Where Now the Harp? Listening for the Sounds of Old English Verse, from *Beowulf* to the Twentieth Century

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> *nis þær hearpan sweg, / gomen in geardum, swylce ðær iu wæron* (2458b-59)[1]
> There is no sound of the harp, delight in courts, as there once were

> The way to learn the music of verse is to listen to it. (Pound 1951:56)

Even within an advanced print culture, poetry arguably never escapes the oral dimension. For Ezra Pound, whose highly intertextual epic *The Cantos*, so conscious of its page appearance, could only be the product of such a print culture, poetry was nevertheless "an art of pure sound," the future of which in English was to be the "orchestration" of different European systems of sound-patterning (Pound 1973:33). Verbal orchestration is meaningless without auditors; it goes without saying that the notion of oral literature simultaneously implies the concept of aural literature. This much is also evident from the very beginning of *Beowulf*: *Hwæt, we Gar-Dena in geardagum, / þeodcyninga þrym gefrunon . . . .* ("Listen, we have heard of the Spear-Danes in times past, of the glory of the people's kings . . . ," lines 1-2). While the conventionality of the opening might suggest the evocation of a formulaic idiom often associated with oral composition,[2] the emphasis is clearly on aurality, on hearing a voice. Much work has been done in recent decades on the evidence in Old English written texts for a poetics that draws on compositional methods derived from an oral culture, either as it had survived into a period of widespread literacy, or as it was imagined to have once existed.[3] This essay will not directly address that valuable rehabilitation of oral-formulaic theory into a more sophisticated understanding of early medieval scribal culture, although it will draw on it at times. Rather, I wish to pay some attention to the contiguous matter of that emphasis on listening for voice, of

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[1] This and all subsequent references to *Beowulf* are from Klaeber 1950.

[2] For comparable examples of the "listen, we have heard . . ." formula, see the opening of *Exodus* in Krapp 1931:91; of *Andreas* in Krapp 1932:3; and of *Juliana* in Krapp and Dobbie 1936:113.

[3] See, for example, Foley 1991a, 2002; Renoir 1988:157-74; O'Keeffe 1990; Stock 1990; Lerer 1991:158-94; Doane and Pasternack 1991; espec. Schaefer 1991; Pasternack 1995; and Amodio 2004:33-78 and 2005.

trying to make a space in the text for audible performance, before moving on to consider an analogous impulse in modern poetry and to argue for a new type of textual allusion. A number of Old English poems could be used to explore the first idea, but the present essay will limit itself to some observations about *Beowulf*.

Beowulf is a poem that stages the making and/or performance of poetry on several occasions;[4] one could say that poetry itself, or its creation, is one of the poem's major themes. Although it is in some ways a self-referential impulse, one hesitates to call this preoccupation metatextual, lest that should suggest that *Beowulf* is concerned to observe and investigate the production of poems like itself, that is to say, textual in its usual sense, made of words in their written, material form. Our *Beowulf*, an inscripted text, the product of a late tenth- or early eleventh-century scriptorium,[5] is intrigued by the sound of oral composition, perhaps as much so as modern scholars of early Germanic verse.[6] Through this staging of the voice or voices of oral poetry, *Beowulf* situates itself as listening in to that tradition.[7] In doing so, the poem implicitly aligns itself with a poetics where transmission and composition are co-dependent, indivisible aspects of the same act, just as its opening rhetorical gambit implicates speaking with hearing and collocates narrator and audience, suggesting through the plural pronoun that a poet is always also a listener, as the second epigraph to this essay makes explicit.

A prime example of this straining to listen for the voice of oral composition occurs in the episode that takes place the morning after Beowulf's victory over Grendel, when one of Hrothgar's thanes *word oþer fand / soðe gebunden* ("found other words, truly bound," 870b-71a) in order to tell *sið Beowulfes* ("Beowulf's adventure," 872a). We are informed that the thane knows a great deal of traditional material; he is *guma gilphlæden, gidda myndig / se ðe ealfela ealdgesegena / worn gemunde* ("a man full of speech, mindful of poems, who remembered a multitude of many old songs," 868-70a). We are also told that to recount Beowulf's adventure the thane has to *wordum wrixlan* ("vary the words," 874a). Seemingly, then, Hrothgar's man reshapes a stock of familiar material to suit the new context generated by the occasion. Details such as these have sometimes led scholars to the assumption that what we are presented with here is a contemporary or near-contemporary portrait of the oral-formulaic *scop* ("poet") at work, manipulating his store of formulae in order to extemporize in honor of Beowulf (Creed 1963). Seamus Heaney's translation italicizes lines 884b to 915 of the Old English (lines 883 to 914 of

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[4] Hill 2002 gives an overview of these occasions. The term "stage," to describe the poet's practice in this respect, I have adopted from Ursula Schaefer (1991).

[5] While I am relatively confident that there must have been earlier *Beowulf*s, and that they probably differed from the one that survives in the Nowell Codex, I am happy enough with the one we have, without desiring that which we do not and cannot have.

[6] Jeff Opland (1980a:191) believes that the compositional practices described in *Beowulf* were once current, and therefore not straightforwardly fictional. Roberta Frank (1993) is skeptical that the depiction of oral poets in *Beowulf* is anything other than a form of medieval historical fiction. Amodio (2005) argues that this and other reports of *scop*ic activity are "idealized and fictional accounts of how legendary figures composed vernacular poetry" (185). See also Niles 2007:141-87.

