

Wonder-Smiths and Others: *smið* Compounds in Old English Poetry—With an Excursus on *hleahor*

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Published online: 8 November 2016

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Abstract The Anglo-Saxons of course knew that a smith is a metalworker, any kind of metal, and in the recorded literature often a goldsmith. In verse especially, *smið* is often the second element of compounds, and the first element is quite frequently an abstract, *gryn-*, *hleahor-*, *lar-*, *teon-*, *wig-*, *wroht-*, *wundor-*. The sense of such compounds is often subtle and disputed. This study has some new senses for these compounds, and others are traditional among scholars of Old English. I favour these: *grynsmið* ‘complotter of -grief and harm’; *-larsmið* ‘scholar of (holy) doctrine’, but also ‘hatcher of plots’; *teonsmið* ‘plotter of mischief’; *wigsmið* ‘war-maker’, but *wih-* means ‘idol’, therefore also ‘idol-maker’; *wrohtsmið* ‘artificer of crime, harm-contriver’; *wundorsmið* perhaps ‘smith of wonderland’ rather than ‘wonderful craftsman’. The compound *hleahorsmið* literally ‘laughter-maker’, but laughter is often gloomy rather than joyous, and *hleahor* and compounds, as well as the verb *hliehhan*, are discussed in an Excursus. We may learn from the literature of the Anglo-Saxons, much of it moral and religious, that it is a wicked world, where even laughter sounds hollow.

Keywords Artificer · Harm · Idol-maker · Laughter · Metal-worker · Mischief · Smith · War-maker · Wonder

Introduction

It is obvious to readers of Old English prose and verse, that the Anglo-Saxons used *smið* (*smiþ*) in compounds to designate metal workers. In Ælfric Bata’s gloss to

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Ælfric's *Colloquy* several kinds of 'smith' are named (Garmonsway 1939, 38 lines 205–207):¹

Ic hæbbe smiþas, isene smiþas, goldsmiþ, seoloforsmiþ, arsmiþ, treowwyrhtan, & *Habeo fabros, ferrarios, aurificem, argentarium, ærarium, lignarium, et manegra oþre mistlicra cræfta biggenceras. multos alios uariarum artium operadores.*

[I have smiths, iron-smiths, a goldsmith, a silversmith, a worker in brass, bronze, or copper,² a woodworker, and other practitioners of many various skills.]

'Goldsmith' is fairly common, prose 13 times and twice in verse; *irensmið* refers to Tubalcain, who according to the Old English rendering of Genesis 4:22 worked in gold and iron.³ Wærferth refers to Stephen in his translation of the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great (Hecht 1900, 1907, I, 318): *Stephanus se irensmið* (3 times, in different cases). In a glossary group of metalworkers ÆRARIUS is glossed *mæstlincsmiþ*, of which the first element is usually translated as 'brass' (cf. German *Messing*), but the Old English word could be 'brass, bronze, or copper' (Wülcker 1884, I, col. 164 glosses 24–26; Porter 2011, 103 glosses 2071–2073). All these are metal workers. Other compounds and derivatives (literal and not considered in this paper) are *mynetsmiððe* 'mint, literally mint-smithy', *smiþbelg* 'smith's bellows' and *smiþtang* 'blacksmith's tongs', *smiðcræft* 'the craft of a smith'; the adverb *smiðlice* FABRILE 'skilfully (in a workmanlike way)', and the place-name *Smiþtun*, that is Smeaton (Yorkshire).⁴ It is likely that *ambiht-smið* in the Laws of Æthelberht is to be understood literally too, but the meaning is not clear (and it is not even certain if it is a compound, and not two words).⁵

These literal uses of 'smith' seem to indicate a narrow sense, 'an artificer in metal'. The word *smið* was often used to render Latin *faber* with a wider meaning. Thus Jesus, Joseph's son at Matthew 13:55, is *smiðes sunu* (variously spelt), rendering FABRI FILIUS in all versions of the Old English Gospel, though in the

¹ It is possible that *manegra* is a late Old English spelling for *manegre*, and that the last five words mean 'many other practitioners of various skills'. In quoting Old English editorial details, punctuation, capitalization, hyphenation or compounding, treatment of abbreviations, and length-marks and other diacritics are not followed.

² OE *ār* has been interpreted as used for any of these metals.

³ Marsden (2008), 16, thus in Cotton MS Claudius B. iv. and Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 509. In Cambridge University Library MS li. 1. 33, however, the reading is *Tubalcain þe was slecgwirtha and smið on eallum weorcum æres* [MS *ærest*] and *ysenes* [MS *ysene*]. 'Tubalcain who was hammer-worker and smith in all workmanship of brass (bronze, or copper), and of iron.'

⁴ For *mynetsmiððe*, see Liebermann (1898–1916), I, 158–159, II *Æthelstan* 14.1 'Münzschmiede'. For *smiþbelg*, see Robinson (1972), 362–371; reprinted (1994), 200 line 36. For [F]ORCEPS *smiþtang*, see Voss (1996), 186 gloss 66, note 193. For *smiðcræft*, see Miller (1891, 1892), II, 442 line 16. For *smiðlice*, recorded three times in glossaries, the earliest in Lindsay (1921), 76, gloss F 110. For the place-name *Smiþtun*, see Robertson (1939), 124, charter LX line 2.

⁵ Liebermann (1898–1916), I, p. 3 § 7. His sense 'Dienst-Metallarbeiter', i.e. 'metal-worker in the service (of the king)' is discussed further at III, 6 Abt 7. Whitelock (1979), 391 fn. 3, accepts that reading as 'literally "service-smith"'. Oliver (2002), 64–65 her § 13, translates *cyninges ambiht smið* by 'the king's official [?] smith' and thinks it might have 'the meaning of "official [or] smith".'

Lindisfarne Gospels the translation is the double gloss *smiðes l wyrihta* ‘of the smith or of the artificer’, and at Mark 6:3 similarly of Jesus himself, *se smið* in the West-Saxon Gospels, and in Lindisfarne *smið l wyrihte* (Skeat 1887, 118–119; and Skeat 1871, 42–43). The traditional English rendering ‘carpenter’s son’ and ‘carpenter’ goes back to at least the Wycliffite renderings of the Bible (cf. Bagster 1841, sigs k1^{vo}–2^{ro}; z4^{vo}–1A^{ro}).

To understand the metaphorical uses of ‘smith’ in compounds it is essential to recognize that the Old English word is literally a metal-worker, not in general terms an artificer. In verse *goldsmið* is literal at *Fortunes of Men* 73 (ASPR III, 156), and *Metres of Boethius* X, 34 of Weland, the smith of Germanic mythology (Godden and Irvine 2009, I, 427). *Smið* has a wider meaning when attached to the following first elements to form metaphors in verse: *gryn-*, *Andreas* 917 (ASPR II, 28; Brooks 1961, 30); *hleahor-*, *Exodus* 43 (ASPR I, 92; Lucas 1977, 80); *lar-*, *Elene* 203 (ASPR II, 71; Gradon 1958, 35); *teon-*, *Guthlac A* 205 (ASPR III, 55; Roberts 1979, 89); *wig-*, *Genesis A* 2704 (ASPR I, 80; Stévanovitch 1992, I, 424–425 ‘*ceux qui forgent la guerre*’); *Vainglory* 14 (ASPR III, 147), *Battle of Brunanburh* 72 (ASPR VI, 20), but Psalm 113:12 [cf. 134:15] is of workmen literally (ASPR V, 98); *wroht-*, *Andreas* 86 (ASPR II, 5; Brooks 1961, 3), *Guthlac B* 905 (ASPR III, 75; Roberts 1979, 110); *wundor-* (Fulk et al. 2008, 57). The last of these, *wundorsmiþa geweorc* (*Beowulf* 1681a), has been understood literally by the editors: ‘piece of workmanship of wonderfully skilful smiths’.⁶ It refers to the *gylden hilt* ‘golden hilt’ (1677a) of the sword, on its *scennum* ‘sword-guards’ a runic inscription (1694–1696a); its blade had melted in the waters. A less prosaic interpretation is possible, and will be preferred below, at Excursus, b. Joyous laughter.

grynsmiðas at Andreas 917

The word *grynsmiðas* at *Andreas* 917 characterizes, in God’s speech, the enemies soon to face *Andreas* 915b–917 (ASPR II, 28; Brooks 1961, 30, Commentary 93):

Ic þe friðe healde
þæt þe ne moton manganidlan,
grame grynsmiðas, gaste gescedðan.

[I shall watch over your safety that the evil adversaries, hostile complotters of grief and harm, do not impair your vital force.]

DOE, s.v. *gryn-smið*, gives the meaning as ‘producer of grief, creator of misfortune’, and then goes to say that the word ‘has alternatively been taken as a form of **gnyrn-smiþ* “worker of calamity, evil-doer”’; ‘alternatively’ expresses the acceptance of one meaning and excludes the acceptance of the other. I listed the following relevant cluster of forms (Stanley 1952–1953, 111–113): *gnorn* n. and adj., *gnorne* adv., *gnornian* v., *gnyrne* n. dat sg., *gnyrna* n. gen. pl.; *grorn* n. and adj.,

⁶ Fulk et al. (2008), 461 Glossary: ‘WONDER-SMITH, i.e. *smith who makes wonderful things, or who works by amazing art*’, with limiting ‘or’ where inclusive ‘and’ would have been better. This edition follows Klaeber (1950), 430 [and 1922, 1928, 399].

grorne adv., *grornian* v.; *grynna* n. gen. pl.; *gryn* n., *gyrne* dat. sg., *gyrna* gen. pl.; and the following compounds and derivatives: *gnorncearig*, *gnornhof*, *gnornscendende*, *gnornsorg*, *gnornword*, *begnornian*, *grynwracu*, *grornhof*, *grornhorn*,⁷ *begornian*, *grynsmið* (the word under discussion here), *grynstaef*, *grynwracu*. I gave a very sketchy account of the meanings: ‘The meaning of the substantives is “grief,” of the adjectives “sorrowful,” of the adverbs “sorrowfully,” and of the verbs “to lament.”’ *DOE* presented alternatives for *grynsmið*; its first element might have been *gnyrn*, and that would not have altered the sense. What the *smiðas* of *Andreas* 917 have hammered out is *gryn* and *gnyrn*: ‘grief, tribulation, persecution and evil’ (ASPR II, 28; Brooks 1961, 30).

