is strongly determined by its metrical framework. The controversy over line 20 of the poem concerns the morpho-syntactic relations between three lexical elements of the first hemistich: *weall walan wiŷrum*. Supposedly, one of these items is an autonomous lexical word, while the remaining two form a nominal compound. In the absence of any explicit palaeographical cues modern editors assume one of two potentially plausible variants: *weall walan-wiŷrum* (Klinck 1992: 214) or *weall-walan wiŷrum* (Muir 2006).¹⁴ These elements form part of a sentence which begins in line 18 and refers to the construction of the buildings: *moŷd mo [...] yne swiftne gebrægd/hwætred in hringas, hygeroŷf gebond/weall walan wiŷrum wundrum togædre*. Due to manuscript damage the text is partially lost, but the attested fragment is large enough to reconstruct the general sense. Klinck (1992: 215) translates these lines as follows: “with wondrous art the stout-hearted one ingeniously bound the wall together with strips of wire into circular structures”. According to this interpretation, concurrent with the editor’s reading of the dubious verse (i.e. *weall walan-wiŷrum*), *walan-wiŷrum* are ‘metal cramps’. Looking for arguments in favour of this version, Klinck recalls a similar phrase from *Beowulf* (line 1031), *wiŷrum bewunden walan* (‘crest wound with wire’; emended to *walu* by Krapp-Dobbie and *wala* by Klaeber) and two glosses: *walana wiŷra* (describing two strips of raised ornamentation, 1 Kings 7: 24) and *wala (vibices)*.¹⁵ The connection between *wala(n)* and *wiŷr* in two other places, which she unfortunately does not specify, lead her to conclude that “it is these elements which should be treated as a compound, and not *weallwalan*” (Klinck: 1992: 214).

Alternatively, *walan* may stand for ‘foundation’ rather than ‘strips of wire’ or ‘cramps’. In conjunction with *weall* it would then designate the base of a building or the underlying framework of the wall: *weall-walan wiŷrum*. Grein (1861–1864), who first proposed this solution on the basis of Old English *wyrt-walan*, glossing Latin *radices* (roots), was followed by most editors, notably by Muir (2006). The shift of morphosyntactic boundary changes the meaning of the passage significantly. Klinck’s reading of verse 20a suggests that it was the outer part of the wall which was wound or strengthened with wire cramps, perhaps in an ornamental way. Grein’s interpretation, by contrast, implies that the wall base or its foundation (*weall-walan*) was bound with wire (*wiŷrum*). Adjusting

¹⁴ Anglo-Saxon scribes represented compound formations in the same way as phrases, that is, each lexical constituent was written separately.

¹⁵ For further details and references see Klinck (1992: 214–215).

Klinck's own words, cited above, to this alternative reading, one may translate the entire section in the following way: 'with wondrous art the stout-hearted one ingeniously bound the foundations of the wall together with wire into circular structures'. Apparently, the alteration is not that important. Yet, considering the uniquely descriptive character of this poem and the accumulation of architectural details, one cannot help thinking that representational accuracy was one of its author's intentions.

Apparently, both options, *weall walan-wiŷŷrum* and *weall-walan wiŷrum*, seem to be acceptable. In the former, the strong masculine noun *weall* (acc. sg.) is the object of the verb *gebond* (3 sg. past tense) while the putative compound *walan-wiŷrum* (dat. pl.) plays the instrumental role of the adverbial of manner. In the latter, the adverbial function is implemented by *wiŷrum* alone, while the nominal compound *weall-walan* becomes the object of *gebond*. Being the second component of the compound formation – *walan* defines its grammatical function. As the clause direct object it ought to be rendered in the accusative. Assuming that – *an* is not part of the root/stem, but represents an inflectional suffix, this interpretation seems entirely plausible. Other forms of the word, including the examples quoted above, imply that *walan* may have represented an oblique case, while the nominative form may have been *wala* or *walu*. This must have been the interpretation of early editors who emended the attested manuscript forms and lexicographers who posit the form *weallwala* in their dictionary entries (cf. Clark-Hall 1960: 399). In view of these comparative data, the assumption that *walan* represents an inflected form seems compelling.

