

Chapter 1

Introduction

Twenty-six poems and fragments of poems are known to have survived the Anglo-Saxon period in more than one witness.¹ These include poems from a variety of genres and material contexts: biblical narrative, religious poetry, riddles, charms, liturgical translations, proverbs, a preface and an epilogue, occasional pieces like “Durham,” and historical poems like the *Battle of Brunanburh*. Their witnesses survive in three of the four principal manuscripts of Old English poetry, in the margins and blank spaces of manuscripts devoted to Latin texts, as constituents of vernacular prose histories and translations, and even in one case carved onto the face of a stone cross.

The importance of these texts to students of Old English poetry lies in the evidence they offer us of how Anglo-Saxon scribes approached the task of copying verse. The majority of Old English poems are found as single copies preserved in one or another of four principal codices: the Beowulf Manuscript, the Junius Manuscript, the Exeter Book, and the Vercelli Book. As a result, editors and critics of Old English poetry have been forced to rely to an extraordinary degree on the relatively few scribes responsible for copying these manuscripts for their knowledge both of the texts themselves and of more general aspects of Old English poetic art.² By allowing us to compare the work of two or more Anglo-Saxon scribes as they

¹In arriving at this figure, I have counted the various recensions of “Cædmon’s Hymn” and the surviving fragments of the metrical translation of the Psalms as separate poems. For a full list of the multiply attested poems and the manuscripts in which they occur, see Appendix 1 “The Multiply Attested Poems.”

²For a critique of this evidence as it pertains to our knowledge of Old English metre, see Hoyt N. Duggan, “The Evidential Basis for Old English Metrics,” *SP* 85 (1988): 145-63.

copy the same piece of poetry, the multiply attested poems provide us with what seems to be an ideal opportunity for determining how these scribes worked – the extent to which they preserved the text of their exemplars, or, if they were more willing to intervene, the nature and extent of the variants they introduced.

The trouble, however, is that the poems which survive in more than one witness do not offer a consistent testimony. Some poems – the West-Saxon *ylda*-recension of “Cædmon’s Hymn” and the Metrical Epilogue to Alfred’s translation of the *Pastoral Care* among them – exhibit almost no variation among their surviving witnesses apart from the occasional graphic error and minor orthographic or dialectal difference. Others – such as *Soul and Body* I and II, *Solomon and Saturn* I, and the common portion of *Daniel* and *Azarias* – on the other hand, show far more and far more significant textual variation. In addition to mechanical errors and dialectal variants similar to those found among the more conservatively transmitted poems, these texts, which include all five multiply-attested poems with witnesses in the four principal anthologies of Old English verse, also show variants which have a far greater effect on metre, sense, or syntax, including differences in the use of case, differences in the choice and arrangement of individual words within the line, and even differences in the arrangement and choice of individual half-lines and lines.

In the past, studies of the multiply attested poems have concentrated on describing and determining the origins of individual types of variants or the variation within individual poems or groups of poems. Variants or poems which do not fit the theory being expounded have been seen primarily as “exceptions” or have been used to set the (chronological or other) boundaries of the theory being proposed.

In this, the work of Alan Albert Jabbour is atypical only in the comprehensiveness of the sample examined.³ The only scholar to deal explicitly with the variation in the entire corpus of multiply attested poems – he omits only Psalm 142:9, the second witness to which was discovered twenty years after his dissertation was completed⁴ – Jabbour divides these texts into two main groups: a “control group” consisting of poems which “can be said with certainty to be scribally transmitted”⁵ and which show a relatively low degree of substantive textual variation, and a “memorial group,” the variants of which have a more significant effect on the passages in which they occur.

