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Early Words to Late Music:
The Value of Practice-led Research in Composition as a Companion to the Analysis of Old English Poetic Metre

> *hludne in healle;   þær was hearpan sweg,*
> *swutol sang scopes.*
>
> "loud in the hall;   there was music of the harp,
> the clear song of the bard."
>
> (Beowulf, ll. 89–90a)

1. Introduction

In the introduction to his String Quartet No. 3, Geoffrey Poole wrote that the viola "Incantation" at the beginning of the piece "echoed the melodic declamation of an Anglo-Saxon bard" (Poole, 1999) and this subjective yet tantalisingly vivid description left me wondering exactly what he meant – we do not know how Anglo-Saxon bardic melodies would have sounded, so what was it in Poole's compositional process and/or output that led him to refer to them? The small number of things that can be conjectured about this ancient unattested music derive from the analysis of surviving written Anglo-Saxon (Old English) poetry, and the reconstruction of lyres discovered by archaeologists. A lively discourse surrounds the way in which the lost oral tradition relates to its written relative and, although it will probably never be possible to reach a consensus, a wide range of hypotheses have been proposed. Was Geoff Poole aware of these issues when he wrote his piece? Did he have an imagined bardic song in his mind, or did he use a systematic process derived from the Old English language to create one? After attempting to satisfy my curiosity by discussing these questions with the composer, I found myself reflecting on a number of wider issues, which ultimately provoked the writing of this paper:

- What are the ways in which today's English composers absorb elements of a distant musicolinguistic heritage into their own idiom? And, what motivates them (or rather *us*) to do so?
- Could the study of contemporary compositions based on the Old English language possibly form a useful contribution to discourse surrounding the proposed oral ancestor of written Old English poetry – bardic singing?

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, evoking an ancient or geographically distant culture in music was likely to involve an imaginative flight of fancy and the use of culturally and historically referential tropes, of questionable authenticity; nowadays greater depth of understanding is expected from creative practitioners whose work draws on remote traditions. Artists interested in engaging with temporally remote or extinct traditions, which offer no opportunity for cultural immersion, depend on the work of researchers to inform their ideas. With the emergence of practice-led research in music composition and an increasing number of contemporary composers working in academic institutions, there is a great deal of exchange and overlap between scholarly research and creative practice. In many cases the idea of engaging with a source of inspiration means more for composers than just allowing the subject to stimulate the imagination; critical engagement and a certain level of insight are common, even expected. Although there is a fundamental difference of purpose that will surely always distinguish between the scholar and the artist – Geoffrey Poole can say whatever he likes about his own music and the subjective process behind it, but if an expert in Anglo-Saxon language and culture describes something as a "bardic melody", we can reasonably expect to hear a historically informed reconstruction – I believe there is much to be gained from investigating the products of interpenetration between scholarly and creative processes.

This paper will outline some of the ways in which paying critical attention to composers' decisions can open up new avenues for exploration in the study of OE poetry. Beginning with a brief summary of issues under discussion in OE poetics, it will offer examples of ways in which the study of particular contemporary compositions can potentially throw a little light on them.[1] The discussion will necessarily be confined to metre and rhythm, since almost nothing is known about OE pitch intonation.

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[1]   The present study is concerned with idiomatically free settings of Old English by contemporary composers; it does not address reconstructions or pastiches drawn from historical idioms by performer-researchers. It is my intention to build on this research in a future publication, by considering the latter category in relation to the former.

2. Controversies Surrounding the Reading of Old English Poetry

There is not a consensus among experts on the details of how OE poetry would have sounded and renderings according to the different schools of thought produce significantly different results. In OE metre, a line consists of two verses, or half-lines, which are divided by a caesura.[2] In 1885, Eduard Sievers demonstrated that the OE half-line (almost) always contains at least four syllables, with two stressed syllables and at least two unstressed syllables. The stresses do not always come at regular intervals and the number of unstressed syllables is quite variable. Rather than rhyming, the poems alliterate and alliterations coincide with primary stresses. In the first half-line (on-verse) of a line, both stressed syllables alliterate; in the second half-line (off-verse), the first stressed syllable alliterates with the on-verse and the second does not.[3] Sievers identified a set of categories, known as "Sievers' Types", which illustrate the different varieties of verse found in the OE poetic corpus (see Table 1).[4]

Table 1. Sievers' Types, named by letter, in descending order of frequency

Type	Stress Pattern	Modern English illustration*
A	/x(xxxx)/x	<u>An</u>na <u>an</u>gry/ <u>An</u>na(bel is a bit) <u>an</u>gry
B	(xxxx)x/x(x)/	And <u>Birht</u>noth <u>bold</u>/ And (so you'll find that) <u>Birht</u>noth (is) <u>bold</u>
C	(xxxxx)x//x	In <u>keen</u> <u>con</u>flict / (And I see that he's) in <u>keen</u> <u>con</u>flict
D	/(xxx)/ \x	<u>Drive</u> <u>Don</u> *back*wards / <u>Driv</u>(ing mr) <u>Don</u> *back*wards
E	/ \x(x)/	<u>Each</u> *one* with <u>edge</u> / <u>Each</u> *one* with(out) <u>edge</u>

*I have added additional Modern English words (in parentheses) to illustrate how extra unstressed syllables might be realized. Stressed syllables are underlined and secondary stressed syllables are shown in italics.

KEY: / denotes a primary stress
\ denotes a secondary stress
x denotes an unaccented syllable.

Each of the six types may comprise additional unstressed syllables, up-to and including the number shown in parentheses.
SOURCE: Mitchell and Robinson, 2001: 161

By far the most commonly occurring pattern across all the literature is the A-type verse, a four-syllable half-line, with primary stresses on the first and third syllables: <u>*Anna angry*</u>. As a result, substantial portions of almost all OE poems can be read easily and comfortably in a duple metre.

