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Grief, Resurrection & Renewal: *geniwad* in Old English Verse

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This article examines the Old English poetic formula *hyht wæs geniwad* (“hope was renewed”) using tools derived from Oral-Formulaic Theory and usage-based linguistics. It suggests that the formula is specifically connected to Resurrection and that it was developed within a small group of closely-related poems, on the basis of an earlier formula expressing overwhelming grief and loss.

Keywords: formula; usage-based linguistics; construction; oral-formulaic theory; emotion; Cynewulf; *Beowulf*

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that Old English poetry is heavily formulaic. Many half-lines of poetry are found in several of the extant poems, either in exactly the same form or with some modification. In the 20th century, Oral-Formulaic Theory taught us much about how such formulas could be used to produce rich poetic effects.¹

In the field of linguistics, from the 1970s onwards, there has been a growing recognition that so-called “prefabs” (i.e. word sequences which are not freely composed by the speaker and decoded by the hearer through analysis of their components, but which are already pre-assembled) are much more common in ordinary speech than used to be assumed.² This interest has gathered pace in the 21st century, with multiple conferences and publications dedicated to the topic.

In recent years, the two fields have shown signs of convergence, or at least of mutual interest.³ The interest is certainly justified: although both communities of

¹ See in particular Parry, “Studies in the Epic Technique”; Lord, *The Singer of Tales*; Foley, *Immanent Art, The Singer of Tales in Performance and How to Read an Oral Poem*.

² Bolinger, “Meaning and Memory”, 2–3.

³ Wray devotes a full chapter to “Formulaic language and the oral tradition” in *Formulaic Language, Pushing the Boundaries*, 37–48, and is in turn quoted by Mize, *Traditional*

scholars have worked largely independently and with different objects and methodologies, they have reached remarkably similar conclusions on a number of important points so that a significant number of claims of oral-formulaic theory regarding the ways in which formulas are learned, used and processed by members of a traditional community have been found to have validity for ordinary speech as well,⁴ bringing significant scientific backing to Foley's claim that "oral poetry works like language, only more so".⁵

In essence, it can be argued that the formulaicity exhibited by oral-traditional texts is a considerably heightened version of phenomena that exist in ordinary speech, and that this intensification of the expressive power of formulas is made possible by a highly codified situation of communication among insiders from the same tight-knit community.⁶

Subjectivities, 96–7. See also the contributions in Frog, ed., *Formula: Units of Speech, 'Words' of Verbal Art*.

⁴ This is true, for instance, for the claims that the most stable formulas are determined in large part by frequency of use, which in turn is determined by the communicative needs of the users (see Lord, *Singer of Tales*, 21–2 and 34; Wray, *Formulaic Language and the Lexicon*, 268); and that hearers know to interpret formulas idiomatically (rather than componentially) because the formula is associated with a specific situation or register (see Foley, *Immanent Art*, 130–9; Wray, *Formulaic Language: Pushing the Boundaries*, 117).

⁵ Foley, *Singer of Tales in Performance*, 127.

⁶ See Wray 2008, *Formulaic Language: Pushing the Boundaries*, 53–54: "Esoterically-oriented communication operates between individuals who know each other and have a single group identity, culture and environment, so that a huge amount of knowledge about daily practices is already shared. ... One of the features of languages employed for esoteric communication is a high level of formulaicity."

Among usage-based approaches, Construction Grammar is especially interesting for the study of oral-traditional formulas for at least two reasons. First, its central tenet that language is made up of constructions of various lengths and degrees of complexity (simple morphemes, polymorphic words, idioms, schematic structures, etc.), which all have in common the fact that they are arbitrary but conventionalized form-meaning pairings allows us to think of formulaicity as a very broad spectrum, which better reflects the reality of the phenomenon.⁷ Second, it encourages us to take into account language change in our examination of formulas: while thinking of “tradition” in abstract terms can encourage a static view, thinking in terms of construction almost inevitably leads us to consider the evolution of a formula over time.

