

## ***Eall-feala Ealde Sæge: Poetic Performance and “The Scop's Repertoire” in Old English Verse*<sup>1</sup>**

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Scenes depicting the recitation of verse, particularly in *Beowulf*, are among the most memorable and closely studied passages in Old English poetry. *Beowulf* repeatedly depicts the making and performance of poetry (Hill 2002), and it is the *swutol sang scopes* (“the clear song of the scop,” *Bwf* 90a) that first draws the monster Grendel’s attention to Heorot and sets in motion the major events of the first part of the poem.<sup>2</sup> In *Beowulf*, the creation of new stories is inextricably linked with the recitation of ones already known, so that the poem “aligns itself with a poetics where transmission and composition are co-dependent, indivisible aspects of the same act” (Jones 2009:486). A different but equally famous depiction of the scop emerges in the Venerable Bede’s account of Caedmon, wherein divine inspiration supersedes tradition as the source of poetic creativity. Of course, these and similar accounts concerning the making and performance of Old English verse cannot be taken as straightforward portraits of the Anglo-Saxon “singer of tales”: after all, Hrothgar’s scop is Danish and Bede’s Christian poet is entirely ignorant of traditional song. Moreover, since *Beowulf* and other narratives depicting vernacular poets—such as *Widsith* and *Deor*—are fictional accounts set in the Migration Age, some critics have gone so far as to deny that they can tell us anything at all about the Anglo-Saxon scop (Frank 1993).<sup>3</sup> Yet in the words of John D. Niles, such a position seems “to represent a veritable ecstasy of skepticism” (2003:37).

Niles usefully characterizes oral poetry as both a living tradition in pre-Conquest England and also as a “cultural myth whose long process of construction was set in motion as soon as the first missionaries from Iona and Rome introduced the arts of writing to Britain in a systematic way” (38). Fictional portraits of the scop, then, combine elements of poetic practice with a deeply-felt nostalgia for an imagined ancestral past (see Trilling 2009). While not straightforwardly reflective of reality, neither are they completely divorced from it. Even

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<sup>1</sup>We would like to thank our colleagues Joseph Harris and Lori Garner, as well as the anonymous readers for *Oral Tradition*, for their valuable comments and corrections on a draft of this paper. Naturally, we are responsible for errors that remain.

<sup>2</sup>*Beowulf* is cited from Fulk et al. (2008) and other Old English poems from Krapp and Dobbie (1931-42). Throughout, Old English texts are cited without vowel length marks. Unless otherwise noted, translations are by the authors.

<sup>3</sup>Of course, the evidence for Anglo-Saxon vernacular poets is not all literary, see Opland (1980a). Thornbury (2014) usefully juxtaposes depictions of vernacular and Anglo-Latin poets such as Aldhelm and Alcuin.

fictional portraits of the making and performance of poetry can tell us much about Anglo-Saxon poetics. Several studies have shown that depictions of poetic performance throughout the corpus incorporate several recurrent thematic patterns supported by common lexemes; in turn, these patterns – traditional themes<sup>4</sup>—are the product of a tradition that has its roots in the oral recitation of verse. Among the Old English themes depicting the recitation of verse are “The Singer Looks at His Sources,” (see Creed 1962; Renoir 1981); “Joy in the Hall,” (see Opland 1976; Foley 1983) and the “Poet-patron” (see Maring 2011). Like other commonplaces of “heroic” life<sup>5</sup>—such as feasting, fighting, and voyages by sea or land—in Old English poetry the performance of poetry is articulated through a nexus of conventional ideas, images, and verbal expressions.

In this essay we identify and discuss a previously unrecognized theme relating to poetic performance, which we will call “The Scop’s Repertoire.” This theme, which stages or describes the making of verse, associates that process with three motifs: *copiousness*; *orality*; and *antiquity*. *Copiousness* references the performer’s knowledge of many poems or songs, and implicitly or explicitly links this vast repertoire with the ability to skillfully and quickly weave new texts. *Orality* means that these texts take the form of spoken, not written, words; they are variously described as spoken tales, as poems, and/or as songs accompanied by instruments. Finally, *antiquity* adumbrates the power of tradition, characterizing either the texts known to the poet and/or their subject matter as ancient and therefore venerable. As we shall see, “The Scop’s Repertoire” takes two forms: in one all three motifs are explicitly present; in the other, the motif of *antiquity* is absent or displaced. These two variants of “The Scop’s Repertoire” articulate different models for what it is that poets do: in the *tradition* model, they accumulate a store of ancient songs, and learning these endows poets with the ability to create their own; in the *inspiration* model, by contrast, the poet’s skill comes directly from God, even if his subject matter may also derive from ancient (Christian) narratives, themselves understood to be the product of divine inspiration. Here the theme participates in competing discourses about poesis that cut across generic and linguistic boundaries in Anglo-Saxon literature, from vernacular verse such as *Beowulf* and *Widsith*, which describe the poet as bearer of a tradition learned by training and perpetuated by imitation, to Anglo-Latin prose narratives such as Bede’s account of Caedmon, which depicts a poet lacking any training or repertoire as having been inspired by God.

“The Scop’s Repertoire” is significant for several reasons. First it articulates some basic principles of the Anglo-Saxons’ conception of poetry, including its nature, origin, transmission, and purpose. Second because the theme undergoes various modifications in form, particularly in

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<sup>4</sup>Walter Arend (1933) introduced the term “typical scene” (later shortened to “type-scene”) for such recurring passages. Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord (1971) preferred “(oral) theme”; see especially Lord (2000:68-98). More recent work has stressed the traditional aspect of themes, which are also found in written texts; see, for instance John Miles Foley (1990:38-39, 239-58). For this reason, we will call these patterns “(traditional) themes.”

<sup>5</sup>On the association of poetry with martial, aristocratic life, see, for example, Hill (2002). The most complete Germanic lyre found to date, the Trossingen lyre, was “decorated by an incised frieze of warriors,” evidence for its “association with the warrior class” (Fulk et al. 2008:121 note to line 89b). On the question of whether the Anglo-Saxon *hearp* refers to a harp or a lyre, see Fulk et al. (2008:glossary, s.v. *hearp*).

overtly religious texts, it illustrates some ways in which the poetic tradition as a whole evolves in response to cultural innovations ranging from writing to religion. Finally, identification of the theme clarifies the intertextual relationship among certain passages that employ it.

Before undertaking a more detailed analysis of “The Scop’s Repertoire,” it is necessary to address the vexed question of verbal repetition in Old English themes. As has long been noted, these do not display anywhere near the same degree of formulaic density that characterizes many South Slavic themes. Concerning the latter, Albert B. Lord has written that, although the different instances of a theme (1995:10):

will not be word-for-word alike, there will be at least a sufficient degree of similarity of wording to show that the singer is using a unit of story that he holds already more or less formed in his mind . . . the kind of composition reflected in [such passages] could not be described as “free improvisation.” On the other hand, [the themes] could not be described as memorized passages either . . .