The major controversy, which still divides OE metrical theorists into two opposing schools of thought, concerns rhythmic realization of metrically disruptive additional unstressed syllables and verse-types that cannot be read in duple metre without the addition of initial or final rests and/or anacruses. One theory is that OE poetry would have been read isochronously, with syllables divided into even feet (or bars).[5] When poems are read in this manner, additional unstressed syllables become problematic, resulting in awkward-to-execute, unnatural-sounding rushed moments and extreme variability of syllable duration. B-, C-, D- and E-type verses are also problematic because their stress patterns do not coincide with strong beats in duple metre, unless rests and/or anacruses are added. John C. Pope claimed to have solved this problem by introducing rests into his metric analyses, which he suggested would have been filled by lyre strokes (Pope, 1966). He produced a rhythmic transcription of *Beowulf* in which rests evened out irregularities in the syllabic rhythm by replacing strong beats when verses began on weak beats and balancing the number of feet in each verse. The entire poem was thus transcribed in duple metre, without any requirement for complex beat subdivision. There are references to harp playing in OE literature that seem to support the idea of lyre accompaniment for bardic performance, although there is no historical evidence that written poetry would have been read in this way.[6] Pope's theory has been further developed by others, including Robert P. Creed, who concluded from his own computer-aided analysis of *Beowulf* that "a simple, two-part rhythm beginning with a down-beat, … controls

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[2] The use of this form of lineation in modern editions is based on metrical analyses of the poems. However, in the original manuscripts the poems were laid out continuously, as in prose texts.

[3] In references, on- and off-verses are "a" and "b" respectively.

[4] Bessinger and Kahrl (ed. and trans.) (1968: 267–288).

[5] Although the isochronous theory of OE metrics was originally proposed in opposition to Sievers' system (Heusler, 1925), later scholars attempted to unify the two approaches (e.g. Pope, 1966; Russom, 1998; Creed, 1990). In this paper, I have followed the convention of recent commentaries and adopted Sievers' Types as the starting point for metrical analysis (see Bliss, 1992; Fulk, 2001; Mitchell and Robinson, 2001; Bredehoft, 2005; Dance, 2010).

[6] E.g. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, IV. 24, *Widsith*, ll. 103–8, *Beowulf*, ll. 86–90a, 1063–68 and 1159b–60a.

the distribution of every syllable in the poem" (Creed, 1990: 205).[7] Creed also commented, on the basis of his own practical experience, that isochronous realization felt intuitive and natural in performance: "it is possible to *perform* the poem effectively according to this rhythm" (Creed, 1990: 205). Creed's published recording of isochronous readings of OE poems (Creed/Raffel, 2009) is rather metronomic and this is an aspect of the isochronous approach that has been criticised, notably by Alan J. Bliss, as over-dependent on modern musical inclinations and thus unsuited to the reading of Anglo-Saxon poetry (Bliss, 1967).[8]

The opposing theory is that OE poetry would have been read nonisochronously, with half-lines of varying duration and irregular stresses. Thomas M. Cable, for example, argued that it should be considered anachronistic to read OE poetry in divisive musical metres, on the basis that Gregorian chant, the only contemporaneous form of music preserved in manuscripts, was unmetred (Cable, 1974: 15–16).[9] The distinctive, original element of Cable's own theory of metrical analysis is the notion that melodic formulas were the dominant formal characteristic of OE poetic prosody, presiding over any temporal accentual and rhythmic rules. He posited four different metrical "positions" for each verse, determined not by placement in time or rhythmic pattern, but by pitch, relative to preceding and successive lexical stresses – i.e. a syllable with primary stress produces a descending pitch contour, so a successive unstressed syllable will occupy a relatively lower pitch. Cable summarized his position thus: "the main correlate of metrical ictus was relative pitch, and not simply the pitch of ordinary discourse, but a heightened and stylized pattern. ... The metrical basis of Old English poetry was the melodic formula ... to which words were fitted according to strict rules" (Cable, 1974: 95–96). The three-line staff that Cable used to illustrate his model of relative-pitch-based analysis has parallels in some contemporary approaches to musical notation, as well as in modern linguistics. Although this theory was, like others, conceived as applicable to spoken performance of OE poetry, it could also be interpreted as a movement towards considering OE poetry in terms of sung performance.[10]

Might a new song-based approach to OE poetics be called for?[11] Very few OE literary theorists have actually tried to *sing* the poetry (or have seriously considered the singing of it, by themselves or others) and this strikes me as regrettable. Nonetheless, OE poetry continues to inspire a healthy number of performances, compositions and re-enactments, and however much or little those responsible know about the texts, it must be acknowledged that many of them know (or at least intuit) a great deal about dramatic style, storytelling and musical communication – elements that have, in my view, been overlooked in the discourse so far. Relatively informed musical reconstructions of Anglo-Saxon bardic performance, using written texts, have become more common in recent years. Perhaps the most notable example is Benjamin Bagby's recorded performance of Beowulf (Bagby, 2006) – a practical application of the rhythmic theories of Pope and Creed, in which theoretically-determined elements are combined with intuitively chosen elements, drawn from his considerable expertise in medieval performance practice.[12] Because so little is known about Anglo-Saxon music, such performances are primarily comprised of speculation-dependent, subjective material, which is perhaps why they have thus far impacted little on OE poetics. However, it is my view that detailed analysis of these types of performances, as well as the creation and analysis of many more, could be very informative. There are indeed precedents for this type of study, defined by Dennis Tedlock as *ethnopaleography*: "Taking a text back to the descendants of those who produced it in order to draw analogies with contemporary spoken arts and obtain commentaries from contemporary readers" (Tedlock, 1983: 16). This applies as much to the analysis

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7   See also Bessinger (1958) and Wrenn (1960).

