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Metaphorical Density in Old English and Old Norse Poetry

Introduction

When we hear the term 'metaphor', we usually think of the semantic nature of a word. Many theories have been voiced on the subject: among others, the metaphorical relation has been identified as comparison, substitution, interaction or the mapping of one conceptual domain onto another.[1] The present analysis, however, is less concerned with the semantic than with the structural component of the metaphorical statement and then only with its occurrence in Old English and Old Norse poetry. Using Roman Jakobson's famous definition of the poetic function and Jan Mukařovský's principle of semantic accumulation as a basis, I will argue that the *structure* of the metaphorical statement considerably influences the degrees of metaphoricity that these two poetic corpora can achieve, and that these degrees are quite different in either poetry. Furthermore, since the discussion of variations and similarities would hardly be adequate without an examination of why they arose in the first place, it will be illustrated that Old English and Old Norse poetic metaphoricity reflects different literary conventions as well as more general socio-cultural developments (e.g. Christianization), thus giving us some valuable information about the past.

Definitions

In his essay 'Linguistics and Poetics' Roman Jakobson writes about poetic language:

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[1] For the last approach, see Lakoff and Turner 1989: ch. 2.

What is the empirical linguistic criterion of the poetic function? In par-
ticular, what is the indispensable feature inherent in any piece of
poetry? To answer this question we must recall the two basic modes of
arrangement used in verbal behavior, *selection* and *combination*. If
'child' is topic of the message, the speaker selects one among the
extant, more or less similar nouns like child, kid, youngster, tot, all of
them equivalent in a certain respect, and then, to comment on this
topic, he may select one of the semantically cognate verbs — sleeps,
dozes, nods, naps. Both chosen words combine in the speech chain.
The selection is produced on the basis of equivalence, similarity and
dissimilarity, synonymity and antonymity, while the combination, the
build-up sequence, is based on contiguity. *The poetic function projects
the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combi-
nation.* (1987: 71)

No doubt, Jakobson's notion of 'selection' needs to be modified. Selec-
tion is not a separate phenomenon but the result of contextuality. To
put it differently, what we wish to say will influence what words we
choose. With this modification in mind, however, Jakobson's definition
of the poetic principle provides an excellent starting point for the pres-
ent analysis. Poetic language, Jakobson argues, distinguishes itself from
everyday language by the encroachment of various modes of equiva-
lence on sentence contiguity.[2] Since these modes of equivalence include
similarity, and since similarity is an essential feature of the metaphorical
relation, metaphor inevitably obstructs the contiguity of a poem: the
greater the poem's metaphoricity, the greater the obstruction.

How, then, is this obstruction brought about, and what semantic and
mental processes are involved? One process is undoubtedly what Jan
Mukařovský calls 'semantic accumulation'.[3] According to Mukařovský,
language is contiguous and simultaneous. All syntactic elements follow
in sequence, but if this sequence were to take place without any consid-
eration of the preceding elements, Mukařovský argues, no unified mean-
ing could be established.[4] As a consequence, any contiguity must involve

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[2] Jakobson's association of metaphor with selection and of metonymy with combination
in his well-known essay "Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances" (1987: 109–14) needs to be
approached with caution, since metonymy is also a mode of selection.

[3] Mukařovský 1976: 53–54. And excellent synthesis of Jakobson's and Mukařovský's the-
ories is given in Steiner and Steiner 1979: 35–70. The article is a revised version of "The Re-
lational Axes of Poetic Language", which appeared as a postscript to Mukařovský's work.

[4] Language accumulation also plays a significant part in Stephen Pinker's cognitive
model of sentence understanding (1994: 192–230); see further footnotes 9 and 14. However,
Pinker does not offer any schema indicating this process.

semantic accumulation, giving rise to following process:

John	went	to	the	door
a	b	c	d	e
	a	b	c	d
		a	b	c
			a	b
				a

Language is temporal and a-temporal. We comprehend the individual units in sequence but also retain them in memory; if the second process did not take place, we could not combine them into larger units of meaning (e.g. phrases, sentences, etc). More important for the purpose of the present analysis, however, is the fact that retention is not a linear development, as the given schema might imply. Mukařovský states:

> The semantic staticness of a word lies in the fact that its meaning is given to us at once and entirely at the moment that it is pronounced. The 'sense' of an utterance, though it also exists — of course, only potentially — at the very moment when the utterance is begun, attains a gradual realization only in time. The utterance is, therefore, a semantic stream which pulls individual words into its continuous flux, depriving them of a considerable part of their independence of reference and meaning. Every word in an utterance flows, each of its words is accessible to additional shifts in its reference and to changes of instance, that the initial emotional coloration of a word changes under this influence into its very opposite, that the meaning of the word subsequently contracts or expands, and so forth. (1976: 50)

The creation of meaning is a constant process of conjecture and modification; in other words, meaning is the product of the interaction among the elements of all retentional columns. In 'John went to the door' we intuitively form syntactic units (subject, verb, predicate) which slightly influence each others' meanings. 'Went' tells us something about John's abilities; 'John' indicates that 'going' is a human activity; and 'to the door' gives us the destination of this activity. Of course, semantic changes in such a straightforward statement as that given above are not of any concern in this paper, as they do not throw any light on the workings of metaphorical language. Accordingly, only the interaction between the metaphorical word and the so-called 'textual marker(s)', i.e. those parts of the context that make a word, phrase,

etc. metaphorical in the first place, will be analyzed here.[5] The sentence 'Betty nailed down a contract' may serve as an example:

Betty	*nailed*	down	a	contract
a	b	c	d	$e > e^1$
	a	b	c	d
		a	b	$c > c^1$
			a	b
				a

Or, in a more simplified form in which only metaphor and textual markers are identified:

Betty	*nailed*	down	a	contract
a	b	c	d	$e > e^1$
	a	b	c	.
		.	b	$c > c^1$
			.	$b > b^1$
				.

