

Cynewulf at the Interface of Literacy and Orality: The Evidence of the Puns in *Elene*

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After the anonymous (and still undated) poet of *Beowulf*, Cynewulf has a good claim to be the most important Anglo-Saxon poet whose vernacular verse has survived. As the accepted author of no fewer than 2,601 lines, such a claim would on its own be uncontested, but recent work has emphasized still further Cynewulf's central importance: his influence on the *Andreas*-poet has been suggested, and it seems that Cynewulf himself may be the author of *Guthlac B*.¹ The existence of a group of so-called "Cynewulfian poems" (such as *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Phoenix*) bears powerful witness to his pre-eminence among Anglo-Saxon poets whose names we know. It is therefore, perhaps, surprising that so little scholarly attention has been focused on the extent to which Cynewulf managed to combine inherited elements of an ultimately oral poetic tradition with aspects of an imported (and ultimately Latin-derived) literate tradition of poetic composition. It is this tension between orality and literacy, and the extent to which Cynewulf can be said to stand at the interface of these two traditions, that this article will seek to explore.

That Cynewulf was a literate poet, writing in response to a literate, Latin-derived tradition seems abundantly clear. Of the four runically signed poems attributed to Cynewulf—namely *Fates of the Apostles* and *Elene* in the Vercelli Book (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare CXVII) and *Christ II* and *Juliana* in the Exeter Book (Exeter, Cathedral Library 3501)—Latin sources have been identified for no fewer than three,² and, indeed, wider generic and

¹ The fullest analysis of the influence of Cynewulf on *Andreas* is by Powell (2002:espec. Appendix C); see too Orchard forthcoming a. For the argument that Cynewulf is author of *Guthlac B*, see Orchard forthcoming a and b. I am grateful to Professor Orchard for giving me access to his papers pre-publication.

² *Elene* derives from a version of the *Vita S. Cyriaci*, *Juliana* from a version of the *Vita S. Julianae*, and *Christ II* from Gregory the Great's Homily XXIX. For a general study of Cynewulf's adaptation of Latin sources and rhetoric, see Jehle 1973. For studies on the Latin sources for individual poems, see, for example, Lapidge forthcoming, which

thematic influences have been suggested for all four.³ *Elene*, Cynewulf's longest surviving work, recounts the Invention of the Cross by the mother of the Emperor Constantine and the successive conversions to Christianity of Constantine, Elene, and Judas (the main representative of the Jews). *Elene* is in many ways characteristic of what we know about Cynewulf's use of patristic and legendary sources, in this case a now-lost and presumably Latin version of the so-called *Acta Cyriaci*.⁴

Moreover, a wide variety of Latin influences have been suggested for the poem's epilogue, which notably and skillfully presents a collage of more or less standard topoi ranging from personal reflection on Doomsday events to the inclusion of (seemingly) pseudo-autobiographical material alongside the poet's characteristic request that his audience pray for his soul (different versions are found in all four signed poems).⁵ It is also within this demonstrably erudite epilogue that Cynewulf's runic signature may be found⁶; therefore this portion of the poem has most commonly been cited as evidence both for Cynewulf's composition in writing of his poems and for their primary circulation in the same medium, since it has been argued that

places particular emphasis on the poem's literary inheritance, and Clemoes 1996, which considers in addition to Latinate and vernacular influences Cynewulf's inspiration through the visual arts. I am grateful to Professor Lapidge for granting me access to his paper before publication. For studies on sources in *Elene*, see below. For editions of these and all other poems cited below, see Krapp and Dobbie 1931-35.

³ For the influence of Latin rhetoric on Cynewulf's style, see Wine 1993:29-92; see also a good response to Wine's methodology in Battles 1998:173. For further background, see Steen 2002:132-64 and Clemoes 1995:431-35. See also Orchard forthcoming a for a preliminary examination of this topic, particularly in relation to the works of such Christian-Latin poets as Caelius Sedulius and Arator, and the Anglo-Latin poet Aldhelm. Orchard forthcoming b provides the most in-depth study of these influences to date.

⁴ For a concise source-history of *Elene*, see especially Gradon 1997:15-22. Gradon demonstrates that although recensions of the *Acta Cyriaci* can be found in both Latin and Greek, and indeed throughout medieval Europe, the version(s) preserved in *Elene* are closest to the Latin stem of the tradition. See also Holthausen 1936:xi-xiii, and Dubois 1943:46-50.

⁵ For a list of possible influences, see Gradon 1997:20-22. For commentary on Cynewulf and Alcuin, see Brown 1903.

⁶ Latin parallels containing acrostics, telestichs, and signatures may be found, for example, in poems by Caelius Sedulius, Aldhelm, Tatwine, and Boniface. For further references, see Steen 2002:133. See also Lapidge 1993:60-71.

runes can neither comfortably nor effectively be read aloud.⁷ Those few who have maintained the possibility that the runes may be construed orally and apprehended aurally have critiqued this view,⁸ but their argument has not significantly altered the opinion that Cynewulf's poetic craft is predominantly literate and visual.

Moreover, the two studies that have most seriously considered issues of orality and literacy with respect to Cynewulf's poetry offer widely divergent viewpoints.⁹ The first, put forward by Jeff Opland (1980), strenuously expresses the opinion that Cynewulf was a literate poet who composed in writing and whose craft is wholly distinguishable from that of oral poets.¹⁰ Ursula Schaefer (1991) takes the more flexible view that Cynewulf's poems (like other early medieval poems composed in writing), are not only orally- or traditionally-referential, but that they also at times preserve the pretense of oral presentation through the use of sustained performance cues (such as the "poetic I/ we").¹¹ Though such observations are hardly innovative in the wider field of oral theory,¹² Schaefer's

⁷ For this particular interpretation of the runic signatures in Cynewulf's poetry, see for example Elliott 1996a and 1996b. See also Frese 1996:323 and n. 2 for her discussion of Latin precedents for poetic signatures.

⁸ For the contrasting opinion that that runes may be heard effectively, see Sisam 1967:25–26; Calder 1981:23; and Schaefer 1991:128.

⁹ For an analysis of earlier studies on the subject, see especially Cherniss 1992:41.

¹⁰ Opland's main shortcoming is his search for absolute extremes of orality and literacy. In order to demonstrate this alleged binarism, he contrasts Cynewulf, whom he takes to be a purely literate poet, with the fictional horseback poet in *Beowulf* lines 853–77 and 898–904a, whom he establishes as his sole model of a pre-Christian (and hence pre-literate) oral poet. It must be noted, however, that while a preliminary theoretical model for transitional literacy existed some fifteen years earlier in Ong 1965, Opland was writing at a time when the "Great Divide" between orality and literacy was still very much a standard component of Parry-Lord theory.

¹¹ Schaefer (1991:117–19) adopts the term "vocality" from Paul Zumthor (1987) to demonstrate this more fluid paradigm of orality and literacy. It should be noted, however, that a similar conception of authors "poised between literacy and nonliteracy" was popularized earlier by Eric Havelock (1983:9).

¹² For a comprehensive bibliography of studies in oral theory and oral traditions, see Foley 1985 and the updated electronic version at www.oraltradition.org. Also see Foley (1999:13–36 and 2002:Fifth Word) for a recent treatment of traditional referentiality in written texts. For other relatively recent studies in the field of oral theory

particular contribution is to show that Cynewulf's use of such mixed modalities as "hearing from books," both within his poetic narratives and with apparent reference to his own sources of knowledge,¹³ is self-consciously fictitious and reveals an awareness (and indeed at times an exploitation) of the breakdown between authorial production and audience reception. Schaefer's notion of fictionality provides a new way of looking at some of Cynewulf's arguable "imitations" of traditional conventions, particularly those that appear to derive directly from *Beowulf*.¹⁴

The present study examines precisely this middle ground with respect to Cynewulf's longest poem, *Elene*, as its central polemic between the Jews and the newly converted Christians (represented by Elene herself) concerns itself directly with the reception, perception, and transmission of both oral and written narratives. This emphasis on written and oral testimonies within *Elene* has been well-documented, in terms of both the role of speech-acts in the poem¹⁵ and the relationship of Cynewulf's runic signature to the main narrative.¹⁶ Special attention has also been paid to the importance of "true" perception in relation to these narratives. The religious tensions in the poem exemplify a larger hermeneutical conflict that distinguishes the Jews who are skilled in the "letter" of the law from the Christians who are wise in its "spirit."¹⁷ It will likewise be argued here that the poem presents a kind of

in the context of Old English literature, see Olsen 1986 and 1988 and Orchard 1997; for applications with respect to Old English poetry, see Amodio 1995.

¹³ See Schaefer 1991:130–32.

¹⁴ Schaefer argues that "imitation" implies a condition of fiction. Her comparison of lines 1–3 of *Beowulf* with lines 1–3 of *Fates of the Apostles* is not only convincing, but indeed may be pushed further. Though it is impossible to establish a relative chronology, it is difficult to ignore the seeming play on such *Beowulf*-ian lines as *blæd wide sprang* in Cynewulf's own *lof wide sprang* (in line 6 of *Fates of the Apostles*), and *lead wide sprong* (in line 585 of *Juliana*), to cite just one of the more obvious examples. For further parallels with *Beowulf* see Sarrazin 1886, Orchard forthcoming b, and Powell 2002. For an assessment of other formulas in Cynewulf's poetry, see for example Diamond 1996, Olsen 1984, Cherniss 1992, and Orchard forthcoming a.

¹⁵ For a comprehensive account of the relationship between the speeches and structure of the poem, see especially Bjork 1985:46–62; also Regan 1996 and Doubleday 1975.

¹⁶ See Frese 1996:333–43.

¹⁷ One of the earliest and still indispensable treatments of this subject can be found in Hill 1996; see also Regan 1996:255–57, who traces the polemic through patristic

interface between the semiotic conditions of orality and literacy, particularly through a study of special linguistic features such as rhyme, echo-words, paronomasia, and onomastic puns. Insofar as these devices are generally held to be primarily aural phenomena, it is hoped that such a project will illuminate the rich oral and visual texture of Cynewulf's poetry and call attention to Cynewulf's use of predominantly vernacular aural/oral elements within a narrative conspicuously derived from literate, Latinate sources.