[7] On Paul Zumthor's term "vocality" as the term by which medieval poetry can be described without resorting to the binary opposition of a crude "orality vs. literacy" model, see Schaefer 1991:118. On "inscribed" verse as "vocalized" and sharing some characteristics with oral poetry, see Pasternack 1995:60-62.

his translation), indicating that he takes them as the tale of *sið Beowulfes* and regards them as an embedded lay, possibly earlier than the surface layer of the poem but in any case in a different voice (2002:24).[8] Here, then, our *Beowulf*-poet creates a platform for the voice of an earlier or ur-*Beowulf*-poet, and so, in a sense, locates himself as listening to material even as he transmits it. Simultaneously, that ur-poet gives voice to material he has previously heard, making—as he must—through transmission, and transmitting by re-making. *Beowulf* here indulges in some fictional navel-gazing, as the written text purports to listen to the putative sound of its oral origins, finding there a voice-within-a-voice reshaping previously heard stories and intervolving in an umbilical spiral of possibly infinite regress.

Yet even disregarding the fact that the *Beowulf*-poet is imagining, and perhaps idealizing, a fictional oral-formulaic forebear whom he must have imagined to have worked several centuries before his own time, it is arguable as to whether we hear the sound or even the sense of that spoken composition at all. For a tale that describes the *sið Beowulfes* in "other words," varied from the traditionally inherited patterns, such as the Danish thane is presumably meant to have told, is precisely what we do not get here.[9] Instead we hear a story of the hero Sigemund[10] and of Heremod, an inadequate king, unadapted to Beowulf's narrative, unless by the innovation of making Sigemund a dragon-slayer, an ironic manipulation of traditional material of which only the *Beowulf*-poet at his meta-narrative level, and not the Danish thane in his moment of fictional composition, can have been aware. Indeed, there is nothing about this episode concerning Sigemund and Heremod to suggest that it is not in our poet's voice.[11] What appears as if it might be the sound of oral composition, captured in script, may be neither more nor less than the *Beowulf*-poet's writerly manipulation of traditional materials.[12]

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[8] See also his introduction, where he compellingly writes: "For a moment it is as if we have been channel-surfed into another poem, . . . I indicate that we are in fact participating in a poem-within-our-poem not only by the use of italics, but by a slight quickening of pace and shortening of metrical rein" (xxvi).

[9] In this respect Opland seems to me to elide what the text gives us with what the text says it is giving us, when he writes that the thane "utters a eulogy in praise of Beowulf. He skillfully rehearses Beowulf's conquest of the monster; he refers to every famous deed of Sigemund that he has heard of; and he reviews the career of Heremod" (1980b:32). Griffith notes that the song "is introduced in a misleading fashion" (1995:14), while Amodio comments that "the *Beowulf*-poet only reports the substance of the poem and does not attempt to present the song itself" (2005:196).

[10] Griffith (1995) finds evidence that the portrayal of Sigemund might not have the purpose of unambiguously flattering Beowulf by comparison with a legendary hero, as is often assumed to be the point of the passage.

[11] This is not to say that the episode might not be in the voice of the Danish thane; the nature of medieval manuscript textuality, not having the equivalent of modern conventions of punctuation, allows for this kind of ambiguity of voicing. But one might argue that it is easier to presume consistency of voice than shift. Griffith argues that the Danish *scop* and the *Beowulf*-poet "speak with one voice here" (1995:14). Amodio contends that the line between the voices of the inner and outer poets "blurs dramatically," suggesting that the *Beowulf*-poet "does not sharply mark out the conclusion of the fictional *scop*'s performance, but rather seems to finish it in his own voice" (2005:197). It is implied in Amodio's reading, then, that the *scop*'s voice is initially heard somewhere in these lines, even if identifying where it ends presents difficulties.

[12] Although I call the poem writerly, like many recent critics I assume the influence on *Beowulf* of compositional strategies that result from knowledge of, concomitant contact with, or the archaic residue of an oral poetics.

Indeed, what is striking about many of *Beowulf*'s attempts to summon the sound of oral composition into its silent world of parchment and ink marks is that the poem seems to bear witness to as much anxiety as confidence about the possibility for success in this respect. Arguably, one of the themes *Beowulf* concerns itself with is the impossibility of realizing in the poem's present a heroic ideal that it locates in the distant past. If one is prepared to assent to this statement (and it would not command universal acceptance), one could also note that the most fully actualized performances of oral composition occur earlier in the poem, further back in narrative time, and that as the poem drives forward its ability to make audible the sound of oral performance becomes less secure. This, then, would be to acknowledge that a general pattern of narrative thrust can be followed in several threads of the poem simultaneously, whereby various forms of cultural anxiety become amplified over the course of the poem, and that treatment of orality and aurality in *Beowulf* is synecdochic of its broader concerns.