These categories are primarily contrastive. In theory, all Old English poems are either “memorial” or belong to the “control” group. The only exceptions are those poems which “chiefly because of their brevity, resist firm classification.”⁶ As Jabbour’s terminology suggests, however, the “control group” – to which almost two thirds of the extant multiply attested poems belong – is intended primarily as a bench-mark against which the features of the “memorial group” can be compared. For one thing, it is defined solely in negative terms. It consists of those poems which, a few exceptions aside, do *not* show “demonstrably conscious emendation,” examples of the addition or omission of half-lines and lines, inversions in the order of words or metrical units, variation in the use of prefixes, or variants which are

³Alan Albert Jabbour, “The Memorial Transmission of Old English Poetry: A Study of the Extant Parallel Texts,” diss., Duke U, 1969. Jabbour’s findings are summarised in a subsequent article, “Memorial Transmission in Old English Poetry,” *ChR* 3 (1969): 174-90. Theoretically less sophisticated but otherwise similar arguments have been made about the variation specifically in *Soul and Body* I and II and *Daniel* and *Azarias* by Alison Jones Gyger. See: “Daniel and Azarias as Evidence for the Oral-Formulaic Character of Old English Poetry,” *MÆ* 35 (1966): 95-102 and “The Old English *Soul and Body* as an Example of Oral Transmission,” *MÆ* 38 (1969) 239-244.

⁴Patrick P. O’Neill, “Another Fragment of the Metrical Psalms in the Eadwine Psalter,” *N&Q* 233 (1988): 434-6.

⁵Jabbour, diss., p. 51.

⁶Jabbour, diss., p. 206.

otherwise “strikingly different to the eye.”⁷ Moreover, differences among its various members are for the most part ignored. While Jabbour acknowledges the existence of differences in the amount and nature of the textual variation exhibited by the poems of both groups – differences which in the case of his “control group” will later provide Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe with the bulk of her examples of “transitional literacy”⁸ – he nevertheless makes little attempt to account for these differences systematically, and indeed, leaves them out of the final summary of his method entirely:

In order to introduce a degree of precision in the analysis of parallel texts, a control group of parallel texts unquestionably transmitted scribally was isolated and analyzed for degree and type of substantive variation. Then, in successive chapters, the parallel texts of *Soul and Body* and of *Daniel* and *Azarias* were contrasted with the control group. What emerged was a memorial group distinguished from the control group not only because of a much higher frequency of substantive variation, but because of striking differences between the two groups in the type of variation. Once the two groups had been established, it remained only to examine a number of parallel texts which, chiefly because of their brevity, resisted firm classification as “scribal” or “memorial”...⁹

Other scholars, while less comprehensive in their samples, nevertheless take a similar approach to the internal differences within the corpus of multiply attested poetry. In his seminal article, “The Authority of Old English Poetical Manuscripts,” for example, Kenneth Sisam excludes a number of poems from his discussion of the “aimlessness” of Old English poetic textual variation on the grounds of their late date or “unusual” pattern of transmission.¹⁰ In contrast to the poems he chooses for his principal examples (*Solomon and Saturn* I, *Daniel* and *Azarias*, and *Soul and Body* I and II), however, these “exceptions” include some of the more conservatively transmitted of Old English poems, including “Cædmon’s Hymn” and

⁷Jabbour, diss., pp. 67-70.

⁸See below, p. 5

⁹Jabbour, diss., p. 206.

¹⁰Kenneth Sisam, “The Authority of Old English Poetical Manuscripts,” *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953): pp. 32-3, fn. 1; pp. 34-36.

“Bede’s Death Song.” Forty years later, Kevin Kiernan dismisses all of Sisam’s principal examples as being themselves either too late or too different from each other to allow any meaningful comparison,¹¹ and argues instead that “Cædmon’s Hymn” and “Bede’s Death Song” are the “only poems whose transmissions can be studied at all.”¹²

The most original attempt at using differences within the sample of the multiply attested poems to establish the boundaries for a particular type of variation or theory of transmission is to be seen in the work of Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe. Taking as her principal examples the West-Saxon *eorðan*-recension of “Cædmon’s Hymn,” *Solomon and Saturn I*, the Metrical Preface to the *Pastoral Care*, and certain witnesses to certain poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, O’Keeffe argues that the metrically, syntactically, and semantically appropriate substantive variation these texts exhibit are a result of the historical period at which they were copied – a period in which “readers of Old English verse read by applying oral techniques for the reception of a message to the decoding of a written text.”¹³ Poems which do not show similar, formulaically appropriate, variation – such as the marginal *ylda*-recension of “Cædmon’s Hymn,” and the later poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* – are used to place boundaries on the applicability of this type of transmission. The *ylda*-recension of “Cædmon’s Hymn,” which shows none of the fluidity found by O’Keeffe in her discussion of the main-text West-Saxon *eorðan*-text, demonstrates the role of “textual environment” in establishing the conditions under which “transitional literacy” operated.¹⁴ The fact that later witnesses and poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* show less substantive textual variation

¹¹Kevin S. Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1981), pp. 179-80.