Yet, the evidence based on the attested glosses is confusing. In one case, Latin nominative plural (*radices*) is expressed via Old English *wala*, while in the other, the same grammatical case and number (*vibices*) is rendered in the vernacular by –*walan*. Two partially complementary answers to the puzzle seem plausible. First, the forms may represent independent lexemes: strong feminine *walu* (nom./acc. pl. *wala/wale*) and weak masculine *wala* (nom./acc. pl. *walan*). Second, historically related forms may have developed different paradigmatic variants with independent case and gender distinctions. This interpretation is compatible with the data given in Clark-Hall (1960: 396, 399) who lists a feminine noun *walu* (ridge, bank; rib, comb (of a helmet), weal, mark of a blow), tentatively suggesting that this might be the form used in line 1031 of *Beowulf*. In an independent lexical entry Clark-Hall gives a masculine noun *wyrtwala* (root, stock; base, lower part), which is followed by a few alternative variants, notably a feminine form *wyrtwalu*. *Weallwala*, specified as a masculine noun, is defined as 'part of a house wall/foundation' via reference to line 20 in *The Ruin*. Gender variation, typical of many vernacular substantives, may have partly contributed to the confusion or lexical interchange of this relatively rare noun.

The standard dictionary of Old English by Bosworth and Toller (1898) differentiates between *wal* (some part of a helmet), supposedly a cognate of later Middle High German *wæl/wæle* (contrivance for fastening the crest of a helmet) and a weak masculine *wala* (-*an*) with the basic sense ‘root’ and its metaphorical extension *ad* (*æt*) *walan* “to the root of the matter, to certainty” (*ad liquidum*). The presence of question marks next to both entries implies that the proposed definitions are plausible but not certain. Yet, the authors associate the first form *wæl*, unspecified for grammatical gender, with the term used in *Beowulf*, emending the attested manuscript inscription appropriately (i.e. *Ymb ðæs helmes hrof heafodbeorge wirum bewunden wal an utan (walan utan, Ms) heold*) and translating the entire passage as follows: “about the helm’s top a ‘wal’ wire-girt guarded on the outside the head’s defence (i.e. the helmet)”. (cf. Bosworth-Toller 1954: 1163). The dictionary further provides several related meanings for the compound *wyrtwala* (i.e. the root of a plant; a root, source; the foot of a hill, lower side of a wood, field, etc.) attesting its alternative paradigmatic variants, that is weak masculine *wyrtwala*, -*an* and feminine *wyrtwalu*, -*e*. Also here *weallwala* is treated as a weak masculine compound meaning ‘wall-foundation’ (Bosworth-Toller 1954: 1175). A question mark added to this entry likewise implies that the proposed meaning is not definitive.

Klinck’s resolution to treat *walan-wiŷrum* as a compound instead of the generally accepted alternative *weall-walan* goes against dictionary evidence. To be sure, lexicographers manifest the conjectural character of the latter by positing question-marks alongside the proposed grammatical details and definitions. Yet, however scarce and divergent, the attested examples constitute a frame of reference for the componential analysis of the term. Crucially, they imply that the form *walan*, used in *The Ruin*, is morphologically complex. Klinck seems to ignore this problem entirely, even though the proposed variant violates the rules of word-formation which require that the first element of a compound be uninflected. In fact, the absence of an inflectional suffix makes it possible to distinguish between a true compound from a phrasal group.¹⁶ This aspect gains particular significance in the light of routine scribal practice to represent the lexical components of a true compound one by one, as if they were autonomous, morphologically independent words. Assuming that -*an* in *walan* is an inflectional ending, an option which cannot be excluded, a putative compound *walan-wiŷrum* is ill-formed.