Even in the poem's earlier movements, however, there are intimations that the soundscape of its putative golden age is under threat and its horizons are difficult to defend.[13] So although it is reported to us that in Heorot *þær wæs hearpan sweg, / swutol sang scopes* ("the sound of the harp was there, the sweet song of the *scop*," 89b-90a), and the poet's creation song is reported to us over the next eight lines, we have already been told that the poem has an ominous auditor who is *ellengæst* ("a courageous creature," 86), a listener in the darkness who *dogora gehwam   dream gehyrde / hludne in healle* ("heard each day the loud joy in the hall," 88-89a). As this creature's listening to the performance is closely linked to his painful suffering (*earfoðlice / . . . geþolode*, "painfully . . . he suffered," 86-87), and since his first attack on Heorot immediately follows the account of the creation song, it is hard not to assume that it is the sound of the performance that prompts Grendel's campaign of violence.[14] Grendel's behavior is the antithesis of the ideal for an auditor of traditional verse; on hearing the sounds of oral performance he threatens to destroy the very arena of its production.[15] *Beowulf* dreams of a world of primary orality, but it does so fitfully and uneasily.

Sounds of oral performance in Heorot are projected again in *Beowulf*: at lines 496a-97b before Hunferth's challenging of Beowulf (and possibly immediately afterwards, at 611-12b); at 1063-1160b, when Hrothgar's *scop* tells his lay of Finn and Hengest; and at 2105-14 when Beowulf appears to describe the aged Hrothgar telling *gyd* ("song") in his own court. Space does not permit a full examination of each of these episodes; it can only be suggested that while on the one hand the *Beowulf*-poet is keen to fix the sounds of performance in Heorot within a network

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[13] That joy always turns to sorrow in the poem has long been recognized as an almost structural aspect of *Beowulf*. See, for example, Andersson 1980.

[14] Opland (1980a:192-93) makes this assumption. While I acknowledge the possibility of his argument that the activities of harping, singing, and narrating are here (and elsewhere in *Beowulf*) carried out by separate individuals, I accept the consensus view that one actor is performing these roles here.

[15] We have already been alerted, of course, to the fact that that arena is fragile and impermanent; no sooner had the *Beowulf*-poet recounted the construction of Heorot than he revealed that its fate is to be destroyed in surges of hostility and hateful fire (*heaðowylma . . . / laðan liges*, 82b-83a). This in turn attunes us to one of the recurring patterns of the poem (possibly eschatological in conviction): that creation is always at the opposite end of an arc that curves towards destruction. The *scop*'s creation song, then, invites its own silencing.

of shared, positive communal values,[16] on the other hand the poem's outer audience has been alerted to that of which the poem's inner audience is unaware, namely the precariousness of the auditorium. The poem's outer audience is also made aware of the dramatic ironies that are set echoing with each performance (such as the juxtaposition of Hildeburh's fate with Wealtheow's hopes when the story of Finn and Hengest is told). The last example sees a slight modulation of the nexus of associations that are brought into the text around the performance *topos*. For while Hrothgar's poem-telling is accompanied by *hearpan wynne* ("joy of the harp," 2107b), as one might expect, Beowulf also tells us that the king's *spell* ("story," 2109b) was *sarlic* ("mournful," 2109a), and that as he proceeds to *cwiðan* ("lament," 2112b), Hrothgar's *hreðer [in]ne weoll* ("heart surged within," 2113b). Another chain of transmission is unwinding here, moving backward into what remains only tenuously within living memory and will soon become the distant heroic past as Beowulf revisits and revoices the aged Hrothgar's own nostalgic return to the memories of his youth.[17]

We are therefore already prepared for the more dramatic shift of emphasis that occurs with regard to the performance *topos* in the last third of the poem. As the poem tacks course into its more overtly elegiac home run, the noise of harp and *scop* are invoked only to note that they are inaudible, that their sounds, along with the pleasures they connote, have vanished echoless into the past. The poem often ventriloquizes these laments for poetry through digressive or otherwise embedded episodes, and these add a layer of distance to the articulation of poetic inexpressibility. Nevertheless, whereas the poet once distanced or doubled himself in order to try to actualize the aural trace of poetic utterance within the text (however fraught or problematic that attempt might be), the poet now doubles and distances himself in order to affirm the difficulty with which that trace can be heard and preserved. So, in the so-called "Lay of the Last Survivor," we are told: *Næs hearpan wyn, / gomen gleobeames* ("There is no joy from the harp, delight of the glee-beam," lines 2262b-63a).[18] While the *Beowulf*-poet mouths these words in the voice of the last member of an otherwise extinguished community, surveying all aspects of its material and cultural expression before they pass forever from meaningful remembrance, it is hard not to hear this direct speech as also expressing the poet's attitude toward a heroic past already slipping beyond recall; one utterance is over-mouthed by a second voice, adding a kind of harmonic texture to the topline. Similarly, when Beowulf contemplates his imminent death, he does so with reference to Hrethel's grief at the accidental killing of one of his sons by another, a grief he in turn compares to that of the father of an executed son. For such a man, we are told: *nis þær hearpan sweg, / gomen in geardum, swylce ðær iu wæron* ("There is no sound of the harp, delight in courts, as there once were," 2458b-59). Here, as elsewhere, the poet is practicing a technique whereby one utterance is layered over with the perspective of several possible

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[16] On the poet's collocation of performance and joy in Denmark, and the subsequent invocation of this network of associations to note their absence in Geatland, see Opland 1980a:197-99. On the performance of the Finnsburg episode in this respect, see Clark 1990:78-79.