¹²Kiernan, *Beowulf Manuscript*, p. 173.

¹³Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 4 (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 191.

¹⁴O’Keeffe, *Visible Song*, pp. 39-40 and 46.

than the earlier ones is cited as evidence that this “literacy” “was more likely in the period before the end of the tenth century than later.”¹⁵

Presented like this, as carefully delimited accounts of specific types of variation or groups of poems, these studies seem unobjectionable, and indeed, in as much as the poems excluded or treated as a contrastive group by one critic are often used as principal examples by another, even complementary. Problems arise, however, when these studies – each of which, with the exception of the dissertation and article by Jabbour, involve the detailed examination of only a few major examples – are presented as if they were general descriptions of Anglo-Saxon scribal practice rather than what they are: accounts of limited types of variation or the variation in limited groups of multiply attested poems.

In some cases, the extrapolation is made by critics of the approach taken by a given scholar. In a recent article examining the validity of O’Keeffe’s notions of the role of “transitional literacy” in the transmission of Old English poetry, for example, Douglas Moffat tests O’Keeffe’s approach by applying it to two poems not among her principal examples: *Soul and Body* I and II, and the common text of *Daniel and Azarias*.¹⁶ Analysing the variants in these two texts, Moffat finds numerous examples which do not fit O’Keeffe’s definition of formulaic variation – that is to say, variants which, “conditioned by formulaic conventions,... are metrically, syntactically and semantically appropriate.”¹⁷ Using this evidence to call “into

¹⁵O’Keeffe, *Visible Song*, p. 136.

¹⁶Douglas Moffat, “Anglo-Saxon Scribes and Old English Verse,” *Speculum* 67 (1992): 805-827. It should be noted that O’Keeffe frequently implies that her analysis does apply to *Soul and Body*, without giving any examples (for references, see below, fn. 22). Moffat also discusses the variation in *Soul and Body* I and II in his edition of the poem and in two articles: *The Old English Soul and Body* (Wolfeboro NH: D.S. Brewer - Boydell & Brewer, 1990); “A Case of Scribal Revision in the OE Soul and Body,” *JEGP* 86 (1987): 1-8; and “The MS Transmission of the OE Soul and Body,” *MÆ* 52 (1983): 300-302. In his articles and edition, Moffat draws heavily on two articles by P. R. Orton: “Disunity in the Vercelli Book *Soul and Body*,” *Neoph* 63 (1979): 450-460; and “The Old English *Soul and Body*: A Further Examination,” *MÆ* 48 (1979): 173-97.

¹⁷O’Keeffe, *Visible Song*, p. 41; see also Moffat, “Anglo-Saxon Scribes,” pp. 810-811.

question the general applicability of the idea of the sensitive and competent Anglo-Saxon scribe,”¹⁸ Moffat then suggests that textual reliability may be impossible to find in any Anglo-Saxon poetical manuscript:

What I am suggesting here is the possibility, indeed, the likelihood, that the Old English poetical manuscripts, because of the complex nature of scribal performance, are textured or layered in a way that demands an adjustment in the way we treat them. They should not be looked at, at least initially, as “coherent” texts, that is, the unified product of a single mind, somewhat sullied by mechanical bungling in recopying or altered stylistically in some indistinguishable way by a sensitive and competent scribe. Rather, the possibility must be faced that they are composite products of two, or very likely more, minds which were not necessarily working toward the same end. That such texts, suffering heavily from what the traditional textual critics call interpolation, might exist is hardly surprising: they are common in Middle English and in Latin. That they should exist for Old English verse is, therefore, unexceptionable; however, that they exist creates special difficulties for modern critics. Once again, because of the peculiar nature of the evidence for Old English verse, specifically the lack of multiple copies of the verse to serve as a check against any one copy, the possibility of scribal intervention working against the poetic direction of the exemplar, and a series of such scribal interventions, must be unsettling. How is one to detect skillful or even competent interpolation if only a single copy of a work remains?¹⁹