¹⁶ In some cases, a phrase is modelled on a true compound, as in the following examples from *Beowulf*: *folces cweŷn* (line 1932) versus *folccweŷn* (line 641) or *beŷaga hord* (line 2284) versus *beŷaghordes* (894). Manuscript rendition of both groups is the same, namely, each word is written separately. In the absence of any palaeographical cues inflectional suffixes, here -*es* in *folces* and -*a* in *beŷaga*, mark these items as autonomous nouns forming phrasal units with *cweŷn* and *hord*, respectively. By contrast, the same lexical forms remain uninflected when used as free morphemes in a compound.

The *walan-wiŷrum* hypothesis hinges mainly on fairly lax semantic parallels and similar lexical collocations. Apparently, it is supported by metrical analysis. Klinck pinpoints the fact that the newly generated form “gives a D-type verse [...] with resolved stress in the second lift” (Klinck 1992: 214f). The representation in (2) below indicates that such an analysis is indeed possible. Resolution of the light syllable in *walan*, expected in the strong metrical position, compresses two adjacent syllables to one metrically relevant grade. As a result, the emerging metrical contour implements Sievers’ basic D pattern: *lift, lift (resolved), half-lift, drop*.

(2) *The Ruin*, line 20: *weall walan-wiŷrum*
 Sievers’ Type D with resolved stress: / | ʔ x \ x Èweall ÈwalanÇwiŷrum

Klinck does not develop the metrical argument, but careful analysis of the alternative reading – *weallwalan wiŷrum* – accepted by most editors, reveals unexpected problems. As the second constituent of a lexical compound *walan* now bears secondary stress. Predictably, the following noun, *wiŷrum*, occupies the strong metrical position and its heavy initial syllable carries primary stress. The emerging pattern of stressed and unstressed elements, represented in (3a), is not compatible with any of the types recognized in the Sieversian model. Its metrical contour shows some affinities with Type E, the basic form of which includes *lift, half-lift, drop* and *lift (/ \ x /)*, but there is a significant difference. The metrical scansion in (3a) ends in an unstressed syllable, a phenomenon unrecorded in the examples representing Type E. Apparently, a similar case occurs in verse 33a of *The Battle of Maldon* which ends in bisyllabic noun *bregu* (sovereign, chief). However, as shown in (3b), the initial syllable of *bregu* is light and thus resolved. This means that the two syllables of *bregu* count as one and combine to form a strong metrical position. This mechanism does not apply to *wiŷrum* from (3a), because here the initial syllable is heavy.¹⁷

(3) *The Ruin*, verse 20a versus *The Battle of Maldon*, verse 33a
 a. / \ x | / x ÈweallÇwalan Èwiŷrum
 b. / \ x | ʔ x ÈNorDÇmanna Èbregu

The presence of three stressed words (*weall, walan, wiŷrum*) in verse 20a of *The Ruin* and, crucially, the unstressed syllable in the final position of the metrical domain make the representation in (3a) suspect. Although Sievers identifies two further subtypes of Type E, neither of these ends in a metrical drop. In fact, it is

¹⁷ The initial syllable of *walan* (3a) is not resolved even though it is light, because it occupies a weak metrical position. Arguably, resolution of syllables carrying secondary stress is very rare (see Pope 2001: 146, fn. 34).

D-type verse that regularly terminates in an unstressed syllable – a detail which seems to support Klinck’s analysis represented in (2). Unfortunately, as argued above, the latter interpretation leads to serious grammatical incongruity. Therefore, the fundamental question is whether the metrical-grammatical mismatch occurring in verse 20a of *The Ruin* can be somehow reconciled.

According to some metrists, “it may be unclear whether certain verses comprising three stressed words should be classified as belonging to type D or type E” (Pope 2001: 147). Relatively clear cases involve verses with double alliteration (see 4 a-b).¹⁸