[17] On nostalgia as a driving engine of the Anglo-Saxons' own construction of oral poetry, as a return to what never was, and as an impulse "oriented towards a conflicted present," see Niles 2007:179.

[18] On the "Lay" as another example of the staging of oral composition and a voice with no auditor, see Thormann 1992.

speakers. What results is a blurring of the focalizer (or should one say vocalizer?), or at least the simultaneous co-existence of several focalizers, a method that allows the utterance to become free of its immediate context, enabling it to speak to and of the wider concerns of the poem as a whole: *Beowulf* is preoccupied with the difficulty of hearing the sound of the harp as it was once practiced—with delight—in heroic courts. For a poem that may have its own origins in oral composition for aristocratic patrons, or at least a poem that encourages us to believe those are its origins, this amounts to self-referential anxiety about the continuation of a cultural tradition within which the textual poem wants to be read. The final note of this motif is sounded towards the end of the Geatish messenger's proclamation of Beowulf's death, when one of the details that metonymically betokens the passing of a heroic age along with the hero is that *nalles hearpan sweg / wigend weccean* ("Not at all [shall] the sound of the harp wake the warriors," 3023b-24a).

Although this anxiety about the possibility of hearing the sound of oral performance can be accounted for aesthetically as expressing an aspect of the poem's wider thematic concern with the continued ductility of heroic ideals, it can also be contextualized in light of the historical and cultural situation in which the poem found itself. For what the *Beowulf* of the Nowell Codex witnesses is the encoding of certain ideas about traditional storytelling and -retelling, the nexus of making and transmission that has been previously mentioned, within and through the technology of script. In its deployment of various traditional formulae, and its tapping of what John Miles Foley (1991a) has termed the "immanent art" of traditional oral cultures,[19] *Beowulf*, although textual and produced by a scribal culture, wants to be read, or rather heard, within the context of an oral tradition. It hopes its readers are knowledgeable of the idioms of such a culture; it hopes its readers are also hearers, as competent in the one medium as they are in the other. By the time our text was produced, close to the turn of the millennium, such a hope may have come to seem faint, or at least less certain. What room is there in the scriptorium for the harp?[20] *Nis þær hearpan sweg, / gomen in geardum,   swylce ðær iu wæron* might be seen as a motto for a number of the concerns both within and outside of the text.

Literary history has proved that *Beowulf* had good reason to be apprehensive about the continuing audibility of the sounds of Old English verse; for several centuries its music was almost entirely unheard,[21] and it was not until the twentieth century that working poets regularly began to investigate and stage those sounds again in their own verse, as the *Beowulf*-poet had done perhaps a millennium or so earlier. During the nineteenth century there were one or two notable exceptions; Tennyson's translation of *The Battle of Brunanburh* performs the rhythms of Old English as he understood them to have operated from the account given by Sharon Turner: fitful and predominantly falling, in measures similar to the trochaic and dactylic feet of standard accentual-syllabics (see Ricks 1987; Turner 1807; Eggers 1971:217). Instances such as this are

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[19] For a distillation of some of these ideas, see Foley 2002:109-24.

[20] Roy Liuzza (2005) writes compellingly on this and other aspects of the poem's own sense of belatedness. Niles speculates that anxiety "in some circles regarding the loss of a former heritage" was experienced as a result of the Benedictine monastic reform of the tenth century (2007:151-52).

[21] See Frank 1993 for an overview of William of Malmesbury's twelfth-century fantasies in this respect, as well as of the editorial attention Old English poetry received before the nineteenth century. For more detail on this latter topic, including the editing of poems not recognized as such, see Plumer 2000.

relatively isolated, however, and in general the interest in Old English in the nineteenth century is philological rather than acoustic. It is Ezra Pound's translation of *The Seafarer*, first published in 1911, that changed this state of affairs.[22] As Michael Alexander has remarked, "though the sense of [Pound's] 'The Seafarer' bears no consistent relation to the sense of the original, the sound of 'The Seafarer' is an authentic if new kind of translation" (1998:75).

Pound's version of the Old English *Seafarer* is really an exercise in the construction and projection of a voice, a voice articulated through an approximation of the sounds of Old English verse, sounds that continued to fascinate him throughout life,[23] as his unpublished essay "The Music of Beowulf" demonstrates.[24] In brief, Pound's three major developments from Old English meter are as follows. First, he allows syllables with primary and secondary stress to fall proximately, as they could in the Old English half-lines that Eduard Sievers' system of "five types" describes as C, D, and E verses (even though Pound does not observe the "rules" about where these consecutive stresses may fall in a line).[25] Consecutive stresses are rare in pre-twentieth-century accentual-syllabic English verse—the occasional spondee being the nearest equivalent. Second, Pound favors rhythmical patterns that are predominantly falling (corresponding to trochaic and dactylic feet in standard accentual syllabics), just as Sievers' type A is the most commonly occurring pattern in Old English. And third, he frequently juxtaposes a line or half-line in one pattern (whether falling, rising, clashing, and so forth) with one of different character, as was common practice in Old English verse. In addition to these three main effects, Pound also elides a number of linguistic particles from his verse, typically articles (as Old English was able to do), thereby paring his syntax of many of the unstressed syllables required in modern English, compacting his lines further, and increasing the likelihood of stressed syllables becoming consecutive. A high concentration of newly coined compound words, some calqued on Old English models, has a similar effect. Furthermore, Pound peppers his verse with alliteration, not in strict imitation of Old English patterns, but with enough density to give an impressionistic sense of the richly woven consonance of Old English poetry. This acoustic texture is distinct from that heard in nineteenth-century verse (except perhaps in the case of the then scarcely-read Hopkins) and clearly audible (Pound 2003:236-37, lines 32-39):