There is a more important consideration when establishing the meaning of poetic compounds. Often the first element is colouring the whole, but not shaping its central significance. In *Beowulf* (1590a) *heorosweng heardne* (acc. sg.) means ‘hard sword-stroke’, and both elements are to be understood literally (see Fulk et al. 2008, 54). In *The Fortunes of Men* 86b (ASPR III, 156) *heoroswealwe* the elements are ‘sword’ and ‘swallow’, and neither element is to be understood literally, *swealwe* is no swallow but refers to the wild bird, *heafoc* (86a) ‘hawk’, tamed and trained to sit on the hawker’s hand, and no *heoro-* ‘sword’ is involved. The first element lends warlike ferocity to the bird; ‘sword-swallow’ is to be understood as poetic Old English for ‘fierce hawk’, and perhaps further, like a sword in the swordsman’s skilful hand, powerful on the hawker’s hand.

The poetic compound *grynsmiðas* (*Andreas* 917) signifies how these evil men engage in persecution and so cause grief. In his note on *grynsmið* in the first edition of the poem Jacob Grimm considered as also *passend* (‘suitable’) the further semantic possibility, that *gryn* means ‘snare’, but he set it aside:⁸

917. *grynsmið*, a synonym of *mangeniðla* [*Andreas* 916, ‘evil adversaries’] (*insidiator* ‘ambusher’), about the same as might also be expressed by *bealosmið*⁹ or by *wrohtsmið*¹⁰ *A*[*ndreas*] 86 [‘evildoer’]. I consider *gryn*, gen. *grynne* (cf. *syn* [‘sin’], *synne*; cf. gen. pl. *grynna* *B*[*eowulf*] 930) to be close to

⁷ *The Riming Poem*, 66a (ASPR III, 168, Notes 314; Macrae-Gibson 1983, 34, Commentary 53), reads in the MS *grom torn graefep*, and I should not have included the compound **gromhorn*, as if attested. It goes back to Grein (1857a, b, 1858, 1861, 1864), II, 141 ‘Reimlied’. 66 *grom horn*, III *Sprachschatz* 529 *grornhorn* or read *grom horn*. The line has been subjected to other emendations, see Macrae-Gibson (1983), 53.

⁸ Grimm (1840), 120: ‘917. *grynsmið*, ein synonym von *mángeniðla*, *insidiator*, etwa was auch *bealosmið* ausdrücken würde, oder *wróhtsmið* A. 86 ausdrückt. zu *gryn*, gen. *grynne* (wie *syn*, *synne*; vgl. gen. pl. *grynna* B. 1843) halte ich das ahd. *grun*, *grunnî*, welches bedeuten muss *malum*, *calamitas*... vom ags. *gryn*, besser *grin laqueus*, pl. *grinu* sehe ich ab, wiewol auch die bedeutung von *fallstrick*, *insidiae* passend wäre.’ [I omit Grimm’s remark that no meaning is given for the word in the entry in Graff (Graff 1834–1846), IV cols 328–329 s.v. *grunni*.] In the translation the line number in *Beowulf* has been converted to that of modern editions, and translations of Latin and Old English words have been provided in square brackets.

⁹ The word is not recorded, but if it were it would mean something like ‘pernicious instigator’.

¹⁰ In Grimm’s note on line 86 *maleficus* ‘evildoer’, but other translations are possible too (Brooks 1961), Glossary 173 s.v., ‘contriver of an accusation; malicious foe’; Roberts (1979), Glossary 228 s.v., ‘strife-worker, worker of evil’, in Roberts’s note (163) on 905, she adds, ‘but *-smið* is a commonly used basic element in Anglo-Saxon verse of all periods’, without telling us how that might help us to understand such compounds.

OHG *grun*, *grunni*, which means *malum* [‘evil’], *calamitas* [‘calamity’]... I look away from OE *gryn*, better *grin* (*laqueus* [‘snare’]), pl. *grinu*, although its meaning, ‘snare, *insidiae*’, would be suitable too.

Kemble (1844), 53 [his (half-)line 1833], did not ignore ‘snare’ in his edition of *Andreas*. He praises (p. vi) ‘Grimm’s edition... executed with all the skill and care that might have been anticipated from the eminent qualifications of its amiable editor’. Kemble translates the half-line *grame grynsmiðas* as ‘the fierce snare-makers’. The rendering ‘snare-makers’ is as suitable as those now usually preferred (Brooks 1961, 146 Glossary s.v. ‘evildoer’; DOE, s.vv. *gyrn*, *gyrn-smiþ*, ‘producer of grief, creator of misfortune’, with the possible further rendering ‘worker of calamity, evil-doer’, but no mention of ‘snare’, DOE’s *grin*, *giren*, *geren*). Etymologists have not found a likely etymology for either *gryn* ‘grief, persecution’ or *gryn* ‘snare’ (though some Germanic cognates have been adduced). The poet of *Andreas*, like his first readers, need not have kept these two words apart: for *grynsmiðas* both ‘persecution, grief’ and *gryn* ‘snare, *insidiae*’ may well have been in their minds: *grynsmiðas* is a rich compound that means all of this, no part of its complex sense is to be set aside; both branches, ‘snare’ and ‘grief’, fit the context. To a lexicographer these are two nouns, in their distinct spellings *gnorn* ‘sorrow, affliction’ and *grin* ‘snare’. To an Anglo-Saxon they may well have appeared to be the same word, in various spellings, among them *gnorn*, *gnyrn*, *gryre*, *grin*, *gryn*, *giren*, *geren*, sometimes abstract, at other times concrete in sense.

hleahtorsmið

This compound *hleahtorsmið* occurs in the description, *Exodus* 42–43 (ASPR I, 92; Lucas 1977, 80), of the joyless Egyptians after the Tenth Plague, the death of the firstborn of Egypt (*Exodus* 11:5–6, 12:29–31). Tolkien (Turville-Petre 1981, 38 note on line 41) argues for short sentences at this point of the narrative: ‘Editors are too shy of breaking up OE verse into short sharp sentences. We are here being given a rapid survey of the events that led up to the Israelite departure.’ The editors of the poem have not so much been shy of ‘short sharp sentences’, as that they have not agreed on where to begin or end the short sentences.¹¹ I print these lines here with modern punctuation and capitalization (37–45a):¹²

¹¹ Thorpe (1832), 179 line 31–180 line 15 (=lines 37–45a), with semicolons at the end of lines 38b, 40a, 42b, 43b; Bouterwek (1854, 1849), I, 113, single line sentence line 43 (his 2972); Grein (1857, 1858, 1861, 1864), I, 77–78, lines 43–46a (with semicolon at the end of 45a); Blackburn (1907), 5, lines 43–47a only commas; ASPR I, 92, lines 43–46a (with semicolon at the end of 44); Irving (1953), 46, lines 43–46a, with semicolon at the end of 43, and 45b in parentheses; revised (1972), 294, lines 43–45a; Lucas (1977), 80–81, lines 42–45 (with dash at the end of 45a). If Tolkien’s editorial assessment of these lines were the only guide, Bouterwek’s treatment might seem best. His punctuation is of short sentences.

¹² I stop at 45a, because 45b would require discussion: *freond was bereafod*, has *freond* as its first transmitted word, and most editors emend to *feond*, as if an Anglo-Saxon scribe would not have distinguished friend from foe. For similar editorial *feond* for MS *freond* at *Vainglory* 70, see Stanley (2016, 8–9).

Hæfde mansceaðan æt middere niht
 frecne gefylled, frumbearna fela,
 abrocene burhweardas. Bana wide scrað,
 lað leodhata. Land dryrmyde 40
 deadra hræwum. Dugoð forðgewat.
 Wop wæs wide, worulddreama lyt!
 Wæron hleahtorsmiðum handa belocene.
 Alyfed laðsið leode gretan,
 folc ferende. 45

The following is an attempt to explain as well as to provide a free translation (in relatively short sentences):

He (God) had at midnight severely laid low the (Egyptian) evil ravagers, many of (their) firstborn (pl.), (idols acting as) city guardians shattered. The (divine) Slayer ranged far and wide, the (divine) Enemy of that people (and) hated (by them). The land (of Egypt) experienced ruination with the corpses of the slain. The host (of the Israelites) went forth. Lamentation was all around, nothing much of the merriment of the world! The hands of the (Egyptian scornful) laughter-makers were restrained (from plaudits). Undertaking the journey hateful (to the Egyptians) was permitted to the (Israelite) people, a nation on their way out!

The notes in Lucas (1977) explain several dark points in these lines, first (p. 79 note on line 37), that God is the subject of *Hæfde* (37a), because *mānsceaðan* (acc. pl.) is (by patristic etymology) the name, Egyptians.¹³ In the translation I therefore write ‘the (Egyptian) evil ravagers’. The *burhweardas* (39a) are well explained by Vickrey (1973), 44, as the idols, ‘all the gods of Egypt’ destroyed by God (Exodus 12:12), and that resulted in my ‘(idols acting as) city guardians’. Lucas (1977), 80 note on 39b–40, explains *lað leodhata* (40a) as God, the *bana*, hated by the Egyptians, and that resulted in my ‘The (divine) Slayer..., the (divine) Enemy of that people (and) hated (by them).’ I do not believe that *Dugoð forðgewat* (41b) is a euphemism for the death of the Egyptians, but think that like *folc ferende* (45a), it refers to the Exodus of the Israelites, a *laðsið* (44), ‘the journey hateful (to the Egyptians)’. The emendation of MS *dryrmyde* (40b) to *drysmýde* seems unwarranted. The ending *-yde* would be more normal as *-ode*; the stem of the verb, in *land dryrmyde* ‘the land (of Egypt) experienced ruination’, is close to that of *Beowulf* (1375b) *lyft drysmaþ* ‘the air grew dark’.¹⁴ The operation of Verner’s Law and the effect of *r*-metathesis, which the language underwent at various times in the various dialects, has resulted in *dreorig* ‘sorrowful, miserable’ and *dreosan* ‘to perish’ as

¹³ Lucas’s note directs the reader to Robinson (1968), 166–167 [reprinted in Robinson (1993), 231–233]. That is why *mān-* can have its normal sense ‘evil, sinful’; in earlier scholarship, when the compound was usually thought to refer to the slayer of the Egyptian firstborn (and was often emended to *mansceaða* (nom. sg.), the first element was either explained with short /a/ as ‘man’, ‘man-slayer’, or with long /ā/ the adj. *mān* ‘evil, fell’, thus Tolkien (in Turville-Petre 1981, 20, 38 Commentary, giving the source), ‘fell destroyer’.