Although the first four words of the statement seem to be as literal as those in 'John went to the door', the situation changes once the last word is reached. Although 'Betty nailed down a . . .' creates the expectation that Betty is engaged in a physical activity, the direct object 'contract' forces us to re-evaluate the semantic contents of both 'nailed' and 'down'. Contracts are not 'fixed with nails' but can be made secure with the same firmness and determination ($c > c^1$). 'Down', on the other hand, does not refer to a physical movement but merely emphasizes Betty's forcefulness and control. It functions as an orientational metaphor, to use Lakoff's and Johnson's term (1980: 14–15), by supplying an abstract concept with a 'spatial orientation'. Finally, the newly established meanings c^1 and d^1 give rise to the comparison between a contract and a physical object that can be nailed down like a floor board, thus

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[5] As much as forty years ago, Max Black (1962: 26–29) established that the metaphorical meaning of a word is shaped by its semantic context. A metaphor is recognized because the literal meaning of the metaphorical word ("focus") clashes semantically with other parts of the remainder of the sentence ("frame"). Black, however, ignored that a metaphorical expression can give rise to further semantic shifts, nor did he realize that this expression is a resolution of the clash, an observation first made by Paul Ricoeur (1979: 143–44). When *wælwulfas* 'slaughter-wolves' carry weapons over the Pante in the Old English *The Battle of Maldon*, for instance, we immediately seek for meanings other than the literal one. Usually not canine animals but warriors are armed, in this case the Vikings, as the subsequent appositional phrase *wicinga werod* 'host of Vikings' indicates. In order to adjust the statement to our perception of reality, we find new meanings that fit the context and consequently solve the initial enigma.

endowing a legal agreement with the physical attribute of solidity (e > e[1]). The retained verb has consequently caused various semantic shifts which can be observed in the last column and which then contribute to the meaning of the whole utterance.

Finally, the problem of selecting which metaphors to examine in the following analysis of Old English and Old Norse verse has to be addressed. As Lakoff and Turner (1989: 67) have argued, poetic thought distinguishes itself from everyday thought not because poetry is metaphorical and everyday discourse is not. Metaphors underlie most verbal expressions even if we do not recognize them as such. However, poetic thought differs from everyday cognition insofar as it utilizes conventional notions in innovative ways. The metaphorical expression 'to pass away', for example, is quickly recognized as 'to die', but understanding the use of the poetic metaphor 'to go into exile' to refer to the same concept requires some analysis, thus slowing comprehension. Correspondingly, although the principle of equivalence applies to all metaphors, the degree of their influence on sentence contiguity will ultimately depend on their conventional nature.

Nevertheless, this observation is only of limited use for medieval metaphors. Since we do not really know what metaphors were conventional in the Old English and Old Norse poetic corpora, we cannot positively identify them, and yet an examination of *all* metaphors would only blur the distinction between poetic and non-poetic discourse. As a consequence, this analysis focuses mainly on the metaphorical structures that occur *exclusively* in poetry and therefore best meet the otherwise unreliable criterion of unconventionality. I am therefore concerned with genre-specific and, in the case of skaldic poetry, even elitist structures. Even this restriction entails the problem that we can never be completely sure if these poetic metaphors had become conventional, nor is it always easy to determine poetic usage particularly if larger metaphorical structures like allegory are examined. Still, occasional ambiguities will not interfere with the general structural tendencies that can be observed in the metaphorical language of the two poetic corpora, and it is only such tendencies that will be discussed in this article.

Applications: Old Norse Poetry

1 Skaldic Poetry

Norse poetry has conventionally been divided into eddic and skaldic poetry, and since the structure and syntactical position of metaphors and textual markers are very different in both types of poetry, they require separate examination in this analysis as well. To begin with some general observations on the structural make-up of skaldic verse (mainly composed by Icelanders from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries), two features come immediately to mind: the use of extended or *rekit* kennings that incorporate more than three metaphorical or metonymical elements,[6] and a very flexible word order for the individual kenning parts.[7] Skaldic kennings can contain up to eight elements, which may appear in any sequence, and which often encourage solutions before the final meaning is established. This focus on nominal structure and comparison gives increased emphasis to Jakobson's principle of equivalence while slowing down sentence contiguity. Interaction on the retentional axis is strong; in fact, in extreme cases it can slow down the movement of a half stanza (helmingr) so drastically that the latter appears to be a vast comparison rather than a contiguous statement. The last half stanza of Þórarinn Loftunga's eleventh-century *Tøgdrápa* is such a case:

> Gatk gollskata;
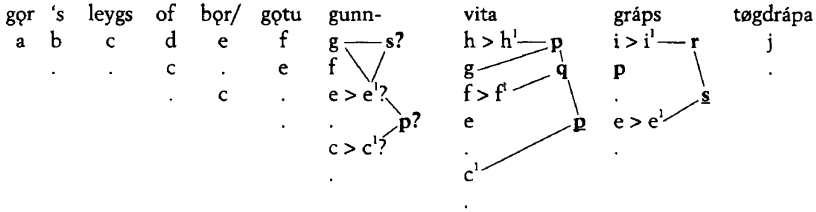> gǫr's lygs of bǫr
> gǫtu gunnvita
> gráps tøgdrápa.[8]

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[6] The term "*rekit* kenning" is used by Snorri Sturluson in his *Háttatal* (ed. Finnur Jónsson 1931: 215). It should be noted, however, that not all critics agree on whether kennings can contain metonymical elements. Whereas Rudolf Meissner's definition of the simplest form of the kenning as "zweigliedriger Ersatz für ein Substantivum der gewöhnlichen Rede" (1921: 2) makes such an allowance, Andreas Heusler calls a kenning "Metapher mit Ablenkung" (cited in Marold 1983: 27–28). The problem with Heusler's definition is that it does not consider the numerous skaldic circumlocutions that contain determinants comprised of another determinant-base word structure. In such compounds, the second-level base word may be metaphorical or metonymical, as the example on pp. 179–80 illustrates.

[7] A flexible word order, however, does not mean that the syntax of a skaldic stanza is completely arbitrary. A major study of syntactical and metrical rules in the *dróttkvætt* is provided in Kuhn 1983.
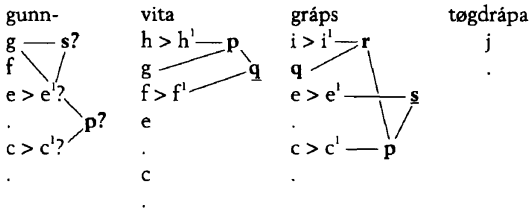
[8] Finnur Jónsson (ed) 1912–15: IA, 324; IB, 298–99. All references to skaldic poetry are to this edition unless otherwise indicated.