More frequently, however, the attempt to extrapolate an interpretation of the origins and significance of the textual variation in one group of poems to the corpus as a whole is made by the author of the study itself. Thus despite the limited nature of their samples, both Sisam and Kiernan present their discussions of the variation exhibited by their principal examples as evidence of the general reliability of Anglo-Saxon scribes. Kiernan, arguing that the scribes of the *Beowulf* anthology were fundamentally accurate, takes what he implies are analogous examples from “Cædmon’s Hymn” and “Bede’s Death Song” (both of which are preserved in marginal contexts or as fixed constituents of vernacular prose framing texts) to demonstrate the extent to which a late witness might “accurately preserve its precedential

¹⁸Moffat, “Anglo-Saxon Scribes,” p. 823.

¹⁹Moffat, “Anglo-Saxon Scribes,” p. 826.

texts.”²⁰ Sisam, on the other hand, sees his examples from *Solomon and Saturn I*, *Soul and Body I and II*, and *Daniel and Azarias* as calling into question the general authority of later manuscript copies of Old English poetic texts as a whole. While he excludes many of the chief examples of accurate transmission and admits that not all Old English texts exist in corrupt copies, he nevertheless argues that the variation his principal examples exhibit is a potential problem in the transmission of most Old English poems:

My argument has been directed against the assumption that Anglo-Saxon poetical manuscripts are generally good, in the sense that, except for an inevitable sprinkling of errors, they faithfully reproduce the words of much older originals. It does not attempt to establish that all the poems have survived in bad texts... and there may be reasons for believing that some poems were lucky.... But when, as is usual for Old English poetry, only one late witness is available, there is no safety in following its testimony.²¹

O’Keeffe’s claims about the general applicability of “transitional literacy” as an explanation for the variation found between manuscript copies of verse texts are even more comprehensive. Because she describes it as a form of *literacy*, O’Keeffe implies that the formulaically appropriate variation she finds between the witnesses to her principal examples is similarly characteristic of *all* poems which meet her chronological and contextual criteria. This leads her to include implicitly both poems like those cited by Moffat in which the variation between witnesses goes far beyond the simple substitution of formulaically appropriate elements, and, presumably, a poem like the Metrical Epilogue to the *Pastoral Care* – which shows almost no variation whatsoever despite the fact that it is found in two of the same pre-eleventh century manuscripts as its more variable companion, the Metrical Preface.²²

²⁰Kiernan, *Beowulf Manuscript*, p. 174.

²¹Sisam, “Authority,” pp. 39-40.

²²Although O’Keeffe never discusses the variation in *Soul and Body I and II*, the common text of *Daniel and Azarias*, or Exeter Riddle 30a/b directly, she mentions them repeatedly as further examples of the type of variation she finds in her principal examples, see (for *Soul and Body I and II* and Riddle 30a/b): pp. 65, 76,

The danger inherent in this use of a limited number of examples from the corpus of the multiply attested texts as the basis for more general conclusions about the nature of Anglo-Saxon scribal practice can be most easily appreciated if one considers the extent to which the poems' critics choose for their principal examples colour their understanding of poetic textual transmission in general:

79, 80 and 93; and (for *Soul and Body* I and II, Riddle 30a/b and *Daniel and Azarias*): p. 66, fn.58 and p. 138, fn.1. Except for citations in her Appendix on "Formulaic Systems in the *Metrical Preface* to Alfred's *Pastoral Care*" (pp. 97, 101 and 103), O'Keefe does not mention the *Metrical Epilogue* to the *Pastoral Care* at all. The variation exhibited by its companion text, the *Metrical Preface* to the *Pastoral Care*, on the other hand, receives a whole chapter.