8   While Bliss blamed this metronomic rigidity on scholars taking too musical an approach, I would argue that such problems arise from an approach that is not nearly musical enough! Also, I do not think that metrical reading and rigidity of tempo should be thought of as interdependent in poetry, since they are certainly not so in music.

9   Apart from the obvious fact that the existence of a particular characteristic in one distinct musical tradition does not automatically prove the existence of the same characteristic in all contemporaneous forms, I find the proposed link between human bipedalism and duple metre in music and dance to be a much more convincing indicator of whether or not isochrony was likely to have existed in ancient music (see Mithen, 2005: 150–154).

10   It is irresistible to mention that there is a striking similarity between this approach to reading Old English poetry and typical readings of Classical Chinese poetry (since both languages are said to be stress-timed, comparison between the two forms of poetry could be beneficial). Since Mandarin Chinese is a tonal language, relative pitch and contour are of paramount importance and tend to be exaggerated in a stylized manner when poetry is read aloud. This *sprechstimme*-like exaggeration also forms also the basis of some Chinese traditional musics, including Beijing Opera.

11   Although it is generally agreed that written OE poetry is related to an earlier oral, probably musical, tradition, the nature of this relationship remains unknown. See Treitler (1981: 471–475) for an excellent description of how texts evolve though interwoven processes of oral and literate transmission, which are virtually impossible for scholars to unpick. On music of the period see Rankin (1999) and Jeffery (1992). On the "oral-formulaic" theory of composition (Lord, 1960), as applied to OE poetry, see Acker (1998), Foley (1985), Magennis (2011: 36–54; 73–76), Magoun (1953), Niles (1981), O'Brien O'Keeffe (1987) and Orchard (1997).

12   See also: Macklin (2007), Ewing (2011), Rowan (2012).

of spoken as well as sung realizations of texts. As Miriam Youngerman Miller observed, in her comparison of OE poetry readings by Creed and Cable, "[since] the *scops* have left no direct lineal heirs, we must conduct our own version of ethnopaleography by consulting the only heirs they have left: native speakers of Modern English, particularly those knowledgeable in Anglo-Saxon poetics" (Youngerman Miller, 1993: 347). This paper will identify ways in which even the stylistically unrestrained creative practice of contemporary English composers working within their own idiom, and drawing on varying degrees of familiarity with OE poetics, has the potential to raise important new possibilities for theorists to consider.[13]

3. Observations on the Work of Contemporary Composers

3.1. 'Concealed Verbalisation' in Geoff Poole's 'Anglo-Saxon Soundworld'

For whatever reason, be it pure imagination or something deeper that we do not fully understand, many English composers who set Old English texts experience the process as a portal through which to connect with their own distant heritage. Geoffrey Poole wanted his String Quartet No. 3 to "inhabit an Anglo-Saxon sound-world" (Poole, email: 19/07/13); he described the piece as "...something of a homecoming to my Anglian seafaring ancestry, in its very North-European feel for rich, gutsy sonorities of the low range of the instruments" (Poole, 1999: 2). Poole is not an Old English specialist, but he feels an affinity with Anglo-Saxon culture and language. The opening section of the quartet is a viola solo, labelled "Incantation" (Ex. 1), which exemplifies an approach he calls "concealed verbalisation", meaning that the instrumental gestures evoke and emulate words and/or speech sounds. Although he also used this technique in other compositions, String Quartet No. 3 contains the only example of musical material drawn from Old English. During the composition process, Poole read various OE words to the Lindsay Quartet violist Robin Ireland, asking him to imitate their contours and timbres instrumentally, whilst also importing a musical impression of their meaning into the resulting gestures. Although he did not retain a complete list of the words used, he did remember the following Modern English translations: sword (*sweord*), blood (*blod*), birch (*beorc*), river (*wæterstream*), skin (*scinn*), knife (*cnif*).[14]

In response to my excitement at the prospect of word-hunting through his score, Poole cautioned: "I doubt you'll find specific words now, even if I thought them at the time of sketching" (Poole, email: 5/10/13). For him, Anglo-Saxon words provided an impression of timbre, rhythm and contour which he abstracted and absorbed, before abandoning specific references and composing intuitively. The "bardic" viola Incantation thus conveys a vague and abstracted, but perhaps still recognizable impression of Old English.

Example 1. Geoffrey Poole, String Quartet No. 3, I "Ofanverthnott": bb. 1–16, vla.

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[13]   It is practical to constrain the current discussion to the work of English composers, but this should definitely not be interpreted as a comment on the relative usefulness of work by musicians of other nationalities. Some excellent research has been conducted in USA, for example, and I believe strongly that wide-ranging studies of music from many different cultures could greatly enhance the study of Anglo-Saxon music.

[14]   I have added speculative Old English translations, since Geoff Poole was only able to remember the Modern English words. There are numerous possible translations of each word; those above are selected because Poole said he had chosen to use OE words that would recognizable to ModE speakers.