As was mentioned, the runic signatures of Cynewulf may present evidence not only of written composition but also of literate transmission and reception. It is, however, interesting to note the extent to which the so-called "rhyming section" in *Elene* (1236–51), which directly precedes the section containing Cynewulf's signature (and also directly follows a scribal *finit* at line 1235), presents a vexed textual crux, at least insofar as the single extant version contained in the Vercelli Book is concerned. Though rhyme is not uncommon in the poem (as we shall see), what is significant about this particular section is the extent to which the passage (in its current state at least) relies upon extratextual aural effects to convey its design. The difficulty arises from the fact that while the majority of the half-lines in this section contain "true" rhymes (twenty to be precise), eight examples present imperfect rhymes. It was Sievers who first put forward the argument that these four pairs may be emended to produce true rhymes if translated from their current late West-Saxon dialect into an Anglian one.¹⁸ The following lines contain the rhyming section, demarcating "true" rhymes in bold, and "Anglian" rhymes with underlining. The remaining irregular pairs (to be discussed below) are in italics (1236–51):¹⁹

Pus ic frod ond **fus** þurh þæt fæcne **hus**
 wordcræftum *wæf* ond wundrum *læs*,
 þragum **preodude** ond geþanc **reodode**
 nihtes **nearwe**. Nysse ic **gearwe**
 be ðære rode riht ær me rumran geþeaht
 þurh ða mæran miht on modes þeaht

debates. Calder's chapter on *Elene* (1981:104–38) remains the most comprehensive discussion.

¹⁸ Sievers 1884:235, n. 1. See also Rogers 1971:47–52. For more recent evaluations, see Fulk 1992:362–68 and Gradon 1997:13–14, which maintain that the precise dialect is Mercian and not Northumbrian as first put forward by Sievers.

¹⁹ All emphases in subsequent examples from the Old English are mine, and unless otherwise stated, bold is used for "true" rhymes, underlining for other types of acoustic emphases. All translations here and throughout are mine.

wisdom onwreah. Ic wæs weorcum fah
 synnum **asæled**, sorgum **gewæled**,
 bitrum **gebunden**, bisgum **bebrungen**,
 ær me lare **onlag** þurh leohtne **had**
 gamelum to *geoce*, gife *unscynde*
 mægencyning amæt ond on gemynd begeat,
 torht **ontynde**, tidum **gerymde**,
 bancofan **onband**, breostlocan **onwand**,
 leoðucræft **onleac**. þæs ic lustum **breac**,
 willum in worlde.

Thus I, experienced and ready, by means of that fickle carcass [lit. deceitful house] wove in word-crafts and gathered in miracles, for long periods of time pondered and sifted thought in the constraint of the night. I knew not clearly about the true cross before Wisdom, through glorious might, revealed to me in the thought of my mind a more increased understanding. I was stained in deeds, fettered in sins, afflicted with sorrows, bound with bitter things, thronged with afflictions, before the Mighty King bestowed upon me instruction through a light manner, as a help to an old man, he meted out his noble gift and instilled in memory, revealed brightness and at times increased it, unbound my body [lit. bone-coffer], unwound my heart [lit. breast-locker], unlocked the craft of poetry. Thus I enjoyed in yearnings, with desires in the world.

According to Sievers, rhyme may be achieved in accordance with the following emendations: the pairs *onwreah . . . fah* may be changed to *onwrah . . . fah*; *amæt . . . begeat* to either *amæt . . . begæt* or *amet . . . beget*; *riht . . . geþeaht* to either *ræht . . . gepæht* or *reht . . . geþeht*; and *miht . . . þeaht* to either *mæht . . . þæht* or *meht . . . þeht*. If we accept Sievers's dialectal theory, these difficulties are scribal rather than authorial, and apparently call upon the audience's aural intuition (or simple tolerance) to make proper sense of the rhyme. A somewhat different approach is required for the remaining two lines, which appear to contain no rhyme.²⁰ One possible explanation may be found through the repetition of formulas elsewhere in the poem. For example, *gamelum to geoce, gife unscynde* ("as a help to an old man, [he meted out his] noble gift") appears to recall line 1200, which reads: *ofer geofenes stream, gife unscynde* ("over the ocean's stream [she sent] the noble gift"). The poet, or possibly an intervening scribe, may have remembered the earlier b-verse (which is unattested elsewhere in the extant corpus of Old English literature) and its pairing with

²⁰ Commentary on these irregular lines is entirely omitted by both Fulk 1992 and Gradon 1997.

geo- in the a-verse, and inserted a version of this formula into the rhyming section. The reading as it stands creates an aural echo with the earlier passage, even though line 1200 itself does not conform to the surrounding units of rhyme. A bold editor might conjecture *gife unseoce* “uncorrupted gift,” which, although unattested as a negative construction, nevertheless would satisfy the pattern of rhyme.²¹ The other problematic non-rhyming line *wordcræftum wæf ond wundrum læs* is somewhat more difficult to explain. Perhaps one solution is to assert a deliberate visual pun on the words *wæf* and *wæs* (the second of which *would* provide true rhyme, though it is grammatically nonsensical) on the basis that the letters <f> and <s> are visually similar, and have been seen elsewhere (even in Cynewulf’s corpus) to cause scribal confusion.²² Likewise, in this case, recourse to an earlier parallel in *wordcræftes wis ond witgan sunu* (“wise in word-craft and the son of a prophet,” 592), which contains the only other attested use of the compound *wordcræft* in the extant corpus (and also a model for <w> and <s> consonance in the a-verse), is unhelpful, as the half-line containing these features is a syntactically different construction. The suggestion of a visual pun in this particular case presents an alternative to the view that these pairs present a straightforward example of assonance and, as such, near-rhyme.²³

The use of rhyme in the above section is coupled with other predominantly aural features. For example, one may note the use of interlinear rhyme in 1240 and 1241 in the pairs *riht . . . miht* and *geþeaht . . .*

²¹ The proposed emendation (which I owe to Andy Orchard) is supported by the fact that other Cynewulfian poems containing the notion of *momento mori* also demonstrate the adjective “sick” in apposition with abstract nouns. For example, *The Fates of the Apostles* (1–2a) states that *Ic þysne sang siðgeomor fand / on seocum sefan* (“I, mournful of death, discovered this song in [my] sick heart”). *Guthlac B* (1065–67) likewise contains the explanation that *nis me earfeðe / to geþolianne þeodnes willan, / dryhtnes mines, ne ic þæs deaðes hafu / on þas seocnan tid sorge on mode* (“To me it is not a hardship to suffer the will of the Prince, my Lord, nor do I have sorrow in mind concerning death in this sick time”).

²² For example *fela þa* (Beowulf 2305a) is generally emended to *se laþa*; *syrd getrum* (*Exodus* 178a) is generally emended to *fyrðgetrum*; and *ufon* (*Exodus* 556a) to *on*. For an example from Cynewulf, see *Christ II* 491b: *lyste* is usually emended to *lyfte*.

²³ For an analogous reading of pairs that do not rhyme in the so-called Rhyming *Poem*, see Klinck 1988:266–79. See also Stanley 1988:25–27 and 36–38 for approximate rhymes.

peaht.²⁴ The use of non-rhyming consonance in 1244 between *bitrum . . . bisgum*, and assonance in line 1249 between *bancofan . . . breostlocan* is also noteworthy. In addition to the repeated double alliteration, we find examples of “ornamental alliteration,”²⁵ which (for example) back-links *begeat* in 1247b with line 1246 (*gamelum . . . geoce . . . gife*), and also *breac* in 1250b with line 1249 (in *bancofan . . . onband . . . breostlocan*).²⁶ The rich aural texture in these lines stands in this respect in contrast to the visually oriented runic section (lines 1256b–75a), though the latter is by no means without aural effects. Consider, for example, assonance in line 1259 between the rune .ƿ. (*yr*; “horn”) and the verb *gnornode* (“mourned”), and the sound-play in line 1268 between the words *lifwynne . . . geliden . . . swa .ƿ. toglideð* (“life-joy . . . will depart . . . just as the water [*lagu*] will flow away”).²⁷ As in the rhyming-section, these aural features are extratextual, and as such require the ear of the reader or listener to supply these resonances. This type of blurring between devices that have been traditionally labeled “written” or “oral” is, as we shall see, detectable at various levels throughout the poem.

End-rhyme and other predominantly aural features are not confined to the rhyming-section alone. As can be expected, many of these rhymes occur

²⁴ The repetition of the element – *peaht* in such close proximity (in both instances meaning “thought” or “counsel”) may represent an example of eye-skip. The likelihood of such an occurrence in Old English rhyming poetry has been generally seen to be diminished by the fact that, in contrast with Latin verse, all extant Old English verse is written out as consecutive prose. However, in a recent conference paper, Abram (2002) has suggested that the Old English exemplar of the so-called *Rhyming Poem* may have in fact been written out in lines, following the format of surviving Anglo-Latin rhyming octosyllables. Such a theory would account for the high occurrence of apparent examples of eye-skip in the *Rhyming Poem*, and indeed perhaps for the tautologous end-rhyme in *Elene*, 1240b and 1241b.

²⁵ For a table outlining the distribution of double alliteration in a number of Old English poems, see Hutcheson 1995:271. For examples of ornamental alliteration, see Orchard 1995.

²⁶ The use of sustained rhyme in an extended passage may be seen elsewhere in Cynewulf’s poems, as in *Christ II* (586–96).

²⁷ Other aural features may include the repetition of key words, such as variations of the verb *gewitan* (“to depart”) in 1267b, 1271a, and 1277b, and also the element –*nearo*- (“narrow” or “difficult”) in 1260b (in the compound *nearusorge*, “difficult sorrow”) and 1275b (in *nedcleofan nearwe geheadrod*, “confined in a narrow prison”), as these help importantly to emphasize the passing of earthly sorrows as stated above.

in the battle-scene leading up to Constantine's conversion. One of the first rhymes to appear in the poem is the pairing *wordum . . . bordum* ("with words . . . with shields," 24b), emphasizing the clashing of both words and weapons at the very beginning of the battle sequence. The pairing is clearly a favorite in the poem as it occurs with obvious aural variation three additional times at verses 235a (*bordum . . . ordum*; "with shields . . . with spears"), 393a and 394b (*æðelinga ord . . . witgena word*; "the foremost of nobles . . . the word of the prophets"), and 1186a (*bord . . . ord*; "shields . . . spears"). In some cases, these rhymes are part of a larger aural texture, as in the case of the pairing *bordum . . . ordum*, which participates in a pun on *bord* in line 238b, meaning both "shield," "protection," and "side of the ship." This precise collocation with its perfect end-rhyme in fact occurs nowhere else in Cynewulf's signed poems, and seems to have been coined for Elene.²⁸ Another passage in the battle-scene that is particularly laden with rhymes occurs at lines 50–55a:

Ridon ymb rofne, þonne rand **dynede**,
 campwudu **clynede**, cyning þreat for,
 herge to hilde. Hrefen uppe gol,
 wan ond wælfel. Werod wæs on tyhte.
Hleopon hornboran, **hreopan** friccan,
 mearh moldan træd.