> Neareth nightshade, snoweth from north,
> Frost froze the land, hail fell on earth then
> Corn of the coldest. Natheless there knocketh now
> The heart's thought that I on high streams

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[22] Pound's "The Seafarer" was first published in *The New Age* (1911) and reprinted in *Poems and Translations* (2003). For the text of *The Seafarer*, see Krapp and Dobbie 1936:143-46.

[23] I have analyzed the rhythmic composition of these sounds in Jones 2006.

[24] "The Music of Beowulf" typescript is at Yale, Beinecke Library, Ezra Pound Papers, YCAL MSS 43, Box 69, Folder 3045. It was first noticed in Robinson 1982. The essay was finished on 8 December 1928, according to an unpublished letter to his father of that date, held in Beinecke Library, Ezra Pound Papers, YCAL MSS 43, Box 61, folder 2696.

[25] The "five types" model of Old English meter was first set out in Sievers 1885. Good introductory accounts of the model can be found in Scragg 1991 and in McCully and Hilles 2005.

> The salt-wavy tumult traverse alone.
>
> Moaneth alway my mind's lust
>
> That I fare forth, that I afar hence
>
> Seek out a foreign fastness.[26]

Pound's "Seafarer" performs the sounds of Old English poetry within a new medium, "making it new," making, that is, by transmitting. [27]

This carrying over, or *translation*, of a verbal soundscape from Old English into modern English does not end in Pound's "Seafarer," however. Rather, similar aural patterns are heard in "Canto I," a poem that begins Pound's epic by returning, through a spiral of possible beginnings for the tradition in which it desires to be read, in search of an origin myth for itself. Thus the poem retells a story from Homeric epic, the putative beginnings of European poetic tradition. Furthermore, Pound selects that section of the *Odyssey* that was traditionally held to be the oldest of the Homeric material, the "Nekuia" or "Book of the Dead," in which Odysseus himself visits the shades of the dead in order to be able to begin his voyage anew. Pound tells this material (incidentally out of Andreas Divus' Renaissance Latin translation, refracting Homer through another cultural myth of new beginnings and origins) in a voice derived "from the early Anglo-Saxon" *Seafarer*, a voice characterized by its spiky cadences formed around consecutive stressed syllables, variable but frequently falling rhythms, weightily coined compound words, and liberal alliterative pointing. In speaking the matter of one possible literary origin (Homeric epic) through the sounds of another (an example of the earliest surviving English poetry), "Canto I" enacts a return to roots and indulges in what might be termed "poeto-genesis" just as much as *Beowulf* does in its portrait of the Danish *scop*.

As I treat at greater length elsewhere (Jones 2006:44-49), this account of the echoes of "The Seafarer" (and so of *The Seafarer*) in the aural fabric of "Canto I" is adumbrated.[28] What I wish to suggest here is that Pound, by listening to the sounds of Old English and retransmitting them through his translation and compositional praxis, makes available an idiom to subsequent poets that we might tentatively liken in some respects to the kind of traditional, idiomatic language in which oral-formulaic singers and their audiences are assumed to be competent. When, in an oral, residually oral, or orally imitative text, a formula such as *under harne stan* is uttered,[29] or a motif such as "the beasts of battle" is given voice,[30] a listener fluent in the text's idiom is assumed to import to the poem at this point knowledge of the whole tradition—of all his

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[26] For a recording of Pound reading "The Seafarer," see http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Pound.html. For the impact of early radio and sound recording on the textuality of modernist poetry, see Weiss 2002.

[27] According to "Canto LIII," the Chinese Emperor Tching Tang had the ideogram for "make it new" engraved on his bathtub (Pound 1990:265). Pound adopts the slogan as his own, using it as the title of a collection of his essays (1934).

[28] For an account of spondaic sound effects in "Canto XLV" also being derived from Old English, see Brooke-Rose 1976.

[29] See *Beowulf*, 887b, 1415a (as the variant *ofer harne stan*), 2744b.

[30] See *Beowulf*, lines 3024b-27.

or her previous encounters with that formulaic phrase or motif. In doing this, the phrase or passage will become invested with an idiomatic significance beyond that of the words' immediate context. Listeners/readers will understand that the hero is about to step beyond the familiar world of the real and into a realm of possibly supernatural danger (Swisher 2002:133-36), or that imminent slaughter in battle is being presaged.[31] If these expectations are not met by the poem, the listener/reader will then understand that a traditional meaning has been invoked in order for the familiar to be bent into a new shape. This is unlike the kind of individuated, one-to-one correspondence that readers are invited to seek out in more literary intertextual allusions of the kind made by Eliot to Dante, for example, in *The Waste Land*; here a reader is invited to locate an exact source for the intertextual reference. According to the paradigm assumed to operate with oral "intertextuality," a whole tradition or corpus is touched and tapped into by the individual work when it deploys a formulaic pattern or scene. Foley (1991a, 1995) describes this contact as working metonymically: a detail or a part signals a whole. The pattern or scene is a switch through which the specific and particular is brought into a wider, traditional context. This invocation and implication of a meaningful cultural context by deployment of traditional metonymic idiom is what Foley terms "immanent art."[32]