Description of the *geniwad*-formula

In this paper, I would like to focus on a particular Old English formula, based on the past participle *geniwad*, “renewed”. I will use conceptual tools derived both from Oral-Formulaic Theory and from usage-based linguistics to analyse the meaning of that construction, how it evolved through time and how that meaning is exploited in different textual contexts.

In traditional Oral-Formulaic terms, the *geniwad*-formula is actually a formulaic system, i.e. a pattern which can be instantiated by formulas which do not use all of the same words, but which serve a similar function and adopt a similar structure. Such semi-fixed patterns are commonly found in ordinary speech as well. In Construction Grammar terminology, they are referred to as partially schematic constructions.⁸ Joan

⁷ Hoffmann & Trousdale, “Construction Grammar”; on the notion of oral-formulaicity as a spectrum see in particular Foley, *Immanent Art*, 16 and *Singer of Tales in Performance*, 50.

⁸ Parry, “Studies in the Epic Technique”, 85; Hoffmann & Trousdale, “Construction Grammar”.

Bybee suggests the use of an exemplar cloud to represent such constructions.⁹ The most frequently encountered pattern is placed at the centre and, for each variable slot, the paradigm of possible variants is shown with varying font sizes representing the number of tokens attested for each type.

While the cloud is based on the corpus under study, it is meant to give an approximation of what imprint the construction may have left in a given speaker's mind: each encounter with an instance of the construction will have left a trace and the most frequently encountered types will have left the deepest impression. Indeed, Bybee claims that "each token of experienced linguistic behavior has an impact on cognitive representation" and that "memory storage for linguistic experience includes detailed information about the tokens (...) including their form and the contexts in which they were used", which echoes Foley's assertion that traditional referentiality entails the invoking of an echoic context that feeds on generations of poems and performances.¹⁰

This model of representation is of course very incomplete, since it only allows for one dimension of the construction to be represented at the same time (here, its morpho-syntactic form, but it could also be used to represent its meaning or pragmatic implications, or the contexts in which it can occur, for instance, but not everything at once).

The word *geniwad* (or its spelling variant, *geniwod*) is encountered 19 times in the Old English extant corpus,¹¹ 15 of them in poetry (79%), although poetry represents less than 6% of the extant corpus. 4 occurrences are found in the same poetic formula:

⁹ Bybee, "Usage-based Theory".

¹⁰ Bybee, "Usage-based Theory"; Foley, *Immanent Art*, 7.

¹¹ About 3 millions words, searchable through Toronto's *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, ed. diPaolo Healey et al.

hyht wæs geniwad (“hope was renewed”), which corresponds to a verse of type A in Sievers’s typology.¹² Most other occurrences follow a similar pattern, with varying degrees of closeness: 8 follow the exact same syntactic and metrical pattern, but substitute another noun for *hyht*, typically a noun denoting another strong emotion of some sort, and 4 others retain a collocation with one such noun, but without the metrical and syntactic structure (2 in poetry and 2 in prose). Only 3 occurrences show no connection to the pattern identified (1 in poetry and 2 in prose).

It seems fair to say that the attraction of *geniwad* to that pattern is extremely strong. Conversely, none of the nouns associated to that pattern can be found in the same structure regularly associated with another past participle or predicative complement,¹³ so it is clear that the stable core of the formula is *geniwad* (preceded by a form of the verb *beon*).

¹² Sievers, *Altgermanische Metrik*. The five basic types are presented on p. 31; type A corresponds to two falling feet, e.g. “**L**ondon **C**alling” or “**M**essage in a **B**ottle”. Sievers’ theory has been refined and sometimes challenged by later scholars, but it remains the basis of most descriptions of Old English verse and is sufficient for our purpose (see Pascual, “Sievers, Bliss, Fulk”). Major works on Old English metre include Bliss, *Metre of Beowulf*; Cable, *Meter and Melody of Beowulf* and *English Alliterative Tradition*; Yakovlev, “Development of Alliterative Metre”.