(4) Examples of Sievers’ Type D and Type E verses with double alliteration

a. Type D: /|/ x x \ Èeald Èenta geÇweorc *The Wanderer*, verse 86a

b. Type E: / \ x | / Ètwelf Çwintra ÈtiŸd *Beowulf*, verse 147a

Structurally parallel verses with single alliteration are less straightforward. Metrical opacity in such instances may sometimes be cleared by syntactic and semantic integrity. Syntactic relations, in particular, tend to be more strict within a metrical foot than across foot boundaries. For example, verse 17b from *The Seafarer*, *hægl scurum fleŸag* (hail fell in showers), is an extension of Type D, because *scuŸrum* (dat. pl.) is used adverbially and modifies the verb *fleŸag* (3 sg. past tense); see 5a. By contrast, verse 125b from *The Dream of the Rood*, *fela ealra gebaŸd* (of these many experienced), represents type E (with resolution of the initial syllable) since the adjective *ealra* (gen. pl.) depends on *fela* (pron., usually with gen.); see 5b.

(5) Syntactic integrity within verse

a. Type D: /|/ x \ hægl scuŸrum fleŸag *The Seafarer*, verse 17b

b. Type E: / x̄ \ x | x / fela ealra gebaŸd *The Dream of the Rood*,
verse 125b

Some verses, for example 45a *sin-sorgna gedreŸag* (the multitude of perpetual sorrow) from *The Wife’s Lament*, are ambiguous (see 6). Being a compound *sin-sorgna* (gen. pl.) should fill the first foot (as in Type E) to ensure syntactic integrity of the verse. As long as this aspect is given priority, the verse may be analysed as Type E with foot boundary following *sorgna* (see 6a). However, since both lexical elements begin with the same consonant, they potentially form an alliterative sequence. Foot division in Type E inevitably enforces double alliteration in the first foot. Moreover, the second alliteration unit anchors an illicit candidate since

¹⁸ The examples given in (4) and (5) are quoted after Pope (2001: 147f). The verse in (4a) is a variation of the basic Type D, the final unaccented syllable changing place with the secondary accent. A parallel extension of the basic type is attested in (5a) below.

sorgna, in contradistinction to *gedreag*, carries secondary stress and thus fills a relatively weaker metrical position. In order to satisfy the alliterative constraint the foot boundary should precede *sorgna* (see 6b). Clearly, the resulting structure introduces a serious mismatch because foot boundary does not coincide with word (i.e. compound) boundary. Hence, (6b) is not a satisfactory alternative.

(6) Metrical and syntactic mismatch: *sin-sorgna gedreŷag*, *Wife's Lament*, verse 45a

- a. Type E / \ x | x / Èsin-Çsorgna geÈdreŷag
 b. Type D /|/ x x \ Èsin-Èsorgna geÇdreŷag

Verses such as 45a from *The Wife's Lament* are relatively rare because compound formations seldom begin with identical phonetic elements. Complex verse patterns which contain three potentially alliterating words imply that within the same domain some lexical elements must have been metrically subordinate. Sievers' classificatory model is not equipped with an appropriate mechanism to capture hierarchical organization above the basic level. It can differentiate between syllables carrying primary and secondary stress and the unstressed ones, but it is unable to give the rationale for the fine distinctions in those cases where metrics and syntax are irreconcilable or at least controversial. Consequently, the evaluation of disputable verses is inevitably arbitrary within this paradigm.

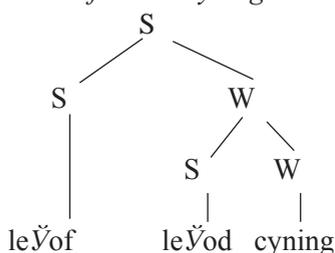
In a non-linear theory of metrical representation which qualifies correlation between metrical positions and their function such seemingly corrupt or irregular verses become legitimate. Among representational models Russom's word-based theory of metre (1987, 1990) seems to be equipped with adequate tools to account for such controversial cases. Russom's tree-structures, grounded in patterns of metrical prominence (which were outlined by Kuryłowicz 1970), are based on relations within metrical domains, i.e. foot and verse. Accordingly, the rule of alliteration states: "[w]hen two metrical constituents appear within the same metrical domain, and each constituent contains a primary arsis, label the first constituent strong and the second weak, and mark the leftmost primary arsis for alliteration" (Russom 1990: 443).¹⁹ Russom illustrates the mechanism with a number of regular examples including *leŷof leŷod-cyning* ('beloved nation-king', *Beowulf*, verse 54a) where foot-boundaries coincide with word-boundaries and alliterative elements occur in default positions, evenly distributed in each foot. Given the hierachical structure in (7a), alliteration is blocked on *cyning* due to