While there has been some debate about how much formulaic repetition characterizes the themes of other traditions, such as Homeric poetry,<sup>6</sup> it is nevertheless clear that Old English themes contained far less verbatim or near-verbatim repetition than Homeric or South Slavic poetry. That is not to say that the Anglo-Saxon themes lack repetition, but rather that the repetition that does occur differs in kind from in the other two traditions.

The underlying reason for these differences has been convincingly explained by John Miles Foley in his comparative study of the three traditions. According to Foley, the lack of formulaic repetition in Old English themes stems from the fact that the prosodic structure of Old English verse, as well as its dominant stylistic feature—variation—do not encourage *thrift* (Foley 1990: 354-55). Thrift derives from the rigid phraseological requirements of Greek hexameter and the Serbo-Croatian epic decasyllable, metrical constraints that encourage the use of formulas to cope with a highly patterned form; essentially, it means that these traditions tend to evolve one way of expressing any idea in a given metrical position. Without such strict demands of phraseology, which do not exist in Old English, there is no need to habitually express traditional ideas in an identical way—and thus thrift is not a salient characteristic. In fact, two of the most important stylistic features of Old English verse, alliteration and variation, demand the *opposite* of thrift. An Anglo-Saxon poet must be able to express the same idea in several *different* ways, depending on the alliterating stave, so that the word-hoard is filled with lexical items that can express identical ideas with different initial sounds in the same metrical position. For example, there are several synonyms for “man” that have similar metrical values, but different initial sounds: *mon*, *wer*, *secg*, *rinc*, *eorl*, and so on. Like alliteration, variation encourages not thrift but *copiousness*; to take a well-known case, the nine lines of *Cædmon’s Hymn* contain eight different epithets for God, connected chiefly by variation. Alliteration and variation discourage the development of a one-to-one correspondence between set expressions and what Milman Parry called “essential ideas” (1971:272); instead, they encourage the formation of versatile

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<sup>6</sup>Mark Edwards states that “verbal repetition between different instances of a type-scene may or may not occur; Lord’s later definition of the “theme” [requiring a high degree of repetition] . . . does not apply to Homeric type-scenes” (1992:285).

substitution systems that can accommodate the demand for synonyms. Hence, one cannot expect a significant percentage of recurring formulas in Old English themes. As Foley (1990:357) states:

If the essential ideas embodied in the narrative design have no consistently focused, one-to-one relationship with the elements of traditional diction that serve as their expressive medium, then the theme simply cannot recur with formulaic repetition marking its various instances.

A lack of recurring formulas does not, however, necessarily translate to a lack of verbal repetition. Foley (1990:340) further explains:

what we can logically expect as thematic data are highly variable half-lines that may have in common only their stressed cores. What verbal correspondence exists will thus appear to take the form of *single morphs*, that is, of roots of words whose systemic context is metrically (and therefore lexically and syntactically) highly variable [emphasis added].

These observations have been confirmed in a number of subsequent studies, which have found abundant morphemic but limited formulaic repetition in Old English traditional themes (see, for instance, Battles 2000, 2011, and 2015).

This pattern also obtains in “The Scop’s Repertoire.” Just as the theme “Sleeping after the Feast” is often, but not always, announced by the collocating morphemes *swefan* (“to sleep”) and *symble* (“feast”), so some, but not all, “The Scop’s Repertoire” passages feature a cluster<sup>7</sup> of repeated word roots that articulate its three motifs: *copiousness* (*eall* “all”; *fela*, “many”), *orality* (*gesegene* “saying”; *sæge* “tale”; *secgan* “to tell”), and *antiquity* (*eald* “old”). These markers are useful for identifying the theme, but their presence is not obligatory, and we also encounter lexical substitutions within each motif, such as *worn* (“many”) instead of or in addition to *fela*.

With these considerations in mind, we now turn to an analysis of the theme. We begin with the passages that feature all three motifs, which thus depict the poet as bearer of tradition. These include *Beowulf* 867b-76a; a pen-trial in London, British Library MS Harley 208, fol. 88r; the Proem to the *Meters of Boethius*; and *Andreas* 1487b-91.

*Beowulf* employs “The Scop’s Repertoire” in one of the work’s most frequently discussed passages, the song in praise of Beowulf composed after the hero’s victory over Grendel. First, many retainers, both old and young, remark that Beowulf is the greatest hero alive; then one of Hrothgar’s retainers commemorates his exploit in verse (867b-876):

Hwilum cýninges þegn,	
guma gilphlæden,	gidda gemyndig,
se ðe <b>eal fela</b>	<b>eal</b> gesegena

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<sup>7</sup>On the “cluster” in Old and Middle English poetry, see especially Ritzke-Rutherford (1981). Kintegen (1977) calls these groups of collocating morphemes “sets.” See also Foley (1990:211-12). This differs from Anita Riedinger’s definition of a formulaic “set”: a group of verses usually sharing the same function and system in which one word, usually stressed, is constant, and at least one stressed word may be varied, usually synonymously, to suit the alliterative and/or narrative context” (1985:306). However, formulaic sets in Riedinger’s terms often involve collocating morphemes within the same half-lines (Wright 2013). A General discussion of formulas, collocation, and other kinds of verbal repetition in Old English verse is to be found in Tyler (2006).

worn gemunde,            word oþer fand  
 soðe gebunden;            secg eft ongan  
 sið Beowulfes            snyttrum styrian  
 ond on sped wrecan            spel gerade,  
 wordum wrixlan;            welhwylc gecwæð  
 þæt he fram Sigemundes            secgan hyrde  
 ellendædum,            uncupes fela . . .

At times a thane of the king, well-supplied with words of praise and knowledgeable in songs—one who recalled an abundance of old tales—composed new words, correctly linked; then he began to artfully recite the exploit of Beowulf, skillfully reciting fine verses with varying words. He related everything that he had heard said concerning the heroic deeds of Sigemund . . .

The passage is explicitly metapoetic, that is, “a scene wherein the poet looks back, as it were, on one of his imagined predecessors in the old oral tradition” (Fulk et al. 2008:165 n. to 867b-915), and it has been read as a kind of self-portrait, a cameo appearance of the *Beowulf*-poet at Hrothgar’s court (Creed 1962; Opland 1980b); Renoir 1980). Recently, however, scholarly consensus has moved toward the position that this depiction is either wholly or predominantly fictive, so that the editors of *Klaeber’s Beowulf* conclude that “nothing in this scene should be taken to reflect upon the poet’s own poetic practice” (Fulk et al. 2008:166). It would be rash, indeed, to read the passage as a kind of Anglo-Saxon poetic self-fashioning—one doubts that the Anglo-Saxon poet composed his magnum opus on horseback, for instance—but to state categorically that *nothing* in this scene resembles what the *Beowulf*-poet is doing seems hyper-skeptical. Though this passage owes more to literary conventions than to actual performances, those conventions—including “The Scop’s Repertoire”—nevertheless encode some basic assumptions of Anglo-Saxon poetics.

