Preface

Recent years have witnessed a revival of metrical studies which help to bridge the gulf between literary and linguistic analysis of poetic language. This approach, founded on the assumption that formal analysis of metre offers means to measure and constrain intuitive statements about poetical style, is close to the tradition represented by Roman Jakobson who successfully combined theoretical linguistic investigations and literary scholarship at the beginning of the twentieth century. Referring to this scholarly tradition Dresher and Friedberg argue in the introduction to the recently published *Formal Approaches to Poetry* that '[i]t is only a matter of time before students of literature rediscover metrical analysis' (2006: 3).

Early Germanic alliterative metre falls within the scope of these current developments. Over the past years it has been subject to many interdisciplinary studies, ranging from historical, linguistics and generative metrics, philological studies of individual texts, and scholarly editing (see, for example, Dresher and Lahiri 1991; McCully and Anderson 1996; Russom 1998; Árnason 2006; Russom 2010).

Virtually all comprehensive analyses of Old English metre are based on *Beowulf* – 'a unique long poem in traditional style dealing with traditional subject matter' (Russom 1998: 8). This is hardly surprising considering its contents, length and internal coherence. The unique *Beowulf* manuscript (British Museum, Cotton Vitellius A. XV) was partially damaged in the fire of 1731 with the loss of

a few words at the top and the outer part of many leaves. However, the reading and punctuation of the uncertain or lost passages, caused by crumbling of the burnt edges, can be verified and, at least, partially restored owing to Thorkelin's transcript (now Copenhagen, Ny Kongelike Saml. 512.4°) made in 1787, when the text was far more legible. The poem, contained between the folios 132-201v of Cotton Vitelius, and written by two scribes, includes 3182 alliterative lines, which is greater than in any of the extant Anglo-Saxon poetical texts. The span of over three thousand lines is large enough to provide a dependable number of recurrent rhythmical patterns, which makes *Beowulf* a reliable corpus for metrical investigations.[1] As a linguistically and metrically coherent text, it stands out as the standard reference framework for the analysis of all other Old English versified compositions.

However, in order to get a complete picture of the Old English poetic tradition it is necessary to go beyond *Beowulf*. The inventory of Anglo-Saxon metrical texts is heterogeneous both in terms of diachronic relations as well as formal differences but, regardless of their literary merits, they are all part of the same verse tradition. To know them means to get acquainted with different facets of that tradition.

This book aims to focus on a group of religious compositions from the end of the Old English period, in particular, the *Paris Psalter* metrical psalms from Ms. Bibliothéque Nationale Fonds Latin 8824 (Paris), and the metrical paraphrases of *Credo*, *Pater noster*, and *Gloria Patri* from three Anglo-Saxon codices: Ms. 121 Junius, Bodleian Library (Oxford), Ms. 201 Corpus Christi College (Cambridge), and The Exeter Book, Ms. 3501, Library of Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral (Exeter). These unique poetical prayers, in which the indigenous metrical form was adapted to convey the spiritual foundations

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[1] Metrists usually emphasize not only the length of an analysed text, but also its contents or theme. Eddic poems on native Scandinavian subjects, written in the form of *fornyrðislag* (the metre of the old sayings), usually regarded as the Norse equivalent of Old English metre, have parallel status to *Beowulf*. On the other hand, much as the length of the Old Saxon *Heliand* is its distinct advantage, traditional metrical strategies sometimes seem to be inconsistent with the sacred theme of the poem (Russom 1998: 9, 136f).

of the Christian faith, fall outside of the recognized verse canon. Regarded as 'second-rate' poems they have been seriously understudied. The following analysis, prescinded from evaluative judgment on the poetic elegance or literary value, outlines the Anglo-Latin background of the poems and provides a descriptive framework of their metrical structure.

Chapter 1 posits the question of how to define Old English verse. An introduction to historical scholarship is followed by an outline of the basic theoretical tenets and standard metrical criteria. The principles of Old English versification draw here on Sievers' *Typentheorie* (1893) and several later developments pertaining to the correspondence between metrical and linguistic categories.

Chapter 2 discusses the relevance of metrical analysis for the interpretation of poetical texts. Examples from various Old English poems are used to show that different components of a metrical line conspire to compose a coherent and semantically cogent grammar of poetry. Diachronic evidence indicates that this aspect of alliterative metre endured as unbroken tradition from early runic inscriptions through late eleventh-century poems. The issues concerned with the relation between a modern typographic editorial format and the manuscript rendition of a medieval text, raised in this chapter, recur throughout the book.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 are monographic analyses of the source texts from the tenth- and eleventh-century manuscripts mentioned above. These two chapters constitute the main body of the dissertation. Each begins with a survey of the existing critical literature and editorial studies, and a description of the manuscript environment. This background is necessary to establish the place of the texts under discussion *vis-à-vis* other vernacular works.

When analysing the compositional aspects of the poems I made an attempt to reconstruct the methodology adopted by the anonymous authors of these texts. I have tried to show how they managed to reconcile the changing structure of late Old English and the formal constraints of the metrical system which they chose as the medium of their artistic expression. Each of the vernacular compositions has its own characteristic metrical and linguistic traits but, as late and nearly contemporaneous texts, they also share features characteristic

for late verse which foretell gradual disintegration of the traditional versification system.

The major points are summarized in Conclusions. The relevant fragments from the metrical psalms and the texts of the longer liturgical paraphrases are given in Appendices. The short paraphrase of the *Exeter Lord's Prayer* is quoted in Chapter 4, section 4.3.1.