¹³ In poetry, there are only two other instances where *hyht* is followed by a form of *beon*, and they follow a rather different pattern, both from each other and from the one focused on in this paper: *Hyht wæs a in heofonum* (“Hope was always in Heaven”, *Judgment Day* 64a) and *hyht is onfangen* (“hope is received”, *Christ I* 99b), where the past participle is followed by a noun clause introduced by *þæt*. The pattern NOUN_{subject} [beon] [past participle] in a verse of type A seems relatively common, but the only phrase I have found in the poetic corpus using that pattern with a noun also found with *geniwad* is *Wroht wæs asprungen* (“Strife had ceased”, *Genesis A* 83b). This half-line raises the interesting possibility that a dual formula meaning either “strife had ceased” or “strife had started

The exemplar cloud for the *geniwad* formulaic system is as follows:

Sorh					Sorrow			
Cearu	bið				Grief	is	(generic present)	
/	x	x	/	x	/	x	x	/
Hyht	wæs	geniwad			Hope	was	renewed	
Wroht	is				Strife	is	(unmarked present)	
Heaf					Mourning			
Hrægl					Garment			
Eall					All			
...					...			

Figure 1. Exemplar Cloud for *hyht wæs geniwad*.

It is important to keep in mind that the extant corpus is limited in size (even though it is exceptionally large by comparison with other vernacular languages in Western Europe at the time) and that the selection of poems may not be representative of the poetic production (or reception) in Old English at any given period. The potential for bias is also increased by the fact that some poems contain several occurrences, which, given the small number of occurrences overall, may be enough to create a strong distortion in the data. Therefore, the cloud shown here cannot claim to be an accurate representation of the pattern stored in the memory of any medieval participant in poetic performance, whether as a poet or as a member of the audience. However, it is the closest approximation available and it makes it easier to consider all types of the formula at a glance.

again” might have existed at some point, but there is little evidence of that and only one instance of *asprungen* in the whole poetic corpus.

The first slot of the construction is obviously constrained metrically. The type-A verse allows for more than two unstressed syllables after the first stress, so a polysyllabic noun (which would take its stress on the first syllable, as most Old English words do) would theoretically be possible here, but all our examples seem to be monosyllabic.¹⁴

It is also constrained semantically, which is consistent with what one would expect from a partially schematic construction:

For instance, it is often found that the set of lexical items that can occupy a slot in a construction may be constituted of two or more clusters of closely related items.... Such clusters of highly related items are the results of item-based analogy....¹⁵

Most of the nouns encountered in the initial position express a strong emotion of some sort. This is obviously the case for all the nouns encountered more than once: *hyht* (“joyful hope”, 4 occurrences), *sorh* (“sorrow”, “grief”, “anxiety”, 2 occurrences) and *cearu* (“sorrow”, “grief”, 2 occurrences).

Heaf and *wroht* are also both connected to intense negative emotions. *Heaf* refers to mourning or weeping, whereas *wroht* has meanings ranging from accusation or slander to quarrel or injury leading to a quarrel. In the line where that word is found, the

¹⁴ At first glance, *cearu* looks like an exception, but for the half-line to scan correctly, it needs to undergo resolution and count as just one syllable. Normally, only long syllables can carry metrical stress, but short syllables can be counted as long when they are followed by an unstressed syllable which is unnecessary for the metre. The first syllable of *cearu* is short (short diphthong followed by only one consonant in the middle of a word), but it is followed by another short syllable that is unnecessary for the metre. Therefore, resolution can occur and *cearu* counts as one long syllable. See for instance Mitchell and Robinson, *A Guide to Old English*, 162–3.