> 'I won a gold-prince; is composed, of the flame/ tree/ path/ battle-flame/ of the hail/ tøgdrápa'.

The first line 'Gatk gollskata', 'I won a gold-prince' is a contiguous statement consisting of a verb with affixed personal pronoun and a direct object. The remaining three lines, on the other hand, show hardly any linear movement. The verb phrase *gør's* 'is composed' and the subject *tøgdrápa* enclose a six-element noun phrase the complexity of which can be seen in the following graph:

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gør  's  leygs of  bør/ gøtu  gunn-        vita          gráps        tøgdrápa
a    b   c     d   e   f      g ——s?       h > h'——p     i > i'—— r    j
     .   .     c   .   e      f  \/         g ——————q    p              .
     .         .   c   .      e > e'?       f > f' ——         \          .
     .         .   .   .          \         e        \    p    .    ——s
     .                              p?      .          p   e > e'
                             c > c'?        .                       .
     .                                      c'
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Or:

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gunn-            vita              gráps              tøgdrápa
g —— s?          h > h'——p         i > i'—r           j
f  \/            g ————————q       q —                 .
e > e'?          f > f' ——         e > e' ——— s
     \          e                       .      \/
      p?         .                 c > c' —— p
c > c'?          c                      .
     .
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p = sword; q = shield; r = battle; s = warrior

All major semantic shifts that occur both on the kenning level and on the level of the various kenning components are indicated. For example, on the kenning level the meaning of the collocation *gunn* 'battle' (g) + *vita* 'light' (h) is 'sword' (p); on the level of the two elements both the determinant and the semantic properties of *vita* determine the metaphorical meaning of the latter (h^1). However, these latter changes will not further be commented upon here, since the main reason for the lack of contiguity in the last three lines of the stanza has to be sought elsewhere. The stanza concludes a poem dedicated to Cnut the Great, and the listener/reader can expect a reference to the Danish ruler as the necessary complement of the verbal phrase 'gør's' '... is composed about ...', and yet neither the general context nor the context of the first one-and-a-half lines provides any clues that could aid a concrete analysis of what

follows. Metaphor is piled upon metaphor with the textual markers being an integral part of each, so that only a dissection of the metaphors themselves will lead to a solution.

The first element of this extended metaphor is the third word, and once this word is reached, a very complex retention process full of ambiguities is set into motion. The sequence *leygs* 'of the flame' — *bǫr* ' the tree' (acc.) — *gǫtu* 'of/for/- the path' (acc. gen. or dat.) suggests that the words belong to one or more metaphorical kennings and, since the three elements cannot be combined into such kenning(s) at this point, occupy an important position on the retentional axis as the sentence proceeds. The introduction of *gunnvita* 'of/for/- the battle-flame' eventually solves the problem. Although *gunn-* alone could form another metaphorical sword-kenning with *leygs* ('battle-flame'; **p?**) or even a warrior-kenning with *bǫr* ('battle-tree'; **s?**), its syntactic linkage with *vita* makes those two possibilities unlikely. *Gunnviti* is a common metaphorical sword-kenning (**p**), which in turn can be combined with *gǫtu* to form a metaphorical shield-kenning (**q**). These initial ambiguities are followed by others that cannot however be so easily resolved. When combined with *leygs* (**c**), the shield-kenning becomes part of another metaphorical sword-kenning ('shield-flame'; **p**). 'Sword-hail' (*gráps*) is a metaphorical kenning for 'battle' (**r**) and a 'battle-tree' is a warrior (**s**). Finally, if we do not take the step '**q + c > p**', another scenario arises. *Gráps* 'hail' is then combined with **q** ('shield') into a battle-kenning ('shield-hail'; **r**); a battle-flame' is a sword (**p**), and a sword-tree is a warrior (**s**). The subject '*tøgdrápa*' finally completes the sentence. To sum up, the two sequential prose translations for the passage are:
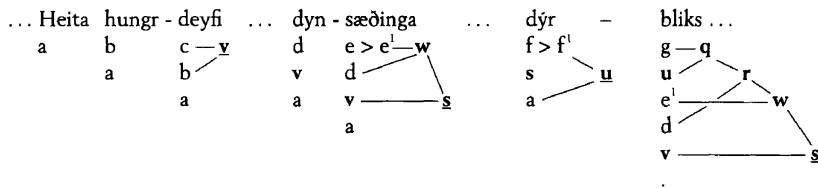
> 1. I won a gold-prince. *Tøgdrápa* is composed about the battle-flame's [sword's] path's [shield's] flame's [sword's] hail- [battle-] tree [warrior].
>
> 2. I won a gold-prince. *Tøgdrápa* is composed about the battle-flame's [sword's] path's [shield's] hail [battle's] flame- [sword-] tree [warrior].

Rekit kennings of this length are not common in skaldic poetry, but neither are they exceptional. Rudolf Meissner lists several kennings with five or more elements in his *Kenningar der Skalden*, one of which he quotes from stanza twenty of Hallfreðr Óttarson's *Óláfsdrápa* (1921: 291). As in so many other *rekit* kennings, the selection that burdens the retentional axis process here involves both metaphorical and metonymical relationships, which need to be recognized in order for the meaning to be understood. I will give the first four lines (or *helmingr*) of the

stanza, a word-by-word translation, a graph that indicates the various semantic shifts on the kenning level, and finally a prose translation:

> Veitkat hitt, hvárt Heita
> hungrdeyfi skalk leyfa
> dynsæðinga dauðan
> dýrbliks eða þó kvikvan. (IA, 163; IB, 154)

> 'I do not know it whether Heiti's hunger-soother (dat.) I shall praise of din-seagulls dead of animal-gleam or yet alive'.

... Heita hungr - deyfi   ...   dyn - sæðinga   ...   dýr   –   bliks ...
    a   b   c — **v**   d   e > e¹ — **w**   f > f¹   g — **q**
        a   b   v   d   s   **u**   u — **r**
             a   a   v ——— **s**   a   e¹ ——— **w**
                        a   d
                                            v ———————— **s**

q = shield; r = battle; s = warrior; u = ship; v = feeder, part of warrior kenning; w = raven

> 'I do not know whether I shall praise the hunger-soother of the sea-mews of the din of Heiti's animal's [ship's] gleam [shield, battle, ravens, warrior] dead or yet alive'.