¹⁴ Sometimes (unnecessarily) emended to *drysmaþ*, see DOE s.v. *drysmian*, and cf. Fulk et al. (2008), 441 s.v. *drysmān*, and p. 48 variants of 1375b.

well as to *dryrmian* ‘to suffer ruination’ and *drysmian* ‘to suffer darkness’.¹⁵ A central problem is the meaning of line 43, *Wæron hleahtorsmiðum handa belocene*. The meaning of laughter in Old English has to be understood to understand *hleahtorsmið*. See the excursus on *hleahtor*, below, for an attempt to understand laughter in Old English.

Evil *larsmeoðas* (nom. pl.) at *Andreas* 1220; wholesome *larsmiðas* (acc. pl.), at *Elene* 203

It is probably coincidental that each of the two long poems in the Vercelli Book employs the compound *larsmið*, which is recorded nowhere else in Old English. At *Andreas* (1220), in the preceding speech (1208–1218) God (*weoroda Dryhten*, ‘the Lord of Hosts’, 1206b) refers to those who will inflict murderous tortures on the saint. They are the immense crowd about to torture him. The poet qualified the compound *larsmeoðas* by *lyswe* (nom. pl. of *lysu*) ‘false, wicked’ (close in sense and etymology to *leas* ‘false’) and they are *bolgenmode*, men whose spirit is enraged.¹⁶ The compound *larsmeoðas* seems inappropriate: no *lar-*, ‘teaching or learning’, is involved.¹⁷

At *Elene* (203) the compound makes good sense; *larsmiðas* refers to those scholars of (holy) doctrine, *on Godes bocum*, who gave a brief account of the crucifixion, and so led St Helena, Constantine’s mother, to find the Cross, *Elene* 202b–210a (ASPR II, 71; Gradon 1958, 35):

Pa se æðeling fand,	
leodgebyrga, þurh larsmiðas,	
guðheard, garþrist, on Godes bocum	
hwær ahangen wæs heriges beorhtme	205
on rode treo rodora Waldend	
æfstum þurh inwit, swa se ealda feond	
forlærde ligesearwum, leode fortyhte	
Iudea cyn, þæt hie God sylfne	
ahengon herga fruman.	210

¹⁵ The words, *dreorig*, *dreosan*, *dryrmian*, *drysmian*, should have been in Stanley (1952–1953), but were not.

¹⁶ ASPR II, 37; Brooks (1961), 39; 152 Glossary s.v. *lar-smið*, ‘one who fashions doctrines, i.e. counsellor’; this may be indebted to Grimm (1840), 129, ‘consiliatores’. Grein (1857, 1859), II, 33, retaining the second element of *larsmeoðas* in his translation, invests the first element, *lar-* ‘learning, doctrine’, with a sense derived from the adjective qualifying it. In his rendering *lyswe larsmeoðas* become ‘die schmähhlichen Ränkeschmiede’ (‘the shameful hatchers of plots’), his rendering depending on the German idiom *Ränke schmieden* ‘to hatch plots’, and ignoring that the sense of *larsmið*, ‘expert in doctrine’, is neutral.

¹⁷ Krapp (1906), 137 note on 1220, directs the reader to p. 64, note on line 86: ‘*wērigum wrōhtsmiðum*, Cf. *grynsmið*, 917, *lārsmið*, 1220. The existence of such compounds in Anglo-Saxon, in which, however, the second element has become generalized in meaning, is an indication of the dignified position of the smith in early Teutonic society.’ Such anthropological generalizations are easy, but the sense of *lār-* is difficult.

[Then the prince, the lord protector (Constantine), bold in battle, valiant spearman, found in Holy Scripture, through scholars of doctrine, (205) where the Lord of Heaven had been hanged on the Cross-Tree to the army's rowdy merriment,¹⁸ maliciously through guile, as the Arch-Fiend seduced people and led astray by the race of the Jews by lying wiles, so that they (210) hanged the Lord God, the Lord of Hosts.]

This is not the first mention of the Cross in *Elene; sigores tacen* (85a) 'symbol of glory and victory'¹⁹ and *mid þys beacne* (92b) 'with this symbol' are poetic locutions for the Cross, the sentence of lines 99–104 identifies the symbol, *beacen* and *tacen*, as *Cristes rod* (103b), and in the battle against Huns and Goths *þæt halige treo* (107b) 'the holy beam' is raised as the symbol of victory. Lines 202b–210a give details of the Crucifixion; the *larsmiðas* (203b) explain it in sacred doctrine.²⁰

Guthlac A 205, teonsmiðas; teona is always of 'mischief'

The compound *teonsmiðas* (nom. pl.) occurs only at *Guthlac A 205* (ASPR III, 55; Roberts 1979, 89), and it is clearly of men intending evil, as the line unambiguously shows: *wæron teonsmiðas tornes fulle* 'the plotters of mischief were full of anger'. In the long sentence in which this line comes (taking semicolons to be strong commas rather than weak full stops) in Roberts's edition running from line 200 to line 214, these men are portrayed as wholly evil (*Guthlac A 200-14*):

¹⁸ There are several words that might have been spelt *beorhtme*. *DOE* s.v. *breahm*, *bearhtm* 'sound, loud noise' expresses no surprise that it is spelt with <eo>, uniquely so among 27 occurrences. The headword indicates that *DOE* has accepted the teaching on metathesis by Robinson, *bearhtm* : *breahm* listed (1985, 250; 1994, 136); no mention of *beorhtme* with <eo>. Förster (1932), 78 fn. 43 considered the etymology of *breahm* 'sound, noise', *bearhtm* 'twinkling, brightness' (*breohtme* recorded once, but not cited by Förster), as ultimately from *beorht* 'bright', all recorded in various forms (including *i*-mutated forms). He concludes, 'Etymologisch möchte ich all diese Formen zu ae. *beorht* "glänzend" ziehen' ('etymologically I should wish to relate all these forms to OE *beorht* "shiny"'). Whether or not this etymology is ultimately correct, philologists should treat these words, perhaps variants of the same word, as semantically close. The scribes by and large kept words with <ea> distinct from words with <eo>. Griffith (1997), 115 note on line 39b, gives both meanings for *beorhtme*, 'in an instant', or preferably 'noisily'. There is every reason for accepting the interpretation of *beorhtme* at *Elene 205* as the word *breahm*, but, as *DOE* says, 'the exact sense... is often difficult to determine'. One may wonder if *heriges beorhtme*, in the brief account of the Crucifixion, might mean 'the army's rowdy merriment'. Grein (1857, 1857), II, 109, translates the phrase 'unter Heeres Toben', and German *Toben* means something like 'raging, rowdiness', and my 'rowdy merriment' is to add an element of *beorht* 'bright' to the phrase, especially when the scribe spelt the word *beorhtme*.

¹⁹ Cf. Stanley (1993), on the closeness of 'glory' and 'victory' in Old English, *sigores tacen* at p. 204.

²⁰ Graddon (1958), 22–23, provides historical details of the cult of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England in her discussion of the date of *Elene*.

Swa him yrsade, se or ealle spræc 200
 feonda mengu, no þy forhtra wæs
 Guðlaces gæst ac him God sealde
 ellen wiþ þam egsan, þæt þæs ealdfeondes
 scyldigra scolu scome þrowedon,
 wæron teonsmiðas tornes fulle, 205
 cwædon þæt him Guðlac eac Gode sylfum
 earfeþa mæst ana gefremede,
 siþþan he for wlence on westenne
 beorgas bræce, þær hy²¹ bidinge
 earme & sacan æror mostu²² 210
 æfter tintergum tidum brucan
 ðonne hy of wapum werge cwoman
 restan ryneþragum, rowe gefegon,
 wæs him seo gelyfed þurh lytel fæc.

[(200) In this way he, who spoke for all the host of foes, enraged him (Guthlac), Guthlac's soul was none the more afraid, but then God had given him courage against that terror, so that the Arch-Fiend's guilt-laden swarm suffered humiliation, (205) the plotters of mischief were full of anger, they said that Guthlac alone, as well as God himself, had caused them the greatest suffering from the time that, for his pride, he had broken into the mound in the wilderness, where (210) formerly they, wretched adversaries, had been able to enjoy a resting-place for a time after (their) torments, when weary and accursed²³ they came from their wanderings to rest for a short period of time.]

The sense of *teona* is not in any doubt, 'malice and injury' combined, and that combination constitutes 'mischief'. It occurs frequently as a simplex, and also in the following poetic compounds: *hygeteona* 'malicious harm', *laðgeteona* 'hateful injurer', *teonwide* 'malicious (?blasphemous) speech', *teonhete* 'malicious hate', *teonleg* 'destructive fire'; *teonword* 'injurious word'; *niðgeteon* 'hostile attack'; *teonful(l)* 'malicious', *teonlice* 'hurtfully'. The idiom *tray and teen* or *teen and tray*, frequent in Middle English, occurs once in Old English, *Genesis A* 2274–2276a, in the speech of Hagar, who is being mistreated by Sarah (ASPR I, 68; Doane 2013, 243; Stévanovitch 1992, I, 396–397):

²¹ MS *he* does not make sense, and *hy*, the most common nom. pl. form in the text, has been generally accepted as a necessary emendation.

²² MS *mostu* is probably merely the result of a scribe writing five minims instead of four.

²³ Two adjectives, 'weary' and 'accursed', appear in the nom. and acc. pl. form *werge*. It is unlikely that the two words are related. Scholars of *Guthlac* have (all?) chosen 'weary'. At *Beowulf* 133 they have wrestled with the problem, gen. sg. *wergan gastes*; for brief accounts with references, see Hoops (1932a), 34–35, and Fulk et al. (2008), 124. There is general agreement that the word at *Beowulf* 133, referring to Grendel, must be 'accursed, evil'. The form *werge* could be understood (and at *Guthlac A* 212 should be understood) as both 'weary and accursed'.

Ic fleah wean, wana wilna gehwilces,
hlæfdiges hete, hean of wicum,
tregan & teonan.

[I fled from woe, deprived of everything I might wish for, (I had) the hatred of the mistress, ill-will and affliction, despised (I fled) from (my) dwelling place.]

In their poetry the Anglo-Saxons were good at expressing misery in rich variation. The biblical source, *a facie Sarai dominae meae ego fugio*,²⁴ may be thought sufficiently woeful to introduce Hagar's sad story. The poet of *Genesis A* invests Hagar with feelings of 'teen and tray' analysed in some detail, as he exploits this rich vocabulary of hardship. The meaning of *teonsmið*, the expressive compound at *Guthlac A* 205, is someone skilful in inflicting harm, a craftsman in the skill of mischief.