Twentieth-century poets writing in English and disseminating their work chiefly through the medium of print are of course not workers of a traditional oral-formulaic idiom such as Foley refers to with the term "immanent art." While acknowledging this, and not wishing to flatten out the enormous differences that exist between a poet participating in an oral culture and a poet like Ezra Pound, it is still true that for many print poets, verbal utterance, audible manifestation of voice, is the dreamed-of entelechy of the text.[33] An aural structure can itself be invested with meaning, although this meaning is cultural rather than lexical. When a density of aural effects such as consecutive stressed syllables and word-compounding, alliteration, falling rhythms, and varied cadences are given voice, the total resulting acoustic gauze may be so strongly suggestive of the sound of Old English verse that a whole canon of Old English poetry may be implied to lie behind or beyond the local poetic utterance, analogous to the way in which traditional meaning is summoned into an oral or quasi-oral text by the invocation of a specific idiom. Of course, the exact composition of a whole canon of Old English poetry will itself vary from reader to reader, according to the nature of the individual's fluency in that tradition; for most twentieth-century readers who have had some experience of that tradition, it will likely have consisted of *Beowulf*, the elegies of the Exeter Book (*The Seafarer*, *The Wanderer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and so on), *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Battle of Maldon*, and perhaps a few others such as the Exeter Book riddles, and it may have consisted of modern translations of those poems (including Pound's) as well as, or instead of, edited original language texts of the Old English poems. To borrow some

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[31] For example, see Bonjour 1957 and Stanley 2000.

[32] See note 19, as well as, for an illustration of how the metonymic dynamic of immanent art operates on a *pars pro toto* basis, Foley 1991b:42.

[33] Perhaps the most explicit expression of this position comes from the poetry and prose of Basil Bunting (1966), who wrote (but later also qualified) "the sound, whether it be in the word or notes, is all that matters" (cited in Forde 1991:76). For a recording of Bunting reading from "Briggflatts," the most significant work he composed from this position, visit http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoem.do?poemId=7500.

of the ideas and terminology of Foley's "immanent art," an aural register (here, one reminiscent of Old English) is the code or switch that can provide access to the implications inherent in an absent body of literature (in this case, Old English poetry).

To illustrate how this contiguity between a twentieth-century poem and the Old English tradition might be established through corporealization of a soundscape and what the effects of this might be, consideration will be given to two post-Poundian compositions:[34] "The Voyages of Alfred Wallis" by W. S. Graham (2004:87) and "Spacepoem 3: Off Course" by Edwin Morgan (1990:268-69). Graham and Morgan have been chosen in part because they both studied the aural ecosystem of Old English poetry: Graham at Newbattle College in 1938-39 (Lopez 1989:2), and partly through Pound's translation of *The Seafarer*—a poem he cites as an influence on his long poem *The Nightfishing* (Snow and Snow 1999:366-67)—and Morgan at the University of Glasgow, between 1937 and 1947 (interrupted for five years by the war) under Ritchie Girvan, using, among other texts, the ninth edition of Henry Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse* (Jones 2004:47).[35] One must be knowledgeable of an idiom before one can manipulate it.

Graham unmistakably contours the opening lines of "The Voyages of Alfred Wallis" according to the soundscape of Old English verse (87):

> Worldhauled, he's grounded on God's great bank,
> Keelheaved to Heaven, waved into boatfilled arms,
> Falls his homecoming leaving that old sea testament,
> Watching the restless land sail rigged alongside
> Townfulls of shallows, gulls on sailing roofs.

The striking opening neologism, compounded from two monosyllables that would normally carry full stress (the second here demoted to secondary stress by being yoked to the first), sounds Anglo-Saxon, although it has no direct precedent there; adjectival compounds formed from a noun as first-element and an adjective as second-element were common in Old English, although adjectival past participles as the second element were much less common.[36] Followed by "he's grounded," the compound "Worldhauled" initiates a pattern of falling rhythm in the first half-line of the poem, rhythmically identical to a phrase such as "Grey-haired he groaneth" in Pound's "Seafarer," and akin to the pattern of Old English cadence that Sievers described as "Type A." A rising rhythm in the second half of the line counterpoints the opening movement and could be performed as a "Type B" if "great" is demoted in stress; other readers

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[34] There is, in fact, a richness of material in this vein. Any number of poems discussed in *Strange Likeness* by Pound, Auden, Morgan, and Seamus Heaney could have been used here, as well as, for example, Richard Wilbur (2004:261-62) or W. S. Merwin (1956:11). Something of a tradition of poems invoking an Old English soundscape exists in the twentieth century. I am not happy with my previous discussion of Morgan's "Spacepoem 3" (Jones 2006:150 and 173). I have not previously written about Graham's "Alfred Wallis" at any length.

[35] Also private correspondence with the author, 2 May 1997 and 2 February 1998. For further details see Jones 2006:124-26.