Fundamentally, the poet functions here as bearer of tradition, and composition cannot be separated from recollection. The professional skill that enables the poet to draw on his copious repertoire is invoked by the the adjective *gemyndig* (“mindful”) and verb *gemunan* (“to remember”) in the second and fourth lines of the passage. Knowing and recollecting old poems and stories enables the scop to create new ones. Songs of famous heroes who lived long ago, such as Sigemund the Wælsing, inspire the creation of new poems—in this case, a *spel* concerning *sið Beowulfes* (“Beowulf’s exploit”), a recent event for the fictional poet, but an ancient one for the *Beowulf* poet. The fictional poet, who recalls *eal fela ealldgesegen* (“an abundance of old tales”) draws on these to create one of his own. This cluster economically evokes “The Scop’s Repertoire.” The words *eal fela* designate *copiousness*, while *antiquity* and *orality* are expressed in the compound term *ealldgesege* (literally, *gesege* denotes something that is *said*). Moreover, the Old English narrator includes himself in this chain of transmission, for tales about Beowulf are invoked throughout the work as the source for the poet’s own knowledge of what happens, including just before the passage wherein Hrothgar’s thane sings about Beowulf: *Ða wæs on morgen mine gefræge / ymb þa gifhealle guðrinc monig* (“In the morning there was many a warrior near the gift-hall, as I have heard,” 837-38). How could the narrator have “heard” about this, if not through stories? Past and present blend together in a way that

makes it almost impossible to determine where one ends and the other begins. Indeed, the passage itself enacts a mingling of stories about Sigemund, Heremod, and Beowulf, making it difficult to tell which narrator is speaking when (Amodio 2005). And this is surely no accident. All of these voices, including that of the author of *Beowulf*, share in the textual transmission of *eal fela ealdgesegen*.

A second instance of “The Scop’s Repertoire” occurs in a single verse written in the bottom margin of London, British Library, Harley MS 208, fol. 88r: *Hwæt! Ic eallfeala ealde sæge* (“Listen! I very many old tales . . .”).<sup>8</sup> Discussion of this pen-trial has long focused on the question of whether it alludes to *Beowulf*’s *eal fela ealdgesegen*, with most critics answering in the negative.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, some have suggested the resemblance to be illusory. Donald Scragg, for instance, notes that “*eall* and *eald* regularly alliterate in the two halves of a verse line,” and concludes that the resemblance “may be no more than coincidence” (2016:178). In the nearly 150 verse lines containing any form of *eald*, alliteration with any form of *eall* in fact occurs only five other times:

Eald is þis eorðsele, eal ic eom oflongad (*Wife’s Lament* 29)

Eald æscwiga, se ðe eall geman (*Bwlf* 2042)

ealde and geonge ealle ætsamne (*Paris Psalter* 148.12)

ealde ge giunge, ealle forhwerfde (*Meters of Boethius* 26.86)

wæron ure ealdfind ealle on wynnum (*Descent into Hell* 89)

Of these, the example in *Wife’s Lament* is not strictly comparable, since *eal* there is an adverb. *Beowulf* 2042b is interestingly similar to *Beowulf* 869a in that it characterizes someone who has a prodigious memory, but in the case of the warrior who whets a young man to seek vengeance by identifying his father’s sword in the hands of a former enemy, he remembers “all” because the warrior himself is “old.” The examples in *Paris Psalter*, *Meters of Boethius*, and *Descent into Hell*, all with *ealle* in the same position in half-lines of the same scansion, are as similar to each other as they are different from the three attestations of “The Scop’s Repertoire.” In none of these other lines is *eall* linked with *fela*. Rather than suggesting that the resemblance between *Beowulf* 869 and the pen-trial in MS Harley 208 is coincidental, comparison with the few other lines alliterating *eall* and *eald* actually strengthens it. In our view, the connection between the texts is not due to the Harley scribe’s knowledge of *Beowulf*, but derives from both *Beowulf* and the pen-trial independently invoking the traditional theme of “The Scop’s Repertoire.”

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<sup>8</sup>The pen-trial is item 229 in Ker (1990:304). Ker dates the “scribble” “s. x/xi (?)”; the manuscript was written in Saint-Denis in the first half of the ninth century but was presumably in England by the time the pen-trial was entered (the manuscript’s provenance is York). See Gneuss and Lapidge (2014:341 [no. 417]). For a facsimile with paleographic analysis see DigiPal s.a.

<sup>9</sup>Ker notes the parallel without comment: “cf. *Beowulf*, l. 869” (304). Robinson calls the connection “very tenuous” (1971:254). Also skeptical are Poussa (1981:286) and Stokes, who states that “no direct link between the two [texts] has yet been found” (2014:180). Orchard entertains the possibility that “this pen-trial represents . . . evidence that *Beowulf* was known and remembered in Anglo-Saxon England” but concludes that “without more texts to be recovered or inferred, we can never really know” (2009:309).

The pen-trial takes the form of the first line of a poem in which the narrator references the source of the text’s subject matter. This is the most common opening formula in Old English poetry (Battles 2014; Chernis 1992; Foley 1991; Weiskott 2016), also indicated here by the initial attention-marker, “*Hwæt!*” (“Listen!”). Since medieval scribes commonly employed the first-lines of familiar Latin poems (notably the opening lines of Virgil’s *Eclogues* and of the *Disticha Catonis*) as pen-trials (Lindsay 1923:29-30), it seems very likely that Jeff Opland is correct in arguing that the pen-trial in MS Harley 208 represents the beginning of a now-lost “memorised . . . secular poem or song” (1980a:186). We cannot, of course, rule out the possibility that the line was composed by the scribe,<sup>10</sup> but either way it instantiates “The Scop’s Repertoire,” with all three motifs present: *copiousness* is evoked by *eallfela*, *antiquity* by *ealde*, and *orality* by *sæge*. The line’s tantalizing reference to *ealde sæge* (“ancient tales”) lacks a governing verb, but comparison with the passage in *Beowulf* and with other instances of “The Scop’s Repertoire” makes it likely that this orphaned line would have been followed with one containing some verb of *hearing* (*gefrægn*) or *telling* (for instance, *secgan hyrde* in the *Beowulf* verse cited above, 875b).<sup>11</sup> Any of these would develop “The Scop’s Repertoire” in greater detail, but even in its present abbreviated state the pen-trial economically evokes the theme.