Two homonyms *wigsmið*, very different in sense and origin

One of the two homonyms occurs in the Paris Psalter Ps. 113:12 (ASPR V, 98):

Þa wæron deofulgild deorce hæpenra
golde & seolfre, þa her geara menn
worhtan wigsmiðas wræste mid folmum.

[Then there were faithless devilish idols of the heathen, gold and silver, which here long ago people, idol-makers, made long-lasting with (their) hands.]

This versified rendering is of course based on the Latin psalm, *simulacra gentium argentum et aurum*; rendered in the Doway version: 'The idols of the gentiles are siluer, and gold, the workes of mens handes.'²⁵

This is a very negative poetic use of 'smiths': though these are workers in silver and gold, usually a good form of artisanship, they are in breach of the first two of the Ten Commandments. The compound *deofulgild*, at the beginning of this verse, names a Satanic form of idolatry, and the compound condemns the activity of the *wigsmiðas* versified in the Paris Psalter. The poetry of the Paris Psalter is not much praised for its art, but here perhaps the versifier knew what he was doing when he turned *wig-smið* 'war-maker' into **wih-smið* 'idol-maker', and his poetic art deserves more praise than it has received.²⁶

The homonym *wigsmið* 'war-maker' occurs three times in Old English verse. Abraham calls the warriors of Gerar so at *Genesis A* 2704, in the long section, lines 2621–2752 (rendering Genesis ch. 20), about Abraham calling Sarah his sister, not

²⁴ *Biblia Sacra* (1926–1995), I, 202 Genesis 16:8; cf. Doway (1609, 1610), I, 61, 'From the face of Sarai my mistresse doe I flye.'

²⁵ Kuhn (1965), 113. This is an edition of the Romanum in an Anglo-Saxon manuscript. For this verse the Gallicanum is the same; see *Biblia Sacra* (1926–1995), X, 247. Doway (1609, 1610), II, 208 Ps. 113:12.

²⁶ Our praise must depend on whether *wigsmið*, with *wig-* 'war', would have been available to the versifier of the Psalms for him to think of turning it into a new compound with **wih-* 'idol'. Our knowledge of Old English is insufficient for such evaluations.

his wife. He explains to Abimelech, king of Philistine Gerar, why he has done so. I do not understand the logic of Abraham's ruse in denying the matrimonial relationship, but it is clear how, after Abimelech had a dream, Sarah is restored.²⁷ It is also clear that *wigsmið* is no admiring term for the Philistines. Abraham, a friendless foreigner in Gerar, was afraid that one of these angry warriors would kill him. It seems that *wigsmiðum* (dat. pl.) means no more than hostile warriors. They are subservient to Abimelech, so that the compound cannot here mean 'originators of hostility'; Abimelech's soldiery cannot originate anything, they are not of sufficient status to start warfare, but they are of a sort that uses warfare to rape women in their power.

In the poem called *Vainglory* by Krapp and Dobbie, *wlonce wigsmiþas* (14a) is a term of dispraise. These men in drunken company are quarrelsome rather than warlike, and perhaps 'proud war-makers' is not very suitable for them.²⁸ Lines 9–21a form a single sentence paragraph:

Pæt mæg æghwylc mon	eape geþencan,	
se þe hine lætedð	on þas lænan tid	10
amyrran his gemyndum	modes gælsan	
& on his dægrime	druncen to rice,	
þonne monige beoð	mæþelhergendra,	
wlonce wigsmiþas	winburgum in,	
sittap æt symble,	soðgied wrecað,	15
wordum wrixlað,	witan fundiaþ	
hwylc æscstede	inne in ræcede	
mid werum wunige,	þonne win hweteð	
beornes breostsefan,	breahstem stigeð	
cirm on corþre,	cwide scralletap	20
missenlice.		

[Everyone can readily consider that, (10) (everyone) who allows his thoughts in this transient time, and in his allotted time too violently drunk, to hinder in his mind the wantonness of (his) spirit, when there are many people extolling discourse, proud warmongers in vinous habitations (15) sitting at the feast (and) uttering poetic formulizations of truth, use verbal variation, try to find a place where there might exist with the men within the building a space suitable for spear-throwing, when wine incites the thought of a man's heart, din arises, (20) shouting in that pack of people loudly resounds in various ways.]

These lines are difficult, especially in sentence structure, and my translation involves finding words for difficult Old English words and constructions. Thus 'wantonness of spirit' is insecure for *modes gælsan* (11b); *monige mæþelhergendra*

²⁷ Abraham's insecurity as an alien in Abimelech's kingdom is well explained by Stévanovitch (1992) II, 631–633, as the reason for lying, but the underlying illogicality is not removed by an understanding of Abraham's insecurity.

²⁸ ASPR III, 147, 298–299 notes. Huppé (1970), 2–26. In Stanley (2016), 1–6, I have explained why I think 'Vainglory' an unsuitable title. I reuse here my edition and translation of lines 9–12 in that article (which is concerned with not emending *se þe hine lætedð* (10a) to *se þe hine ne lætedð*).

(13) ‘many people extolling discourse’ may mean ‘esteeming conversation highly’, and that reading is better than to emend to an equally obscure *mæþelhegendra* (gen. pl.) *redeführende* (‘those conducting conversation’).²⁹ ‘Proud warmongers’ may be too specific for *wlonce wigsmiþas* (14a); ‘proud warriors’ is too unspecific,³⁰ since *smiþ* means ‘initiator’ when used figuratively. Rūden (1978), 161–162, has a good note on this occurrence; he recognizes that the poet is condemning ‘einen beginnenden Wortstreit beim Gelage’ (‘a battle of words just starting at the orgy’), and he analyses the condemnatory words in lines 13–21a. Perhaps the most difficult half-line is *soðgied wrecað* (15b); *gied* is often ‘song, poem’. In *Beowulf* 867b–874a related wording occurs in the presentation of an ideal poet and an ideal of poetry: *gidda gemyndig* ‘filled with the memory of songs’, *soðe gebunden* ‘bound in truth’; similar wording occurs later in the poem in another passage idealizing poet and poetry (2105–2114): *gidd & gleo* ‘song and music’, *gyd awræc | soð & sarlic* ‘set forth a song true and sad’.³¹ These idealizations may incline one to think *soðgied wrecað* must mean ‘they set forth truthful poetry’. In the Exeter Book poem, however, the context is negative, about a battle of words at an orgy. It may mean that these drunks, *wlonce wigsmiþas*, here ‘proud word-battle smiths’, are hurling truthful insults at each other, for insults hurt most when they are *soðe gebunden* ‘bound in truth’. This wisdom is well formulated in post-medieval romance by old, blind Alice’s outburst in rebuttal of an imputation of ‘offensive and unfounded suspicions’; Alice is a truth-speaker in *The Bride of Lammermoor*:³² “‘Offensive?’” said Alice—“Ay, truth is ever offensive—but, surely, not unfounded.”

At the end of *The Battle of Brunanburh* (73) the same locution, *wlonce wigsmiþas*, is used in the patriotic glorifying of the *Adventus Saxonum*, and especially the victory over the British, *Wealas*.³³ More than a thousand years after the triumph of Brunanburh in AD 937 the word *triumphalism* entered the English lexicon. As far as our record of Old English allows us to speculate about such matters, the Anglo-Saxons did not entertain notions of triumphalism as they celebrated in verse how the West Saxons and Mercians under Æthelstan defeated the combined Vikings, Scots, and Welsh (*Wealas*), at Brunanburh (wherever that may have been). The poem has been much translated into Modern English and vigorously praised.³⁴

²⁹ Grein (1857, 1859), II, 153. Dobbie, in ASPR III, 147, accepts the emendation and, p. 299, renders the compound ‘men in conversation’; he draws attention to uses of that compound, three times in *Andreas*, where Krapp (1906), 94 (note on line 261) renders the compound ‘of human kind’, p. 210 (glossary s.v.) ‘deliberating, holding council’; he may have been thinking of *reordberende* ‘speech-bearers’ understood as a poeticism for ‘humans’; see Stanley (2011), 22–32.

³⁰ Mackie (1934), 11. When I translate *wigsmiþ* I vacillate between ‘warmonger’ and less abusive ‘war-maker’.

³¹ Cf. Stanley (1966), 150–151, 156–157; reprinted (1987), 117–118, 124–125.

³² Scott (1819), *The Bride of Lammermoor*, II, 110–11, Bk II, ch. vi. [=ch. XIX in modern edns].

³³ Spelt *weeallas* in the Parker Chronicle: ASPR VI, 20; Campbell (1938), 95.

³⁴ Scragg (1999), describes the poem as ‘a tissue of conventional images from heroic poetry’, which strikes a note of disagreement with earlier, more perceptive praise. One must wonder where in Old English verse a body of heroic poetry is to be found to establish which images deserve to be described as negatively ‘conventional’, rather than as ‘of a grand convention’.

The locution *wlance wigsmiþas* occurs twice, with very different meanings. In *The Battle of Brunanburh* it is used in glorious commemoration of the Anglo-Saxon triumph over Celts. In *Vainglory* the *wlance wigsmiþas* are drunk and their warfare is a manifestation of drunkenness, being quarrelsome, probably hurling insults, perhaps with abusive singing, if their *soðgied* means that they reveal ‘truth’ by insulting song (cf. punk rock in which, however, truth is not a requirement). At *Genesis A* 2704 most editors and glossators think *wigsmið* means little more than ‘warrior’; and the *wigsmiðas* of Paris Psalter Ps. 113:12 are ‘idol-makers’, with *wig* not ‘war’ but *wih* ‘idol’.

Cannibals in *Andreas*, Devils in *Guthlac B*: *wrohtsmiðas*

The first element of the compound *wrohtsmið* is polysemic, or rather interpreters of *wroht* in translations, glossaries, and dictionaries have many modern words to render it, and because they have so many to choose from, those dealing with an occurrence in a text find it difficult to choose how best to translate it. Some of the senses, in Clark Hall (1984) s.v. *wroht*, sound legal: ‘accusation, slander, crime, injury’. Liebermann (1898–1916), 250, however, does not include the word in his vol. II, *Wörterbuch*, and it appears not to be a technical legal term. Wulfstan uses *wroht* only once, according to the *DOE* Corpus online. Wulfstan’s love of law is not in doubt, but he got the word from Ælfric.³⁵ Ælfric uses *wroht* also elsewhere.³⁶ His use in ‘De Falsis Diis’ is about Mars: *His sunu hatte Mars, se macede æfre saca, | and wrohte and wawan he wolde æfre styrian* ‘His (Jove’s) son was called Mars, who at all times brought about conflict, and he ever wished to stir up contention (or blame [but not accusation] and woe’. John Pope, who had a very sensitive grasp of the semantics of Old English, in his glossary entry *wroht* gives ‘blame, accusation, contention’ for the sense of the word in this homily. It is certainly ‘accusation’ in Pope (1967, 1968), II, 506, Homily XIII, line 207—of those who sought to accuse Jesus, because of his failure to respond to the Mosaic Law, John 8:6, when dealing with the woman taken in adultery.