¹⁹ As Russom (1990: 438) explains, the proposed rule of alliteration "does not apply to the stressed syllables of the actual phonetic material, rather to the strong metrical positions occupied by those stressed syllables". To paraphrase Kuryłowicz (1970: 16–20), alliteration should be regarded as "a poeticised version of the Old English compound stress rule".

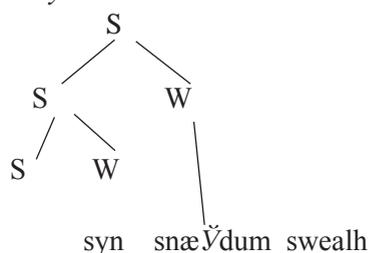
deep embedding of the noun which is dominated by two weak nodes. In contrast to (7a), the representation in (7b) allows for optional three-element alliteration.²⁰ Since the major constituent break falls after the second stressed syllable this tree diagram is significantly different. Notably, the third lexical element, which implements the second foot, may optionally alliterate, because it is dominated by a single weak node.

(7) Alliteration in a tree-structural model (cf. Russom 1990)

a. *leŷof leŷod-cyning*



b. *syn-snaeŷdum swealh*



Returning to the dubious 20a verse from *The Ruin*, it is worth reconsidering its status in the light of the tree-structural representation. Apparently, in the traditional Sieversian system this verse seems to implement Type D: *weall walan-wiŷrum*. However, this classification is impaired by the fact that it enforces a morphologically incorrect structure as *walan*, presumably an inflected form (acc. sg.), is entrapped in the word-internal position. The alternative representation, *weall-walan wiŷrum*, repairs the morphological structure but generates a metrical pattern incompatible with any of the types. Yet, outside Sievers' taxonomy the latter representation gains weight.

The variant proposed by Klinck, *weall walan-wiŷrum*, faces a serious obstacle in the non-linear representation (see 8a). Verse-internal division reflects the provisionally stipulated major constituent break and defines foot domains. Since the verse appears in the first half of the line, the highest node is marked as strong. The first foot, implemented by the direct object *weall*, is also marked strong, while the second foot, being heavy and branching, contains two metrical constituents, *walan* (S) and *wiŷrum* (W), which represent the adverbial. Being the last element of the left-headed tree, *wiŷrum* is its weakest branch dominated by two weak nodes. The model predicts that a doubly embedded noun, which is the weak constituent of a weak constituent, never alliterates. Indeed, structurally similar examples from *Beowulf* satisfy this constraint. In fact, Russom (1990: 446)

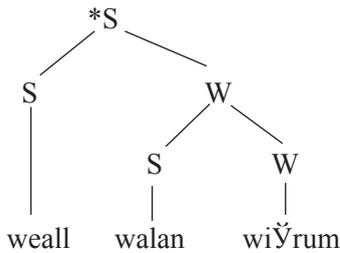
²⁰ In the following representations, i.e. (7) and (8), S stands for the 'strong node/position', W – for 'the weak node/position'. The association lines, both single and branching, reveal hierarchical relations and dependencies between higher and lower nodes within the a-verse.

claims that ‘this type of a half-line never has two alliterating syllables in the heavy second foot’. Hence, the proposed structural division of the major constituents contradicts the attested data.