¹⁵ Bybee, “Usage-based Theory”.

meaning seems to be closest to “quarrel” or “strife”. A thief has removed an item from the treasure of a dragon which had been slumbering for three hundred years:

þa se wyrm onwoc, **wroht wæs geniwad** (*Beowulf* 2287)

Then the dragon awoke, **strife was renewed**¹⁶

The dragon then looks for the thief and becomes enraged when it cannot find him, eventually unleashing destruction on the land in revenge for the theft. Whether *wroht* can be understood as an emotion here is debatable, but support for that interpretation can be found in *Guthlac A*:

ða wæs eft swa ær ealdfeonda nið,

wroht onwylled. (390-391a)

Then the hostility of the old foes was back again as before,

strife boiled up.¹⁷

As noted by Leslie Lockett, the use of the verb form *onwylled* in that sentence is typical of the “hydraulic” representation of emotions in Anglo-Saxon literature, where “an intensely negative emotion or thought” is typically represented through “seething and swelling”.¹⁸

¹⁶ All quotations from Old English poetry are taken from Van Kirk Dobbie & Krapp’s *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. All translations are my own.

¹⁷ Interestingly, the noun *nið* presents the same kind of ambivalence as *wroht* and *heaf*, in that, according to Bosworth and Toller’s Dictionary, it can mean the emotion of hatred or envy itself, but also action undertaken under the influence of that emotion or consequences of that hostility on others. It seems, therefore, that in Old English emotions are not necessarily understood as purely psychological phenomena, but rather as forces at the interface of the inner and outer world. “Níþ”, in Bosworth and Toller, eds., *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. 722.

¹⁸ Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, 60.

At first glance, *hrægl* (“garment”, “clothes”) and *eall* (“all”) seem to have no obvious connection to the semantic paradigm here, but I will come back to them later.

A formula for intense loss

Leaving *hrægl* and *eall* aside for now, it seems that the odd one out in our list of items is also our most frequent one: *hyht*. All the other nouns refer to strongly negative emotions, connected to violence, death and loss.

In *Beowulf*, in addition to the episode with the dragon already mentioned, the formula is used twice in the context of Æschere’s unexpected death at the hands of Grendel’s mother. The first time, the poet has just told how Grendel’s mother hurriedly killed Æschere in his sleep, unhindered by Beowulf who was not in that part of the building at the time. He then recounts how she takes back the hand of her dead son, which had been kept as a trophy, before leaving the hall:

Hream wearð in Heorote; heo under heolfre genam
cupe folme; **cearu wæs geniwod**,
geworden in wicun. Ne wæs þæt gewrixle til,
þæt hie on ba healfa bicgan scoldon
freonda feorum. (*Beowulf* 1302-1306a)

There was an uproar in Heorot; she seized the hand that she had recognized
under the blood; **grief was renewed**,
had happened in the dwelling. That was not a good transaction,
that on both sides they had to pay
with the lives of loved ones.

This is followed by a description of king Hrothgar’s sorrow and by his own words:

Hroðgar maþelode, helm Scyldinga:
“Ne frin þu æfter sælum! **Sorh is geniwod**
Denigea leodum. Dead is æschere,
Yrmenlafes yldra broþor,
min runwita ond min rædbora (...).” (1321-1325)

Hrothgar spoke formally, the protector of the Scyldings:
“Don’t ask if I am happy! **Sorrow is renewed**
for the Danish people. Æschere is dead,
Yrmenlaf’s elder brother,
my close councillor and my advisor (...).