Ælfric is an exact user of words, but prose lexis is not the same as verse lexis. The simplex *wroht* occurs often in verse, and, if the translators, glossators, and lexicographers are to be believed in the variety of their renderings, this noun is very various in sense, or perhaps scholars are very insecure in their understanding (see Grein, 1912–1914, 829 s.v.). There is less scope for variety of sense or interpretation in the two uses of *wrohtsmið* in Old English verse. Those so designated are decidedly not the friends of whoever in the poem is the pitiable one with whom the reader is to empathize.

The compound *wrohtsmiðum* (dat. pl.) occurs at *Andreas* 86 (ASPR II, 5; Brooks 1961, 3), near the end of St Matthew’s prayer (lines 63–87), that God will not allow

³⁵ Bethurum (1957), 223 ‘De Falsis Dies’, line 59; Wulfstan adapted Ælfric’s ‘De Falsis Diis’, edited by Pope (1967, 1968), II, 683 line 127.

³⁶ Similarly Godden (1979), 142 Homily XIV line 150; for the source in the Gospels, see Godden (2000), 479.

him to be killed by the *werigum wrohtsmiðum*. These are the anthropophagi, the Marmedonian man-eaters, among which Matthew finds himself. Brooks's note says rightly that, despite its spelling, the adjective is not *werig* 'weary', but **werge* (not recorded in nom. sg.) 'accursed', and Brooks is copiously supported by the information supplied (without reference to *Andreas*), in the recent edition of *Beowulf*, (note on *wergan gastes* 'of the accursed spirit', 133a).³⁷

For *wrohtsmið* Brooks, in his glossary (p. 173) has the senses 'contriver of an accusation; malicious foe'. For *-smið* 'contriver' may be all right, but are we really to believe that the man-eaters of Marmedonia had the intellectual capacity to contrive an accusation, *wroht*? And where in the compound does the sense 'foe' appear? Brooks might have done better to combine what he has in his glossary entry to give 'contriver of malice', unless 'contriver' implies a higher level of excogitation than might be expected of these cannibals. Better still, he might have found that Kemble's edition (1844, 6 his line 171) had provided the best translation of the half-line, 'these base artificers of crime'.

The *deofla deaðmægen* are the 'deadly force of devils' of *Guthlac B* 895a, when they attack the saint; and he, *elnes anhydig* 'resolute of courage' (897a), *wiðstod stronglice* 'resisted strongly' (903a), with the result that the assailants were defeated (ASPR III, 75; Roberts 1979, 110), lines 903b–906:

Næs seo stund latu
 earmra gæsta, ne þæt onbid long
 þæt þa wrohtsmiðas wop ahofun,
 hreopun hreðlease, hleoþrum brugdon.

[There was no slow delay with the wretched visitant spirits, nor (was) the wait long before the contrivers of evil lamented loudly, the inglorious ones howled, they had changed their tune.]

The form *gæst* can be either 'visitant' with short vowel, or *gæst* 'spirit' with long vowel; 'visitant spirits' is to allow both senses. Roberts, p. 163, has a note on *hleoþrum brugdon* (906b), from which it emerges that the sense is probably 'changed in (their) sounds', conceivably a metaphor taken from music, applied in mockery to the devils changing their tune.³⁸ The context of *wrohtsmiðas* in *Guthlac B* may be seen as mocking the discomfited devils, but it is not necessary that the compound is used mockingly or even ironically. They who entered the fray as 'artificers of evil' have become, using Gollancz's rendering (1895, 159), inglorious 'harm-contrivers', and have been taught to change their tune.

³⁷ Brooks (1961), 66; in his glossary Brooks (p. 171) has not only 'accursed' but adds 'outcast, evil'. Fulk et al. (2008), 124 note on *Beowulf* line 133a, *wergan gastes*.

³⁸ Grein (1857, 1859), II, 91 his line 878b, translates 'ihre Stimmen wechselnd' ('changing their voices'). Gollancz (1895), 159, translates (906b) 'oft varied they their strain', with 'oft' added to amplify *brugdon* 'varied'. *DOE*, s.v. *bregdan* 4.b.ii., renders the phrase *hleoþrum bregdan* 'to vary, change (in) speech/sound'. The phrase occurs also in Godden and Irvine (2009), I, 440, C Text, Metre 13 line 47b, *hleoþrum brægdan*, rendered freely (II, 134), 'piping their songs'.

***Beowulf* 1681a *wundorsmiþa geweorc*, ‘a manifestation of workers of miracles’ or ‘of mystic-smiths’, or ‘the wonderful work of excellent weapon-smiths’**

Kemble was early in translating *Beowulf*, and for line 1681a (his line 3360) he chose ‘the work of wondrous smiths’.³⁹ Schaldemose gives mythical reality to what is ‘wondrous’ about these smiths, by translating the line, ‘det Arbeid af Dværge’ (‘the work of dwarfs’).⁴⁰ A few half-lines earlier the product of these smiths, the hilt of the sword, is described as *enta ærgeweorc* (1679a), translated by Kemble (p. 68) as ‘primæval work of giants’; but Schaldemose (1847), 78 (his line 3353) renders the half-line as ‘et Værk af Trolde’ (‘work of trolls’). A troll in Danish is not a giant necessarily; ‘dwarf, imp’ appears to be what the word also means. Schaldemose is not necessarily inconsistent: he could not have known what size of mythical being an *ent* was.

Klaeber’s glossary, from his first edition of *Beowulf* (1922) onwards, always included, s.v. *wundor-smiþ*, the reference ‘Cf. Earle’s note’.⁴¹ I had not looked at Earle’s note until I was working on this paper on *-smið* compounds. Earle’s introduction to his *Deeds of Beowulf* is often interesting, especially about *Beowulf* scholarship in the nineteenth century, and I had written about that.⁴² I had ignored Earle’s notes on the poem; they should not have been ignored, for they show good sense, often reasoned independence from what by the end of the nineteenth century had become received scholarly wisdoms.⁴³

Earle deals with *enta* and rejects ‘of dwarfs or elves’, asserting ‘of giants’, because ‘the sword to which this hilt [1676] belonged is described above in 1562 as giants’ work, *giganta geweorc*.’ Then, ‘1681 a. a work of mystic smiths: wundor smiða geweorc.’: ‘I do not understand the poet to mean a work of smiths of extraordinary cunning, who produce wonderful masterpieces of art (as Heyne [Earle quotes the glossary entry]); but rather as smiths of wonderland, of Fairyland; mythical, heroic, romantic smiths.’ Earle goes on to justify his use of ‘mystic’ for *wundor*, by alluding to Tennyson’s ‘mystic, wonderful’.⁴⁴ In 1892 Earle could have expected that his literate readers would have known the lines Tennyson had published fifty years earlier (1842, II, 5), in *Morte d’Arthur* (later *The Passing of Arthur*) about another mythical sword, Excalibur. Arthur is addressing Sir Bedivere:

³⁹ Kemble (1837), 69. So also Thorpe (1855), 112 his line 3366. Heyne (1863), 281 glossary s.v. *wundor-smið* ‘Schmid, der wunderbare Arbeit fertigt’ (‘smith, who fashions wonderful work’).

⁴⁰ Schaldemose (1847), 79. His text appears to be Kemble’s (which he refers to in his ‘Fortale’).

⁴¹ The reference is substantially unchanged in Fulk et al. (2008), 461.

⁴² In Stanley (1964–1965); last republished (2000), 41–43.

⁴³ Earle (1892), 164–165, his notes on *enta ær geweorc* and *wundor smiða*.

⁴⁴ Chambers (1914, 253) Glossary s.v. *wundor-smið*, ‘WONDER_SMITH, mystic-smith, 1681.’ Chambers did not take over ‘mystic-smith’ from Wyatt (1894, 241) Glossary s.v. *wundor-smið*. It appears to be Chamber’s tribute to Earle, and further to Tennyson.

Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
 Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
 In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
 Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
 Clothed in white samite, mystic,⁴⁵ wonderful,
 Holding the sword—and how I row'd across
 And took it, and have worn it like a king.

It is relevant in detail, a sword, a lake, a wondrous handing-over of the sword. Tennyson and Earle use the word *mystic* to mean: awe-inspiring and symbolic ‘those old days’, rather than *mystical*, as a technical religious term. Earle did not use *mythic(al)*, for that adjective suggests unreality. He says, ‘in the translation we must not admit any expression which suggests that the story is not true’.

We may go further than that; the study of Old English as an academic subject has brought with it an irreparable loss. As we academics try to understand *Beowulf*, the greatest literary product in Old English—‘literary product’ insufferable term—we have lost the wonder of it. Like the hilt which it is about, the poem is the work of a *wundorsmiþ*: the *Beowulf* poet is greater than, in Heyne’s terms (1863, 281), a ‘Schmid, der wunderbare Arbeit fertigt’.

Tolkien (1936, 277–278 = 35–36 of separate) wrote of his sense of wonder in his reading of *Beowulf*: ‘its maker was telling of things already old and weighted with regret, and he expended his art in making keen that touch upon the heart which sorrows have that are both poignant and remote.’ Earle experienced both *Beowulf* and Tennyson’s *Morte d’Arthur* like that, and thought the poetic quality, which brought about that experience, was *mystic*. In *Beowulf* the sense of wonder is heightened by a treble distance in time. The first, from the time when the *enta ærgeweorc* ‘ancient work of giants’ (1679a) was fashioned to the world of *Beowulf* the Geat fighting Grendel and his mother in Denmark, and back in Geatland, where after *fiftig wintra* of gracious rule (2733), he died in his fight with the dragon. The second distance, to the age of the poet and his ‘original audience’ (a creation of *Beowulf* scholarship). And the third distance, more than a thousand years later, to our own limited world of ‘Old English Language and Literature’. That remoteness makes *wundorsmiða geweorc* as impalpable as the inscription on the hilt: it is an object beyond the grasp of *littérateurs* and linguists, not to mention archaeologists. We now read all Old English hindered rather than helped by ponderous annotations, each note in commentaries a monument of information retrieval, and a tombstone to the immediacy of the poem. It is different with the note on line 1681a by ‘old John Earle’, as Tolkien (1936, 249 = 7 of separate) calls him. Earle’s note brought life to the poem, partly because he understood metaphor, and partly because he was not silent when he dismissed the unimaginative interpretation of *wundorsmiþ* by Heyne, who was a great philologist but appears to have been deaf to ‘mystic’ metaphor.