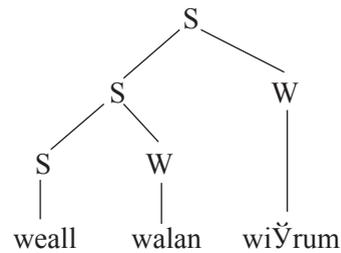
The alternative solution, by contrast, complies with the theory predictions (see 8b). The constituent break posited after *walan* makes the first foot heavy. Its two elements, *weall* and *walan*, fill the strong and the weak nodes, respectively. The second foot is light and dominated by a single weak node – *wiŷrum*. Clearly, the number of alliterating segments remains the same, but they are structurally justified. Crucially, none of the alliterating words is dominated by two weak nodes. In such complex verses, alliteration is obligatory on the leftmost strong node. Optional alliteration may occupy the second foot, which is the weak constituent of a strong constituent. However, alliteration is not precluded on the more deeply embedded weak constituent of the first foot either, because it is dominated by a strong node on the higher level.

(8) *The Ruin*, verse 20a, *weall walan wiŷrum*, in non-linear representation

a. *weall walan-wiŷrum*



b. *weall-walan wiŷrum*



Theory-driven argument may not be decisive in itself, but it carries more weight in conjunction with the grammatical and lexical evidence. Klinck’s reading, though compatible with an attested metrical pattern, ignores the linguistic cues entirely. The original interpretation of verse 20a, namely *weall-walan wiŷrum*, founded on the long-standing philological and editorial tradition, seems to be endorsed by both the linguistic data and an alternative metrical analysis. Both variants are largely conjectural. Yet, (8b), strengthened by reasoning based on independent grounds, seems more cogent.

Verses with complex alliterative contour like (7b) are not common. In fact, they form metrical residue. Yet, their scarcity follows from the linguistic preconditions rather than from formal constraints. *Beowulf* contains verses with double alliteration in the first foot, such as *Guð-Geata leŷod* (verse 1538a) or *beorht-beŷacen godes* (verse 570A), identical to the *sin-sorgna gedreah* from *The Wife’s Lament* discussed above. The poem also contains hemistichs like *syn-snæ#dum swealh* (verse 743a) in which all three lexical elements alliterate. Both

types provide formal grounds for the analysis of ambiguous cases, like verse 20a from *The Ruin*.

Clearly, the distinction between a weak constituent of a weak constituent and a weak constituent of a strong constituent is so subtle that it calls for questions concerning the psychological reality of the entities. Such discrete relations are not very likely to have been consciously considered by Anglo-Saxon poets (cf. Russom 1990: 448). Yet, the uncommon patterns scattered among the verses of *Beowulf* are not the effect of stylistic flamboyance of its author. Parallel sequences are attested in other poems as well. They can either be discarded as irrelevant residual forms, appropriately emended, or accepted as minor but legitimate types. Formal apparatus based on linguistic principles constrains intuitive evaluation of poetical data and helps to rationalize the less conventional patterns by finding them a place within a coherent system. Despite their highly abstract character, alternative models of metrical representation generate a typology based on linguistic principles instead of self-contained metrical taxonomy which divorces poetry from the language it speaks. Viewed from the perspective which weaves the language and poetical praxis Old English verses gain new and often unexpected significance.

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł omawia niektóre problemy metryki staroangielskiej, ilustrując je wybranymi fragmentami utworów poetyckich z datowanego na wiek X *Kodeksu z Exeter* (The Library of Dean and Chapter, Exeter, Ms 3501). Autorka stara się pokazać, w jaki sposób rytm i wersyfikacja kształtują znaczenie kluczowych fragmentów utworów, współpracując z semantyką i leksyką tekstu. Szczególny nacisk położono na te miejsca, w których relacje metryczne wchodzą w bezpośredni związek ze składnią i semantyką. Znajomość fundamentalnych zasad wersyfikacji staroangielskiej pozwala niekiedy rozstrzygnąć znaczenie spornych fragmentów, nadając interpretacji wiarygodne podstawy. Odwołujące się do kategorii językoznawczych współczesne teorie wersyfikacji są, obok klasycznych schematów, ważnym źródłem poznania zależności jakie istnieją pomiędzy materiają języka staroangielskiego a tkanką poetycką anglosaskich utworów.

Słowa kluczowe: staroangielski system wersyfikacyjny, znaczenie przejęć poetyckich, reguły metryczne, semantyka tekstu

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