The sequence of the elements in this kenning creates ambiguities similar to those indicated in the preceding graph. The elements *Heita hungrdeyfi* (Heiti = name of a sea-king; 'hunger-soother' = feeder; v) do not form one complete kenning and consequently remain on the retentional axis. Still, *hungrdeyfir* (v) constitutes a conventional metonymical base word in a warrior-kenning, which is usually completed with a determinant referring to a beast of battle (e.g. feeder of the raven). The introduction of *dyn-sæðinga* 'of din-seagulls' seems to fulfil the expectations, as, together with a weapon-determinant, it forms a metaphorical circumlocution for 'raven' (w). At the same time, *Heita* must be considered, and in combination with *dýr* 'animal' gives rise to a standard metaphorical ship-kenning (u), which is then collocated with *bliks* 'of the gleam'. 'Ship-gleam' is a metonymical kenning for shield (q) — shining shields were hung on sides of Viking ships — but this new collocation also forces the listener to reassess the two components of *dyn-sæðinga* (w > d,e). *Heita dyn dýrbliks* 'shield-din' provides us with a standard (metonymical) kenning for 'battle' (r), while the original 'din-seagulls' are turned into battle-seagulls, i.e. ravens (w).

Finally, as already mentioned, the 'hunger-soother' or feeder of ravens is a warrrior (s).

Hallfreðr certainly does not use metaphorical language as extensively as Þórarinn does in the example given above because not only metaphors but also metonyms encroach on the contiguity of the statement. Even the proportion between kenning and the remainder of the sentence is not as distorted in Hallfreðr's *helmingr* as in Þórarinn's. And yet the former's composition is highly metaphorical because it delays the solution of the two metaphors to the very last line and consequently loads the retentional axis with various semantic possibilities that are only gradually reduced as the sentence proceeds.

Since skaldic poetry was composed orally, one may wonder how an audience could understand and enjoy such convoluted constructions as those cited above. No doubt, the audience was acquainted with the conventions of kenning formation and consequently were in a much more advantageous position that we are today. But if we look at the retention process involved in the solution of the extended kenning, we may also speculate on the nature of the audience's 'literary competence' (Culler 1975: 113-30, at 116). Both poet and audience must have been able to retain and combine the various kenning elements, an ability that the modern reader of literature certainly lacks.[9] At the same time, skaldic poetry distinguishes itself not only by the excess but also by the diversity of its metaphorical language. Although the literary conventions that must have accompanied word-formation and syntax provided the individual skald with the possibility of creating a highly metaphorical poem, many skalds did not exploit this possibility. The skald's choice of diction and syntax, just like any other poet's choice, will ultimately depend on his/her own personal inclinations and abilities. For example, in his *Sonatorrek*, Egill Skallagrímsson avoids complex syntax and metaphorical kennings,[10] as both devices would only distract from the depth of the speaker's personal grief. Stanza seven provides a particularly good example of this outpouring of feeling:

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[9] Note, for example, Pinker's sweeping claim, based on the study of Modern English syntax: "Short-term memory is the primary bottleneck in human information processing. Only a few items — the usual estimate is seven, plus or minus two — can be held in mind at once, and the items are immediately subject to fading or being overwritten" (1994: 201). As skaldic practice shows, both the intrinsic qualities of a language and cultural practices can stretch the limits of short-term memory to a considerable extent.

[10] Throughout the poem, however, Egill resorts to mythological kennings. The kennings are particularly frequent in the first three stanzas, in which the poet complains about his difficulties in composing the poem.

Mjǫk hefr Rán
ryskt um mik,
em ek ofsnauðr
at ástvinum (1–4)[11]

'Rán has shaken me strongly, I am stripped of dear friends.'

Mjǫk	hefr	Rán/	ryskt	um	mik/	em	ek	of-snauðr/	at	ástvinum
a	b	c,c^1	d > d^1	e	f^1	g	h	i > i^1	j	k	l
	.	.	c,c^1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
			.		d^1						
					c,c^1						
					.						

The syntax of this *helmingr* is straightforward, and not a single kenning is used. In fact, the interaction between possible metaphors and other parts of the sentence is restricted to three words or fewer, depending on the interpretation of the textual marker 'Rán'. For a pagan Egill, the sea-goddess Rán may have been real (c) or merely a metaphorical construct personifying the sea (c^1). In either case, the context of the stanza makes the verb certainly metaphorical. In response to the drowning of his son Bǫðvarr, Egill blames Rán for his grief: neither the sea-goddess nor the sea have shaken Egill physically but have caused a tumult of feelings in him. Furthermore, the metaphorical *ryskja* brings the dead metaphor *snauðr* 'deprived, stripped, poor' (i) back to life. Although *snauðr*, originally derived from a lost verb 'to strip' (Guðbrandr Vigfússon and Richard Cleasby 1957: s.v.), had lost its figurative force and retained the more or less straightforward meaning of 'poor', the physical violence implied in the verb revivifies the literal meaning of the adjective. With the loss of his much beloved second son, Egill is involuntarily and even violently separated (i^1) from his dear friends just as a man may be stripped of his clothes. In spite of these semantic developments, however, the sentence retains overall contiguity, while interaction on the retentional axis is considerably reduced if compared with Þórarinn's or Hallfreðr's stanzas.

Egill's relative avoidance of artificial word order and complex metaphorical kennings shows that no poet at any time had to use highly rhetorical language. However, a more general tendency towards a simplification of the skaldic language occurred after the introduction of Chris-

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[11] Text in Turville-Petre 1976: 32. Turville-Petre's translation of the lines has been consulted.

tianity in Scandinavia in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. Critics have repeatedly pointed out that mythological kennings were rare in this transition period and that syntax became more transparent.[12] The new faith emphasized directness of the message and consequently discouraged any techniques that drew too much attention to its language. Poems that are written in this new style are Þórarinn Loftunga's *Glælognskviða*, Sigvatr's *Knútsdrápa* (eleventh century) and Einarr Skúlason's *Geisli* (twelfth century). Stanza four of the last poem may serve as an example:

> Upp rann engla skepnu,
> (iðvandr) of dag þriðja
> (Kristr ræðr krapti hæstum)
> *kunn* réttlætis sunna. (IA, 459; IB, 427)

> 'The sun of justice [Christ], known to the creation of angels, rose up on the third day; guileless Christ rules with the greatest power.'