⁴⁵ *OED3* online has entered this as its first quotation, s.v. *mystic* n. and adj., sense 6. ‘That inspires an awed sense of mystery’, similar to Earle’s interpretation of Tennyson’s use. In this interpretation of *mystic* there is no right or wrong. *OED3* sense 6. is taken over from *NED*’s sense 5.b., published 1908, and *NED*’s ‘in recent use’ is now no longer applicable and has been omitted in *OED3*.

My interest in ‘smith’ compounds in Old English verse began with dissatisfaction with the editorial understanding of *wundorsmiþa geweorc* at *Beowulf* 1681a, only two lines after *enta ærgeweorc*, only about eight lines before the mysterious runic inscription on the *scennum* (dat. pl., 1694, some kind of sword-guard?) of the wondrous hilt, revealing the mysterious beginning of ‘ancient strife’, *fyrngewinnes* (1689a), when the Flood destroyed monsters, giants, but the hilt they had fashioned remained for us Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Saxonists, post-diluvians all, to see in our mind’s eye.

The theological mystery of lines 1677–1698a is great; *æfter deofla hryre* ‘after the fall of devils’ (1680a) begins it. In verse we get several times *æfter lices hryre* ‘after the death of the body’.⁴⁶ *Beowulf* alone has ‘after the fall of devils’, and (twice) *æfter hæleþa hryre* ‘after the fall of warriors, heroes, men’.⁴⁷ ‘The fall of devils’ is close to uses by Ælfric, two of them about the Fall of the angels.⁴⁸ The subject of this passage is grand enough to constitute *wundorsmiþa geweorc*, not work of artisans making luxury goods, but like the work of the poet of *Beowulf* himself, a ‘wonder-smith’ able to put theological ideas into poetic language.

Conclusion

As often when lexis is pursued through the *DOE* Corpus certainty of interpretation is not achieved (for verse Grein’s *Sprachschatz*, now more than 150 years old, is frequently all that is needed),⁴⁹ though it is to be hoped that one has a better understanding at the end of the process than one had at the beginning. Old English poets are not so cut off from real life that they avoided writing of the work of goldsmiths; two of them, of different dialect and date, have mentioned goldsmiths in what we have, at *Fortunes of Men* 73, at *Metres of Boethius* X, 34 of Weland, the smith of Germanic mythology; and at Paris Psalter Ps. 113:12 artisans are creating idolatrous statuary.⁵⁰

Anglo-Saxon writers have used the craft of smiths metaphorically. In the verse that has come down to us that metaphorical use is more common than poetic literalness. It is likely therefore, that when the poet of *Beowulf* writes of

⁴⁶ *Andreas* 229a (ASPR II, 9); *Guthlac B* 1093a (ASPR III, 80), cf. *Guthlac A* 829b in a short rhyming sequence (ASPR III, 73); *Phoenix* 645a (ASPR III, 112).

⁴⁷ Lines 2052a, and 3005a best studied in Hoops, ‘War *Beowulf* König von Dänemark?’ (1932b), 78–88, with *Scildinges* 3005b well emended to *scildwigan* (85–86), setting aside Heyne’s conjectural and fundamentally misguided emendation to *Scilfingas* (1863, 87 his line 3006), unconvincingly disinterred in Fulk et al. (2008, 102, 262). Dorothy Whitelock suggested to me about sixty years ago that Hoops’s emendation is improved if the error is traced back to the spelling *scilduigan*, <ui> misread <in> by scribal minim-confusion. There is the consequential further correction of final *-as* to *-an*.

⁴⁸ See the notes by Godden (2000, 16–17, 196, and 386). It should be emphasized that the writings of the Anglo-Saxons are not systematically interrelated: because one poet writes of the fall of corpses we must not assume that that is somehow related to another who writes of the fall of heroes; or that because a homilist writes of the Fallen Angels, that that is directly related to a poet who writes of fallen devils, though ultimately referring to the same event in Christian thinking.

⁴⁹ Grein (1857, 1858, 1861, 1864), vols III and IV.

⁵⁰ ASPR III, 156; Godden and Irvine (2009), I 427; ASPR V, 98.

wundorsmiþa geweorc the half-line is more about *wundor* and less about *smiþ* than how literalists might wish to interpret it. It is unexpected that in verse ‘smith’ compounds are so often used in negative contexts. That is probably because so much of the extant Old English verse is moral, usually religious: it is a wicked world, where even laughter sounds hollow.

Excursus

What do *hleahator* and *hleahtorsmið* (*Exodus 43*) mean in Old English?

Cheerless laughter, common in Old English verse

On the whole, laughter was not happily perceived in Old English verse or prose. It occurs often in negative contexts, and less often as joyous laughter experienced positively. In Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* the man from Incuneningum describes hell, from where he had come back, and reported the horrible laughter he had heard:⁵¹ *ic ðone wop þara manna & þone hleahator þara diofla sweotolice geheran ne meahte* ‘I could not clearly hear apart the lamentation of humans and the laughter of the devils’. Of course, hell is not the same as this world; even so, a man of this world hearing the sounds of hell is reporting his experiences on coming back. These contrasting aspects have been discussed before.⁵² By surveying laughter in Old English I hope to demonstrate that the compound *hleahtorsmið* was not constructed in innocent *naïveté*. Those who, like me, attempt to pursue the analysis of wit and laughter are always in danger of appearing, like Sulpiz in his pursuit, as portrayed by Gottlieb Konrad Pfeffel (1736–1809), in an aphorism (Pfeffel 1810, IV, 170):

Der Witzling.
Wie ein Rennthier⁵³ läuft Sulpiz
Hintern Witze her;
Aber immer läuft der Witz
Schneller noch als er.

[The Witling: Like a fast-running animal, Sulpice runs after wit; however, wit always runs still faster than he.]

Wahrig’s study of laughter in medieval England is the most comprehensive, and once the theoretical beginning (1955, 275–278) has been left behind, with its name-

⁵¹ Miller (1891, 1892), I, 428 lines 5–6; rendering (Colgrave and Mynors, 1969, 492–493): *fletum hominum et risum daemoniorum clare discernere nequirem*, ‘I was unable to discern clearly between human lamentation and devilish laughter’.

⁵² The following studies of wit and laughter in Old English range widely, and in detail are often relevant to aspects of some of the uses of laughter in several poems: Young (1950); Wahrig (1955); very briefly, Tucker (1959), at p. 223 ‘the striking line’ *Genesis A 43* is quoted, but *handa belocene* is not elucidated; Habicht (1959), 13–22; Niles (2000), esp. pp. 14–15, 18–21. Young wrote in the hope of demonstrating that not all Old English poetry is gloomy.

⁵³ In current, etymologically more acceptable spelling, *Rentier* means ‘reindeer’. In earlier modern German the spelling *Rennthier* was used for both ‘fast-running animal’ and ‘reindeer’.

dropping (e.g., Hegel, Darwin, Freud, who have said nothing about Old and Middle English laughter), there is some interesting discussion of laughter in texts.

Some idioms involving laughter occur several times. With the modal auxiliary *þurfan* laughter is often found in the negative: ‘to have no need, no occasion for laughter’. At *Genesis A* 72b–73a, the angels had no occasion to laugh at their Fall, *siðe ne þorfton | hlude hlihhan* ‘they had no need to laugh aloud at that journey’.⁵⁴ At *Elene* 918b–919a, the devil speaks, *ic þa rode ne þearf | hleahtre herigeam* ‘I have no occasion to praise the Cross with laughter’ (ASPR II, 91). The idiom is used, at *Guthlac B* 1356b–1357a, to begin the lament, *Huru ic swiðe ne þearf | hinsið behlehan* ‘Indeed I have no occasion at all to laugh at (Guthlac’s) death’ (ASPR III, 87). At *Juliana* 526b–528a, the devil, at the end of his long speech, regrets not to be able to deride the Fall, *Ic bihlyhhan ne þearf | æfter sarwraece siðfæt þisne | magum in gemonge* ‘I have no occasion to laugh about this expedition among my comrades’ (ASPR III, 128). At *Brunanburh* 47–48, the defeated army had no occasion to laugh, *mid heora herelaþum hlehan ne þorftum | þæt heo beaduweorca beteran wurðun* ‘they had no occasion to laugh with the remnants of their army that they were to be better in deeds of battle’ (ASPR VI, 19).

To laugh and play often go together, sometimes with merriment or game, *hliehhan*, *plega(n)* and *gamen*. At *Genesis B* 724b–725a, Satan’s messenger triumphs over Adam and Eve, *Hloh þa & plegode | boda bitre gehugod* ‘Then the messenger, with bitter mind, laughed and exulted’.⁵⁵ In view of the context, this is a negative use, though not syntactically negative. The phrase *hleahtor alecgan* (also at *Guthlac A* 229) is used (combined with *gamen* ‘play’) at the death of Beowulf, *nu se herewisa hleahtor alegde, | gamen & gleodream* ‘now the warlike leader has given up laughter, play and revelous joy’, *Beowulf* 3020–3021a.⁵⁶

Judgement Day II (234–235) depicts the eternally damned when worldly pleasures and laughter will cease, *Bonne druncennes gedwined mid wistum, | & hleahter & plega hleaþað ætsomne* ‘Then drunkenness will vanish (together) with feastings, and laughter and play will leap (away) together’.⁵⁷

At *Judith* line 23, drunken laughter, but no mention of ‘play’, characterizes Holofernes in a line perhaps expressing noise—probably onomatopoeically—by

⁵⁴ *Heo on wrace syððan | seomodon swearte, siðe ne þorfton | hlude hlihhan*, ASPR I, 5, 162 note on line 72; Stévanovitch (1992), I, 254 (also apparatus); Doane (2013), 147 text, 293 note, with translation of 71b–73a (‘They hovered dark (or darkly) in torment afterwards, had no need to laugh aloud on account of that journey’). Wahrig (1955), 293: “‘Nicht lachen’ ist hier litotisch gemeint. Es bedeutet geradezu ‘heulen’”: “‘Not to laugh’ is here to be understood as a litotes. It almost means ‘to howl’”. Also *Andreas* 1702b–1703a (ASPR II, 50; Wahrig, 294), *Genesis A* 2382–2385a (ASPR I, 71; Wahrig, 302–303). There is good reason to doubt that ‘not to laugh’ means ‘to howl—almost’.