Table 1: Multiply Attested Old English Poems Discussed by Selected Critics²³

Context and Poem Short-Title	Unreliable/Non-Literate Transmission			Formulaic Transm.	Accurate Transm.
	Sisam	Moffat	Jabbour ²⁴	O’Keeffe ²⁵	Kiernan ²⁶
Glossing and Translating Poems <i>BDS</i>	–		±		
<i>Cæd(aeldu)</i>	–		–		
<i>Cæd(ylda)</i>	–		–	–	
Fixed Context Poems <i>Cæd(eorðan)</i>	–		±		
<i>CPPref</i>	–		–		
<i>CPEp</i>	–		–		
<i>Brun</i>	–		–		
<i>Capt</i>	–		–		
<i>CEdg</i>	–		–	–	
<i>DEdg</i>	–		–	–	
Anthologised and Excerpted Poems <i>MSol</i>			±		–
<i>Soul I & II</i>					–
<i>Dan/Az</i>					–
<i>Dream/RuthC</i>	–		±		–

As the above table suggests, critics who see Old English poetic texts as being either fundamentally unreliable or the result of non-literate means of transmission (Sisam, Moffat, Jabbour), invariably choose poems from anthologies like the Exeter Book, Junius Manuscript, or – in the case of *Solomon and Saturn I* – Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 422, as their principal examples. O’Keeffe’s argument that substantive textual variation in Anglo-Saxon

²³The table lists all poems cited as principal positive examples by the selected critics (in the case of Jabbour, all poems described as certainly “memorial”).

Legend:

- Principal example (“Memorial” in Jabbour)
- Explicitly excluded from principal examples
- ± Explicitly mentioned as doubtfully “memorial” (Jabbour only)
- [blank] Not discussed in any detail

²⁴Jabbour discusses all poems found in more than one witness. All poems not included in this table belong to his control group or are “doubtful.”

²⁵O’Keeffe also explicitly excludes the later (metrically irregular) *Chronicle* poems *Death of Alfred* and *Death of Edward*.

poetry is a result of the formulaic engagement of the scribes responsible for its transmission, on the other hand, depends primarily on the evidence of poems which, with the exception of *Solomon and Saturn I*, are found exclusively as constituents of larger framing texts like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the Old English translation to Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*. And Kiernan bases his argument – that Anglo-Saxon scribes could produce substantively accurate copies of their exemplars under the right conditions – on yet a third group of principal examples, the majority of which are found in Latin manuscripts.

What is needed is an approach to the multiply attested poems which recognises the extent to which the variation these poems exhibit occurs for a variety of reasons and under a variety of circumstances. Rather than attempting to assign the variation these poems exhibit – a few “exceptions” aside – to any *single* scribal practice or habit, such an approach would instead attempt to explicate the full range of habits, techniques, and motivations influencing the way Anglo-Saxon scribes worked.

Hints of how such an approach might work are to be found in the work of Roy Michael Liuzza and Peter S. Baker.²⁷ Working in each case with different groups of poems, these critics emphasise the great variety of possible motivations which might prompt a scribe to vary his text. Taking his principal examples from a close analysis of the variation exhibited by the two surviving witnesses to Exeter Riddle 30, for example, Liuzza proposes a simple grammar of what he sees as the three main types of scribal variation:

The first might be represented as A > a, a normalization of spelling or a variation in which the sense is not affected. This variation is the mainstay of the philologist; without it our knowledge of the English language would be seriously impoverished. The second may be represented as A > X, a plain error in which sense is garbled into

²⁶Kiernan compares individual witnesses from the texts cited as principal examples rather than the variation exhibited by all surviving witnesses.

²⁷Roy Michael Liuzza, “The Texts of the OE Riddle 30,” *JEGP* 87 (1984): 1-15; Peter S. Baker, “A Little Known Variant Text of the Old English Metrical Psalter,” *Speculum* 59 (1984): 263-81.

nonsense; the detection and correction of this variation is the business of even the most cautious modern editor. A third variation, A > B, might change one sense into another, substituting familiar words for unfamiliar ones, inserting conjunctions or particles to clarify the assumed sense, or rearranging syntax and grammar, not always at the expense of the meter. This third sort of variation, though it may be minor in an individual instance and would be, in the absence of a duplicate text, imperceptible, could alter the rhetorical structure, and hence the style, of a passage. For this reason it is proper to think of the scribe as an “editor”; in a very real sense the scribe is the shaper, not merely the transmitter, of Old English poetry.²⁸