Two poems based on Latin sources show that the “The Scop’s Repertoire” was not limited to secular tradition, yet both adapt the theme’s constituent motifs of *orality*, *copiousness*, and *antiquity* in ways consistent with their religious subject matter. *Andreas* prefaces its concluding fitt(s)—depicting the saint’s triumph—with the following passage (1478-91):

Hwæt, ic hwile nu      haliges lare,  
 leoðgiddinga,      lof þæs þe worhte,  
 wordum wemde,      wyrd undyrne  
 ofer min gemet.      Mycel is to secganne,  
 langsum leornung,      þæt he in life adreag,  
 eall æfter orde.      Þæt scell æglæwra  
 mann on moldan      þonne ic me tælige  
 findan on ferðe,      þæt fram fruman cunne  
 eall þa earfeðo      þe he mid elne adreah,  
 grimra guða.      Hwæðre git sceolon  
 lytlum sticcum      leoðworda dæl  
 furður reccan.      Þæt is **fyrnsægen**,  
 hu he **weorna feala**      wita geðolode,  
 heardra hilda,      in þære hæðenan byrig.

Listen! For some time I have proclaimed with words in verse songs the story of the saint—praise for what he did, his well-known exploits, beyond my capacity. There is much to tell (requiring

<sup>10</sup> O’Keeffe describes this as “formulaic reading” (1990:*passim*). Doane (1994) prefers the term “scribal performance”; Thornbury refers to “scribal composition” (2014:69).

<sup>11</sup> *Secgan hyrde/hyrdon* also occurs in *Christ I* 73b, *Partridge* 1a, *Descent into Hell* 83b, *The Metrical Preface to Wærferth’s Translation of Gregory’s Dialogues* 26b, as well as other passages in *Beowulf* (273b, 582b, 1346b).

lengthy study) about everything that he endured in his life, one thing after another. It would take some man more learned than I consider myself to find these stories in his memory, all the grim encounters—everything from the beginning—that that he endured with courage. Nevertheless, we must further recount a portion of words of verse in short episodes. It is said of old how the saint suffered many punishments—fierce encounters—in that heathen city.

This passage combines the usual motifs and morphemic elements of “The Scop’s Repertoire.” In particular, the closing lines echo the morphemic cluster found in *Beowulf* and the pen trial: compare 1490a *weorna feala* (*copiousness*) with *eal fela* and *worn* (*Beowulf* 869a and 870a) and *eallfeala* (*Pen trial*), and 1489b *fyrnsægen* (*antiquity, orality*) with *ealdgesegen* (*Beowulf* 869b) and *ealde sæge* (*Pen trial*). *Andreas* merely employs *weorn* rather than *eal* and *fyrn* in place of *eald*. Of course, the deeds of *Andreas* are *fyrnsægen* in a different way than stories about Sigemund and Heremod, and likewise *weorna fela* refers to the many episodes of hardship endured by the saint rather than to poems or stories known to the poet.<sup>12</sup>

The narrator here strikes a very different stance from the one usually adopted by Old English fictive scop, who take pride in knowing even the most obscure details of a hero’s biography. (The Danish poet in *Beowulf* incorporates *uncupes fela*, 872b, “many things not widely known,” into his song about Sigemund.) In *Andreas*, *copiousness* is expressed in the poet’s awareness of a great many stories about *Andreas*’ deeds and sufferings, but undermined by learned topoi emphasizing the inexpressibility of those stories as well as the poet’s own modesty as one whose poor skill and wit are surpassed by the mighty theme of his tale.<sup>13</sup> So far from claiming mastery of a vast repertoire, he claims only to have learned fragments of it; and so far from implying that either the copiousness or the antiquity of those stories endows him with poetic mastery, he apologizes (disingenuously, of course) for his incompetence. He professes that it would take a man more learned than he (*æglæwra mann*) to relate the entire hagiographical dossier of the apostle Andrew from start to finish. This would require lengthy reading or study (*langsum leornung*), and the narrator suggests that this is beyond him—and also, presumably, beyond the audience’s patience,<sup>14</sup> for he promises that the concluding section will be brief; to paraphrase, “There are just a few short bits left to go.” Still, the *Andreas* poet does posit “a more learned man” who might be capable of mastering that copious repertoire and retaining all those stories in his mind—precisely the kind of scop that the *tradition* variant of the theme typically

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<sup>12</sup> In their recent edition of *Andreas*, Richard North and Michael D. J. Bintley, comparing *ealdgesegen* and *fyrnsægen*, regard this passage as an allusion to *Beowulf* (2016:62). In their note to *Andreas* 1489, they also compare Cynewulf’s description of Judas as *fyrngydda frod* (*Elene*, 542). They further suggest that *leodgiddinga* and *wyrd undyrne* are allusions to Cynewulf’s *Fates of the Apostles* 97b and 42 (58-59); and that *Mycel is to secganne . . . adreag* is a reference to *Guthlac A* 531-32 (61-62). Given the formulaic nature of Old English poetry and the notorious difficulties in establishing the authorship and provenance of individual poems, the problems in constructing even a relative chronology of the longer poems, and the fragmentary nature of the corpus, it is problematic to construe such parallels as literary allusions.

<sup>13</sup> On inexpressibility topoi and “affected modesty” in medieval literature see Curtius (1953:159ff). According to Curtius, “Included among the ‘inexpressibility topoi’ is the author’s assurance that he sets down only a small part of what he has to say (*pauca e multis*)” (1953:160); compare the *Andreas* poet’s *lytlum styccum*.

<sup>14</sup> As Curtius notes, “Among modesty topoi also belongs the assurance that the author wishes to spare his audience satiety or boredom (*fastidium, taedium*)” (1953:85).



invokes.<sup>15</sup> For all its embellishment with topoi derived from learned Latin models, then, the *Andreas* poet’s allusion to “The Scop’s Repertoire” is evident.

A rather different kind of adaptation of the constituent motifs of “The Scop’s Repertoire” occurs in the *Meters of Boethius*. Two passages in this work employ the theme: the Proem in its entirety and the opening verses of *Meter 2*. The Proem begins with a fascinating portrayal of the (royal) Christian poet’s art:

Dus Ælfred us            **ealdspell reahte**,  
 cyning Westsexna,        cræft meldode,  
 leoðwyrhta list.        Him wæs lust micel  
 ðæt he ðiossum leodum        leoð spellode,  
 monnum myrgen,    **mislice cwidas**  
 þy læs ælinge    ut adrife  
 selflicne secg,    þonne he swelces lyt  
 gymð for his gilpe.    Ic sceal giet **sprecan**,  
 fon on fitte,    folccuðne ræd  
 hæleðum **secgean**.    Hliste se þe wille!