They rode about the famous one; then the shield dinned, the battle-targe
 clanged, the king advanced with a troop, a battalion to the battle. The
 raven yelled from above, dark and greedy for carrion. The troop was on
 the march. The horn-bearers ran, the heralds called out, the horse trod the
 earth.

As in the above example, the rhymes here emphasize the din of voices and the crash of weapons. The first pair, *dynede . . . clynade* ("dinned . . . clanged"), occurs with variation and similar effect in other poems containing battle scenes, as in *Judith* verse 24b, and the *Rhyming Poem* line 29, both of

²⁸ Variations of the elements - *word-* ("word"), - *bord-* ("shield"), and - *ord-* ("spear[-point]" or "forefront") occur in close proximity (either as simplexes or compounds) but without end-rhyme in *Christ II* 740 and 741a (*wynnum geworden . . . æþelinga ord*; "become joyous . . . forefront of nobles") and again in 768a and 769b (*attres ord . . . biter bordgelac*; "poison spear . . . bitter shield-play"). Examples of the same rhyming pair in other poems include *Andreas* 1205b (*ordum . . . bordum*, "with spears . . . with shields") and *The Battle of Maldon* 110b (*bord ord [onfeng]*, "shield [caught] spear-point").

which contain the pairing *hlyne*de . . . *dyne*de.²⁹ In *Elene*, the rhyme lends the passage a sense of heightened excitement that builds from the beginning of the battle-scene through a number of rhetorical devices,³⁰ most notably the use of what may be termed “incremental repetition”—the repetition of key words, sounds, or phrases at the beginning of consecutive sense-units³¹—in the a-verse of the formula “x to battle,” as seen above in line 52 (*herge to hilde*) and indeed throughout lines 22–68.³²

However, the battle-field in *Elene* is not the only showcase for such essentially aural effects as rhyme and incremental repetition. Cynewulf also uses rhyme to convey heightened emotion outside the heroic context, most commonly in order to portray states of either confusion or dismay.³³ For example, Cynewulf expresses the confusion of the Jews as they receive and discuss the news from Judas concerning the burial and whereabouts of the cross (536–54). He uses the rhyme *sume hyder* . . . *sume pyder* (“some hither . . . some thither,” 548b),³⁴ together with homeoteleuton (which I

²⁹ For a discussion of the extensive verbal parallels between the battle-scenes in *Elene* and *Judith*, see especially Orchard forthcoming b, which pairs the half-line *dynedan scildas* with the near-rhyme *hlude hlummon* (“shields dinned” and “loudly rang,” *Judith* 204b and 205a).

³⁰ Cf. also the subsequent battle scene between the Romans and the Huns and Hugas in lines 105–37, and in particular the cluster of rhymes in 114a and 114b (*borda gebrec* . . . *beorna geprec*, “crashing of spears . . . tumult of warriors”); 115a and 115b (*heard handgeswing* . . . *herga gring*, “hard hand-swing . . . slaughter of armies”); and in 121a and 122b (*stundum wræcon* . . . *bræcon bordhreðan*, “at times they pressed forward . . . they broke the shield coverings”).

³¹ On “incremental repetition,” see, for example, Bartlett 1935:4–61.

³² See *gearwe to guðe* (“ready to battle,” 23a); *hergum to hilde* (“with armies to the battle,” 32a); *abannan to beadwe* (“summon to battle,” 34a); *bannan to beadwe* (“summon to battle,” 45a); *wæpnum to wigge* (“with weapons to battle,” 48a); [*ðeah hie werod læsse*] *hæfdon to hilde* (“[though] they had [few in the army] to battle,” 49a); *cafe to cease* (“swift to battle,” 56a); and *hrora to hilde* (“bold to battle,” 65a).

³³ Other noteworthy examples of rhyme include (but are not limited to): *þone stan nime* . . . *hlafes ne gime* (“that he might pick up the stone . . . not care for the loaf,” 615b and 616b), as well as the internal rhymes *frodra* . . . *godra* (“of the wise . . . of the good,” 637a and b), and *bylde* . . . *fylde* (“encouraged . . . filled,” 1038a and 1040b).

³⁴ This rhyme is predominantly found in prose, occurring nineteen times by my count, and only one other time in extant verse (*The Meters of Boethius* 20.164).

distinguish here from rhyme to signal the same grammatical endings) for the words *þeahdedon* . . . *þrydedon* . . . *þohton* (“contemplated . . . pondered . . . thought”), to express their bewilderment and the flurry of deliberation that results from Judas’s disclosure. Cynewulf uses a similar strategy to convey Judas’s own confusion as he is finally released from his confinement in a hollow pit in order to lead Elene to the burial-place of the True Cross. Judas’s reaction is described as follows (719b–23a):

[O]nd hwæðre geare nyste,
 hungre **gehyned**, hwær sio halige rod,
 þurh feondes searu foldan **getyned**,
 lange legere fæst leodum dyrne
 wunode wælreste

[N]evertheless, he did not know exactly, humiliated with hunger, where the holy Cross through the trickery of fiends was buried in the earth, long set in its resting place, kept secret from the people, dwelled in its bed of slaughter.

The rhyme linking the words *gehyned* (“humiliated”) and *getyned* (“buried”) not only aurally reflects Judas’s mental disorder but also ominously connects Judas’s own confinement in an *engan hofe* (“narrow house,” 712a) with the confinement of the Cross, which is likewise interred in *þam reonian hofe* (“in a dreary house,” 833).³⁵ Cynewulf recycles the rhyme *getynde* . . . *gehyned* to link these burials with the confinement of the devil who, upon his defeat by Judas, claims that he is not only in *þam engan ham oft getynde* (“in that narrow home often enclosed,” 920), but that he is also *nu gehyned* (“now humiliated,” 922b).³⁶ In the devil’s speech (902–33), however, the rhyme is supplemented by a series of aural repetitions, chiefly in the form of echo-words (the close repetition of identical or etymologically related morphemes),³⁷ which appear to imitate the devil’s deadlocked condition.

³⁵ The narrative correlation between Judas and the cross in *Elene* has been noted by Regan 1996:258–59. Regan also notes analogues in this respect between Judas and “the Dreamer” in *The Dream of the Rood*.

³⁶ The element *-hof-* appears four more times in the poem (either as a simplex or complex) at lines 252a, 557b, 763a, and 1303a. The final two instances refer to the future entombment of the damned and are therefore thematically linked to the above three burials instigated by crime.

³⁷ This definition is derived from Battles 1998:168–240. For earlier discussions of the echo-word, see Beaty 1934, Rosier 1964, Kintgen 1974, and Foley 1990.

These include the simplexes *folgab . . . folgab* (“retinue . . . follow,” 903b and 929b); *nið-* (“enmity,” 904a and 912a); *æhta . . . æhtum . . . æhte* (“possession[s],” 904b, 907a, and 915a); and *rihta . . . rihte* (“of [my] rights . . . in right,” 909b and 916a), and also pairs that contain one compound element, as in *sacu . . . wipsæcest* (“strife . . . contradict,” 905a and 932b); *manfremmende . . . gefremede* (“sinful . . . performed,” 906a and 911b); and *cirde . . . wiðercyr* (“turned . . . reversal,” 914a and 925b). The repetition of *riht* (“right”) and *æht* (“possession”) highlights the devil’s use of quasi-legal terminology to enforce his claim over wicked souls. Such a reading is supported by an analogous treatment of the devil elsewhere in the same manuscript, in Vercelli Homily X.76–91, where the devil is seen to vie with God for *riht* over the souls he hopes to gather into his *hordcofan* (“hoard-coffer,” Vercelli Homily X.88).³⁸

The extent to which Cynewulf uses echo-words to enrich sound-play in the speech of the devil and to highlight rhetorically his defeat and stasis has already been seen. The extended use of echo-words as a governing rhetorical feature can be found elsewhere in the poem with dramatically different effect. For example, in the passage describing the sea-voyage of Elene and her troops in search of the True Cross (225–55),³⁹ a passage which is wholly without precedent in any of the extant Latin versions of the *vita*, Cynewulf uses this device to communicate movement rather than stasis. The difference is that rather than using *polyptoton* (the same form of a word with different grammatical endings) as the prevailing link, a device which is itself static, in the passage describing the sea-voyage, Cynewulf uses varieties of compounds and derivative forms that demonstrate differing degrees of progression and change. This type of evolutionary sound-play is seen, for example, in the repetition of the elements *fearoð-* (“stream” or “shore”) and *-hengestas* (“horses”), which together form the kenning for “ships” (*fearoðhengestas*, lit. “sea-horses”) in 226b, and appear in the subsequent kennings for “ships” (*wæghengestas*, “wave-horses,” 236b) and “the sea” (*sæfearoðe*, “sea-shore,” 251a). These three kennings alone span nearly the whole of the voyage, marking out its development. A similar progression may be seen in the additional compounds containing the element *-wæg-* (“wave”), particularly in kennings for “ship,” *wæges helm* (lit.

³⁸ Scragg 1992:200–201. The word *riht*, which has been omitted from Vercelli X.78, is supplied from a variant homily contained in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 302, though the overall sense of the passage remains the same without the emendation. For further commentary on this dialogue, see Zacher forthcoming.

³⁹ Cf. Battles 1998:182–88.

“covering of the wave,” 230a) and *wægflotan* (lit. “wave-floater,” 246a), as well as the kenning for “the sea” in *fifelwæg* (lit. “giant wave,” 237a). The list may include aurally similar compounds possessing the element *-weg-* (“way”), as in *bæðweg* (“watery-path,” 244a) and *eastwegas* (“path to the east,” 255a). Two further simplexes that develop into compounds for both “sea” and “ships” are the elements *-sæ-*, which appears no fewer than five times, and also *-brim-*, which occurs three times.⁴⁰

Cynewulf likewise uses repetition of a single element to develop paronomasia (by which I mean the creation of an etymological or pseudo-etymological relationship for the purpose of sound-play between two or more words) on the element *-sið-*, which can mean both “journey”—as in *siðfæt* (“journey,” 229b), *sið* (243b), and *siðes* (247b)—and “time”—as in *siðan* (“afterwards,” 230a) and *sið* (“after,” 240b). A variation on this technique may be seen in the string of (at least partly) etymologically unrelated words containing the sound *-yð-*, as in *yða* (“of the waves,” 239b), *hyðe* (“harbor,” 248a), *yðhofu* (lit. “wave-house,” 252a), and *eðgesyne* (“easily seen,” 256b), which is also attested in the variant spelling *yðgesyne*. The rapidly changing landscape of linked sound-elements creates a snowballing effect that propels the narrative forward at a rapid rate. Though the rhetoric is perhaps no match for the conceit in Cynewulf’s *Christ II*.850–66, which compares transitory life to a sea-voyage (and which shares numerous verbal parallels with the sea-voyage in *Elene*),⁴² the crafty verbal artistry of *Elene*’s journey makes the suspense-building hiatus a welcome one that amply displays Cynewulf’s rhetorical skill.