Regardless of whether or not it is perceptibly "Anglo-Saxon", the Incantation is certainly very speech-like, in the irregularity of its rhythms and phrase lengths and the breath-like durational variability and unsystematic placement of its rests, as well as in its erratic dynamic changes, spiky articulations and fricative-like timbral effects. For me, the implied speech prosody of this passage also conveys a sense of animated emotion – perhaps Robin Ireland's musicalization of Poole's chosen words was derived from imagining the varying speeds, emphasized consonants, lengthened vowels and heightened dynamic contrasts of dramatically charged speech. I would also propose that certain rhythmic features of the Incantation actually do evoke the specific sound of Old English. Firstly, the musical line is divided into phrases of unequal duration, the first elements of which are frequently accented or emphasized by acciaccaturas and/or descending pitch contours; this emulates OE lexical stress, which occurs on the first syllables of words, except in the case of verbs beginning with prefixes.[15] Secondly, acciaccaturas in the Incantation seem to resemble OE unstressed prefixes like "ge". However, none of Poole's remembered words contain prefixes, which makes me wonder if the acciaccaturas in fact resulted from mispronunciations of OE diphthongs in words like "*beorc*" and "*sweord*" (correct pronunciation: [eo̯]; common mispronunciation: [eˈo]). Such mispronunciations are actually very common among Old English scholars as well as non-specialists.[16] The Old English word "*beadoweorca*" provides a useful illustration – this word is particularly difficult for ModE speakers to pronounce because it contains two unfamiliar diphthongs: 'ea' [æɑ] and 'eo' [eo]. The first component of both of these diphthongs should be emphasized: [ˈbæɑdo̯ˌweo̯ˑka], but ModE speakers intuitively pronounce them as two separate syllables, with stresses on the second components: [beˈɑˌdoweˈjoˑka]. This characteristic is a particularly distinctive feature of the Incantation that, however inaccurate it might be, does imbue the passage with a sense of archaic, speech-like otherness.

It is confusing that the source words Geoff Poole remembers using are primarily one- or two-syllable words, while the rhythmic gestures in the Incantation are much more indicative of longer words, compounds and whole phrases. Although he only used individual OE words as source material, what Poole eventually composed sounds more like a complete syntactical utterance – a sentence, phrase, paragraph or perhaps even a poem. With the exception of the two points above, most of the features marking the Incantation as more speech-like than melodic are applicable to speech in almost any language. However, considering different styles of speaking that transcend language differences does raise a point that is well worth considering in relation to OE poetry.[17] A theatrical style of delivery would surely be appropriate for the story-telling bard and would suitably complement the poems' evocative content. Many of the elements that characterize emotive speech – durational variability of pauses, accelerating and decelerating phrases, sudden, emphatic changes in speed etc. – would impact considerably on the isochronicity of an OE poetry reading. Cable noted that most metrical studies of OE poetry "deal with an abstract, idealized" system, without taking into account "the accidental features and idiosyncrasies of an individual performance" (Cable, 1974: 13). It is my view that these extra-systematic features are actually fundamental, not just accidental or idiosyncratic – without them, no storyteller from any epoch could truly move his or her audience. To my ears, Creed and Raffel's uniformly isochronous recordings of various OE poems exemplify this (Creed/Raffel, 1964). They lack nuance and sensitivity because they apply Creed's theory too rigorously, without making allowances for the flexibility, freedom, and tension and release of truly emotive expression. Reading an OE poem in this way is like playing a Chopin Nocturne without *rubato* or dynamic changes. I suspect that I might not be alone in hearing more bardic character in Geoff Poole's Incantation – however poor the viola's "accent" might be – than in the Creed/Raffel recordings. I wonder if an audience of Anglo-Saxons would prefer to listen to a metrically consistent *scop* with an impeccable accent, or a dramatically engaging one with a few linguistic idiosyncrasies?

3.2. Alternative Routes to Isochrony: Polyphony, Slowness and Sustain in Stef Conner's *Hord Songs*

In view of the above, I find it unsatisfying that tempo – something so crucial to affect in speech and song – is mentioned very infrequently in analyses of OE poems. It is also a factor that affects speech-intelligibility and would thus vary according to the context in which a text was delivered. A *scop* singing to a crowded mead-hall would probably need to speak or sing unusually slowly to make himself heard over a rowdy drunken audience, while a scholarly monk reciting a poem to a colleague need not speak any faster or slower than normal. Also,

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[15]   See Lass (1996: 46).

[16]   For an example of diphthongs pronounced in this way by an expert, see Lee (2006: 1:00–1:23), "*wealstan*" and "*geweorc*". Pronunciation is not necessarily a priority for all scholars of historical English literature.

[17]   It is of course subjective that I perceive the Incantation as evocative, dramatic and emotionally affecting, but I suspect that further research would probably support the universality of this perception.

different OE poems create different atmospheres through contrasting evocative imagery; a poem about battle would probably be recited faster than a poem about prayer. There are tempo variations between the Creed/Raffel recordings, which may have been entirely intuitive, that are consistent with what one would expect to hear in relation to the atmosphere of the texts: *The Ruin*, for example, is a poem about reflecting woefully on the transience of existence and it is read more slowly than Riddle No. 1, a fierce poem about inclement weather. Contrasts in tempo are of course fundamental to the character of musical settings, in which they are often heightened. Comparing two of the movements in my 2012 composition *Hord Songs* reveals a thematically-appropriate extreme contrast between tempi: "The Marks of War-Blades" (Table 2; Ex. 2) is a setting of a reflective, mournful poem (Riddle No. 5),[18] with a suitably moribund slow tempo, while "Of Fire and File" is a setting of a dramatic, colourful poem about the shock and awe of conflict (Riddle No. 71), with a lively tempo and sense of motion (Table 3; Ex. 3).[19] One would expect two atmospherically different musical settings to display a greater contrast in tempo than two spoken recitations, in part because extreme tempi and long held notes, like those in my setting of Riddle No. 5, would be difficult and uncomfortable to execute in speech. Anyone who has sung in a choir and tried to practice tricky rhythms by speaking instead of singing will know how awkward and utterly unnatural it feels to speak long held notes. In my experience, singers in these circumstances usually resort to using *sprechstimme* with exaggerated prosodic contours and indeterminate pitch, since it is more comfortable to slide up and down than to sustain a single pitch in a speaking voice.