Thus Alfred, king of the West Saxons, recounted the ancient tale for us, displaying his art and skill in making verse. He greatly desired to recite poetry—various lays to delight men—lest tedium should drive away the self-satisfied man who in his pride takes small account of such things. I must yet undertake to proclaim in words, speaking in verse, wisdom known to many nations. Let who will, listen!

Beginning with the motif of *antiquity*, the Proem depicts its religious subject matter as an “ancient tale” (*ealdspell*)—as of course it was, since Boethius had written his *Consolation* centuries before. *Copiousness* is lexicalized in *mislice cwidas*, a phrase that literally denotes “a variety of sayings” but in context likely refers to the whole miscellany of poems that follows. Finally, *orality* is invoked by a variety of expressions: *-spell*, *cwidas*, *sprecan*, and *secgean*. These elements recur, though differently configured, at the beginning of *Meter 2*. Here the narrator sings (1-4a):

Hwæt, ic **lioða fela**    lustlice geo  
**sanc** on sælum,    nu sceal siofigende,  
 wope gewæged,    wreccea giomor,  
**singan** sarcwidas

Listen! Before, I gladly sang many songs in a state of happiness; now, lamenting and weighed down by sorrows, I, sad wretch, shall sing songs filled with sorrow.

<sup>15</sup> North and Bintley regard this as the *Andreas* poet’s homage to Cynewulf (2016:60).

Here *copiousness* (*lioða fela*, “many songs”) and *orality* (*sanc*, “sang,” *singan*, “sing,” *-cwidas*, “sayings” or “songs”) are evident, but not the *antiquity* thematized by the Proem. To be sure, *Meter* 2 is itself (a poetic translation of) one of the “ancient songs” mentioned in the Proem, and *Meter* 2.1-2 does highlight chronology, but *geo* (“formerly”) and *nu* (“now”) merely contrast the speaker’s own happy past in relation to his sorrowful present—a shift in reference prompted by the autobiographical burden of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*. These deictic terms reflect the telescoping of the motif of *antiquity* created by the duality of poetic voices. Boethius is the originator, not the bearer, of the poetic tradition of the *Meters* inherited by Alfred, and what was “now” for Boethius is “formerly” for Alfred.

In highlighting the poet’s wisdom, the *Meters of Boethius* points the way to the second group of poems that employ “The Scop’s Repertoire.” These do not invoke the motif of *antiquity* because they depict the poet not as bearer of tradition, but as an inspired artist whose “gifts”—in a very literal sense—come from God. *Orality* and *copiousness* still remain prominent in these passages, and the passages are connected by a network of traditional diction, which shows that they are drawing on the same underlying theme. All the poems that feature this version of “The Scop’s Repertoire”—*Christ II*, *Maxims I*, and *The Gifts of Men*—treat poetry as one of the “gifts-of-men.”

Before discussing these poems, it is worth pausing to examine perhaps the most famous passage in early English letters depicting a poet as divinely inspired artist, Bede’s story of Caedmon. The anecdote tacitly assumes the reader’s familiarity with the bearer-of-tradition model. Before Caedmon receives the gift of song from God, he leaves a gathering where the guests pass around a harp and recite poems. As Andy Orchard has pointed out, “The later Old English version . . . adds the detail that he left ‘for shame’ (*for scome*); the implication seems to be that it was expected that adult Anglo-Saxons would carry round in their heads a store of song” (2009:294). Furthermore, there is a clear link between knowing existing songs and being able to compose new ones. Bede regards Caedmon’s gift of poetry as unique because he is the exception to the rule: *Et quidem et alii post illum in gente Anglorum religiosa poemata facere temtabant, sed nullus eum aequiperare potuit. Namque ipse non ab hominibus neque per hominem institutus canendi artem didicit, sed diuinitus adiutus gratis canendi donum accepit* (“It is true that after him other Englishmen attempted to compose religious poems, but none could compare with him. For he did not learn the art of poetry from men nor through a man but he received the gift of song freely by the grace of God”; Colgrave and Mynors 1969:414-15). Instead of learning old stories from other professional poets or from popular oral narratives, at Hild’s command Caedmon is instructed by the brethren in the “whole course of sacred history” (*iussitque illum seriem sacrae historiae doceri, ibid.*:418-19), which provides Caedmon with a copious and ancient subject matter that replaces and improves upon the inherited tales of the traditional poet’s repertoire.

Though Bede depicts Caedmon’s case as unique, gnomic verse routinely categorizes poetry as one of the “gifts-of-men” that God bestows upon humankind. Cynewulf’s *Christ II* offers a good example in a passage that evokes “The Scop’s Repertoire” (659-70a):

Da us geweorðade      se ðas world gescop  
godes gæstsunu,      ond us giefe sealed.

Sumum wordlaþe      wise sendeð  
 on his modes gemynd      þurh his muþes gæst,  
 æðele ondgiæt.      Se mæg **eal fela**  
**singan and secgan**      þam bið snyttru cræft  
 bifolen on ferðe.      Sum mæg fingrum wel  
 hlude fore hæleþum      hearpan stirgan,  
 gleobeam gretan.

To one man He sends into mind a wise eloquence in words—a noble faculty—through the spirit of  
 His mouth. One to whom wisdom of mind has been granted can sing and relate very many things.  
 One can play the harp well and loudly before heroes, stirring its strings with fingers.

In this passage, *copiousness* and *orality* are expressed in a morphemic cluster (*eal fela* / *singan and secgan*) that closely resembles those found in *Beowulf* (*eal fela ealdgesege*) and the Harley pen trial (*eallfeala ealde sæge*). There are differences as well: *secgan* takes the form of a verb rather than noun (*-gesege, sæge*); and the cluster occurs in a b-verse/a-verse sequence rather than a-verse/b-verse one. In addition to deploying traditional language, the passage also features some unusual and striking imagery. God’s gift comes *þurh his muþes gæst*, “through the breath (spirit) of his mouth”—a verse that suggests the operation of the Holy Spirit but also echoes God’s creation of humankind (*Genesis A* states in lines 999b-1000 that *Adam wearð / of godes muðe gaste eacen*, “Adam was animated by the spirit of God’s mouth”) and of the heavens.<sup>16</sup> Of course, poets are not uniquely gifted; Cynewulf states that God distributes talents widely so that no one group can grow too proud of its gift. Still, the fact remains that poets and harpers are mentioned first—ahead of even those who know how to interpret scripture—and so may lay claim to the title of *primi inter pares*.