In a similar vein Baker emphasises the extent to which scribes might vary for different reasons and under different circumstances, focusing his discussion on the differences in the variation exhibited by poems as diverse as the *Battle of Brunanburh*, the Metrical Preface and Epilogue to the *Pastoral Care*, and the Eadwine and Paris texts of Psalms 90:16.1-95:2.1:

If such texts as C’s *Brunanburh* and the Corpus 12 *Preface* and *Epilogue* show how faithfully Old English scribes were capable of following their exemplars, such texts as D’s *Brunanburh* and those cited by Sisam show how many changes might be introduced into a text, whether as a result of memorial transmission, revision, or scribal incompetence. Thus it is impossible to generalize about “the authority of Old English poetical manuscripts”: Neither a conservative nor an adventurous editorial philosophy will be correct if applied indiscriminately.²⁹

It is possible, however, to go farther than this. For not only do poems like the *Battle of Brunanburh*, the common text of the Paris and Eadwine Psalters, and the poems “cited by Sisam” – *Daniel* and *Azarias*, *Soul and Body* I and II and *Solomon and Saturn* I – show different amounts and types of variation, they are also different types of poems, copied in different contexts and for different reasons. The *Battle of Brunanburh* is a historical poem celebrating a specific Anglo-Saxon victory and is found only in copies of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The Old English translation of Psalms 90:16.1-95:2.1 translates and appears alongside the Latin equivalent of its text in both witnesses. And *Daniel* and *Azarias*, *Solomon and Saturn* I, and *Soul and Body* I and II are all found in at least one case as part of apparently

²⁸Liuzza, “Riddle 30,” p. 14.

²⁹Baker, “Variant Text,” p. 269.

unique anthologies of Old English verse and (in some cases) prose. In such circumstances, it seems reasonable to assume that the scribes responsible for copying these poems approached their work with different ideas as to the nature of the task at hand. Because their text was being used as a translation, for example, the scribes who copied Psalms 90:16.1-95:2.1 in the Eadwine and Paris psalters might reasonably be assumed to be less willing to alter the text of their exemplar on internal, formulaic grounds, than those responsible for copying *Soul and Body* I and II or the common portions of *Daniel* and *Azarias* in collections like the Exeter, Vercelli, or Junius codices. Similarly, scribes responsible for copying the poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* might reasonably be expected to treat their verse in more or less the same fashion as they do the historical prose with which they find it in their exemplars – introducing substantive innovation if that was their policy elsewhere in the manuscript; or not, if they were similarly conservative in their prose.

It is the thesis of this dissertation, moreover, that poems found in similar contexts will show similar amounts and types of textual variation. On the basis of a complete catalogue of the substantive textual variation exhibited by the witnesses to all metrically regular Old English poems known to have survived the Anglo-Saxon period in insular copies,³⁰ I argue that the corpus can be divided into three main contextual groups. Poems which, like the common text of Psalms 90:16.1-95:2.1, have been copied as glosses and translations in primarily Latin manuscripts will be found to show similarly low levels of significant

³⁰A complete list of all poems known from two or more medieval witnesses can be found in Appendix 1. The following are too late or irregular to be included in this study: *Latin-English Proverbs*, *Death of Alfred*, *Death of Edward*, *Charm 5/10*; and the **Hr-Ld₁-CArms** sub-group of the West-Saxon *eorðan*-recension of “Cædmon’s Hymn” (all metrically irregular); the Northumbrian *eorðu*-recension of “Cædmon’s Hymn,” and “Bede’s Death Song” (both show post-conquest or continental developments). For a discussion of the *eorðu*-version of “Cædmon’s Hymn,” see: Daniel P. O’Donnell, “A Northumbrian Version of ‘Cædmon’s Hymn’ (*eorðu*-recension) in Brussels Bibliothèque Royale manuscript 8245-57 ff.62r²-v¹: Identification, Edition and Filiation,” forthcoming in: *New Essays on the Venerable Bede* (provisional title), edited by A.A. MacDonald and L. Houwen (Groningen, 1995). I am preparing a study of the **Hr-Ld₁-CArms** sub-