As noted by Erin Sebo, “[i]n a narrative that has already told of so many deaths and murders, Hrothgar’s extraordinary outpouring of grief arrests the poem”. In particular, the episode stands in contrast with Hondscio’s death, which has gone relatively unnoticed. Commenting specifically on Hrothgar’s long speech, she adds: “Earlier raids by Grendel on Heorot are described in terms of an almost existential wound to the humanity and community of the Danes and Hrothgar’s speech begins by locating Æschere’s death in that sorrow”.¹⁹

The formula “sorrow is renewed” is not used for just any kind of sorrow, then, but for a paroxysm of grief, made all the crueller because hurt is inflicted on an old wound, still raw from previous sufferings. Interestingly, the way the first mention of the formula is framed strongly suggests that it is meant to apply equally to Grendel’s mother. Her son having returned to her mortally wounded, she already knows of his death and comes to seek vengeance precisely because of her intense grief (1277-1278). Having succeeded in her endeavour, she is intent on leaving the hall full of warriors, so she can save her own life (1292-1293), but recognizing her son’s bloody hand brings her sorrow back to full force.

In *Exodus*, the formula is used to describe the lamentations caused by the punishments inflicted on Egyptians by God:

¹⁹ Sebo, “*Ne Sarga: Grief and Revenge in Beowulf*”, 179.

þa wæs ingere ealdum witum
deaðe gedrenced drihtfolca mæst;
hordwearda hryre **heaf wæs geniwad,**
swæfon seledreamas, since berofene.
Hæfde mansceaðan æt middere niht
frecne gefylled, frumbearna fela,
abrocene burhweardas. (33-39a)

Then, many people of that nation were completely
drenched with death, through old torments;
For the downfall of the treasure-guardians, **mourning was renewed,**
the joys of the hall perished, bereft of treasure.
At midnight, he savagely destroyed
the wicked ones, many first-born children,
he vanquished the city-dwellers.

The tale of the Egyptians' woes then goes on for many lines, but it is worth noting that no violence had occurred before this. The future defeat of the Egyptians by Moses had already been alluded to, but the lines immediately preceding this passage merely describe God speaking to Moses and strengthening him. As a consequence, the passage quoted here reads as a sudden and savage assault. There is no build-up of the tension, but a sudden explosion of destructive violence. Why mourning is said to be "renewed" in this context is less obvious than in *Beowulf*, though the mention of "old torments" may be meant to suggest that such hardships had occurred before.

In *The Wanderer*, the formula is used twice, only a few lines apart. After a moving description of a dream in which the wanderer remembers the joys of his past, when he embraced and kissed his lord, the poet moves on to the abrupt awakening:

ðonne onwæcneð eft wineleas guma,
gesihð him biforan fealwe wegas,
baþian brimfuglas, brædan feþra,
hreosan hrim ond snaw, hagle gemenged.
þonne beoð þy hefigran heortan benne,

sare æfter swæsne. **Sorg bið geniwad,**
 þonne maga gemynd mod geondhweorfeð;
 greteð gliwstafum, georne geondsceawað
 secga geseldan. Swimmað eft on weg!
 Fleotendra ferð no þær fela bringeð
 cuðra cwidegiedda. **Cearo bið geniwad**
 þam þe sendan sceal swiþe geneahhe
 ofer waþema gebind werigne sefan. (45-57)

Then the friendless man awakens again,
 he sees before him the dreary waves,
 the sea birds bathing, spreading their wings,
 the frost and the snow falling, mingled with hail.
 Then the wound of his heart is all the more grievous,
 sadness for a loved one. **Sorrow is renewed.**

Whenever the memory of relatives passes through his mind,
 he greets the companions of men with joy,
 looks at them eagerly. They drift away again!
 The souls of the swimming ones do not bring
 many familiar speeches there. **Grief is renewed**
 for he who must very often take
 his exhausted spirit over the interlocking waves.

These words are followed by musings in the first person, which eventually lead the speaker to a message of Christian consolation and wisdom. However, in that specific passage, no solace is in sight. This is once again a climax of grief and loss, made “all the more grievous” because hurt is inflicted on an already existing wound.