While the motif of *antiquity* (usually lexicalized by *eald*) is missing in Cynewulf’s articulation of the theme, it is very much present in the surrounding context. Both preceding and following the *sum*-catalogue Cynewulf himself quotes three biblical “songs,” thus representing the Bible as a repository of traditional poetry that he has mastered (and re-performed in his own formulaic diction). In lines 618b-26, Cynewulf versifies Gen. 3:16-19, which he characterizes as a *cwide* that was formerly sung (*se þe ær sungen wæs*, 618b). In lines 650b-53, he versifies a psalm mash-up (apparently conflating Pss. 8:2, 18:10, and 47) as something “sung” by the wise man (*Bi þon se witga song*). And in lines 712-19, he versifies Song of Songs 6:9, introducing it as having been “sung” by Solomon, *giedda gearosnottor* “very skillful in poems.” Cynewulf would have known that in the original Hebrew both the Psalms and the Song of Songs were in fact poems, but he could hardly have believed that of God’s condemnation of Adam and Eve in Genesis (though he would undoubtedly have regarded God’s direct discourse as elevated

<sup>16</sup> For instance, Psalm 32:6, *verbo Domini caeli firmati sunt et spiritu oris eius omnis virtus eorum* (“By the word of the Lord the heavens were established; and all the power of them by the spirit of his mouth,” emphasis added), is translated *Worde drihtnys hefynys getrymyde synd & gaste muðys his eall mægyn heora* in the Old English interlinear psalm gloss. The Vulgate is cited from Weber (1983), with punctuation added, and the translation is from Challoner (1989). The Old English interlinear gloss is cited from Wildhagen (1910). Cynewulf mentions the creation of human beings and of the heavens in the lines immediately preceding “The Scop’s Repertoire,” suggesting that the allusion is deliberate.

language). By rendering all these passages into Old English verse and claiming that they had been sung by wise men from biblical times, Cynewulf has effectively transformed them into vernacular *ealdgesegenas*, with which he frames his invocation of “The Scop’s Repertoire.”

The motifs and language of *Christ II* find a close echo in several verses in *The Gifts of Men*. In the latter poem, the gifts of poetry, harping, and song are separated from one another by intervening lines, nevertheless its resemblance to Cynewulf’s version is striking. To appreciate this resemblance, the two versions are presented below, with repeated morphemes in italics:

Da us geweorðade      se ðas world gescop  
 godes gæstsunu,      ond us *gief*e sealed.  
*Sumum* wordlaþe      wise sendeð  
 on his modes gemynd      þurh his mupes gæst,  
 æðele ondgiet.      Se *mæg* **cal** *fela*  
**singan and secgan**      þam bið snyttru *cræft*  
 bifolen on ferðe.      *Sum mæg* *fingrum* wel  
**hlude** fore hæleþum      *hearpan* *stirgan*,  
*gleobeam gretan*

(*Christ II* 659-667a)

Then the One who created the world, God’s son, honored us, giving us gifts. To one man He sends into mind a wise eloquence in words—a noble faculty—through the spirit of His mouth. One to whom wisdom of mind has been granted can sing and relate very many things. One can play the harp well and loudly before heroes, stirring its strings with fingers.

*Sum* biþ woðbora,  
 giedda giffæst. . . .  
*Sum* mid *hondum* *mæg*      *hearpan gretan*,  
 ah he *gleobeames*      gearobrygda list. . . .  
*Sum* *cræft* hafað      circnytta **fela**,  
*mæg* on lofsongum      lifes waldend  
**hlude** hergan,      hafað healice  
 beorhte stefne.

(*Gifts of Men* 35b-36a, 49-50, 91-94a)

One is a poet, gifted with songs. . . . One knows how to play the harp, making its strings vibrate skillfully. . . . One has skill in many church-services; he can loudly praise the Lord of life in songs of praise, having a bright, excellent voice.

Both passages contain *sum* catalogues detailing as gifts: the skills of versifying, singing, and playing the harp. Harping, in particular, finds expression in very similar phraseology: compare *Sum mæg fingrum wel / hlude fore hæleðum hearpan stirgan*, / *gleobeam gretan* (*Christ II*) with *Sum mid hondum mæg hearpan gretan*, / *ah he gleobeames gearobrygda list* (*Gifts of Men*). The

*Gifts of Men* handles the motif of *copiousness* somewhat differently from *Christ II*, taking the form of the singer’s versatility in performing church services (*Sum cræft hafað circnytta fela*)—and thus praising God in a manner that parallels Caedmon’s poetry (*Nunc laudare debemus auctorem regni caelestis . . .*). Meanwhile, *orality* is synonymous with vocality, and the primary quality of a good voice is that it is *hlud*, “loud.” Loudness also appears as a positive quality in the *Christ II* passage, though there attributed to harping.<sup>17</sup> If one imagines the conditions of performance in an Anglo-Saxon mead-hall (or monastic refectory), it is not difficult to see how the ability to sing and play loudly would be a major asset. In both passages, God’s gift to the poet expresses itself not just in a mastery of the poetic arts—forming and singing verses as well as playing the harp—but also in the *variety* of the scop’s repertoire.

The same point is made explicitly in the third gifts-of-men passage that employs “The Scop’s Repertoire,” *Maxims I* 165-71. This poem articulates simple truths concerning a whole host of phenomena, expressing their essential nature through their most easily recognizable associations: “a king is eager for power” (58b, *cyning biþ anwealdes georn*), “frost must freeze” (71a, *forst sceal freosan*), “fire consumes wood” (71b, *fyr [sceal] wudu meltan*), and so on. What, then, characterizes the poet? *Maxims I* answers this in two passages, first stating that *god scop [geriseþ] gumum* (127a, “the good scop [belongs] among men”), then elaborating further (165-71) that :

Wæra gehwylcum wislicu                      word gerisað,  
gleomen gied    ond guman snyttro. . . .  
Longað þonne þy læs    þe him con **leoþa worn**,  
oþþe mid hondum con    hearpan gretan;  
hafaþ him his gliwes giefe,    þe him god sealde.

Wise words are becoming to everyone—a poem to the minstrel, prudent speech to the man. . . .  
One who knows many songs or can play the harp with hands will experience the less longing  
because of it; he has the gift of entertaining others, which God has given him.

Line 167b, *þe him con leoþa worn*, is another way to express the *copiousness* of the scop’s repertoire. The motif of *orality* is implicit in the allusion to playing the harp, and the social nature of poetry—“the good scop belongs among men,” “one who knows many songs will not be lonely”—presupposes an oral performative model in the sense that the poet communicates to an audience through spoken or sung words, not in isolation and through writing. This passage shares with *Christ II* and *The Gifts of Men* the central conceit that poetry is a gift from God, a catalog list-structure, and also specific formulas that describe, for instance, playing the harp: compare *mid hondum con hearpan gretan* to *Christ II*, *mæg fingrum wel / . . . hearpan stirgan*, / *gleobeam gretan*, and *Gifts of Men*, *mid hondum mæg hearpan gretan*. These intertextual links suggest that the three passages form their own sub-type of “The Scop’s Repertoire”—one which depicts the poet as inspired by God, not as bearer of tradition.