substantive textual variation. As I demonstrate in Chapter Two, this group can be extended to include all other metrically regular poems not copied as constituents of vernacular prose framing texts or as part of an anthology or compilation. Poems which, like the *Battle of Brunanburh*, are found as fixed constituents of larger framing texts, on the other hand, will show a different pattern of textual variation. While most witnesses to these poems show relatively few substantive variants, certain witnesses are far more innovative. As I demonstrate in Chapter Three, the differences between these poems can be shown in all but one case to be related to the pattern of variation found in the surrounding prose. Scribes who show themselves to have been conservative copyists of the framing texts in which these poems are found also produce the most conservative copies of the poems themselves; those who show themselves to be more willing to introduce substantive variation into their poetic texts, on the other hand, also almost invariably produce the most innovative copies of the accompanying frame. Finally, poems which, like *Soul and Body I and II*, the common text of *Daniel* and *Azarias*, and *Solomon and Saturn I*, survive with at least one witness in a compilation or anthology show a third pattern of textual variation. These poems – discussed in Chapter Four – are frequently excerpted from or interpolated into other texts and exhibit a variation which, in contrast to that found in the other two groups, appears at times to reflect the intelligent engagement of the reviser with the poem.

The argument presented here has some important implications for our understanding of Anglo-Saxon poetic practice. In the first place, it suggests that Old English poetry surviving in more than one witness may not be as representative of the general body of Old English verse as has been generally assumed. Although the multiply attested poetry appears at first glance to represent a broad range of styles and genres, on closer inspection it is clear that certain types

group of the West-Saxon *eorðan*-recension. The transmission of “Bede’s Death Song” is discussed in

of manuscript contexts were more likely to produce multiple copies than others. In the general corpus of Old English poetry, for example, 65% of the approximately 31,000 lines of surviving verse is preserved in the four main ‘Poetic Codices’;³¹ in the corpus of multiply attested poetry, however, these same codices supply less than a third of the surviving lines. Poems found as fixed constituents of vernacular prose framing works, on the other hand, are over-represented in the corpus of multiply attested verse. They account for approximately 27% of the lines found in more than one witness, versus about 9% of all surviving Old English poetry.

Secondly, the observation that Anglo-Saxon scribes copied differently depending on the context in which they were working suggests that they may have read – and perhaps even composed – these texts with different artistic expectations as well. That metrical, syntactical, and lexical differences exist between poems like *Beowulf* and poems like the metrical translation of the Psalms is obvious.³² But other differences may also exist. As I argue in Chapter Four, for example, poems found in the anthologies differ from those in other contexts in that they are frequently transmitted as fragments rather than as coherent and discrete wholes. This, coupled with the fact that they appear to have travelled independently of any specific context or group of texts suggests that they also may have been seen as a body of verse which compilers and copyists of Old English poetry felt free to adapt, excerpt, or interpolate at will.

A full explication of the literary or textual implications of these contextual divisions is beyond the scope of this study, although I believe my findings support those of scholars like É.

Dobbie, *Manuscripts*.

³¹The figures in this paragraph are based on the contents and editorial line divisions in the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, vols. 1-6.

³²See M. S. Griffith, “Poetic Language and the Paris Psalter: The Decay of the Old English Tradition,” *ASE* 20 (1991): 167-86; also Patricia Bethel, “Anacrusis in the Psalms of the Paris Psalter,” *NM* 90 (1989): 33-43.

Ó Carragáin and Patrick Conner who have examined the relationship of context and content in individual manuscripts.³³ As I argue in my conclusion, moreover, I believe a similar comparative approach may also prove fruitful in the examination of the variation exhibited by the witnesses to different types of prose texts. First, however, it is necessary to examine the nature, bounds, and characteristic features of the textual variation exhibited by each of the three main contextual groups of multiply attested Old English poetry. This is the work of the following chapters.