Cynewulf also uses the same rhetorical technique in passages that may be labeled exegetical or didactic, as in the scene when Eusebius renders advice to *Elene* concerning the nails of the True Cross. According to the

⁴⁰ The element *-sæ-* (“sea”) occurs in *sæmearas* (“ships [lit. sea-mares],” 228a); *Wendelsæ* (“Mediterranean,” 231b); *sæ* (“sea,” 240a); *sæmearh* (as above, 245b); and *sæfearoðe* (“seashore,” 251a). The element *-brim* (“sea”) appears in *brimpisan* (“ship,” 238a); *brimwudu* (“ship [lit. sea-wood],” 244b); and *on brime* (“on the sea,” 253a). See further kennings for “sea” in *mearcpaðu* (“road through border territory,” 233a), *earhgeblond* (“sea [lit. wave-blend],” 239a), *egstreame* (“sea-stream,” 241a) *merestræte* (“sea-road,” 242a), and *lagofæsten* (“water-fastness,” 249a), as well as for “ship” in *hringedstefnan* (“ring-prowed ships,” 248b).

⁴¹ Cf. Roberta Frank’s definition of paronomasia (1972:208, n. 7).

⁴² Cf. the compounds in *Christ II*.: 850b (*laguflode*, “water-flood”), 853a (*flodwudu*, “ship [lit. flood-wood]”), 863a (*yðmearas*, “ships [lit. wave-mares]”), and 852b and 863b (*sundhengestum* and *sundhengestas*, “sea-steed-”).

prophecy in Zacharias 14:20, Eusebius recommends that the nails be placed in the bridle of the horse of a king who will thereby be made unconquerable. The use of echo-words here is a combination of the techniques seen in the above two passages, in that it combines straightforward repetition of an element (either as a simplex or compound) with the type of evolutionary sound-play and simple paronomastic structuring seen in the description of Elene's sea-journey. In this way, Cynewulf (following the Latin versions of the *vita*) uses repetition of key elements not only to explain but also to expand the cryptic prophecy delivered by the prophet that *in die illo erit quod super frenum equi est sanctum Domino et erunt lebetes in domo Domini quasi fialae coram altari* ("in that day that which is upon the bridle of the horse shall be holy to the Lord: and the caldrons in the house of the Lord shall be as the phials before the altar," Zacharias 14:20).

One particularly interesting example of this type of progressive sound-play in *Elene* begins with the compound *sigesped* ("victory-success," 1171), as its two constituent elements repeat elsewhere in the passage as *sige* and *sigor* (1180b and 1182a) and as *wigge sped* ("wealth in battle," 1181b), the latter of which not only rhymes with the original compound but also shape-shifts into a second string of echo-words incorporating the phrases *wæpen at wigge* ("weapon in battle," 1187a) and *wigge weorðod* ("honored in battle," 1195a). The half-line *wigge weorðod* in turn introduces subsidiary sound-effects, such as the potential play on *wig-* ("battle," 1195a) and *wicg* ("horse," 1195b), and also links the verb *weorðod* with the earlier *midlum geweorðod* ("honored by its bit," 1192b). This chain of effects appears to link all the important elements of the prophecy as expressed in Eusebius's speech. Other examples include paronomastic play on *meare* ("mare," 1175a) and *mære* ("famous," 1175b), and also the repetition of compound-elements in the opposites *oferswiðan* ("might overcome," 1177) and *unoferswiðed* ("unvanquished," 1187a), which modify, respectively, both the king who will use the holy bridle in war and the unassailable strength of the bridle itself. Such instances of echoic repetition in the passage are accompanied by larger patterns of structural repetition that link the passage as a whole to other analogous scenes in the poem.⁴³ The clearest such example is the opening summons delivered by Elene to Eusebius (1160–63a):

⁴³ Cf. the summons issued to wise men by Constantine in 153–56a. Also see Elene's sequential summons to the three thousand wise men in 276–81, the thousand men in 323–31, and the five hundred men in 377–84a. The final call to the wise men is made by the officials of the emperor in 555–58a.

Heht ða gefetigean forðsnotterne
 ricene to rune, þone þe rædgeþeaht
 þurh gleawe miht georne cuðe,
 frodne on ferhðe.

She commanded them to fetch the very wise man quickly to counsel, the one tried in spirit, who through wise power might eagerly make known counsel.

The wording recalls several other type-scenes in the poem, the closest being Elene's earlier summons to the same man (1050–53):

Siððan Elene heht Eusebium
 on rædgeþeaht, Rome bisceop,
 gefetian on fultum, forðsnoterne,
 hæleða gerædum to þære halgan byrig.

Afterwards, Elene commanded Eusebius, the bishop of Rome, a very wise man, to be fetched in aid into counsel for the advice of men into the holy city.

Parallels to this summons and others like it work at the macrocosmic level (even as the echo-words do at the microcosmic level) to create aural resonances between the numerous calls to counsel and the resultant deliberations that structure the action of so much of the poem.

The extent to which Cynewulf employs paronomasia as a form of aural repetition is clear. Since Cynewulf makes such pervasive and varied use of this particular rhetorical technique, it is worth pausing to attempt to distinguish some sub-categories. While numerous studies have examined instances of paronomastic and onomastic puns in Cynewulf's poetry,⁴⁴ few have attempted to comment comprehensively on Cynewulf's particular use of these features,⁴⁵ and even fewer have attempted to situate these findings within current debates on orality and literacy. Numerous studies of paronomasia in Old English literature have shown the necessity of drawing a distinction between etymologically and nonetymologically based paronomasia and such features as double-entendre, which effects a pun

⁴⁴ For what remains one of the most sensitive treatments of paronomasia in Old English poetry, see Frank 1972.

⁴⁵ See Lampugnani 1993. See also brief discussions of this topic in connection with *Elene* in Bjork 1985:62–64, 78, and 89; and Anderson 1983:74–75 and 103–33.

through play on two meanings within a single word.⁴⁶ These distinctions will be maintained here. This section of the discussion will cover a range of examples, beginning with paronomastic puns that have been dealt with extensively in criticism to date, and which are (generally speaking) abundantly attested within the poetic corpus. In addition to identifying what appear to be either visual or aural puns, I will offer variations on common pun-sequences that appear to be context-specific to *Elene*.

Cynewulf's use of the pun *rod: rodor* ("rood: heaven") has been widely discussed, particularly in relation to *Elene*, as the poem features the story of the Invention of the True Cross.⁴⁷ Roberta Frank, who cites some twelve examples of this pun in *Elene*,⁴⁸ was perhaps the first to show that the effect of the pun lies mainly in the incongruity generated by the juxtaposition of *rod* ("rood"), which is itself mundane (but which becomes heavenly through the passion of Christ), and *rodor* ("heaven"), which is divine. As such, the pun presents what Eric Stanley (quoting Jean Paul Richter) has referred to as "the optical and acoustic deceit of wordplay,"⁴⁹ for although the pun is immediately pleasing to the ear, the opposition between the mundane and heavenly is awkward to the eye until the larger narrative elements are realized. The following two examples demonstrate a variation of this particular irony between "high" and "low" elements as a model for subsequent conversions. The first example explains the role of the Cross in delivering victory to Constantine (144–47):

Da wæs gesyne þæt sige forgeaf
 Constantino cyning ælmihtig
 æt þam dægweorce, domweorðunga,
 rice under roderum, þurh his rode treo

Then it was seen that the Almighty King gave to Constantine in that day's work victory, honor, [and] power under the heavens, through his rood-tree.

⁴⁶ See Frank 1972:207–8 (espec. n. 7), Lampugnani 1993:303–4.

⁴⁷ See Frank 1972:210–11, Lampugnani 1993:308, and Stanley 2001a:349–50.

⁴⁸ Frank 1972:210–11 cites the following lines in *Elene*: 147, 206, 482, 624, 631, 855, 886, 918, 1022, 1066, 1074, 1234. She also cites two occurrences of this pun in *Juliana* 305 and 447, and in *Christ II* 727.

⁴⁹ Stanley 2001a:345 is quoting Richter 1804: "der optische und akustische Betrug des Wortspiels."

As can be seen from the syntax, the irony derives not so much from the disparity between *rod* (“rood”) and *rodor* (“heaven”), as the *rod* is already equated with the symbolic Cross of the vision, but between the earthly *rice* (“power”) and the heavenly *roderum* (“heavens”). It is not until the very end of the poem that we learn the power of the Cross to remedy this disparity (1228b–35):

Sie þara manna gehwam
 behliden helle duru, heofones ontyned,
 ece geopenad engla rice,
 dream unhwilen, ond hira dæl scired
 mid Marian, þe on gemynd nime
 þære deorestan dægweorðunga
rode under roderum, þa se ricesta
 ealles oferwealdend earne beþeahte. Finit.

Let there be for each of men the doors of hell closed, (and) heaven’s unlocked, (and) the kingdom of the angels eternally opened, let there be unending joy and each of their portion assigned with Mary, for the one who holds in memory the festival of the dearest rood beneath the heavens, which the most powerful sovereign-lord of all covered with his arms. *Finit.*

This passage reveals the ability of the Cross to elevate the mundane to the heavenly, even as the cross itself experienced conversion from a secular object to religious symbol. Verbal parallels with the above passage in 144–47 reveal the extended irony: the adjective *ricesta* (“most powerful,” 1234b), which here describes Christ, contrasts with the earthly *rice* (“power,” 147a) of Constantine, just as the *dægweorðunga* (“festival,” 1233b) celebrating the Invention of the Cross contrasts the earlier attribution of *domweorðunga* (“honor,” 146a) for Constantine’s *dægweorce* (“day’s work,” 146b) in battle.

It should be noted, however, that word-play on *rod*: *rodor* need not be limited to these two elements. A series of satellite words,⁵⁰ or words frequently attracted to this pair, also helps to enrich the verbal texture of the poem. For example, on two occasions (at 1017–26 and 1063b–78a), *reord* (“voice”), a (near-)anagram of *rodor*,⁵¹ occurs in close proximity with both

⁵⁰ This term is derived from Battles 1998:33.