[36] Given Graham's obsessive wordplay and his interest in language itself as subject, it is hard not to see "worldhauled" as a paranomastic calque from *wordhord*, the Old English compound metaphor for a poet's vocabulary, the "word-hoard" that the poet is said to unlock in *Widsith* (Krapp and Dobbie 1936:149).

may voice the final syllables as three consecutive stresses, a rare effect in traditional accentual syllabics but precedented in Pound's "Seafarer" and "Canto I," where the motif is sometimes deployed at the end of a line in phrases such as "ice-cold sea," "hail-scur flew," and "bronze lance heads."[37] Rhythmically, the poem's opening half-line is echoed precisely by "Keelheaved to Heaven" at the start of line two. Reiterating the hook in this way draws the ear's attention to it more insistently and to its construction from newly compounded material, redolent with Anglo-Saxon plangency (similar Anglo-Saxonesque compounds are coined later in the poem: "prayerspray," "seagreat," "shipcry").

Elsewhere in these opening lines, falling rhythms predominate, contrived where necessary by inverting standard modern English word order and placing verb before subject ("Falls his homecoming"), as was possible in Old English (e.g., *nap nihtscua*, line 31 of *The Seafarer*, or Pound's appropriation of the structure in his "Seafarer": "Waneth the watch"). This preponderance of falling rhythms in the poem, of cadences that would have to be described as trochaic and dactylic in the terminology of traditional accentual-syllabic analysis, drawing as it does on the sounds of early English verse, contradicts the commonly voiced view that there is a linguistically iambic essentialism inherent to the English language.

While Graham does not deploy alliteration as a structural principle, as in Old English verse, there is an impressionistic sense of the device here, in the density of consonantal patterning on /h/, /g/, /r/, and /s/, similar to Pound's freer experiments with the sound-system of Old English poetry in "Canto I" (although here also coupled with assonance). These same aural effects are voiced throughout the poem; in particular, the text often weights its prosody with consecutive stressed syllables, sometimes drawing attention to their sound by alliteration: "stone sailor," "black boats," "loud limpet." Pointing proximate stressed syllables with alliteration in this way is a device not required in Old English half-lines of the C, D, and E types, but is possible when those patterns occur as the first half-line, or verse, of a line.

It is, of course, impossible to write of the aural texture of a poem without also writing about its lexical and morphosyntactic qualities; in the above analysis, description of falling rhythm and consecutive stress necessitates discussion of word choice and word order. It might be claimed that Graham's deployment of Anglo-Saxonisms in this poem is as much linguistic as it is phonic, an assertion that cannot be denied only because it is always true of language. The point I wish to make, however, is that out of language—the material from which the poem is constructed —an Anglo-Saxonist mesh of sound is created, and that soundscape, which we might think of as an aural allusion, an allusion in sound, has a meaning, the operation of which we might liken to the traditional meaning Foley describes with the term "immanent art." For the invocation of the aural ecosystem of Old English verse puts "The Voyages of Alfred Wallis" into conversation with that body of literature, at least as it was commonly understood, mediated, and transmitted in the middle of the twentieth century. That is to say, a corpus of heroic and elegiac verse that would include *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Maldon*, *The Dream of the Rood*, as well as other lyrics and elegies from the Exeter Book, is brought to bear on Graham's "Voyages of Alfred Wallis," itself an elegy for the Cornish painter who died in 1942.

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[37] That Pound is fond of double consecutive stressed syllables, especially at the ends of lines, is well established. See Brooke-Rose 1971:89 and Kenner 1991:192-94.

Themes characteristic of Old English verse, such as the loss of companions, the transitory nature of human comfort and achievement, as well as certain allegorical patterns of understanding, such as an ocean-going passage towards safe harbor representing the journey of the Christian soul towards God, are brought into contact with Graham's poem through its strategy of voicing the world. We might even be justified in bringing into conjunction with "Voyages" specific scenes from certain Old English poems, such as the funeral ship in *Beowulf* (lines 26-52) or the unconsoling cries of the seabirds heard by the *wineleas guma* ("companionless man") of *The Wanderer* (Krapp and Dobbie 1936:134-37, lines 45-48), who does not yet enjoy the mercy of God, in contradistinction to the subject of Graham's poem, towards the end of which "the gulls wade into silence." Claiming allusion to specific passages on the basis of aural influence may be considered too tendentious by some, but the more general point that the themes and motifs of Graham's poem are embedded within a body of English poetry from the distant past, and given a sense of historical depth, through the poem's weaving of a music that reminisces for the sounds of Old English (much as *Beowulf* does for the sounds of a distant, heroic oral culture) holds good. Old English poetry and "The Voyages of Alfred Wallis" are allowed to percolate each other through the thin film of voiced sound.

Edwin Morgan's re-performance of an Old English soundscape in "Spacepoem 3: Off Course" is not as linguistically outré as Graham's. Rather, the poem is constructed out of two-stress noun phrases that constantly vary in lexical content while repeating the same syntax. Rhythmically, then, the poem is formed from units of the same weight as the Old English half-line, although their cumulative effect is more monotonous than most Old English verse. The aural likeness of these noun phrases to Old English half-lines is visually emphasized by their layout—two units to the line, with a gap of extra white space between them, as modern editions set out Old English verse (Morgan 1990:268):

the golden flood   the weightless seat
the cabin song   the pitch black
the growing beard   the floating crumb
the shining rendezvous   the orbit wisecrack
the hot spacesuit   the smuggled mouth-organ

As the poem progresses, its component adjectives and nouns recur, split from their original pairs, and reform into new combinations, until the poem reaches its end (269):

the floating lifeline   the pitch sleep
the crawling camera   the turning silence
the space crumb   the crackling beard
the orbit mouth-organ   the floating song.