<sup>17</sup> Compare *Widsith* 103-05a: *Donne wit Scilling sciran reorde / for uncrum sigedryhtne song ahofan, / hlude bi hearpan* (“Then Scilling and I lifted up with bright voice a song before our lord, singing loudly to the harp”).

To better understand what these two variants of “The Scop’s Repertoire” can tell us about Anglo-Saxon vernacular poetics, it is necessary to inquire about the theme’s likely origin and development. To begin with the bearer-of-tradition passages, the idea that creating poetry essentially consists of *hearing* and *saying* is deeply embedded in Old English poetic formulas. As Ward Parks has pointed out, the ubiquitous “I heard” formulas—for the verbs *hyran* and *gefrignan* alone, he tallies 90 instances in 30 poems—“invoke legendary tradition and a body of ‘sayings’ orally transmitted” (1987:51).<sup>18</sup> Parks concludes that the ubiquity of such formulas provides an important clue as to how the pre-Conquest English conceived of poetry and poetics (1987:61):

It suggests that the concept of poetry as something told, remembered and told again belonged to the very root Anglo-Saxon understanding of what narrative acts were. So deeply embedded was this notion that reference to the world of hearing and things heard occurred as the first thought and reflex of the poet whenever he disengaged for a moment from the actual material of his discourse to reflect upon himself as a teller. These phrases may thus provide us with an indicator of an unarticulated yet widely pervasive Anglo-Saxon poetic inherited from oral tradition .

Parks’s point could be extended by noting that the same poetic—which connects an iterative process of *hearing* and *saying* with the creation of poetry—obtains not just in Old English verse, but also in other early Germanic alliterative verse. In Old High German poetry, for instance, the *Hildebrandslied* famously begins with *Ik gihôrta dat seggen* (“I have heard it said that . . .”), while the *Wessobrunner Gebet* opens *Dat gafregin ih mit firahim firiuuizzo meista* (“I have heard among men as the greatest marvel that . . .”); the opening of *Muspilli* is lost, but in line 37 the narrator introduces a passage with *Daz hôrtih rachôn dia uueroltrehtuuison* (“I have heard people of the right faith say that . . .”).<sup>19</sup> In other words, three of the four surviving Old High German narrative poems in the inherited alliterative meter prominently employ the same *hearing-saying* conceptual framework that is so prevalent in Old English poetry.

Furthermore, “The Scop’s Repertoire” has a precise analogue in the opening stanza of the best-known Middle High German alliterative poem, the *Nibelungenlied* (de Boor 1979):

Uns ist in alten mæren	wunders <b>vîl geseit</b>
von helden lobebæren,	von grôzer arebeit,
von frôuden, hôchgezîten,	von weinen und von klagen,
von küener recken strîten	muget ir nu wunder <b>hœren sagen</b>

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<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Frederick Klaeber remarks that the *gefrægn* formulas of *Beowulf* hold special interest because they “unmistakably point to the ‘preliterate’ stage of poetry, when the poems lived on the lips of singers, and oral transmission was the only possible source of information” (1950:lxvi). Compare Rumble (1964). Nelson (2009) focuses on the rhetorical effects of these formulas.

<sup>19</sup> Old High German texts are cited from Braune and Ebbinghaus (1979). The meaning of *Muspilli*’s *uueroltrehtuuison* is disputed; it is usually glossed “men learned in secular law,” but Mohr and Haug (1977:41-42) suggest “people of the right faith.”

In old tales we are told of many marvels; of heroes’ noble deeds, of great hardship, of joys and feasts, of weeping and wailing, of daring warriors’ battles, you may now hear wonders told.

This stanza opens and closes with references to *oraltiy* in hearing and telling, to *antiquity* in the evocation of the tales of the past and their connection with the story of the present, and to *copiousness* in the specification of the great many *wunder* (“wondrous things”) known by the poet: line 1 states that “we have been told” (*geseit*) many marvels in old tales, and line 4 informs the listeners that “you will now hear [*hæren*] wonders told [*sagen*].” These three basic components of “The Scop’s Repertoire” also find expression in cognate morphemes: Old English *fela*, Middle High German *vil*; Old English *eald*, Middle High German *alt*; and Old English *gesegene*, *sæge*, *secgan*, Middle High German *geseit*, *sagen*. The Old and Middle High German passages all invoke the bearer-of-tradition model.

An example of “The Scop’s Repertoire” in the Old Saxon *Heliand*, like the Old English *Andreas* and *Meters of Boethius*, creatively adapts the theme to its particular needs. The *Heliand*-poet redefines the motif of *copiousness* and invokes *antiquity* by the poet’s historical distance from the evangelists whose near-contemporary accounts he is translating centuries later. The poem opens with a statement describing how many wise men wished to praise Christ’s deeds, but only four were chosen by God (lines 1-31). It continues (lines 32-37, Behagel 1996:8):

That scoldun sea fiori thuo                    fingron scrīban,  
settian endi **singan**      endi **seggean** forð,  
that sea fan Cristes      crafte them mikilon  
gisâhun endi gihôrdun,      thes hie selbo gisprac,  
giuûisda endi giuûarahta,      uundarlicas **filo**,  
sô manag mid mannon      mahtig drohtin...

Those four were to write with their fingers—to set it down, singing and reciting—what they had seen and heard about Christ’s great power, many wondrous things that he himself said, proclaimed, and performed among men, the mighty Lord . . .

This paraphrases the initial section of Tatian’s gospel harmony, which at this point follows Luke chapter 1 verses 1-4:<sup>20</sup>

Quoniam quidem multi conati sunt ordinare narrationem quae in nobis conpletae sunt rerum, sicut tradiderunt nobis qui ab initio ipsi viderant et ministri fuerunt sermonis, visum est et mihi assecuto a principio omnibus diligenter ex ordine tibi scribere, optime Theophile, ut cognoscas eorum verborum de quibus eruditus es veritatem

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a narration of the things that have been accomplished among us; according as they have delivered them unto us, who from the

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<sup>20</sup> For the sake of convenience, Tatian is cited from Sievers (1872). The translation is from Challoner (1989). The punctuation and capitalization of both passages has been slightly emended for ease of reading

beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word: it seemed good to me also, having diligently attained to all things from the beginning, to write to thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mayest know the verity of those words in which thou hast been instructed.

In paraphrasing this passage, the Old Saxon poet adds two of the three elements that define “The Scop’s Repertoire,” namely *orality* and *copiousness*: the evangelists “sing and say (recite)” (*singan endi seggean*) the “many wondrous things” (*uundarlicas filo*) that Christ performs. The former phrase also occurs in *Christ II* (662a *singan* and *secgan*), while the latter is paralleled by the *Nibelungenlied*’s opening verse (*wunders vil*). Although the source passage represents itself as Luke’s eyewitness testimony, *antiquity* is implied in that for the *Heliand* poet the testimony of the evangelist is now by definition removed into distant past.