⁵¹ The form *roder*, a perfect anagram of *reord*, is attested elsewhere, as can be seen in the on-line corpus of the Dictionary of Old English (<http://www.doe.utoronto.ca>), from which I have derived much of the lexical information cited here. The connection

rod and *rodor*. In the first example (1017–26), the combination of all three elements emphasizes the authority of God’s word (*reord of roderum*, 1022a), as it is according to his instruction that Elene commands a temple to be built at the site where the cross was found (*rode*, 1022b). It also stresses the connection between the cross as secular object and as a sanctified symbol of Christ’s passion. A second satellite-word is *ræd* (“counsel”), the relevance of which requires little explanation, as we have already seen the connection between the various assemblies in the poem and the finding of the Cross. To cite just one example that falls outside of this broader context, one may adduce the extent to which the devil puns on this paronomastic string of words once he has been defeated by Judas. Complaining about the tremendous power of God (916b–19a), the devil states that

Is his rice brad
ofer middangeard. Min is geswiðrod
ræd under roderum. Ic þa rode ne þearf
hleah tre herigea.

His kingdom is broad over the middle-earth. My counsel is diminished
under the heavens. I have no need to praise the rood with laughter.

Like the Jews in the poem who attempted to keep the whereabouts of the cross a secret, the devil is here deprived of his ability to persuade.

A second constellation of paronomastic elements that has received substantial critical attention, both with respect to Cynewulf’s poetry and within the larger extant Old English poetic corpus, is the sequence *lif* (“life”), *lof* (“praise”), *leaf* (“dear”), *lufu* (“love”), and *geleafa* (“belief”). Kintgen has shown that the grouping of these elements is especially important in religious poetry, “where life, love and praise are easily and

between the elements *rod-*, *rodor-*, and *reord-* plays a particularly important role in *The Dream of the Rood* (also in the Vercelli Book), as it is the *rod* that speaks to the dreamer and compels him to reform.

⁵² A second passage, in which Elene orders Cyriacus to find the nails of the Cross, establishes a similar connection, though this time with a host of subsidiary sound-effects: the extended pattern *rode . . . rodera . . . reordode . . . rode rodera* (1066a; 1066b; 1072b; 1074a; and 1074b) is punctuated by a series of words containing nonetymological anagrams of the element *-rod-*, as in *wundorwyrð* (“wonderful event,” 1070a), *wuldorgifum* (“glorious gifts,” 1071a), and *word* (“word,” 1071b).

⁵³ This particular sequence is taken from Kintgen 1977.

frequently related to faith.” It is undoubtedly for this reason that examples of this grouping abound in *Elene*. It is likewise interesting to note that the single greatest concentration of disparate elements belonging to this word-group occurs, paradoxically, in Judas’s 116.5-line speech (419b–535). The speech essentially recounts Judas’s conversation with his father, Symon, who passes onto him knowledge about the controversy concerning Christ’s crucifixion, his conviction that Christ is the true savior, and the imperative to reveal the information should wise men seek it. Much of the speech (seventy-seven lines) consists of indirect speech by Symon (441–53; 464–527), and it is in fact only in these lines that these various elements occur. In these speeches, it is clear that Cynewulf uses sequences of the above elements as a rhetorical tool for persuasion. In one speech (511–27), for example, Symon uses these elements to explain to Judas the extent of God’s mercy and the need for belief and reform. The tone of the speech is duly homiletic, and begins with the address (511): *Nu ðu meaht gehyran, hæleð min se leofa* (“Now you might hear, my beloved man”). The element *-leof-* in the address is picked up by a string of paronomastic elements (517–27):

Forðan ic soðlice ond min swæs fæder
 syðan gelyfdon
 þæt geþrowade eallra þrymma god
 lifes lattiow, laðlic wite

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*:311.

⁵⁵ Clusters containing ten lines or fewer between elements include (those within Judas’s speech are in bold): 305a (*lif*), 311b (*lifdon*); 441b (***lifdagum***), 450b (***leofað***), 453b (***lofiað***); 486b (***lifgende***), 491a (***geleafan***), 491b (***lufan***); 511b (***leofa***), 518a (***gelyfdon***), 520a (***lifes***), 523a (***leofesta***), 526b (***lif***); 575a (*life*), 585a (*endelifes*); 606a (*lif*), 606b (*leofre*); 747b (*lof*), 756a (*lifes*); 792b (*lifes*), [795a (*lyftlacende*)], 795b (*gelyfe*); 877a (*life*), 878a (*unlifgende*); 889b (*lof*), 898a (*lifes*), [899a (*lyft*)]; 959a (*geleafful*), 965a (*geleafan*); 1016b (*leofspell*), 1026b (*lifes*); 1035a (*lifweard*, *leof*), 1035b (*geleafa*), 1045b (*lif*), 1047a (*geleafful*), 1047b (*leof*); and 1205a (*leofra*), 1205b (*lufan*), 1208a (*lifes*), [1213b (*lefe*)]. Note too that Judas’s speech contains a lacuna after 438b. Most editions (Krapp 1932, Gradon 1997) resume at line 439b with the word *eaferan*.

⁵⁶ For discussions of homiletic rhetoric in *Elene*, see especially Whatley 1975a and Wright 1990.

⁵⁷ Cf. the verbatim parallel in *The Dream of the Rood* 78 (*Nu ðu miht gehyran, hæleð min se leofa* [“Now you might hear, my beloved man”]) and also 95 (*Nu ic þe hate, hæleð min se leofa* [“Now I implore you, my beloved man”]).

for oferþearfe ilda cynnes.
 Forðan ic þe lære þurh leoðorune,
 hyse leofesta, þæt ðu hospcwide,
 æfst ne eofulsæc æfre ne fremme,
 grimne geagncwide, wið godes bearne.
 þonne ðu geearnast þæt þe bið ece lif,
 selust sigeleana, seald in heofonum.

Therefore I and my dear father afterwards truly believed that the God of all glories, the Leader of life, suffered hateful torture because of the great need of mankind. Therefore I teach you through wise counsel, dearest son, that you might never commit blasphemy, evil attack, or grim retort against the son of God. Then you will earn so that to you will be given eternal life, the best of victory-rewards, in heaven.

In two cases, the paronomastic element is highlighted by “ornamental alliteration”: the word *leofesta* (523a) is linked back to *lære* and *leoðorune* (522), just as *lif* (526b) is linked forward to the sound element of *sigeleana* (527a), and also accompanied by sound-play on *bearne* and *geearnest* (526b and 527a). The use of this particular rhetorical flourish, with its attendant oral/aural effects, not only highlights the presence of homiletic speech, but also links the concepts of belief, life, and dearness as a means of attempting to convince Judas of the importance of meriting reward in heaven.

Thematically speaking, many of Cynewulf’s recurring paronomastic puns in *Elene* appear to play in some way on the notion of sin. One well-documented example of this type of sound-play is on the element *-man-*, which can mean either “man” (*mǎn[n]*) or “sin” (*mān*). The pun occurs in four disparate groupings within the poem as follows: when Elene attempts to extract the whereabouts of the cross from Judas (621–26); in the Devil’s speech to Judas (900–933); in Judas’s response to the devil (939–45a); and in Cynewulf’s epilogue as he explains the portion of the blessed (1312b–19a). Though in each case the wordplay is functional, it is by no means static. For example, in the aforementioned speech of the devil, we find a clever association of *manna* (“of men,” 902a), *manfremmende* (“performing sin,” 906a), and *manþeawum* (“sinful custom,” 929a); each of these is also paired in the b-verse with the first-person possessive pronoun *min-*. This yoking has the effect of stressing the devil’s claim to *riht* (“right”) over the wicked, and also of transferring the blame away from himself. When Judas responds to the devil, he throws his words back at him

⁵⁸ See Frank 1972:221; Stanley 2001a:349.

in typical flyting fashion, calling him a *morðres manfrea* (“sinful ruler of murder”), thereby reasserting his culpability, and also *synna gemyndig* (“mindful of sin”), which echoes Cynewulf’s earlier description of him as an *eatol æclæca, yfela gemyndig* (“accursed wretch, mindful of evil,” 901). Judas likewise inverts the devil’s rhetoric by using the second-person pronoun three times, once with impressive spitfire, as he manages to utter two of the most tongue-twisting lines in Old English verse: *Ne þearft ðu swa swiðe, synna gemyndig / sar niwigan ond sæce ræran* (“You do not have such great need, mindful of sin, to renew sorrow and to rear conflict,” 939-40). If Cynewulf had in mind an oral performance of this speech, he certainly seems to have had a good sense of humor.

It is also worth noting the passage in which Symon reveals to Judas the circumstances of Christ’s crucifixion (464–71a):

Ongit, guma ginga, godes heahmægen,
 nergendes naman. Se is niða gehwam
 unasecgendlic, þone sylf ne mæg
 on moldwege man aspyrigean.
 Næfre ic þa geþeahhte þe þeos þeod ongan
 secan wolde, ac ic symle mec
 asced þara scylda, nales sceame worhte
 gaste minum.

Perceive, young man, the high power of God, the name of the Savior. It is to each man inexpressible, which man himself may not discover on earth. Never did I wish to seek those in counsel that this people began, but I always separated myself from those guilts, not at all caused shame in my soul.

While there is no particular ambiguity surrounding the word *man*, which must in this context mean “man,” the elaborate sound-play on and within words for “man” and “sin” encourages a potential pun—the words *naman* and *unasecgendlic* both contain nonetymological elements meaning “man” (*man* and *secg*), and *niða* can be the genitive plural of both the masculine nouns *nip* (“strife”) and *niðas* (“men”). It is here the cumulative effect of like puns and sound-effects that alert the ear to this potential pattern of double-entendre.

A similar paronomastic pun may be found in the pairing *fyrn: firen* (“ancient: sin”). Fred Robinson has commented on these elements, showing

⁵⁹ This strategy comprises a typical strategy in heroic flyting. Cf. especially *The Battle of Maldon*, 29–41 and 45–61. For the occurrence of this topos in Old English literature, see further Blake 1976, Parks 1990:espec. 67–71, and Orchard 2000:8.

that while *fyrn* has a general association with things “ancient,” very commonly in religious poetry it refers to a specifically pre-Christian age.⁶⁰ It is presumably for this reason that *fyrn-* so often attracts the sense *firen-*, and may at times be interpreted interchangeably, as Robinson has demonstrated on the basis of both scribal and contemporary editorial evidence.⁶¹ In terms of the use of these elements in *Elene*, Robinson points out that *fyrn-*, with the specific sense of “pre-Christian,” occurs no fewer than ten times in the poem, with reference to both pagan and Jewish (also pre-Christian) writings, as well as Jewish and Old Testament prophets and prophesies. However, the pun *fyrn-: firen-* does not comprise the only paronomastic pairing on these elements. It is interesting to note the extent to which the pun attracts satellite elements, adding further specialized nuance. The attraction of *fyr-* (*-fir-*) “fire” has been noted before,⁶² though other connected elements may include *fyrhð-* (*ferhð-; firhð-*) “mind, spirit,”⁶³ and *fira(s)-* “men, people,” the latter of which creates yet another pun on “man” and “sin.”⁶⁴ A straightforward example linking “fire” to “sin” occurs at the very end of the poem, in lines 1308b–19a, as Cynewulf compares the fortune of those who separate themselves from sin (*ascyred ond asceaden . . .*

⁶⁰ For the fullest discussion of this paronomastic pun, see Robinson 1999.