If the possibilities of both held notes and a wide-ranging, flexible tempi are introduced into the process of scanning OE poems, it becomes quite a lot easier to achieve natural-sounding isochrony. Scansions that begin with a four-syllable A-type verse in medium tempo, for example, become very uncomfortable when verses with lots of extra unstressed syllables appear, as the speaker is forced to cram up to nine syllables into a segment of time previously occupied comfortably by just four. If the tempo is elastic, or uniformly slow, sudden syllabic onslaughts are less problematic. Held notes also expand the stock of potential rhythmic realizations of any given verse, providing lots of different options for dealing with odd numbers of syllables and non-duple stress placements.

Accordingly, the rhythm of my setting of Riddle No. 5 (Ex. 2) basically represents a slowed-down isochronous reading of the poem; if the note-values were halved, it would look a little like Pope's rhythmic transcription of *Beowulf*. Stressed syllables in the poem are set to strong beats and the E-Type verses "*iserne wund*" and "*beadoweorca sæd*" are displaced by rests and held notes, so that their final stressed syllables land on strong beats (Ex. 2, bb. 165–166 and 169–170). Although it has been acknowledged that stressed syllables in OE poetry were likely to have had longer durations than unstressed syllables, no metrists have considered including long held notes in their scansions, presumably because it is counter-intuitive to speak them. In view of the fact that written OE poems and their oral ancestors may well have been sung, I think that this possibility should be introduced into metrical theories, in addition to Pope and Creed's suggested rests and lyre interjections.

Table 2. Scansion: Riddle No. 5, *The Exeter Book*: ll. 1–2

	Sievers' Verse-Types	On-verse	Off-verse	ModE Translation
1.1	AE	/ x / x x Ic eom anhaga	/\ x / iserne wund	I am a lonely wanderer, wounded with iron,
1.2	AE	/ x x / x bille gebennad	/ x \ x / beadoweorca sæd	smitten by war-blades, sated with strife...

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[18]   All of the OE riddles cited in this paper are in the *Exeter Book* manuscript (Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501); quotations are taken from Baum (ed. and trans.), 1963; numbering system from Krapp and Dobbie (eds.), 1936.

[19]   Taken at face value, the tempo markings for these two pieces – 60 and 70 – are not that different, but the quaver beat-subdivisions of "Of Fire and File" create the impression that it is much faster than "The Marks of War Blades".

Example 2. Stef Conner, *Hord Songs*, VI "The Marks of War-Blades": bb. 161–174

In "Of Fire and File", my setting of Riddle No. 71, the sense of forward momentum and dense activity is partly due to polyphony, something that – like rests, lyre strokes and held notes – can be used to displace stressed syllables to strong beats and unstressed syllables to weak ones, maintaining the metre when syllable counts and accentual patterns are metrically disruptive. Throughout this movement, voices are used *instrumentally*, in that non-semantic segments derived from the text (e.g. "ri" and "i", Ex. 3) provide background, polyphonic accompaniment to foreground isochronous, mainly syllabic settings of semantic units. In particular, phonemes from stressed syllables are treated polyphonically to enhance their prominence. In some instances polyphony takes the form of an echoed word or phrase (e.g. "*reade bewæfed*", Ex. 3, b. 74, repeated bb. 75–77), and in others it is formed from the anticipation of a phoneme that is about to be heard in the text (e.g. "i" and "nu", Ex. 3, bb. 82–83).

However delightful I find the image of multiple scopas duelling polyphonically across the mead-hall, I cannot claim that there is any evidence to indicate the possibility of polyphonic realization of OE poetry by medieval performers. Nonetheless, polyphony in the vocal lines of this piece is reminiscent of polyphonic instrumental accompaniment, something which may well be worth considering in relation to OE poetic performance. Clive Tolley has remarked on the Anglo-Saxon fondness for "punning and riddling, making things appear other than they are, or hiding their nature, and showing how things in the world are interlaced and complex"; by way of example he observed, "in the great epic Beowulf the lead-up to the final battle of the hero against a dragon is interwoven with legendary tales from Swedish history, and reflections on the meaning of life" (Tolley, 2012: 4). Although it is probably not practical or idiomatic to play a six-string lyre polyphonically whilst singing, the possibility of creating a polyphonic interplay between voice and lyre could be an attractive musical interpretation of the idea of interlacing forms and themes in Anglo-Saxon art.[20] Also, the possibility of using the lyre to anticipate, repeat and reinforce melodic ideas that are connected to stressed syllables and formulas in the text is very interesting.

Table 3. Scansion: Riddle No. 71, *The Exeter Book*: ll. 1–2

	Verse-Types	On-verse	Off-verse	Translation
1.1	(BA)	x x / x / Ic eom rices æht,	/ x x / x reade bewæfed,	I am the property of a powerful man, clothed in red,
1.2	(AA)	/ x / x stið ond steapwong.	/ x x / x Staþol wæs iu þa	Hard and steep-cheeked, my place was once …

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[20] To comment further on this idea is outside the scope of this paper; on the subject of self-accompanied singing with Anglo-Saxon lyre, see Pope (1966), Bessinger (1958), Bagby (2000) and Macklin (2003).