“The Scop’s Repertoire” occurs in North Germanic poetry as well. The opening of *Oddrúnargrátr* (“The Lament of Oddrún”) provides a close parallel to the West Germanic passages cited above (lines 1-2, Neckel 1983:234):

Heyrða ec **segia**      í sǫgom **fornom**,  
hvé mæR um kom      til Mornalanz

I have heard it said in ancient tales how a maiden came to Mornaland.

*Orality* is thematized in the first half-line (*heyrdā ek segia*, “I have heard it said”), *antiquity* in the second (*í sǫgom fornom*, “in ancient tales”). *Copiousness* is not separately lexicalized in this passage though it is signaled in an indirect and attenuated way through the plurality of *sǫgom fornom*. *Oddrúnargrátr* exemplifies the bearer-of-tradition variant of “The Scop’s Repertoire.”

Moreover, a passage in *Hyndluljóð* (“The Song of Hyndla”), though not directly instantiating “The Scop’s Repertoire,” nevertheless constitutes an analogue to the “poetry as gift from god” variant of the theme. The third stanza of *Hyndluljóð* catalogues the various talents given to men by god (in this case, Odin), including poetry (Neckel 1983:288):

Gefr hann sigR sumom,      enn sumom aura,  
mælsco mǫrgom      oc manvit firom;  
byri gefr hann brǫgnom,      enn brag scáldom,  
gefr hann mansemi      mǫrgom recci.

To some he gives victory, to others gold, to many eloquence, and wisdom to men; fair winds he gives to heroes, and likewise verses to poets; he gives bravery to many champions.

Since these verses do not lexicalize any of the three constituent motifs of “The Scop’s Repertoire,” the passage cannot be regarded as exemplifying the theme. It does, however, articulate the basic idea of the *inspiration*-model of the theme, that making poetry is a divinely given skill, and it features two secondary elements persistently associated with the Old English “poetry as gift from god” variant of “The Scop’s Repertoire”: the motif of the *gift*, which appears as noun (*giefu*) in *Christ II* and *Maxims I*, an adjective in *The Gifts of Men* (*giffæst*, “gifted



with”), and a verb in *Hyndluljóð* (*gefa*, “to give”); and the form of the *catalogue* headed by the word *sum*. The general similarities in content and form between the Old English and Old Norse “gifts-of-men” passages have not escaped critical notice. Notably, Geoffrey Russom (1978) has argued that these and similar lists draw on Germanic concepts of nobility, while Elizabeth Jackson (1998) has shown that they use identical structural principles of list-making. To these general observations, we can add that *Hyndluljóð* parallels two particular motifs found in the Old English “poetry-as-inspiration” variant of “The Scop’s Repertoire.”

Given that the “The Scop’s Repertoire” is attested in each of the major Germanic verse traditions—Old English, Old and Middle High German, Old Saxon, and Old Norse—it seems reasonable to postulate a Germanic origin for this theme. It is beyond the scope of the present essay to inquire into a possible Indo-European connection, though both the notion that poetry is a divine gift and that poets are bearers of tradition are well-attested in a variety of Indo-European traditions (Watkins 1995, West 2007). The salient parallels in motifs, diction, and rhetoric shared by the Germanic passages are summarized in **Table 1** below. (For the sake of convenience, the two passages from the *Meters of Boethius* appear in a single column. Although *Hyndluljóð* does not exemplify our theme, its parallels with the Old English gifts-of-men passages are included here.)

“The Scop’s Repertoire” evinces remarkable longevity and stability as a poetic theme. The evidence surveyed here suggests that the theme has roots in preliterate Germanic poetic tradition, and it persists down to the tenth- or eleventh-century Harleian pen trial (and, on the Continent, to the thirteenth-century *Nibelungenlied*). Even poets such as Cynewulf or the *Andreas* poet, whose actual mode of composition seems to have had little in common with the practices of the singer of tales, continue to depict the poet as an oral performer whose excellence is defined by a copious repertoire of songs, while, simultaneously, also accommodating the theme with learned Christian elements such as modesty *topoi* and the workings of the Holy Spirit. The myth of the oral poet persisted even in literate contexts, just as the cultivation of traditional poetics in Anglo-Saxon England persisted down to the very eve of the Norman Conquest. And just as literate authors performed the role of scop, so they employed the traditional poet’s diction and narrative devices in their writings. “The Scop’s Repertoire” both instantiates one such convention and also metonymically conveys its very essence through the motifs of *orality*, *copiousness*, and *antiquity*. That is, the theme depicts the creation of poetry through the passing on of traditional tales, and it is itself a bit of poetry (or the conceptual framework for fashioning such) that has been passed on from poet to poet. In addition, the distinct versions of the theme illustrate two different Anglo-Saxon poetics: the *tradition* model, in which poets accumulate a store of inherited songs, and learning these endows them with the ability to create their own; and the *inspiration* model, where the artist’s skill comes from God. Finally, “The Scop’s Repertoire” clarifies the intertextual relationships between the various passages that employ the theme, particularly *Beowulf* line 869 and the pen trial in MS Harley 208; these are part of a widely-disseminated network of traditional diction that not only includes various Old English texts but also Old and Middle High German, Old Saxon, and Old Norse poems. Far from having nothing to say about the making and performance of Anglo-Saxon verse, traditional themes such as “The Scop’s Repertoire” tell us what Anglo-Saxon poets themselves believed were the wellsprings of their craft.

	Poet as Bearer of Tradition							Poetry as Gift from God			
Motif	<i>Beowulf</i>	<i>Harley Pen-Trial</i>	<i>Andreas</i>	<i>Boethius, Proem / Meter 2</i>	<i>Nibelungenlied</i>	<i>Heliand</i>	<i>Oddrúnar-grátr</i>	<i>Christ II</i>	<i>Gifts of Men</i>	<i>Maxims I</i>	<i>[Hyndluljóð]</i>
Antiquity	<i>ealldgesegena</i>	ealde	<i>fyrnsægen</i>	<i>ealdspell</i>	alten		fornum				
Copiousness	eal fela worn	eallfeala	feala weorna	fela	vil	filo		eal fela	fela	worn	
Orality	<i>ealldgesegena</i> , secgan hyrde	sæge	<i>fyrnsægen</i> , secganne	secgean	sagen hæren	seggean gihôrdun	segja heyrða	secgan			
Attention marker		hwæt	hwæt	hwæt							
Poetry as gift								giefe	<i>giffæst</i>	giefe	gefr
Catalog marker								sum	sum		sumum
Playing harp								hearpan gleobeam gretan	hearpan gleobeames gretan	hearpan gretan	

Table 1. Salient parallels in motifs, diction, and rhetoric shared by Germanic passages.

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