⁶¹ It is noteworthy that on one occasion in the already much-discussed speech by the devil (902–10a) Cynewulf distinguishes between *fyrn-* in *fyrngeflit* (“ancient conflict,” 903a) and *firen-* in *firenum* (“sins,” 908a). This, however, does not preclude the possibility of double-entendre here and elsewhere. Rather, in this instance it seems the poet is trying to spell out the connection, highlighting this pun with like-puns in the passage, such as the aforementioned play on *manna* (“of men,” 902a) and *manfremmende* (“sinful,” 906a), and also reinforced by preceding satellite elements in *ferhðsefan* (“mind,” 894b), *feorhnere* (“for the salvation,” 897a) and *fira cynne* (“of mankind,” 897b).

⁶² Frank 1972:219. See above for examples.

⁶³ Examples include *fyrndagum* (“in former days,” 528b) and *fyrhðsefan* (“in mind,” 534b); *fyrhðwerige* (“mind-weary,” 560a) and *fyrngewritu* (“in ancient-records,” 560b); and *fyrhðe* (“in mind,” 641a) and *fyrn* (“long ago,” 641b).

⁶⁴ Note the following examples: *to feorhnere fira cynne* (“for the salvation of mankind,” 897); *nerigend fira. Mec þæra nægla gen. / [on fyrhðsefan fyrwet myngað]* (“savior of men; yet [desire in my mind reminds] me about the nails,” 1077-78); and the nearly parallel *nerigend fira. Ðu ðas næglas hat / [þam æðlestan eorðcyninga / burgagendra on his bridels don]* (“savior of men. Bid [the noblest of earthly kings to wear] these nails [in his bridle],” 1172-74).

gehwylcre . . . firena, 1313–14a) through the fire of Judgment (*þurh þæs domes fyr*, 1314b), to gold that has been purified in fire (*ofnes fyr*, 1311a). The paronomastic pun is highlighted by a string of further words for sin: *synnum* (1309a), *womma* (1310b), *scylda* (1313b), *mana* (1317b), and *synna* (1318a). An analogous pun on *mǎn[n]*: *mān* is stressed through the parallelism of *swa bið þara manna ælc* (“so may it be for each of men,” 1312b) and *þæs ðe hie mana gehwylc* (“for those who each of sins,” 1317b). Cynewulf’s rather transparent rhetoric in this Judgment Day context serves to render more immediate the need for reform.

Cynewulf’s use of this type of pun is not always so obvious. A particularly interesting example of the appearance of *fyrn-* together with its satellite elements occurs as Elene attempts to gain access to information from Judas concerning the whereabouts of the cross (640b–48a). Judas, claiming ignorance, makes the statement that *Ic ne can þæt ic nat, | findan on fyrhðe þæt swa fyrn gewearð* (“I am not able to find that which I know not in my mind, that which is so ancient,” 640b–41). Elene continues Judas’s pun on *fyrhðe . . . fyrn*, pointing out the inconsistency in his logic as she reminds him that the Jews have a perfect memory of the Trojan War, an event that took place even longer ago (643–48a):⁶⁵

Hu is þæt geworden on þysse werþeode
 þæt ge swa monigfeald on gemynd witon,
 alra tacna gehwylc swa Troiana
 þurh gefeoht fremedon? Þæt wæs fyr mycle,
 open ealdgewin, þonne þeos æðele gewyrd,
 geara gongum.

How did it happen in this nation that you so manifold know in memory of each single wonder that the Trojans performed through fighting? That open ancient-struggle was much longer ago than this noble event in the passing of years.

The words *fyr mycle* in the above quotation have been emended from the manuscript reading *fær mycel*: the first element because the construction appears to demand an adverb, and the second because it presents a more recognizable comparative construction in anticipation of *þonne* (“than”) in line 647.⁶⁶ If we accept the emendation to *fyr* (“longer”), we may also allow the inevitable pun on “fire,” as it so fittingly invokes the burning of Troy, despite its awkward syntax. The clumsy grammar is not offensive in this

⁶⁵ For commentary on this passage, see Whatley 1973.

⁶⁶ Gradon 1997:51 has *f[ie]r myc[le]*, which presents a variant spelling of *fyr*.

case, as the aural and formulaic expectation of “fire” is not diminished until reaching the *þonne* clause. However, Pamela Gradon has argued that “*mycel* for *mycele* in a comparative construction has been thought possible; [compare] *Beowulf* 69–70. Such a construction might explain the substitution of *fær* for the necessary comparative” (1997:n. 646b). In such a case, there is the possibility of a second pun on *fær*, which can mean a “sudden attack,” a sense that works in apposition with *gefeohht* (“fighting”) and *ealdgewin* (“ancient struggle”), though again with strain on the syntax. A parallel with Wulfstan’s homily XII, *De falsis dies*, demonstrates the possibility of a pun on both the elements *fyr-* and *fær-* (Wulfstan XII.21–24). The passage is particularly apposite because it describes the “spurious” beliefs held during a pagan period referred to as *gefyrn* (“of old,” Wulfstan XII.3):

Sume men eac sædan be ðam scinendum steorrum þæt hi godas wæron,
[ond] agunnan hy weorðian georne, [ond] sume hy gelyfdon eac on fyr for
his færlicum bryne.

Some men also said about the shining stars that they were gods, and began
to worship them eagerly, and some believed also in fire on account of its
sudden burning.

Wulfstan’s homily demonstrates the extent to which all three elements may be used in the context of a larger piece of word-play.

The pun on “fire” and “sin” above, is echoed thematically in a less frequent pun that yokes together the elements *līg-* (“fire”) and *līg-* (“lie,” “falsehood”). One rhetorically rich passage occurs as Elene threatens the Jews with death by fire should they not end their deceit. Elene’s warning, which is laden with puns, is obviously effective, as it compels them to offer up Judas because he is *giddum gearusnottorne* (“very wise in songs / riddles,” 586a) and *sundorwisne* (“singularly wise,” 588a). Elene states that (574–84a)

Ic eow to soðe secgan wille,
ond þæs in life **lige** ne wyrðeð,
gif ge þissum **lease** leng gefylgað
mid fæcne gefice, þe me fore standað,
þæt eow in beorge bæl fornimeð,
hattost heaðowelma, ond eower hra bryttað,
lacende **lig**, þæt eow sceal þæt **leas**
apundrad weorðan to woruldgedale.

Ne magon ge ða word geseðan þe ge hwile nu on unriht
 wrigon under womma sceatum, ne magon ge þa wyrd bemiðan,
 bedyrnan þa deopan mihte.

I wish to say to you as truth, and concerning that in life will not be a lie, if you follow this falsehood longer with fraudulent deceit, you who stand before me, a fire will seize you, the hottest of heat-surgings, and the leaping fire will separate your corpse, so that for that deceit you shall be weighed in judgement to death. Nor might you prove those words, which you now for a while in unrighteousness hid under garments of sin, nor might you conceal the event, keep secret the profound power.

The elements in bold represent the items linked through paronomasia, while the underlined items represent synonyms for “fire” and “falsehood.” Extra emphasis is created through the repetition of *leas* in 576a and 580b, which is also highlighted through continued “l” alliteration in lines 575–76. In addition, the sound-play on *fæcne* and *gefic* (577a) is emphasized through ornamental alliteration that back-links to *gefylgað* in 576b.⁶⁷ It is also worth noting a possible visual pun on *apundrad* (“weighed in judgment”; 581a), which in the manuscript would have been almost indistinguishable from *awundrad* (“wondered”), on account of the similarity between scribal <p> and <w> (wynn). This secondary reading is highlighted not only by the occurrence of governing <w> alliteration in line 581, but also by the predominant <w> alliteration contained in the two lines following (582–83). The combination of aural and visual play in this case serves to offset the austerity of Elene’s prediction and warning.

While the pun in this passage is explicit, elsewhere it is less direct. When Cynewulf describes the fates on Judgment Day of the three portions of people, he explains that (1298b–1302a)

Bið se þridda dæl,
 awyrgede womsceaðan, in þæs wylmes grund,
leas leodhatan, lige befæsted
 þurh ærgewyrht, arleasra sceolu,
 in gleda gripe.

⁶⁷ Cf. a similar passage (293–309) in which Elene berates the Jews for their spiritual blindness. She maintains that despite Christ’s willingness to save them from *ligcwale* (“death by fire”), nevertheless the Jews continue to mingle *lige wið soðe* (“falsehood with truth”).

There will be the third portion, accursed evil-doers, in the bottom of the surge, false tyrants, secured in the fire through former deeds, a band of lawless ones in the grip of the flames.

The phrase *lige befæsted* most likely represents “secured in the fire.” However, since both *līg* and *līge* are masculine i-stems,⁶⁸ the sense is interchangeable with “secured in falsehood.” This play on words is highlighted further through the play on *lease leodhatan* (“false tyrants”) and *arleasra sceolu* (“a band of lawless ones”), which together depict deceitfulness as a lack of virtue.⁶⁹ The closeness of these elements, both in terms of their sound-quality and orthography, generates a deliberate ambiguity that emphasizes the severity of falsehood and its dire consequences.

It should not be assumed from the above paronomastic puns, particularly those which play on “man” and “sin,” that Cynewulf presents a thoroughly bleak picture of humanity. A converse relationship between man and things virtuous or divine is expressed through a host of other paronomastic sequences, for example: *hæleð* (“man”) together with *halig* (“holy”) and other words containing the root -hal-;⁷⁰ the double use of the masculine noun *þrymm*, which can mean both “multitude” and “glory”;⁷¹

⁶⁸ *Lig* “fire” may also be neuter.

⁶⁹ Cynewulf’s technique in *Elene* may be compared with that in *Juliana* for the reason that here too puns on “fire” and “falsehood” are implicit. In lines 563b–68, for example, we are told that Juliana, who is described as *leahtra lease* (“devoid of sin”), with a clear pun on *leas* (“false”), is cast into a *lig-* (“fire”), which miraculously does not burn her. Cf. also *Juliana* 582–84a, where Juliana is again cast into the fire.

⁷⁰ Frank 1972:221 cites *Elene* 1203; other examples may be found in 670b–71a, 1006–14a (the passage contains five discrete instances), and 1053.