Example 3. Stef Conner, *Hord Songs*, II "Of Fire and File": bb. 69–85

3.3. Melisma and Formula in Text Settings by Edmund Hunt

Analysis of Edmund Hunt's work yields yet another possible addition to the technical inventory of OE poetics – *melisma*. Like long notes and slow tempi, this is an overlooked feature, peculiar to sung performance, that could facilitate greater flexibility in scanning complex verses. Practically speaking, as is the case in many narrative-driven folk songs where intelligibility is paramount, melismas in OE bardic singing would probably have been relatively short – short enough to ensure that listeners would not lose track of meaning.

In English folksong collections, it is clear that, while syllabic text-setting dominates, short melismas are common; typically, they emphasize stressed syllables and repeated phrases and/or heighten the forward momentum of up-beats.[21]

Edmund Hunt's use of melisma in his compositions is constrained enough not to inhibit listener comprehension. It is also methodically connected to the accentual patterns of the poetry he sets. Melismatic musical phrases reinforce stressed, alliterating syllables, with the longest melismas occurring on the first stressed syllables of on-verses. His short composition *I Had A Living Spirit* (Ex. 4) – a setting of Riddle No. 74 (Table 4) – illustrates this very neatly.

Table 4. Scansion: Riddle No. 74, *The Exeter Book*

	Verse-types	On-verse	Off-verse	Translation	Alliterating phoneme
1.1	BA	x x / x / Ic wæs fæmne geong,	/ x / x feax har cwene	was a young woman, a fair-haired lady,	f
1.2	BA	x / x / ond ænlic rinc	x / x / on ane tid	and at the same time a peerless warrior;	vocalic alliteration
1.3	AB	/ x / x Fleah mid fuglum	x x / x / ond on flode swom	I flew with the birds and swam in the sea,	f
1.4	AA	/ xx / x deaf under yðe,	/ x / x dead mid fiscum	dove under the wave, and was dead among fishes,	d
1.5	BC	x x / x / ond on foldan stop.	x x / / x Hæfde ferð cwicu	and I walked on the ground. I had a living spirit.	f

Example 4. Edmund Hunt, *I Had a Living Spirit*: bb. 3–25, mezzo-soprano

The alliterative structure of this poem yields a satisfying ABACA form (Table 4), which is highlighted by Hunt's composition. His setting of each line that alliterates on the consonant "f" begins with a relatively long melisma on the first stressed syllable of the on-verse. This not only emphasizes the accented position of these syllables in the poem's metrical structure, but also reinforces the prominence of the phoneme [f] in the overall form. On-verses (such as Ex. 4, bb. 3–7; bb. 10–11; bb. 16–17; b. 22; bb. 24–25) are given more noticeably melismatic treatment than off-verses, which are mostly set syllabically. The two longest f-alliteration melismas (Ex. 4, b. 6; bb. 16–17) are distinctively marked by the leitmotif figure they incorporate (Ex. 5).

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21   For example, see Roud and Bishop (2012).

Example 5. Leitmotif figure used to set on-verse f-alliterations in Hunt's *I Had a Living Spirit*

Alliterating syllables are similarly marked in Hunt's *We Are Apart; Our Song Together*, a setting of the notoriously difficult to interpret poem *Wulf and Eadwacer*. In this piece, the first alliterating stressed syllables of the poem – "leo" and "lac", from the line "[a] *Leodum is minum* [b] *swylce him mon lac gife*" "It is to my people as if someone would give them a gift" (l. 1, stressed syllables underlined)[22] – are treated with the same rhythmic motive, here referred to as the "*leodum* motive" (Ex. 6; illustration Ex. 7).

Example 6. "Leodum motive" in Edmund Hunt's *We Are Apart; Our Song Together*

Example 7. Edmund Hunt, *We Are Apart; Our Song Together*: bb. 18–27, mezzo-sop.

This motive is the most distinctive gesture in the piece, used as it is in the opening phrase, and to set various stressed syllables of other on-verses, including "ren" (from "*renig*", ex. 8), "mur" (from "*murnende*", Ex. 9) and "*Wulf*" (Ex. 10). These melismas are particularly noticeable because of Hunt's syllabic treatment of the proximate non-alliterating syllables.

Example 8. Edmund Hunt, *We Are Apart; Our Song Together*, bb. 60–2, m-s.

Example 9. Edmund Hunt, *We Are Apart; Our Song Together*, bb. 109–110, m-s.

Example 10. Edmund Hunt, *We Are Apart; Our Song Together*, b. 120, m-s.

"*Wulf*" is apparently the name of the person to whom the poet's lament is directed. When the word forms the first stressed syllable of a typical line,[23] Hunt sets it with a relatively long melisma, incorporating a version of the *leodum* motive into the middle of the gesture (Ex. 11–12). This is another use of distinctively long melisma to mark the most prominent phoneme (and in this case word) of a poem, like those in *I Had a Living Spirit*. The last time the name Wulf is heard, it is set to the original *leodum* motive, which could be perceived as a recapitulation of the original theme, further reinforcing the prominence of the word.

Example 11. Edmund Hunt, *We Are Apart; Our Song Together*, bb. 33–34

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[22]   All translations of this poem from Treharne, 2010: 77.

[23]   By "typical" I mean a line comprising an on- and off-verse, with at least 4 syllables in each.