Upp	rann	engla	skepnu,/	iðvandr	of	dag	þriðja
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h
.	.	.	.	.	.	.

Kristr	ræðr	krapti	hæstum/	kunn	réttlætis	sunna;
j	k	l	m	n	o	$p > p^1$ —— x
.	.	.	.	.		o

Turville-Petre has charcterized the skald Sigvatr as a poet who uses complex syntax but simple diction (1976: lxiii). The same can be said about the poet of *Geisli*. The syntax of the *helmingr* just cited, which describes Christ's resurrection, is not easy to follow: the main sentence 'upp rann of dag þriðja réttlætis kunn' is interrupted by two sentences 'engla skepnu kunn' (here marked by italics) and 'iðvandr Kristr ræðr krapti hæstum' (in parentheses), both of which are split into fragments as well. Yet the whole sentence contains only one metaphor *sunna* 'sun', which together with *réttlætis* 'justice' gives rise to a metaphorical god-kenning (x). Accordingly, syntactic oddities burden the retentional axis (not indicated in the graph) without significantly increasing the metaphoricity of the utterance. The listener/speaker has to remember units for their rearrangement later in the sentence, but since this rearrangement

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[12] See, for example, de Vries 1964: I, 227–29.

does not involve metaphor, the metaphorical density of the stanza remains low.

Of course, it would be misleading to assume that skaldic poetry lost all of its metaphoricity as time went on. The introduction of Christianity certainly did not persuade every poet to abandon his old practices. Metaphorical kennings continued to exist together with syntactic intricacy during the transition period; Hallfreðr's convoluted *helmingr* was composed after the poet's conversion, and more examples could be given.[13] Finally, they became particularly popular with the twelfth-century poets who now showed an antiquarian interest in the old style. Einarr Skúlason, for instance, may be best known for his *Geisli*, but he also composed poems containing highly metaphorical language, as the following *lausavísa* illustrates:

> Glymvindi lætr Gǫndlar
> gnestr hjǫrr taka mestum
> Hildar segl, þárs hagli,
> hraustr þengill, drífr strengjar. (IA, 480; IB, 452)

'The valiant prince lets Hild's sail [shield] take most of Gǫndul's clashing wind [battle], where string-hail [arrows] showers; the sword clashes.'

Glym-vindi	lætr	Gǫndlar/	gnestr	hjǫrr	taka	mestu/
a b > b¹	c	d ——— r	e	f	g	h
a > a¹	b¹	/	r	.	.	.
	a¹	b¹ > b²	c			
		a¹ > a				

	Hildar	segl	þárs	hagli,/		hraustr	þengill,	drífr	strengjar
(i)	(ii)			(i)	(ii)				
i	i	j > j¹	k	l > l¹	l	m	n	o	p t
.	.	i q	.	. r²?	.			. .	/
d - r¹	r	.		j	q				q/
.	.	r		i	.				l¹
b²		.		r	r				.
a					.				r
									.

r = battle; q = shield; t = arrow

Metaphor plays an important part in these four lines. At first glance one might actually think that the prince is steering his ship across the ocean in rough weather (*vindr* 'wind', *hagl* 'hail') rather than fighting a battle; only the kenning determinants *Gǫndlar*, *Hildar* and *strengjar* pull the narrative back onto a literal level. The main factor determining the high metaphoricity of the stanza, however, is the combination of Einarr's use of ambiguous kenning elements, a complex syntax and flexible word order. Syntax and word order are particularly important in this case. Not only are the elements of two of the three metaphorical kennings separated from each other by one or more words, thus requiring the audience to postpone any judgement until both sentences are complete, but the continuous syntactic violations throughout the stanza also create some semantic ambiguities of their own. True, the interruption of the sentence flow by metaphor is relatively slight in the first line. *Gǫndlar* quickly resolves the semantic incongruity between *glym-* 'clashing' and *vindi*. While *glym* could have been a metaphorical description (a^1) of a particularly noisy wind (b^1), the reference to the valkyrie Gǫndul indicates that 'wind' is a metaphor for battle, and the sentence reads as follows: '... lets take most of Gǫndul's clashing wind [battle; r]'. But the unusual word-order of the main sentence — there is no subject in sight — and the interpolation of *gnestr hjǫrr* 'the sword clashes' create some doubt about this interpretation once the first word of the third line is uttered.[14] *Hildar*, the name of another valkyrie, combines with *glymvindi* just as well as *Gǫndlar* does; if this new battle-kenning (r^1) is used, the latter word would then stand alone again. *Segl* 'sail', the next word, only temporarily suspends this doubt. It makes *Hildar* part of the shield-kenning *Hildar segl* (q), but since *hagli* in the same line also combines with *Hildar* (note the alliteration here) into another straightforward battle-kenning (r^2), *segl* is freed again. Only when the final word *strengjar* 'of the string' is uttered, do we know for certain that the three kennings are *glymvindi Gǫndlar*, *hildar segl* and *hagli strengjar* 'arrows', and that all kenning elements actually appear in their proper sequence. No doubt, Einarr could compose highly metaphorical verse; if he chose a less convoluted style, he did so because his subject matter required it.

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[14] Pinker (1994: 213) calls statements that first mislead the reader/listener "garden paths". He also argues that we follow these paths because we select one interpretation rather than keep all semantic possibilities in mind. Once we hit a dead end we have to start anew.

11 Eddic Poetry

Metaphorical density can consequently be both extremely high and low in skaldic poetry. Depending on various factors such as subject, literary preferences and external cultural influences (i.e. Christianity), each skald had the opportunity either to intensify or compromise his/her use of metaphor and complex syntax, a choice that gives rise to an immense number of different levels of metaphoricity in the skaldic corpus. The metaphoricity of eddic poetry does not achieve either this high intensity or this enormous diversity. Being mainly concerned with narrative and to some extent gnomic contents, eddic verse relies heavily on a para-tactic, contiguous style that imposes some limitations on metaphorical density, at least at the top end of the 'metaphoricity spectrum'. This can be seen in stanza seven of *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana ǫnnur*:

> 'Hvar hefir þú, hilmir, hildi vacþa
> eða gǫgl alin Gunnar systra?'[15]

> 'Where have you, ruler, awakened battle/ or fed the geese of Gunnar's sisters [valkyries, ravens]?'