Uses of the formula in *Beowulf* (including the passage with the dragon), *Exodus* and *The Wanderer* are therefore characterized by loss of what is most precious (Hrothgar’s best friend, Grendel’s mother’s son, the wanderer’s lord, the dragon’s treasure, the Egyptians’ finest warriors) and all-encompassing grief. In some instances (*The Wanderer*, the *Æschere* episode in *Beowulf*), emphasis is laid on the fact that an

old wound is being re-opened, but in others (*Exodus* and the dragon episode in *Beowulf*), that older wound is at best in the background and only present grief matters.²⁰

The number of occurrences is much too small for any certainty to be achieved, but it is tempting to think that a formula for renewed sorrow may have crystallized into a formula for overwhelming sorrow. This is typical of the kind of semantic shift one may expect from a linguistic construction. As the construction solidifies into a whole, its meaning is approached holistically, so that the meaning of *geniwad* on its own becomes less relevant and the situations associated with the formula as a whole come to define its meaning. Since the paroxysm of grief seems to be the most notable feature of those situations, it is understandable that this should become the primary meaning of the formula.

However, as noted by Wray, the fact that the meaning of the component parts of a formula do not *need* to be activated for a formula to be understood does not mean that they can never be.²¹ As long as the word *geniwad* remains transparent (and there is no reason to suspect it was not so throughout the Old English period, since several closely

²⁰ The word *geniwod* is also found paired with a strong negative emotion once in prose, in Wulfstan's homily *Incipiunt sermones lupi episcopi* (Bethurum, ed., *Homilies of Wulfstan*, 145–46, l. 54–6): *He ofsloh Abel, his agenne broðor, 7 ða wæs Godes yrre þurh ða dæde ofer eorðan yfele geniwod*, “He killed Abel, his own brother, and then God's anger over the earth's evil was renewed because of that deed.” While the surrounding text is based on saint Pirmin's *Dicta Abbatis Pirmini* or *Scarapsus*, this particular sentence has no known source (*Ibid.*, 293–95). It immediately follows an account of Adam and Eve's Fall from Eden, so “renewed” can be interpreted as referring to that first sin. Influence by the poetic formula cannot be ruled out, since *geniwad* is rare elsewhere in prose and the overtones of the formula (very strong negative emotion, typically connected to loss and death) is compatible with the context, but the formulation is too different for that to be certain.

²¹ Wray, *Formulaic Language and the Lexicon*, 264 and *Formulaic Language: Pushing the Boundaries*, 17–19 and 25.

related words were in frequent use throughout the period and are still in use today), its meaning can be reactivated by the context.

It is worth noting that two of the three poems quoted here, *Exodus* and *Beowulf*, are presumed to be early by philologists who venture to date Old English poems.²² This, together with the facts that the grief formula is the most productive one in the corpus, and that the idea it conveys seems relatively universal, makes me think that this is probably the older use of the formula, from which the *hyht*-variant developed.²³

²² The dating of Old English poetry is a highly contentious issue, and no consensus exists on the dating of most Old English poems. However, as demonstrated in particular by R. D. Fulk (*History of Old English Meter*), several linguistic tests seem to concur in suggesting the following relative chronology: a first group with *Beowulf*, *Genesis A*, *Daniel* and *Exodus* among the earliest poems; a second chronological group comprising *Andreas* and Cynewulf's poems; a third group comprising Alfred's *Meters of Boethius*, *The Battle of Maldon* and *Judith*. Translating that evidence into an actual date of composition or determining the relative chronology of poems belonging to the same group are even thornier issues, and it must be granted that a number of factors (deliberate archaisms, metrical irregularities and evolution, transmission, dialectal variation, etc.) may create distortions in the available data, but there is no reason to discount such evidence entirely. As for *The Wanderer*, at 115 lines, it is rather too short to be dated conclusively through such means: its editors found some evidence supporting a late date, but concluded that it was impossible to reach any kind of certainty (Dunning & Bliss, eds. *The Wanderer*, quoted in Frantzen, "Afterword", 240).