Example 12. Edmund Hunt, *We Are Apart*; *Our Song Together*, b. 53

There are some interesting atypical lines in the poem, to which Hunt affords appropriate prominence. Line 13, for example, seems to be a sorrowful cry from the speaker to the absent Wulf: "*Wulf min Wulf!*" "Wulf, my Wulf!" This half-line defies categorization according to Siever's types, because it only has three syllables, while OE verses typically require four. However, it seems quite appropriate that the line is somewhat anomalous and metrically disruptive given that it represents an unusually subjective, emotive piece of expression; it is a climactic moment, dividing the text into near-golden-ratio-proportions. Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson interpret it thus: "The verse as it stands is very effective in context. We conclude that this poet is willing to violate the strict rules of OE prosody in order to achieve bold effects" (Mitchell and Robinson, 2007: 311). Hunt complements the anguished, jarring character of the verse by setting the first "Wulf" (Ex. 13, bb. 89–90) with an unusually long, descending melisma and the second (Ex. 13, bb. 94–95) with a short echo. Long rests occur in between and either side of these gestures. It is the only instance in the piece in which a long rest (a bar or more) interrupts a half-line. The remainder of the piece preserves the structure one would expect, with short to medium rests emulating caesuras between half-lines and longer rests (bars/multiple bars) occurring between whole lines. This treatment of the line seems to truly celebrate its arresting abnormality; it is a reminder that in OE poetry, as in music, "rules" are often skilfully broken, to superb effect.

Example 13. Edmund Hunt, *We Are Apart*; *Our Song Together*, bb. 89–95

Lines 2–3 and 7–8 of the poem are also somewhat anomalous: "[a] *willað hy hine aþecgan gif he on þreat cymeð* [b] *Ungelic(e) is us.*" "They will consume him if he comes into their troop. It is different with us." The fact that the lines are repeated "like a refrain" is very unusual in the OE corpus (Mitchell and Robinson, 2007: 311). They are also metrically disruptive, containing a large number of stressed syllables and, like line 13, missing the off-verses of lines 3 and 8 (see Table 5). Hunt sets the phrase to the virtually same rhythm both times, with widened melodic contour imbuing the second repetition with the character of emphatic speech (Ex. 14–15). He also embraces its prose-like quality by setting "*Ungelice is us*" as indeterminately pitched speech. Like line 13, this portion of text, and Hunt's treatment of it, offers a reminder that rhythm and theme are meaningfully connected in OE poems. Even if poems are read isochronously, the fact that some phrases are clearly designed to disrupt metric flow should be embraced, because they are so designed in order to effectively express disruptive, shocking or especially affecting ideas![24]

Table 5. Scansion: *Wulf and Eadwacer*, ll. 2–3a (repeated ll. 7–8a)

	Verse-type	On-verse	Off-verse	Translation
1.2	AC	/ x x x x x/ x willað hy hine aþecgan	x x x / / x gif he on þreat cymeð.	They will consume him if he comes into their troop.
1.3	E	/ x \ (x) x / Ungelic(e) is us.	[empty]	It is different with us.

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[24]   Accordingly, Creed's metrically regular reading of the poem (Creed/Raffel, 2009) is much less emotionally engaging than Hunt's setting.

Example 14. Edmund Hunt, *We Are Apart*; *Our Song Together*, bb. 26–29

Example 15. Edmund Hunt, *We Are Apart*; *Our Song Together*, bb. 47–50

In addition tot he possible use of melisma, this analysis of Hunt's work raises two important things to consider. Firstly, his settings display a similar sense of freedom to Poole's viola Incantation, with rests or pauses of varying duration heightening the dramatic affect of particular phrases, and note-durations and phrase-lengths changing according to the mood of the lines they set. Characteristics of the poetry such as stresses, alliterations and caesuras are preserved carefully, owing to his careful study of the texts, but they are treated with a degree of freedom – each phrase is given the time it needs to realize its full affective potential. And, metrical anomalies in the poems are celebrated and enhanced in Hunt's settings. Again, this highlights the importance of musical sensitivity, which I believe transcends any distinction between isochronicity and nonisochronicity in the reconstruction of OE poetry. In a sense, musicalizing the argument renders the duality somewhat obsolete anyway; there is no universal rulebook prohibiting metred music from metrically modulating and changing speed, or un-metred music from implying a pulse. When words and music are brought together, in storytelling and affective communication, the priority must surely be to combine the two, naturally and sensitively, in such a way that they can fulfil their emotive purpose. No actor would barrel metronomically through a Shakespeare sonnet, without pausing to allow listeners to fully inhabit the emotionality of each moment, so why would we read OE poetry in this way?

Secondly, Hunt's stylish use of leitmotif figures to mark repetition and stress is a very logical musical extension of what is already present in the text, which testifies to his considerable knowledge of Old English language and poetry.[25] Indeed, the musical leitmotif is strikingly analogous to the poetic formula: "A group of words ... regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (Lord, 1960: 3). The fact that recurring melodic and rhythmic motives are used so effectively in these settings presents us with an appealing musical reinterpretation of Cable's theory of the centrality of the melodic formula in OE metrics (Cable, 1974). In fact, Tolley has already made some tentative steps in this direction by creating a syllabic setting of *The Wanderer*, in which poetic formulas are translated into melodic motives and stressed syllables are marked with lyre chords (Tolley, 2012).[26] To develop these ideas further, collaboration between musicians and OE scholars is essential, because it will not be possible to understand how the formula functions in an oral musical tradition without absorbing performers' direct experiences of musical memory, extemporization and the process of cultivating and drawing on a stock of melodic and rhythmic building blocks – the improviser's "bag of tricks".[27] It would be useful to know, for example, how memorable rhythmic motives are, in comparison to melodic ones, when singers try to summon up appropriate musical partners for particular words and phrases in real-time performance. I would also like to investigate ways in which certain musical features – such as melismas, held notes and ornaments – can facilitate useful thinking time for extemporisers. These, and doubtless innumerable other, crucial new OE research questions are raised when critical attention is paid to the dynamic, creative and intuitive processes of musicians who work with the language.

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[25]   As an undergraduate, Hunt studied insular medieval languages at the University of Cambridge.