⁵⁵ ASPR I, 25. Doane (1991), 226, 296 note on line 725a, says that the form *gehugod* is perhaps influenced by Old Saxon *gihugid* (cf. OE *gehogod*); as suggested by Klaeber (1931), 61 glossary, s.v. *gehugod*. See the translation by Stévanovitch (1992), II, 726–7, ‘qu’exulta, que sauta de joie | le messenger à l’âme amère’.

⁵⁶ ASPR III, 56; Roberts (1979), 138 (note on line 229), draws attention to the contrast, ‘striking euphemism of *Beowulf* 3020’, literal at *Guthlac A* 229. Cf. Fulk et al. (2008), 103.

⁵⁷ ASPR VI, 64; Caie (2000), 98–99 text and translation, p. 124 note on 235–240.

rhyme and alliteration, *hloh & hlydde, hlyned & dynede* ‘laughed and clamoured, roared and made a great din’.⁵⁸

The phrase (used metaphorically at *Beowulf* 3020) is used literally of the tempters assailing Guthlac, who gave up laughter when unsuccessful, *hleahtor alegdon | sorge seofedon* ‘they gave up laughter, sighed in disappointment’, *Guthlac A* 229b–230a.⁵⁹

Laughter is several times combined with negative abstracts, scorn, jeering, terror. Sarah’s foolish laughter is condemned by the poet at *Genesis* 2382–2385a:⁶⁰

Ʒa Ʒæt wif ahloh wereda Drihtnes,
nalles glædlice, ac heo gearum frod
Ʒone hleoðorcwyde husce belege
on sefan swiðe.

[Then the woman laughed at the Lord of Hosts, not at all radiantly, but she, old in years, greatly enveloped with scorn in her mind (her) wordy utterance.]

At *Juliana* 189, Juliana’s brutal husband combines laughing at her with jeering, *Ahlog Ʒa se hererinc hospwordum spræc* ‘Then that army-man laughed out, spoke in jeering words’ (ASPR III, 118).

At *Riddle 33*, 3b–4a, the noise of the iceberg (the subject of the Riddle) is anthropomorphized: *hlinsade hlude: hleahtor wæs gryrelíc | egesful on earde* ‘clamoured loudly: (its) laugh was horrible, frightful in (its) home’.⁶¹ This is wordplay, *leahtor* ‘vice’, but to alliterate better *hleahtor* ‘laughter’, perhaps designed to mislead a would-be solver near the beginning of the riddle. This riddle, like all the Exeter Book *Riddles*, may well have been intended for a monastic readership to enjoy and solve: a cleric might have expected anything written for him to be about vice rather than about laughter, but if skilled in verse such a reader would have enjoyed the concealment, that alliteration requires *hleahtor* for the manuscript reading *leahtor*.

⁵⁸ ASPR IV, 99; Griffith (1997), 97 text, 111–112 Commentary on lines 23–25 (esp. on laughter), p. 46 on frequency of rhymes, and pp. 167–168 on rhymes (identified as rhymes though often ‘no doubt either accidental or the product of the poet’s grammar and appositive style’). The noise created by Holofernes in his drunken state (lines 21b–27b), *hloh, hlydde, hlyned, dynede*, as well as *stymde* ‘stormed, raged’, *gylede* ‘yelled’, and perhaps *manode... gebærdon* ‘they (his drunk entourage) shouted making a merry din’ [see *DOE* s.v. *gebaeran* 3.a., and Griffith’s Commentary, p. 113 note on 26b–7]. Paronomasia, including rhyme on noise verbs (line 23b), echoes that noise effectively.

⁵⁹ See note 51, above.

⁶⁰ ASPR I, 71; Stévanovitch (1992), I, 404–405, translation of 2382–2385b, ‘Alors la femme se rit du Seigneur des armées, l non pas joyeusement mais, chargée d’années, l la révélation elle couvrit de dérision l en son esprit grandement.’ Cf. Doane (2013), 249 text, 379 Commentary.

⁶¹ ASPR III, 197; Williamson (1977), 87 text (his Riddle 31). MS *leahtor* is traditionally emended to *hleahtor* to alliterate; *leahtor wæs gryrelíc* makes sense, ‘(its) vice was horrible’. Cf. my recent attempts to defend manuscript readings that exploit the lability of such word-initial consonants as /h/ and /hl, hn, hr/ (Stanley 2013, 499–505; and again, 2015, 365–366). Wahrig (1955, 399–400) discusses the alternation of *hleahtor* and *leahtor*. He claims that in late Old English—he does not differentiate northern from southern dialects—the words had become homophones. For paronomasia to work identity of sound is not essential. Mrs Malaprop’s *mal à propos* confusion amuses all the more because not of homophones (Sheridan 1775, 46, 52), *Rivals*, Act III scene iii: ‘He is the very Pine-apple of politeness!’; ‘she’s as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile.’

Several times in Old English verse laughter is to be regarded as reprehensible, though not always explicitly condemned. At *Genesis A* 1582a–1584a, the Drunkenness of Noah begins with Ham laughing as he told his brothers where Noah was resting, *ac he hlihende | broðrum sægde hu se beorn hine | reste on recede* ‘but he, laughing, said to his brothers how the man was resting in the house’.⁶² At *Genesis* 2389 Sarah’s laugh is condemned as *hihtleas* ‘faithless’ (or perhaps ‘joyless’), a word that occurs only here.⁶³ At *Andreas* 1702b–1703a, the slaying of the saint is no laughing matter, *Ðæt þam banan ne wearð | hleahtre behworfen* ‘That was not treated as a laughing matter for the slayer’.⁶⁴ At *The Seafarer* 20–21, the Seafarer tells of the sounds he hears at sea: whereas those on dry land are accustomed to the sound of happy laughter, *dyde ic me to gomene ganetes hleoþor | & huilpan sweg fore hleahtor wera* ‘I took as my entertainment the gannet’s song and the ?curlew’s melody instead of the laughter of men’.⁶⁵ At *Beowulf* 730a, Grendel’s ‘mind laughed out’ in anticipation of achieving slaughter, *Ða his mod ahlog*.⁶⁶

As we have seen, lamentation, *wop*, is a reality in *Exodus* 42–45a, where laughter-smiths are ineffectual.⁶⁷ At *Solomon and Saturn* 348–350a (=II 170–172a), the contrasts *wop* & *hleahtor* are companions in Saturn’s gloomy view:⁶⁸

Ac forhwan beoð ða gesiðas somod ætgædre,
wop & hleahtor? Full oft hie weorðgeornra
sælða toslitað.

[Why then are those companions inseparably together, lamentation and laughter? They very often slit asunder the happiness of the well-intentioned.]

My translation of *weorðgeorn* as ‘well-intentioned’ is questionable. Alfred uses the adjective of Cato; in the recent edition that is rendered ‘ambitious’, and in the glossary ‘eager for honour’.⁶⁹ For Cato each editor or glossator of Alfred’s verse invests the adjective with a sense appropriate for Cato, and that varies from reader to reader. My translation aims at a Saturnine message, the destruction of happiness. Saturn is no Cato, of whom Ben Jonson wrote (1616, 708, *Catiline* III.1):

⁶² ASPR I, 49; Stévanovitch (1992), I, 354–355, II 539; Doane (2013), 201.

⁶³ ASPR I, 71; Stévanovitch (1992), I, 404–405 translates 2389a ‘un rire sans joie’, II, 606 Commentaire; Doane (2013), 249. Wahrig (1955), 303, distinguishes, unpersuasively, the ‘literal’ meaning of *hihtleas* from the sense required here: ‘eigentlich “hoffnungslos”, in unserem Falle aber “ungläubig” (‘literally “hopeless”, in the use under discussion, however, “unbelieving”’).

⁶⁴ ASPR II, 50; Brooks (1961), 55 text; 118 Commentary on 1703.

⁶⁵ ASPR III, 143; Klinck (1992), 79 text, 128–129 note. Cf. Magennis (1992).

⁶⁶ Fulk et al. (2008), 27; the note, p. 159, describes it as ‘this sinister laughter’; but ‘sinister’ is the impression created by the context on impressionable readers, it is not expressed by the poet. Habicht (1959, 13–14) attaches to this half-line his view that *ahlog* means ‘lachte auf’, i.e. ‘burst out laughing (noisily)’. He intellectualizes too much when he says that the use of *mod* in this idiom (because *mod* means ‘mind, spirit’) *entkörperlicht* (‘dis-corporealizes’) this use of *ahlihan*.

⁶⁷ See 3. *hleahtorsmið*, above.

⁶⁸ ASPR VI, 43. Cf. Anlezark (2009), 86–87 text and translation, and 130 Commentary on lines 170–4.

⁶⁹ Godden and Irvine (2009), I, 427, *Metre* 10, 48–51; II, Translation 126, Glossary 623. That *weorðgeorn* may be understood in different ways is shown by Griffiths (1991), 190 Glossary s.v., ‘keen to achieve, high-souled’.

CHOR[US]. The voice of CATO is the voice of *Rome*.
 CATO. The voice of *Rome* is the consent of heaven!

Joyous laughter

There are uses of happy laughter in Old English verse. At *Christ II* 738b–743, the angelic laughter when Christ enters heaven is wholly and seriously positive and in response to God’s *plega* ‘joyful exploit’:⁷⁰

Pa wæs engla þreat
 on þa halgan tid hleahtre bliþe
 wynnun geworden, gesawan wuldres Ðrym, 740
 æþelinga Ord, eþles neosan
 beorhtra bolda, þa wearð burgwarum
 eadgum ece gefea Æþelinges plega.

The sentence structure of these lines is difficult, the punctuation varies in the editions, and I agree with Das that *Pa* at 738b and *þa* at 742b are probably correlative, and that these lines together give the essential character to *hleahtre bliþe*, which is joyous laughter (unlike the sense of *hleahtor* in *hleahtorsmiðum*). The following free translation attempts to explain these lines, *Christ II* 738b–743:

Then the host of angels came to be happy with laughter at that holy time, with joys, seeing the glorious Lord, the Chief of princes, enter his home, the radiant dwellings, when for the happy inhabitants of that (heavenly) city there was eternal bliss, the (heavenly) Prince’s joyful exploit.