²³ How productivity interacts with longevity is complex. Chiara Bozzone's model suggests that productivity is the mark of a young formula, whereas fossilization (resistance to change sometimes accompanied by semantic opacity) is characteristic of an older one, which seems in contradiction with the hypothesis presented above (Bozzone, "Constructions: A New Approach to Formularity", 91–3). However, that theoretical principle is complicated by the fact that not all formulas go through their cycle at the same pace and that not all types of a given formula evolve at the same pace either (*Ibid.*, 154). As a consequence, it is entirely possible for a productive pattern (the sorrow-formula) to generate a new type (the *hyht*-formula), which becomes so popular in a given circle that it rapidly solidifies and no

A formula for hope and salvation

The *hyht*-variant is found in four different poems, which all happen to be connected: *The Dream of the Rood* (148b), *Christ II* (529b), *Andreas* (1010b) and *Guthlac B* (953b). *Christ II* is one of the four signed poems by Cynewulf. *Guthlac B* is usually considered as the unsigned poem most likely to have been composed by Cynewulf as well, both because its ending is missing (making the absence of a signature irrelevant) and because, like *The Phoenix*, it is extremely close to Cynewulf stylistically, meaning that the author can either have been Cynewulf himself or another poet working in the same milieu.²⁴ *Andreas* cannot be attributed to Cynewulf, but it contains many phrases suggesting Cynewulfian influence, whether direct or indirect.²⁵ All three poems are also thought to be neither “early” nor “late”, though it is impossible to know how much time separates their respective dates of composition.

At first sight, *The Dream of the Rood* may seem unconnected to that group of texts (aside from the fact that, like *Andreas*, it is found in the Vercelli Book): it is notoriously hard to date the poem, even by the standards of Old English poetry,²⁶ and,

longer tolerates variation, while the original formula lives on and continues to tolerate variation (and may or may not keep on generating new types).

²⁴ Fulk, “Cynewulf”; Roberts, ed., *Guthlac Poems*, 48–63.

²⁵ Powell, “Verbal Parallels in *Andreas*”, 54–104; North and Bintley, eds., *Andreas*, 57–62.

²⁶ Dating the poem on linguistic grounds is almost impossible because it is relatively short (only 156 lines). Two Anglo-Saxon artefacts bear inscriptions which apparently come from the same text: the eighth-century stone monument known as *The Ruthwell Cross* and the early eleventh-century reliquary known as *The Brussels Cross*. The inscriptions are close enough to the text of the poem that all three works must be related, but the differences are significant enough that the transmission history is likely complex. To make matters worse, it is not certain that the inscription on *The Ruthwell Cross* itself dates from the eighth-century, and the texts of the two inscriptions come from the first part of the poem, which some critics think may have been written earlier than the second one, which could have

while it has been attributed to Cynewulf by various critics in the past, it is now accepted that such claims owed more to a desire to attribute as many poems as possible to a known name than to reliable evidence.²⁷ However, Andy Orchard makes a strong case for *The Dream of the Rood* having had a widespread influence during the Anglo-Saxon period (a hypothesis certainly supported by the existence of the Ruthwell Cross and Brussels Cross inscriptions) and in particular suggests the poem may have influenced *Elene*, another poem by Cynewulf also found in the Vercelli Book.²⁸ It is also worth noting that the formula occurs in the second half of the poem, that is to say in the part of the poem which has been found to be closest in style to Cynewulf, leading Rosemary Woolf to claim that it “must surely be a later addition by a writer of the school of Cynewulf”.²⁹

been added by another poet at a later stage. As a consequence, there is no certainty that a poem similar to the complete Vercelli text was already in existence in the eighth century when the Ruthwell Cross was first erected. On the relationships between the poem and the two artefacts, see in particular Howlett, “Inscriptions and Design”; Roberts, “Some Relationships”; Fred Orton, “Northumbrian Identity”; Ó Carragáin, *Ritual and the Rood*; Conner, “Ruthwell Monument Runic Poem”; Peter Orton, *Writing in a Speaking World*; Hines, “Ruthwell Cross”; Neidorf, “Brussels Cross Inscription”. On the possibility of composite authorship, see in particular Dickins and Ross, eds. *The Dream of the Rood*, 18; Peter Orton, *Transmission of Old English Poetry*, 160; Neidorf, “Composite Authorship”.