⁷¹ This is a common pun. Most editors account only for the sense of *þrymm* as “glory” in *Elene*. However, there is sufficient ambiguity in at least one instance to merit the suspicion of double-entendre. Note the following example (326-31):

Hio þa on þreate .M. manna
 fundon ferhðgleawra, þa þe fyrngemynd
 mid Iudeum gearwast cuðon.
 Prungon þa on þreate þær on þrymme bad
 in cynestole caseres mæg,
 geatolic guðcwen golde gehyrsted.

Then they found in a troop a thousand men of wisdom in mind, those who knew the most clearly the memory of former times among the Jews. They thronged in a troop to where

variations on the phonetically similar grouping *we(o)rod* (“troop”) . . . *word* (“word”) . . . *weard* (“guardian”) . . . *wyrd* (“fate”);⁷² the play on *leod* (“people”) and *leoht* (“light”);⁷³ and concerning the state of the world in general, as in the play on *woruld* and *wuldor*, which form perfect anagrams of one another.⁷⁴

Another much neglected sound-element in *Elene* is the abundant onomastic play, through the use of both paronomasia and Hebrew and Greek etymologies.⁷⁵ This critical neglect is surprising, given the fact that there are two name-changes actually highlighted in the poem itself. The first is Saul’s name-change to Paul after he martyrs Stephen, Judas’s brother. Despite Saul’s crime, it is revealed that God chooses to spare him because Stephen both forgives him and prays for his soul. Symon’s description of the event is as follows (491b–500a):

Pa for lufan dryhtnes
Stephanus wæs stanum worpod;
ne geald he yfel yfele, ac his ealdfeondum
þingode þrohtherd, bæd þrymcyning
þæt he him þa weadæd to wræce ne sette,
þæt hie for æfstum unscyldigne,

the kinswoman of the emperor waited in glory on a throne, the magnificent war-queen,
decked in gold.

The phrase *on þrymme* is generally translated as “in glory” (cf. Bradley 1995:173, Gradon 1997:110 [she has no entry for *þrymm* as “troop”]). However, there is nothing to suggest that *Elene* must be alone. The parallelism between *on þreate*, mentioned twice in 326a and 329a, and *on þrymme* in 329b presents enough evidence for a pun. Also cf. *Elene* 744b for another possible double-entendre involving *þrymm*.

⁷² For an excellent assessment of these paronomastic elements, see Frank 1972: 212–15. In *Elene*, the fullest examples include 890–96; 973–79a; and 1281–88 (some of these also containing satellite puns on *wuldor*, *weald*-, [ge]wurd-, and *wundor*).

⁷³ See especially Lampugnani 1993:314, whose examples include *Elene* 162b–63, 1115, and 1122b–26. As Lampugnani also points out, *leoht* participates in other sound-groupings, such as *leoht* and *beorht* (92) and *leoht* and *geleaf*- (1136a).

⁷⁴ Cf. Lampugnani 1993:304 and her example drawn from *Elene* 1149a and 1152a. Also consider the use of these elements in 778a and 781b, and 1046a and 1048a.

⁷⁵ On the topic of onomastic puns in Old English verse, see the four articles devoted to this topic in Robinson 1993:183–236. For examples in *Elene*, see Whatley 1975b and Hill 1996.

synna leasne, Sawles larum
 feore beræddon, swa he þurh feondscipe
 to cwale monige Cristes folces
 demde to deape.

Then for his love of the Lord Stephen was pelted with stones; he did not repay evil with evil, but patient he interceded for his old enemies, bade the King of glory that he might not set retribution for that woeful deed, that they on account of envy, according to the instructions of Saul, deprived of life the innocent and sinless [man], just as he through enmity deemed many of Christ's people to execution and death.

The phrase *Sawles larum* (“according to the instructions of Saul,” 497b) presents a potential pun on the vernacular word for *sawl* (“soul”), the subsidiary meaning of which is strengthened by the proximity of a similar term for “life” in the phrase *feore beræddon* (“deprived of life”).⁷⁶ The element *-sawl-* also appears in a similar grouping of words later in the poem, in lines 876–77, this time just prior to Cyriacus's resurrection of a dead man. We are told that *Elene heht þa asettan sawlleasne, / life belidenes lic on eorðan* (“commanded it to be set soul-less, the body of the one deprived of life on the earth”). Here too the element *sawl-* (“soul”) is paired with the synonymic phrase *life belidenes* (“deprived of life”), and also with the negative component *-leasne* (“without”) and the verbal element *-set-* (“to set”). The vernacular pun on “Saul” and “soul” appears to emphasize that Saul's soul, like Judas's, bears the untapped potential for virtue and faith, qualities that make him worthy of redemption. The use of name-play to demonstrate Saul's transformation presents what seems a poignant foreshadowing of Cynewulf's own spiritual conversion. Though Cynewulf employs runes in his signature, by fixing his name in this manner Cynewulf also paradoxically expresses reversal and change.

There is likewise evident sound-play on the name Stephen, which is highlighted again through the use of repeated sound-elements. In lines 491b–92a above, we are told that *þa for lufan dryhtnes / Stephanus wæs stanum worpod* (“then for his love of the Lord, Stephen was pelted with stones”). The pairing of *Stephanus* and *stan-* is repeated in 509–10, when it is explained that *Saul Stephanus stanum hehte/ abreotan on beorge, broðor*

⁷⁶ The words *sawol* (“soul”) and *feorh* (“life”) occur together as near-synonyms elsewhere in the corpus, for example, in *Riddle 39* (16a): *Ne hafað hio sawle ne feorh* (“she does not have soul or life”); and *Beowulf* (850–52a): *deaðfæge deog, siððan dreama leas / in fenfreoðo feorh alegde, / hæþene sawle* (“death-fated he hid joyless in the fen, his dark stronghold, till he gave up life, his heathen soul”).

pinne (“commanded Stephen, your bother, to be killed with stones on the hill”), and again in 823–24a when Judas’s brother is described as *Stephanus, heold, þeah he stangreopum / worpod wære* (“Stephen, dear, though he was pelted with stone-blows”). The sound-play on *stan* and *Stephanus* (which itself circumscribes the word *stan*) further highlights this repetition. Both of these effects appear to be used in order to associate, if not identify (as has been suggested by some), Judas’s brother, Stephen, with Stephen the Protomartyr, who was also killed by stoning.⁷⁷ The connection is strengthened by the fact that “Stephen” and “stone” are highlighted elsewhere in Latin etymologies, as for example, in Isidore’s *Etymologiae* (VII.xi.4), where it states explicitly that *Stephanus enim corona dicitur; humiliter lapidatus, sed sublimiter coronatus* (“Stephen indeed is called ‘crown’; humbly he was stoned, but with sublimity he was crowned”).⁷⁸ This etymology, with its apparent disparity between earthly demise and transcendent glory, certainly seems appropriate to the description of the death and martyrdom of Judas’s brother.

These various conversions, which take place outside the main narrative, prepare for the name-change of Judas himself, who is given the name Cyriacus by Eusebius upon his conversion to Christianity. The significance of the name Cyriacus, which is glossed in the poem as *æ hælandes* (“law, gospel, or revelation of the Savior”) has been well-noted in the context of the poem, primarily because it contrasts *unriht æ* (“un-right law,” 1041a), described here as pagan custom and worship, and the law of the Old Testament, expressed variously as *Moyses æ* (“Moses’s law,” 283), *Ebreisce æ* (“Hebrew law,” 397), and *dryhtnes æ* (“law of the Lord,” 970).⁷⁹ This perceptible antithesis is heightened further through the use of what appears a spurious etymology: the correct translation of Cyriacus is not

⁷⁷ The technique may be compared to the use of onomastic puns for Daniel in the eponymous Old English poem. As Frank 1972:216 points out, the poet highlights the etymology of the name Daniel, which means “Judgment of God” in Hebrew (דָּן אֱלֹהִים), by repeatedly pairing the name with words for both “God” (*drihten*) and “Judgment” (*dom*).

⁷⁸ Lindsay 1911:VII.xi.4. See also Thiel 1973:428, who cites additional etymologies by pseudo-Melito and Eucherius of Lyon. In all three cases, a second, Hebrew etymology is cited, as discussed below. Hill 1996:207–20, has proposed a figurative reading of many of the characters in the poem, including possible readings of Stephen as the Protomartyr, Elene as Holy Church, and Judas as a typological figure for the Judas of the New Testament, the Apostle Paul, Joseph, Christ, and even Tobias.

⁷⁹ See especially Whatley 1975b and Regan 1996.

“law, gospel, or revelation of the Savior,” as Cynewulf proposes, but rather *dominicus*, or “lordly.” Gordon Whatley has persuasively argued that Cynewulf’s misnomer represents a deliberate liberty on the part of Cynewulf, in that he has apparently attempted to “make the name express more completely the substance of Judas’s conversion and his new identity as Christian and bishop” (1975:120). While convincing, this particular use of word-play does not exclude the possibility of other onomastic puns. In lines 1058b–62a we are told about the circumstances upon which Eusebius gives Judas his new name:

Cyriacus
 þurh snyttro geþeaht syððan nemde
 niwan stefne. Nama wæs gecyrred
 beornes in burgum on þæt betere forð,
 æ hælandes.

Through wise thought he [Eusebius] afterwards named him Cyriacus afresh. His name was henceforth changed in that city to the better one: “law, gospel, or revelation of the Savior.”

The phrase *niwan stefne*, as an idiom meaning “afresh” or “anew,” is well attested in Old English poetry.⁸⁰ While this sense is certainly apposite in the present context, Robert Bjork has proposed a potential pun on the more literal denotation of *niwan stefne* (“new voice”).⁸¹ Bjork’s reading appears to coincide with numerous criticisms devoted to the shifting ontological terms used to mark Judas’s movement from knowledge of the letter of the law (*scientia*) to a spiritual understanding of it (*sapientia*).⁸²

⁸⁰ Examples of the phrase *niwan stefne* (“afresh”) in the poetic corpus include *Genesis A* 1555 and 1886; *Andreas* 123; and *Beowulf* 1789a and 2594a.

⁸¹ Bjork 1985:46–62. The word *stefn* in this case refers to the feminine noun for “voice.” The form *stefne* as an accusative is attested elsewhere in the corpus—for example, Ælfric’s translation of *Genesis* 3:17, 21, and 36.