[26]   I eagerly await publication of this research, which is still in its early stages.

[27]   Fascinating research in this area is already underway. See, for example, Erik Pihel's commentary on oral-formulaic extemporization in rap (Pihel, 1996).

4. Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that studying musical realizations of OE poems by contemporary composers has the potential to raise many previously unconsidered possibilities. The point of considering contemporary concert music is not that this genre is especially revealing in itself, but that its idiomatic remoteness from early medieval music just goes to show how incredibly important it is to pay attention to musical settings in *all* styles, provided of course that they are supported by a reasonable level of familiarity with the literature. The compositions discussed in this paper represent quite different approaches to OE text-setting, but they do share a sense of freedom and flexibility, which is fundamentally important. The discussion has raised the important point that even when poems are scanned metrically, metre can be freely and frequently disrupted to great effect; it has also introduced the idea of incorporating elastic tempi, long notes and melisma into scansions of OE poems, also highlighting how all of these elements can be used to complement the tone of the text; furthermore, it has raised the possibility of polyphonic interplay between voice and lyre, and offered several new ways in which the idea of melodic and rhythmic formulas, in both vocal line and lyre accompaniment, could be further developed through collaboration with performers and with reference to research in performance psychology.

The study of OE poetry could benefit very much from the input of creative artists. It is valuable, even essential, to bring poetry written in dead languages to life by performing it, in spoken, intoned or sung form. In a sense, every performance of an OE poem is a new composition – existing theories provide an incomplete impression of how a poem could sound and performers are left to fill in the blanks with intuitive or speculative decisions. I concur with Dennis Tedlock, who has argued that ancient poetry "must be judged not on the basis of its acceptability as silent written literature, but on the basis of how it sounds when read aloud..." (Tedlock, 1977: 516). New creative interpretations not only enliven the poems themselves, but also the discourse surrounding them; "oral poetry begins with the voice and an oral poetics returns to the voice" (Tedlock, 1977: 517). Finally, it must be remembered that exchange between creative practitioners and OE scholars has the potential to enhance artworks at least as much as discourse. Old English poetry is, after all, beautiful, atmospheric, rich and sophisticated, yielding innumerable organic yet novel materials for music composition.

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Santrauka

Nuo senųjų žodžių iki vėlyvosios muzikos:
kai kompozicijos praktika praverčia analizuojant senosios anglų poezijos metriką

Straipsnyje teigiama, kad bendradarbiavimas tarp tyrėjų ir kūrybingų muzikų gali sudaryti sąlygas kilti naujoms teorijoms interpretuojant senąją anglų poeziją, kuri, kaip manoma, kilo iš oralinės, veikiausiai muzikinės, tradicijos. Straipsnio pradžioje apibendrinami dalykai, susiję su senosios anglų poetikos diskursu, sutelkiant dėmesį į metrą ir ritmą. Aptarus du oponuojančius senosios anglų poetikos deklamavimo požiūrius – izochroninį ir neizochroninį – pateikiama nuomonė, kad šioms abiem teorijoms labai praverstų muzikologinis žvilgsnis. Gana efektyvu analizuoti metrikos teorijas klausantis poezijos skaitymo; kaip vertingos iliustracijos pateikiami keli jos atlikimo pavyzdžiai (ypač Benjamino Bagby). Čia tiktų senąją anglų poeziją analizuoti kaip dainą.

Straipsnyje taip pat analizuojami trys senosios anglų poezijos paveikti šiuolaikinių kompozitorių – Geoffrey Poole'o, Edmundo Hunto ir šio straipsnio autorės – kūriniai. Aptariama Geoffrey Poole'o Styginių kvarteto Nr. 3 pirmoji dalis, pažymint pusiausvyrą komponavimo procese tarp intuityvaus ir sisteminio požiūrio, kuris apima senosios anglų kalbos elementų absorbavimą ir atsaką į juos. Daroma išvada, kad nors ir neįmanoma susieti specifinių kompozicijos ypatybių su konkrečiais senosios anglų kalbos elementais, jos kilmė iš panlingvistinės kalbėsenos primena, jog tematinis poezijos turinys turėtų veikti deklamaciją, kadangi emocinis tonas keičia ritminį kalbėsenos pobūdį.

Aptariamos dvi straipsnio autorės kūrinio *Hord Songs* dalys ir pažymima, kad lėti tempai ir ilgai tęsiamos natos nelemia deklamacijos, nes tai yra dainavimo, o ne kalbėsenos bruožai. Analizė taip pat pabrėžia tempo lankstumo svarbą deklamuojant poeziją – tai dažnokai pamirštama. Vienoje iš dalių naudojama polifonija yra lyginama su anglosaksų dainų lyros akompanimentu, čia trumpai apibrėžiama polifoninė sąveika tarp balso ir lyros.

Edmundo Hunto kompozicijų *I had a Living Spirit and We Are Apart* ir *Our Song Together* analizė suteikia du naujus techninius elementus senosios anglų poetikos apžvalgai – tai yra melizma ir leitmotyvas (pastarasis traktuojamas kaip muzikinis senosios anglų poetinių formulių praplėtimas). Pastebima, kad Hunto jautrus metrinių nereguliarumų traktavimas poemose iliustruoja kalbos ritmo sąsajas su jo emociniu kontekstu. Straipsnis baigiamas išvada, kad, plėtodami savo tyrimus, senosios anglų poetikos tyrėjai turėtų atkreipti dėmesį ir į muzikines įžvalgas, atsižvelgti į atlikimo psichologijos tyrimus ir skirti daugiau dėmesio kalbėsenos ritmo ir emocinio afekto ryšiui.