Hvar	hefir	þú,	...	hildi	vacþa/	eða	gǫgl	alin	Gunnar	systra
a	b	c		d	$e > e^1$?	f	$g > g^1$?	h	$i - \underline{w}$	$j - y$
	.	.		.	$d > d^1$	.	.	.	g^1	i
					.				.	.

$$g^1 \diagdown w$$

$$g^1 . $$

w = raven; y = valkyrie

The lines uttered by Sváva show how poets *could* make extensive use of metaphor in very different ways without crossing the limits imposed upon them by a contiguous syntax. The interaction between the meta-phor *vekia* 'awaken' and the textual marker *hildr* 'battle' is mainly restricted to these two words; *hildr* tells us that *vekia* is a metaphor ($e>e^1$), while *vekia* animates *hildr* ($d>d^1$). More important for a compar-ison with skaldic poetry, however, is the metaphoricity of the *rekit* ken-ning. The metaphorical base word *gǫgl* and the two-element determi-nant are, in skaldic fashion, separated by the past participle *alin* 'fed' so that the metaphor has to remain unsolved (g^1?) until it can interact with

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[15] Neckel-Kuhn 1983:1, 152. All references to the poetic *Edda* are to this edition.

the other kenning elements at the end of the sentence. In fact, some ambiguity arises then, since *Gunnar gǫgl* makes a perfect valkyrie kenning, and once *systra* is uttered, the audience has to rearrange: Gunn's sisters are valkyries and their geese are ravens. Even in this case, however, the kenning is well integrated into its narrative context. *Hildi vacþa* as well as the correlative *eða* already suggest that *gǫgl* is not a goose but a bird of battle. The past participle reinforces this hypothesis, as warriors do not 'feed' geese but ravens, and finally the valkyrie-kenning completes the metaphor.

Metaphorical *rekit* kennings are extremely rare in the eddic corpus. Only two other such kennings can be found, and they are metaphorically less complex than *gǫgl Gunnar systra*. The kennings occur in *Sigrdrífomál* and *Oddrúnargrátr*:

> 1) "Biór fœri ec þér,　brynþings apaldr,
>   magni blandinn　oc megintíri". (*Sdr*, st. 5)

> '"I bring you beer, apple-tree of the corslet-meeting [battle, warrior] mixed with strength and ? great fame".'

> 2) "Opt undromc þat,　hví ec eptir mác,
>   lingvengis bil,　lífi halda'. (*Odd*, st. 33)

> '"Often I wondered about that, how I could afterwards, Bil of the serpent-bed [gold, woman] , stay alive".'

Both kennings are well integrated into the narrative, the sequences of their elements are grammatically proper, and the kenning referents are either explicitly or implicitly expressed. We know from the context of the poem, for example, that Sigrdrífr addresses Sigurðr. *þér* consequently implicitly identifies the hero while, at the same time, it is the explicit referent of the appositional *brynðings apaldr* 'apple-tree of the corslet-meeting'. The line from *Oddrúnargrátr* is equally straightforward. Again, context tells us that Oddrún speaks to Borgný in this lament, so that *línvengis Bil* 'Bil of the serpent bed' must be an appellation for the latter. The two metaphorical kennings are complex in themselves, but the processes involved in understanding them certainly are not, since the interaction on the retentional axis involves exclusively the kenning elements and the kenning referent.

Old English Poetry

The failure of eddic metaphoricity to match either the intensity or the diversity of the skaldic metaphorical language shows that the latter has a unique status even in the Scandinavian cultural context. The last section of this article, devoted to the metaphoricity of the Old English poetic corpus, confirms this uniqueness of the skaldic metaphorical mode. Like the eddic verse, Old English poetry never attains the high complexity of the poetry of the skalds and consequently lacks one pole of the 'metaphorical spectrum.' At the same time, however, it shows some interesting features of its own. Since Christianity was firmly established in Anglo-Saxon England before the composition period of the earliest texts that have come down to us, no poems that are essentially products of the pagan period, such as Egill Skallagrímsson's *Sonatorrek* or the eddic *Hamðismál* and *Atlakviða*, exist.[16] All Old English poetry is, to use an observation once made by James Carney on early Irish literature, the result of the 'cross-fertilization' of a pagan ancestry and a Christian present (1966: 2). For instance, the Anglo-Saxon scops used extensive metaphorical narrative, and, as may be expected from a thoroughly Christianized society, allegory was a favourite mode.[17] But the Anglo-Saxon scop also resorted to such narrative whenever he wished to express ideas in more vivid or more attractive terms. Two examples are given here: the first six introductory lines of *Andreas* (1) and lines fifty to fifty-three of *Maxims I* (2):

> 1)
>   Hwæt! We gefrunan   on fyrndagum
>   twelfe under tunglum   tireadige hæleð,
>   þeodnes þegnas.   No hira þrym alæg
>   camprædenne   þonne cumbol hneotan,
>   syððan hie gedældon,   swa him dryhten sylf,
>   heofona heahcyning,   hlyt getæhte. (Krapp 1932: 2)

> 'Lo! We have heard in ancient days of twelve glorious men under the stars, thanes of a/the lord/Lord. Not at all did their power diminish in warfare when banners crashed, after they parted, as the lord/Lord himself, high king of Heaven, prescribed their lot.'

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[16] Of course, since even ninth- and tenth-century Norse poems can be found only in manuscripts dating from later periods, Christian influences at some stage of the transmission of these texts cannot be ruled out.

[17] Popular allegories include the portrayal of temptation as the devil shooting his arrows of sin and of God as a physician. See Stanley 1987: 234–80, at 237–45.

2)

Styran sceal mon strongum mode.   Storm oft holm gebringeþ,
geofen in grimmum sælum;   onginnað grome fundian
fealwe on feorran to londe,   hwæþer he fæste stonde.
Weallas him wiþre healdað,   him biþ wind gemæne.
(Krapp and Dobbie 1936: 158)

'Man must steer a violent mind. A storm often raises the sea, the ocean
into grim conditions; the angry dark ones begin to hasten from afar to
the land, (testing) whether it would stand firm. The walls resist them,
the wind is experienced by both of them'

Both poets use metaphorical imagery to enhance the message of each
passage. In the first excerpt, the *Andreas* poet expresses the courage of
the apostles by consistently portraying them as Germanic warriors living
according to the rules of the heroic code.[18] All emphasis is on the heroes'
martial prowess; they are presented as glorious leaders whose powers
never fail in physical combat. Even the few dispersed textual markers
that allude to their role as warriors of God — a possibility that is con-
firmed a few lines later when Matthew is introduced — are ambiguous
and could equally contribute to the literal meaning of the lines. Twelve
men are involved, but *twelve warriors* also announce Beowulf's fame.
Likewise, it is certainly conceivable that they could have served a lord
and then have gone different ways, as God willed. True, *heahcyning* and
the appositional *dryhten* remain metaphorical because of the textual
marker *heofena*, but the reference to God only indicates that they
enjoyed divine favour and not that they were fighting a spiritual battle.