At *Genesis A* 2066–2067a, the victors laugh:⁷¹ *Ðær hlihende huðe feredon | secgas & gesiððas* ‘There those laughing, men low and high, carried off booty’.⁷²

⁷⁰ ASPR III, 23. Das (1975), 31, 84 note on 738–742. The principles governing the order of subject and verb in prose do not apply strictly in verse, see Mitchell (1985), II, 304 § 2555. The later interpretations of *æþelinges plega* seem less satisfactory than that by Grein in his *Sprachschatz*. His rendering, Grein 1857, 1859), 169, ‘des Edelinges Springspiel’ ‘the ætheling’s jumping game’, is unsatisfactory in style, though it goes with *hlyp(um)* ‘leap(s)’ (720, 726, 730, 736, 745, 747), *styll* ‘leap’ (719, 723, 728), and *gestyllan* ‘to leap’ ([648,] 716, 745, 747), a mystical metaphor; see Cook (1909), 143–145. In Grein’s *Sprachschatz* (1857, 1858, 1861, 1864), IV, 361 s.v. *plega*, Grein quotes *Christ* lines 742b–743, and renders the word as *Christi Auferstehung* (‘Ascension’), which is his explanation. My ‘joyful exploit’ has ‘joyful’ to get in the sense of *plega* ‘play’, and ‘exploit’ avoids the gymnastic ‘leap’, though ‘leap’ is theologically correct.

⁷¹ ASPR I, 62. Doane (1013), 231. Stévanovitch (1992), I, 384–385, translates *hlihende* ‘exultant’.

⁷² The history of the word *marshal* shows how the designation of a low attendant of horses, a farrier, becomes a title of honour, ‘Groom-in-Waiting’ for example. Etymologically *gesið* is closely related to German *Gesinde* ‘farm-hands’ and its diminutive *Gesindel* ‘riff-raff’. But *gesiðcund* is of a higher status. There is a difference in status between *secgas & gesiððas*, the former ordinary fighting men, the latter those who commanded them, not ‘retainers’ (given by Doane, p. 428, as a possible sense), but *gesiðcund*, an adjective that occurs some fifteen times in legal prose (early and late, and not only West Saxon), indicates a class distinction, what exactly is not certain; cf. Campbell (1986), 131. It seems that *secgas & gesiððas*, like Middle English contrastive word-pairs, is such a pair and means ‘everybody; the high and the low’. The Old English word-pair occurs, also in a martial context, at *Judith* 201a, but is not commented on by the editors (e.g., Griffith 1997). It occurs also, not in a martial context (the manuscript

At *Andreas* 454b–457, the seafarers laughed out when the Lord calmed the waters:⁷³

Ða ure mod ahlog,
 syððan we gesegon under swegles gang
 windas & wægas & wæterbrogan
 forhte gewordne for Frean egesan.

[Then our spirit laughed out, once we saw under the course of the sun, that winds and waves and terrifying waters had become afraid in fear of the Lord.]

Resignation B (70–72a) opens with *hwæpre ic me ealles þæs ellen wylle | habban & hlyhhan & me hyhtan to, | frætwan mec on ferðweg* ‘however I will have courage in all this and laugh and look forward with hope, to array myself for the soul’s journey’.⁷⁴

At *The Descent into Hell* 21a, 24–25, dwellers in hell rejoicing at the Resurrection, *hlogan helwaran* (‘the dwellers in hell laughed’), and John the Baptist announces Christ’s Descent to those in hell, *hæleð helwarum hlyhhende spræc | modig to þære mengo ymb his mæges [sið]* ‘the spirited man laughingly spoke to the dwellers in hell, to that multitude, about his kinsman’s [journey]’ (ASPR III, 219 text, 356–7 notes).

At *Beowulf* 611–612b, laughter is joyous in Heorot when Beowulf’s words had been heard, *Ðær wæs hæleþa hleahtor; hlyn swynsode, | word wæron wynsume* ‘There was laughter of men (in the hall), cheerful noise was heard, (Beowulf’s) words were gladly received’.⁷⁵

At Paris Psalter 85:11, 1–2a, the Psalmist’s spirit laughs out in (sacred) fear of the Lord’s name, *Heorte min ahlyhheð þonne ic ðinne halgan naman | forhtige me on ferhðe* ‘My heart laughs out whenever I fear in spirit thy holy name’.⁷⁶

In *The Battle of Maldon* 146b–147a (ASPR VI, 11; Scragg 1991, 24–5), Byrhtnoth laughs as in the course of the battle he gives thanks to the Lord for a good day’s work, *Se eorl wæs þe bliþra, hloh þa modi man* ‘The earl was the happier, the brave man then laughed’.

At *Solomon and Saturn* 178b, David, after defeating the Chaldeans, laughs out: *næfre ær his ferhð ahlog* ‘never had his spirit laughed out before’.⁷⁷

Footnote 72 continued

damaged) at *The Husband’s Message* 34a, again no editorial comment on the alliterative word-pair (e.g., ASPR III, 226, 363; Klinck 1992, 101, 204).

⁷³ ASPR II, 15. Brooks (1961), 15 text, 77 Commentary on 454.

⁷⁴ ASPR III, 217. Klinck (1992), 97 text, 193 notes. Muir (1994), I, 342 (the poem renamed ‘Contrition fragment B’), II, 633, his line 3, revives unconvincingly the emendation *forðweg* ‘onward journey, departure’.

⁷⁵ Fulk et al. (2008), 23 text, p. 155 notes, accepting, without admitting it into the text, the emendation *wynsum* (MS *wynsume*)—perhaps to strengthen the highly questionable validity of ‘Kaluza’s Law’.

⁷⁶ ASPR V, 53. The Paris Psalter, rendering the Romanum, is close to the Gallicanum, *Biblia Sacra* (1926–1995), X (1953), 196, *Psalmi LXXXV*, 11, *laetetur cor meum ut timeat nomen tuum*; translated in the Doway Version (1609, 1610), II, 160], ‘let my hart reioyce that it may feare thy name.’

⁷⁷ ASPR VI, 38. Anlezark 2009, 78 text (his ‘Poetic Fragment’, line 9b), 116 Commentary. Magennis, ‘Images of Laughter’, p. 200, calls this laughter ‘unrestrained spiritual joy’.

The laughter in the *Rune Poem* (38–40) looks joyous, if only we knew what the rune name means:⁷⁸

ʔpeorð byþ symble plega and hlehter
wlancum * * * ðar wigan sittap
on beorsele bliþe ætsomne.

[*Peorð* is always play and laughter for the great... where warriors sit happily together in the beer-hall.]

As translated here, this does not sound like the Heroic Age as bodied forth by Anglo-Saxonists, but the context is difficult: the wording is incomplete, *wlanicum* (dat.) refers to the great or proud unidentified, and the rune name is wholly obscure.

Conclusion of the excursus

Where nothing is known theories of pagan origins soon intrude—but should not prevail. Wahrig writes on ‘the pagan-Germanic conception’ of laughter, *die heidnisch-germanische Auffassung*:⁷⁹

In this conception laughter is just an expression of unrestrained joy and *joie de vivre*. That finds expression in laughing together at a banquet: in such manifestations laughter is the corporeal response to the very joy of being together after danger overcome or at a meeting of friends and acquaintances... The laughter of the Anglo-Saxons was not yet differentiated, that is, was not yet motivated specifically, but was for the most part the immediate outburst of feelings. The intellect is little involved.

Wahrig was perhaps never at a student get-together, or he would have experienced unmotivated laughter, perhaps after an examination overcome, or simply as an outburst of feelings without any intellectual involvement. One would hesitate to think it symptomatic of a return to paganism or of a resurgence of paganism.

This long survey of laughing and laughter in Old English verse demonstrates that, much as in modern life and literature, laughter can be happy. In negative contexts laughter may be mentioned only as a reminder that there is nothing to laugh about: that there is no cause for laughter refines the experience of adversity. The compound

⁷⁸ ASPR VI, 29, 156 note (mainly on the rune name). See Page (1999), 70–71. Magennis (1992), 198, reports that this description of warriors laughing as they drink is ‘not typical of Old Norse and is not found in Old Saxon’ use of ‘hall imagery’. It is unique in Old English too, and it requires faith in the oneness of Germanic poetry for that to be significant other than as unique.

⁷⁹ Wahrig (1955), 395: ‘Hier ist das Lachen einmal Ausdruck ungezügelter Freude und Lebenslust. Das kommt im Miteinanderlachen beim Gastmahl zum Ausdruck: das Lachen ist hier eine physische Reaktion auf die bloße Freude des Zusammenseins nach überwundener Gefahr oder beim Zusammentreffen von Freunden und Bekannten... Das Lachen der Angelsachsen war noch nicht differenziert, d. h. auf besondere Motive gerichtet, sondern war meist ein unmittelbarer Ausbruch von Gefühlen. Der Intellekt ist dabei wenig beteiligt.’

hleahtorsmiðum (dat. pl.) is used of the Egyptians at *Exodus* 43a.⁸⁰ There is nothing in the biblical account about the Egyptian ‘laughter-smiths’ laughing maliciously at the misfortune of others; but at the slaying of their first-born (*Exodus* 11:6), they are reduced to lamenting, *wop*, and (again not in the Bible) their hands are *belocene*, ‘locked’, that is presumably, not engaged in plaudits or some other hand gesture of joy.

That so much of the surviving Old English verse is religious has probably led to the high degree of negativity in laughter. *Cynewulf* is almost on his own when he has the angels *hleahtre bliþe* ‘happy with laughter’ at the Ascension, a joyful exploit described as *plega* ‘play’ at *Christ II*.⁸¹ In coenobitic thinking, *hleahtor* and *leahtor*, ‘laughter’ and ‘vice’, may have been distinguished by little more than the confounded articulation of the initial consonants. Old English verse is serious: the poets are rarely overheard at play, though we can sometimes catch them at wordplay.

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⁸⁰ Währig (1955), 287, goes further than is, I think, appropriate: ‘*hleahtorsmið*, ein hapax legomenon, das bei der beinahe impressionistisch anmutenden Wiedergabe des 2. Mose I, 22... gebraucht wird.’ (‘*hleahtorsmið*, a hapax legomenon that is used in the almost impressionistic seeming translation of *Exodus* 1:22’).

⁸¹ See at Excursus, b. Joyous laughter, and fn. 74, above.

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