About This Dissertation

Terminology

In this study, a “substantive variant” is any form which affects sense, metre, or syntax. This category includes both readings which make good metre, sense, and syntax, and nonsense forms produced by graphic error or scribal misapprehension. “Potentially significant substantive variants” are forms which subsequent readers might reasonably be assumed to interpret as legitimate Old English, whether or not they make good sense, syntax and/or metre. “Significant substantive variants” are alternative readings which make more-or-less acceptable sense, metre, and syntax. Thus, in the *eorðan*-recension of “Cædmon’s Hymn,” the **B**₁ reading *wuldor godes*³⁴ (for **T**₁ **To C(N) O** and **Ca wuldorfæder** [and orthographic variants]) is a significant substantive variant: both forms make reasonable sense, metre, and syntax, and subsequent scribes in the **B**₁ tradition would be unlikely to reject the innovative form on

³³See: É. Ó Carragáin, “How Did the Vercelli Collector Interpret the *Dream of the Rood*?,” *Studies in English Language and Early Literature in Honour of Paul Christopherson*, ed. P. M. Tilling, Occasional Papers in Linguistics and Language Learning 8 (Belfast: 1981) 62-104; and “The Vercelli Book as an Ascetic Florilegium,” diss., Queen’s U, 1975; Patrick W. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth Century Cultural History*, Studies in Anglo-Saxon History 4 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993).

³⁴The sigla in this and the following two examples are discussed at the appropriate places in Chapter 3 (see the following footnotes for references) and are listed in Appendix 2, “Manuscripts and Sigla.”

internal grounds alone.³⁵ **ChronD** *heord/weal* for **ChronA** *bord/weal* **ChronB** **ChronC** *bordweall* in the *Battle of Brunanburh*, line 5b, on the other hand, is a potentially significant substantive variant.³⁶ While *heordweal* is acceptable Old English in its own right, the word makes no sense and is unmetrical in context. Subsequent scribes in the **ChronD** tradition might be expected to recognise that something was wrong, but would not necessarily be able to reconstruct the original reading from the form in their exemplar. Indeed, they might even be misled into searching for metrically and syntactically appropriate synonyms to the **ChronD** form. **ChronA** *cul bod ge hna des* for **ChronB** **ChronC** **ChronD** *cumbol gehnastes* (and orthographic variants) in the *Battle of Brunanburh*, line 56a, finally, is simply substantive.³⁷ It affects – and in this case destroys – sense, metre, and/or syntax without being meaningful or metrically or syntactically appropriate in its own right. While subsequent scribes faced with such forms may or may not be able to recover the original reading – **ChronG** (a direct descendant of **ChronA**) reads *cumbelgehnades*, correctly guessing the first half without changing the second – they would be unlikely to accept them as legitimate Old English.

Scansion

Scansion in this dissertation in the main follows John C. Pope's restatement of Eduard Sievers's five types.³⁸ This differs from Sievers's original system in the addition of subtype A-4 (which brings together all Type A verses with a short second lift), the inclusion of Siever's subtypes C-1 and C-2 under a single verse-type (C-1), and the use of the designation C-2 for

³⁵See below, Chapter 3, p. 131.

³⁶See below, Chapter 3, p. 208.

³⁷See below, Chapter 3, p. 171.

³⁸John C. Pope, *The Rhythm of Beowulf: An Interpretation of the Normal and Hypermetric Verse-Forms in Old English Poetry* (New Haven: Yale, 1942), pp. 238-241. A more convenient version of this restatement is to be found in *Seven Old English Poems*, Second Edition (New York: Norton, 1981), pp. 109-116. See also E. Sievers, "Zur Rhythmik des germanischen Alliterationsverses I," *PBB* 10 (1885): 209-314; "Zur

Siever's original Type C-3 (i.e. Type C with a short second lift). I differ from Pope (and Sievers) in my analysis of Type A-3 verses. Following A.J. Bliss,³⁹ I consider these to consist of a single stressed and alliterating element preceded by one or more particles. My analysis of alliterating finite verbs also follows Bliss.⁴⁰

Variant Catalogues

The variant catalogues included for each text include all substantive textual variants in the corpus of multiply-attested metrically regular alliterative poetry – with the exception of dialectal, phonological, or orthographic variants (such as the syncopation of unstressed or half-stressed vowels after long syllables) with a purely metrical effect. Corrections and erasures are discussed as relevant (see in particular, pp. 122-127).

Rhythmik des germanischen Alliterationsverses II," *PBB* 10 (1885): 415-545; and *Altgermanische Metrik*, Sammlung kurzer Grammatiken germanischer Dialekte (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1893).

³⁹A.J. Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), esp. §§9-11.

⁴⁰Bliss, *Metre*, §§12-29.