It is unnecessary to establish a graph for the first passage because its
metaphorical nature is clear. The aforementioned textual markers raise
the possibility of various shifts on the retentional axis which are finally
confirmed in the subsequent lines. In the meantime, however, the lis-
tener/reader has no problem in comprehending the lines on a literal
level, while being prepared to give them a metaphorical meaning. The
second example is quite different and does require a graph:

styran	sceal	mon	strongum	mode.	Storm	oft	holm	gebringeþ/
a	b	c	d	$e > e^1$	f,f^*	g^*	h,h^*	i,i^*
	.	.	.	$d > d^1$	e^1	.	.	.
				.	d^1		e^1	
				$a > a^1$	.		d^1	
							.	

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[18] As Joyce Hill (1981: 57–80, at 65–74) has shown, *Andreas* is the only poetic saint's life
which is more heavily influenced by the heroic tradition than by the *miles Christi* tradition.

geofon	in	grimmum	sælum;	onginnað	grome	fundian/
j,j^*	k^*,k^*	l,l^*	m,m^*	n,n^*	o,o^*	p,p^*
.	.	.	.	.	.	.

h,h^*

.

f,f^*

fealwe	on	feorran	to	londe,	hwæþer	he	fæste	stonde.
$q > q^1,q^*$	r,r^*	s,s^*	t, t^*	$u > u^1,u^*$	v,v^*	w,w^*	x,x^*	y,y^*
$p > p^1,p^*$	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
$o > o^1,o^*$				q^1, q^*				
.				p^1, p^*				
				o^1, o^*				
				.				

The poet opens with a statement expressing an emotional process in physical terms: 'a man must *steer* a violent mind'. The sentence is straight-forward and can be analysed in the same manner as 'Betty nailed down a contract' (see above). Once *mode* is reached, *styran* becomes a metaphor (a^1), which turns the mind into a fiercely moving boat (e^1). The next sentence (ll. 50b–51a), on the other hand, is more complex. A sea-storm scene is depicted, but its juxtaposition with the previous statement, which also uses nautical imagery, turns it into a metaphorical description (marked with an asterisk) of a turbulent mind ('strongum mode'). Still, the actual correspondences become only clear in what follows, and then only in the half line 'onginnað grome fundian'. The verb *fundian* usually requires an animated subject which is only suggested by the adjective *grome*. In line 54, however, *fealwe* refers to waves; thus personified waves (q^1) hasten to an encounter with an equally personified coastline (u^1) in order to match their strength with the latter, which successfully resists the attack. It is only a small step to apply the converging martial and sea imagery to the working of the mind: the fierce waves propelled by the wind represent kindled emotions — the referent for *storm* remains unclear — while the mind is compared to the coastline (not a boat!).

The metaphorical processes in the second and third sentence, strongly simplified in the analysis, entail two overlapping extensive metaphors indicated by $\alpha > \alpha^1$ (personification) and $\alpha > \alpha^*$ (depiction of a mental process by means of sea-imagery). The latter process forces the listener/reader to retain and reassess all words, but the movement of the sentence is only slowed down and not halted. After all, the description of the sea-storm does not need re-evaluation but its sig-

nificance in terms of the previous statement does. The audience can easily follow the lines and at the same time translate the literal statement into a metaphorical one. Finally, in order to make sure that his metaphors have been understood, the poet explicates them by means of a related simile:

> Swa biþ sæ smilte,
> þonne hy wind ne weceð;
> swa beoþ þeoda geþwære,   þonne hy geþingad habbað,
> gesittað him on gesundum þingum,   ond þonne mid gesiþum healdaþ
> cene men gecynde rice. (ll. 54–58a)

> 'Just as the sea is calm when the wind does not stir it, so nations are peaceful, when they have negotiated, settle down in healthy circumstances, and then brave men with their kinsmen hold their rightful kingdom.'

In these lines the poet pulls the audience back to his general message: if emotions are checked, people will negotiate and, like the calm sea, remain peaceful and live in prosperity.

Another feature of Old English poetry that keeps the metaphoricity relatively low if compared with skaldic poetry (and even eddic poetry) is the use of appositions. An appositive style, to use Fred Robinson's expression (1985), helps to make metaphors transparent, as lines 1143 to 1144 from *Beowulf* show:

> Þonne him Hunlafing   hildeleoman,
> billa selest   on bearm dyde. (Klaeber 1950: 43)

> 'Then Hunlaf's son [placed] the battle-light, the best of swords, into his lap.'

Here the metaphorical nature of *leoma* is explained by the appositional words without requiring the aid of any other syntactic element. Of course, both the determinant *hild* and the general context of the lines already indicate that Hunlaf's son does not place a flame into Hengest's lap, yet the appositional *selest billa* removes any possible lingering doubt that *hildeleoma* is a sword. Thus the process could be described as follows:

...	Hunlafing	hilde-leoman,/	billa	selest	...
	a	b $c > c^1 — p$?	d	e	
		. b	.	d	
		.		p	
				b	
				.	

The process is straightforward. The listener/reader expects a sword kenning which is immediately confirmed by the following noun phrase.