Language, like all matter, whether it exists in page-space or outer space, is limited in its constituent parts but infinite in the permutations possible from its own resources; it constantly renews itself by returning to its elements, just as this futuristic science-fiction poem returns to Old English rhythms to project itself into an imaginary future. As already noted, the poem does

not imitate Old English verse patterns in any strict sense. Indeed, being written in Modern English, it cannot. Rather it takes a line, or tradition, and traces the evolution and deviation of that tradition, of its course from the distant past into the future, and of its going "off course" over time. This distortion of the trajectory of a sound system is enacted visually, as the Old English-influenced line literally shifts off course, or deviates from its origin, just over halfway through the poem (269):

the cabin sunrise   the hot flood
the shining spacesuit   the growing moon
  the crackling somersault   the smuggled orbit
  the rough moon   the visionary rendezvous.

Again, the invocation of the Old English poetic soundscape brings this poem into a contiguous relationship with the whole corpus. The Old English *topos* of the sea voyage, evident in *Beowulf* as well as *The Seafarer*, is inevitably brought to bear on our reading of Morgan's poem, a poem that arguably is a vessel itself, made in, from, and for language: a song that finally proclaims itself to be, like a ship, "floating" (*flota* is a term used for Beowulf's ship in lines 210b, 218a, 294b, and 310b). Themes from Old English poetry such as the need for exploration, both inner and outer, are rewritten as perennial, while the space-poet, whose gaze encompasses the "turning continents," echoes the rhythmical patterns uttered by his ancestor, the fictional Anglo-Saxon poet Widsith, the "far-traveler," who boasts of having spent time among every tribe of the world as it was known to him (Krapp and Dobbie 1936:149-53).[38]

Both "The Voyages of Alfred Wallis" and "Spacepoem 3" are products of a highly evolved print culture, but both poems also desire to be voiced, in their approximations, imitations, and echoes of the Old English soundscape; they foreground their aural structure (Morgan's poem partly by deploying the visual signals made available through the medium of print) and beg to be uttered. Without Old English being directly quoted, but by its sounds being ventriloquized, the unspoken corpus finds voice, and the unstated is made present. Naturally, these sounds are not authentic reproductions of the aurality of Old English verse; they are refractions, deviations, mediations: sounds evolved "off course." But we have already observed that *Beowulf* itself does not capture the authentic sounds of oral performance except through the same processes. If the auditors of "Alfred Wallis" and "Spacepoem 3" recognize the soundscape that is being evoked, a richly suggestive interpretative context is implied for these poems, and a conversation starts to open up between the present and the past. "Alfred Wallis" and "Spacepoem 3" voice themselves into a network of Old English traditional scenes and common thematic materials that become part of the poems' matrix of meaningful intertextuality, or, to adopt Foley's language for talking about traditional idiom, these poems resonate with extratextual meaning, the allusion not referring to any specific intertext, but rather implying a whole corpus.

What I am suggesting, then, is that a type of allusion is operating here that has not previously received proper recognition. These poems initiate or trigger an aural allusion, an

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[38] In Morgan's poem "The Sputnik's Tale" (2007:40), the conceit of the artificial satellite as a modern "Widsith" ("Far-traveler") is made explicit.

allusion in sound, not between two texts or passages at the specific and local level but between one individual poem and a larger body of work. That body differs in its mode of textuality from the trigger poem; it is a body of traditional and formulaic poetry produced by a scribal culture marked by oral practice, which has been subsequently canonized, stabilized, and reified by nineteenth- and twentieth-century editors according to models of textuality that emerge from print culture. In this respect the aural allusion differs markedly from Foley's model of immanent art, which describes the relationship between tradition and a component part of that tradition. Clearly, twentieth-century poems initiating an aural allusion to Old English do not belong to that triggered tradition. Indeed, if they did, the whole need to describe the phenomenon of aural allusion would not arise at all; rather, by deploying the tradition's conventional sound effects, they would be straightforwardly participating within that tradition. For this cross-corpus aural allusion to operate effectively, the triggering poems need their readers to be competent in the tradition they invoke; they need their readers to hear and recognize the aural weave and to know something of what has previously been voiced in it. In these respects the poems operate in ways not dissimilar to *Beowulf*. We have here two twentieth-century poems of the printed page that wish to be heard against the background noise of Old English poetry as recovered by modern editors. *Beowulf* is a late tenth- or early eleventh-century product of a scribal culture that wishes to be heard within the context of an oral tradition, as remembered, witnessed, or imagined by the book-learned. It seems that the narrator of *Beowulf* need not have been so anxious about the possibility of the sounds of the harp being audible in the courts of the future; "harp" is also a blues nickname for the harmonica, or mouth-organ, and there is one of those smuggled into the cabin of Edwin Morgan's "Spacepoem."

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