⁸² See further the copious studies devoted to analysis of the various and shifting ontological terms used to mark Judas’s movement from knowledge of the letter of the law (*scientia*) to a spiritual understanding of it (*sapientia*). Hill 1996:220–21, for example, argues that ontological epithets for Judas change as early as the moment of his discovery of the true cross, while Regan 1996:274–75, has argued that Judas’s reception of *sapientia* takes place upon his renunciation of the devil. While such a change is certainly evident in the text, it should be noted that efforts to locate purist terms that are either pre- or post- Judas’s conversion have generally been unsuccessful. The likely reason is that Cynewulf takes great effort not to disparage knowledge based solely on the Old

In addition, there may be a second pun designed to name Cyriacus a “*niwa stefn*,” or a “new Stephen,” since he is to follow in the footsteps of his brother, Saint Stephen. The repetition of the phrase *niwan stefne* in connection with Cyriacus’s discovery of the nails used in Christ’s crucifixion certainly seems to strengthen this reading, as it confirms Cyriacus’s spiritual transformation (1125–27a):

Ða wæs geblissod se ðe to bote gehwearf
 þurh bearn godes, bisceop þara leoda,
 niwan stefne.

Then he who turned to penitence through the son of God, the bishop of that people [Cyriacus], was made happy afresh.

The notion that Cyriacus is a “New Stephen” is likewise supported by a second (also well-attested) Hebrew etymology that interprets *Stephanus* as *norma* or “standard, norm of behavior”:⁸³

Martyrum primus in Novo Testamento Stephanus fuit, qui Hebraeo sermone interpretatur norma, quod prior fuerit in martyrio ad imitationem fidelium.

Stephen was the first martyr in the New Testament, who is called *standard* in Hebrew speech, because he was first in martyrdom for the imitation of the faithful.

This particular onomastic pun, which uses teleology to foreshadow Cyriacus’s immanent sainthood, is not surprising given the extensive verbal and thematic links connecting the various conversions in the poem.⁸⁴

If the name Stephen is here meant to be symbolic or prototypical, then it is worth investigating possible onomastic play in relation to some of the other names in the poem. Most importantly, the three allegedly Hebrew names mentioned in the text, namely Judas, Symon (his father), and Sachius

Testament, but rather to show its fulfillment in the acceptance of the precepts of the New Testament.

⁸³ This second derivation from Isidore’s *Etymologiae* may be found in Lindsay 1911:VII.xi.4.

⁸⁴ See especially Frese 1996:333–43, who not only maps out connections between the conversions of Constantine, Elene, Judas, and the remainder of the Jews, but also locates other connections with Cynewulf’s own conversion, which is described (pseudo-) autobiographically.

(his grandfather), all appear to contain etymologies that link them in various ways to speech-acts.⁸⁵ The connection is particularly notable given the significance not only of written testimonies in the poem, but also of oral histories, as it is through the latter medium that the history and whereabouts of the cross are finally revealed. The telling of this history originates (at least according to both the Latin and vernacular accounts) with Sachius, whose apparently Syriac name may be glossed by Latin *iustificatus* (“justified”), *iustus* (“just”), or *iustificandus* (“needing to be justified”).⁸⁶ This etymology is wholly appropriate for the role that Sachius plays in the poem, since before dying he not only reveals the whole truth concerning the

⁸⁵ Cynewulf’s use of Hebrew etymologies, presumably by means of such ultimate sources as Jerome, has only recently been brought to light. Studies include Robinson 1993, who has commented variously on the use of biblical and patristic etymologies in relation to biblical verse, and Porter 1988, who has written about loan-words from several languages in the context of both *Elene* and *Andreas*. I note a potentially striking example in *The Fates of the Apostles* (63–67):

Hwæt, we þæt gehyrdon þurg halige bec,
 þæt mid Sigelwarum soð yppe wearð,
 dryhtlic dom godes. Dæges or onwoc,
 leohtes geleafan, land wæs gefælsod
 purh Matheus mære lare.

Alas! We have heard though holy books, that the truth was manifest among the Ethiopians, the lordly judgment of God. The origin of day awoke, of the light of the faith, and the land was cleansed through the glorious teaching of Matthew.

I have translated the word *or* as “origin.” However, there may be a subsidiary pun on the Hebrew word אור (*or*), which means *lumen* or “light,” given the conspicuous clustering of light-giving elements, such as *Sigel-* (“sun”), *dæg-* (“day”), and *leoht-* (“light”). The Hebrew etymology is extremely well-attested—presumably because Or is the name of a biblical mountain at the edge of the land of Edom—in commentaries by Jerome, Isidore, Philo, Origen, and pseudo-Melito (see Thiel 1973:375). It is entirely fitting that such a pun should surface in the description of Ethiopians, or *Sigelwara*, so named because of their apparently dark complexions. The Old English *Sigelwara* (with its compound-element for “sun”) itself seems an ironic twist on the Latin etymology for “Ethiopians” (*Aethiopes*) as *tenebrae* (“darkness”) and *caligo* (“swarthy”), as attested in the etymologies of Isidore (*Aethiopiae*), Apringius and pseudo-Melito (*Aethiopes*), and in etymologies for “Ethiopia” (*Aethiopia*) in Jerome, Eucherius of Lyon, and pseudo-Melito (see Thiel 1973:307). Also compare the use of the word *or* in *Cædmon’s Hymn*, line 4a, which may provide a similar pun in its narrative context of the Creation of the world.

⁸⁶ See Robinson 1993:224, n. 3, and also Thiel 1973:445, who records this etymology in the works of Jerome, Isidore, Eucherius of Lyon, and pseudo-Melito.

role of Christ as true Savior to his son Symon, but he also justifies his action by instructing Symon to make public the same truth. Symon's revelation is so significant because, as he is abundantly aware, it will bring about the eventual demise of Jewish sovereignty (448–50a). It is, of course, the entire point of the poem that while Symon hears the prophesy, he does not make it known except in private to his son Judas. It is therefore noteworthy that Symon's name comes from the Hebrew root *ע.נ.ש* ("to hear, consent"), which is correctly glossed in Latin as both *audiens* and *obediens*.⁸⁷ Judas's name, by contrast, is derived from the Hebrew verb *הודיע* ("announced," the nominal form being *הודיעה* ["announcement"]), which is commonly glossed in Latin as *confessio*.⁸⁸ Judas is in fact the one who confesses the truth to Elene and her retinue (first in the form of prayer in 725–801 and then as thanksgiving in 807–26), a speech-act that leads directly to the invention of the cross. Judas's transformation into a *melda* ("informer"), despite his earlier efforts to hide his knowledge (426b–30a), is in keeping with his new title as *æ hælendes* or "revelation of the Savior."⁸⁹ These highly learned and literate puns, which themselves emphasize speaking and hearing, once again set into relief the rich verbal texture of the poem.

⁸⁷ Thiel 1973:422; both etymologies may be found in Isidore, and partial etymologies in pseudo-Jerome (*obediens*) and Jerome (*audiens*). The name Simon has been commented upon in terms of its significance elsewhere in Old English poetry as *obediens*. See for example, Robinson 1993:231, in relation to the poem *Andreas*, and also Irving 1970:74 and 89 (as cited in Robinson 1993:231 n. 18).

⁸⁸ The etymology of Judas is extremely well-attested, for example, in Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, Rufinus, Cassiodore, Isidore, and pseudo-Jerome. For a complete list of Latin works containing the etymology, see Thiel 1973:338.

⁸⁹ The word *melda* may also link Judas to the devil in *Juliana*, as the fiend refers to himself three times precisely in this capacity (*Juliana* 463a, 557a, 621b). Likewise, just as Elene is eventually able to extract Judas's confession by holding him *to gisle* "as a captive" (598–603), Juliana is able to effect the devil's confession through a similar imprisonment (*Juliana* 284–88). The verbal and thematic parallels between these confessions are considerable, and reveal what looks like a deliberate pastiche within Cynewulf's own poetry. If the fight between Juliana and the devil in *Juliana* in fact presents an adaptation of the "anchorite in the desert motif" (cf. Robinson 1972), *Elene* adopts what appears to be at once a version and inversion of this topos. The demonization of Judas through this parallel, a problem that is not rectified but rather highlighted by Judas's rejection of his Jewishness, has been noted with reference to other problematic passages in the poem. Indeed, here as elsewhere, Cynewulf seems to be invoking the Pauline divide between the letter and the spirit. See further Calder 1981:113 and Regan 1996:256–57 for particularly sensitive readings of Cynewulf's use of these binary divisions.

A final onomastic pun testifies to a further use of this type of word-play within the vernacular word-hoard.⁹⁰ As can be expected, the name Elene, which is phonetically linked to the Old English noun *ellen* (“valor”), lends itself particularly well to this type of punning. The first of these puns occurs as Judas is let out of his prison. Having decided to reveal the place of the cross, we are told that Judas (724a), *elnes oncyðig* (“mindful of valor”), prayed to God in Hebrew. As Elene has only just subjected him to torture through imprisonment and starvation, it is not unreasonable to read this phrase as a pun indicating that Judas is “mindful of Elene” in his decision. This reading is strengthened by a parallel phrase occurring just before Judas unearths the three crosses in the ground (827–28): *Ongan þa wilfægen æfter þam wuldres treo, / elnes anhydig, eorðan delfan* (“Then joyful and resolute of valor, he began to dig the earth after the tree of glory”). Although Judas is here driven in part by his own will, he is not yet resolute in his own belief, and is still very much influenced by Elene’s desire. The cumulative effect of these phrases is that just as Judas is in many ways a “New Stephen,” he is also shaped and influenced by Elene, a fact which Cynewulf does not allow us to forget.

Cynewulf’s use of onomastic puns, which are in the main derived from learned Latin and otherwise imported etymologies, emphasizes the expected figurative and allegorical levels of the text. They also, however, highlight at the same time the transmission of oral histories and mediating speech-acts, demonstrating precisely the extent to which Cynewulf is at the interface of orality and literacy. The same can be said (as we have seen) throughout the poem with regard to Cynewulf’s use of (for example) rhyme, echo-words, and paronomasia, all rhetorical effects that are often attributed to the influence of an inherited native oral tradition, but which are also manifestly inspired by an imported Latin and literate tradition. It was the demonstration that Cynewulf was as clearly a formulaic poet as the poet of *Beowulf* that first undermined (for some at least) Magoun’s still classic analysis (1953) of the importance of the application of “oral-formulaic” theory to Old English verse.⁹¹ It may be fitting, therefore, that in the poetry

⁹⁰ See also the apparent vernacular onomastic pun in *Elene* 1041b–42: *Him wearð ece rex, / meotud milde, god, mihta wealdend* (“To him was the eternal King, the Creator God, the wielder of powers, gracious”). The inclusion of the Latin word *rex* and the effect created through the insertion of *milde* between *meotud* and *god* encourages a pun on “God” and “good.”

⁹¹ The counter-argument with regard to Cynewulf and other translations from Latin poetry was put forward by Benson 1966.

of Cynewulf we witness the extent to which even a literate and Latinate Anglo-Saxon could choose to compose poetry using elements that can have been most effective only in oral performance.⁹²

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⁹² I am sincerely grateful to Andy Orchard and Toni Healey for their comments and assistance in the writing of this essay.

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