Variation enabled the Old English poet to present a particular concept or idea in different ways; it was up to the individual scop whether he wished to use metaphor for such presentation. In fact, the scop could use metaphorical variation very effectively. The extraordinary description of the Israelites' voyage across the desert in the Old English *Exodus*

> Þær halig god
> wið færbryne   folc gescylde,
> bælce oferbrædde   byrnendne heofon,
> halgan nette   hatwendne lyft.
> Hæfde wederwolcen   widum fæðmum
> eorðan on uprodor   efne gedæled,
> lædde leodwerod,   ligfyr adranc,
> hate heofontorht.   Hæleð wafedon,
> drihta gedrymost.   Dægsceldes hleo
> wand ofer wolcnum;   hæfde witig god
> sunnan siðfæt   segle ofertolden,
> swa þa mæstrapas   men ne cuðon
> ne ða seglrode   geseon meahton
> eorðbuende   ealle cræfte,
> hu afæstnod wæs   feldhusa mæst,
> siððan he mid wuldre   geweorðode
> þeodonholde. (Krapp 1931: 93)

'There the holy God shielded the people against the terrible burning, overspread the burning heaven with a covering [wooden board?], the hot air with a holy net. The storm cloud had separated with wide embraces earth and the upper sky alike; it led the host of people, the fire was extinguished, heavenly bright by the heat. The men were amazed, the most joyful of hosts. The protection against the day[-light] moved across the sky; wise God had covered over the course of the sun with a sail, such that the men did not recognize the mast-ropes, nor could see that sail-rod, the earth-dwellers with all their might, how the greatest of field-houses [tents] was fastened, after He honoured with his glory the people gracious to the Lord.'

The metaphors and metaphorical kennings in these much quoted lines are numerous and unusual. In addition to the rather obvious metaphors that depict the heat of the sun as a fire (*færbryne, byrnendne heofon, ligfyr*), the poet calls the pillar of cloud that protects the Israelites against this fire a covering or wooden board, a net, a day-shield, a sail and a field-

house [tent]. Roberta Frank (1987: 339-42) has suggested that this second set of metaphors has a skaldic ring, since all of the metaphors are the base words of traditional skaldic shield-kennings and consequently reinforce the poet's initial statement that God *shielded* the Israelites against the hot sun. Still, the syntax bears little resemblance to that of skaldic poetry. Although the referent (i.e. pillar of cloud) is not explicitly expressed (as in the previous example), it must have been clear to any member of the Christian community, thus enabling the poet to depict it by means of unconventional imagery. Indeed, the poet removes any remaining doubt concerning the referent by placing three of the five metaphors either in apposition (*bælce, nette*) or by making them part of loosely parallel sentences:

> Þær halig god ... bælce oferbrædde byrnendne heofon ... (71b ff.)
> hæfde witig god sunnan siðfæt   segle ofertolden ... (80b ff.)

Once we know that *bælc* refers to the pillar of cloud, both *net* and *segl* become cloud-metaphors as well.

Finally, Old English scops could use variation to build up the same elaborate metaphorical narrative structures as those discussed in the examples from *Andreas* and *Maxims I* and to keep, at the same time, a condensed, enumerative style. This technique is visible in the last lines of the *Exodus* passage cited above. By claiming that the Israelites could not see the mast-ropes or sail-rod of the pillar of cloud, the poet both elaborates on the sail/pillar-of-cloud comparison and refers to its metaphorical status: the Israelites could not see the ship parts because they did not exist. Another example of extensive metaphorical structures making use of apposition is provided by the sea-journey passage in Cynewulf's *Elene*, lines 243 to 246a. In this passage, Cynewulf vivifies the scene by depicting the ship as a horse rushing over a path:

> Þær meahte gesion,   se ðone sið beheold,
> brecan ofer bæðweg,   brimwudu snyrgan
> under swellingum,   sæmearh plegean,
> wadan wægflotan. (Krapp 1932: 72)

> 'He, who beheld the expedition, could see there the sea-wood
> break over the bathway, hasten under swellings, the sea-horse
> play, the wave floater advance.'

Here the direct object of 'meahte gesion' consists of one metaphorical

verb and three appositional infinitive clauses, all of which contain at least one metaphorical word interacting with its semantic environment:

brecan	ofer	bæð-weg,		brim-wudu		snyrgan	...	sæ-mearh		plegean/
a	b	c	$d > d^1$ - z	e	$f > f^1$ - u	$g > g^1$		h	$i > i^1$ - u^2	$j > j^1$
	a		. c		. e	$u > u^1$		. h		$u^2 > u^3$
			.		z z	z		g^1		g^1
			$a > a^1$		. .	.		u^1		u^1
					$a^1 > a^2$	a^2		.		.

wadan	wæg-flota
k	l m - $u^4 > u^5$
j^1	. l
u^3	$k > k^1$
g^1	j^1
u^1	u^3
.	.

u = ship; z = sea

As can be seen from this graph, semantic shifts are extensive but transparent. The two determinants (textual markers) in the metaphorical kennings already indicate that *weg* refers to the sea (d^1) and *mearh* to the ship (i^1), while the appositional structure of which both kennings are part only reinforces these references. The *sæmearh* is also a *brimwudu* 'sea-wood' and a *wægflota* 'wave-floater' and therefore cannot be anything else but a ship which crosses the sea. Yet at the same time, Cynewulf elaborates on the ship-horse comparison by the use of three parallel verbs. Usually associated with animate beings, these verbs both acquire a metaphorical meaning and animate the subject: the ship hastens ($u > u^1$; $g > g^1$), plays ($u^2 > u^3$; $j > j^1$) and advances ($u^4 > u^5$; $k > k^1$). Cynewulf's appositional metaphors are both additive and interactive and therefore increase the metaphorical density of the lines more than purely enumerative ones.

Because no pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon poetry has survived, we simply do not now whether the Old English appositional poetic style was rooted in an ancient tradition and only reinforced by Christian literary practices (as in Ireland), or was the product of Christianity alone. In any event, Old English variation was a stylistic feature that corresponded to the new religion's emphasis on clarity and simplicity to the extent that even extraordinary metaphors remain accessible to us. This metaphori-

cal quality distinguishes Anglo-Saxon verse from Norse poetry, in which the appositional style was never fully developed. The more frequent occurrence of hypotaxis rather than parataxis and of substitutional rather than appositional metaphors is a dominant feature of skaldic poetry, but the appositive style is not common in eddic verse either. If Walther Paetzel's study of the *Elder Edda* (1913) can be taken as an accurate description of eddic style, then variation is a relatively infrequent phenomenon in that form of poetry. Perhaps the mainly traditional material of the eddic poems, like the conventional formulations of skaldic verse, discouraged the cultivation of a style that was not part of a native tradition. In contrast, the metaphorical practices of Old English versification appear less strongly defensive of the native cultural heritage and, consequently, more readily assimilated into the new faith.

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