²⁷ The hypothesis of Cynewulf’s authorship for this text has been defended in particular by Dietrich, *Disputatio de Cruce Ruthwellensi* and Rieger, “Über Cynewulf”. For reasons why such arguments cannot be accepted, see for instance Anderson, *Cynewulf*, 82 and Stévanovitch, ed., *Cynewulf: Christ II*, 157.

²⁸ Orchard, “*Dream of the Rood*”. For discussion of other texts likely influenced by *The Dream of the Rood*, see Bolton, “Tatwine’s *De Cruce Christi*”; Conti, “Anonymous Homily”; Fulk, “Refashioning of Christ’s Passion”; Horgan, “*Dream of the Rood*”.

²⁹ Woolf, “Doctrinal Influences”, 153, n. 34. Metrical and lexical differences between the two parts of the poem are considered in detail by Neidorf, who concludes that the second part of the poem is significantly later than the first (“Composite Authorship”).

While the connection between *The Dream of the Rood* and Cynewulf is by no means certain (and may very well have taken a more circuitous route than Orchard or Woolf suggest), it is certainly plausible. As for the other three poems, they are clearly closely-connected enough that a stylistic innovation that reached a member of that group may very well have spread to the others. I find it likely that the *hyht*-formula is such an innovation.

In *The Dream of the Rood*, “hope is renewed” for the just souls trapped in hell, when Christ’s sacrifice on the cross redeems the original sin.³⁰ The quotation occurs in the closing lines of the poem, which are akin to a prayer in form.³¹

Si me dryhten freond,
se ðe her on eorþan ær þrowode
on þam gealgtreowe for guman synnum.
He us onlȳsde ond us lif forgeaf,
heofonlicne ham. **Hiht wæs geniwad**
mid bledum ond mid blisse þam þe þær bryne þolodan.
Se sunu wæs sigorfæst on þam siðfate,

³⁰ According to Monica Brzezinski, this passage cannot refer to the Harrowing of Hell, as usually assumed, but to the Last Judgment. However, her argument rests mainly on the fact that the passage describes “many saints greeting Christ on His arrival in Heaven, a situation impossible when Christ was first opening the Gates of Heaven” (“Harrowing of Hell”, 252). This argument would be valid if the word *halgum* (*Dream of the Rood*, 154a) could only refer to saints, but its meaning is broader than that and can also be interpreted here as a synonym for “angels”. Cf. *Andreas* 725a, for instance, where *haligra hiw* (“the appearance of the holy ones”) clearly refers to the angels depicted on the temple.

³¹ The passage is not exactly like a prayer, since it is not addressed to God, but it contains most of the defining elements of an early medieval prayer, whether in Latin or in Old English: a reference to God (usually an invocation, but here in the third person), a comment following the invocation (often through a relative clause, as is the case here), a petition (here located at the very beginning instead of after the comment), and “a closing formula of praise and affirmation”; Bzdyl, “Prayer in Old English Narratives”, 21 and 37.

mihtig ond spedig, þa he mid manigeo com,
gasta weorode, on godes rice,
anwealda ælmihtig, englum to blisse
ond eallum ðam halgum þam þe on heofonum ær
wunedon on wuldre, þa heora wealdend cwom,
ælmihtig god, þær his eðel wæs. (144b-156)

May the lord be a friend to me,
who suffered here on earth before,
on the gallows-tree, for human sins.
He released us and gave us life,
a heavenly home. **Hope was renewed**
with joys and happiness for those who endured burning there.
The son was victorious on that expedition,
mighty and powerful, when he came with a multitude,
a troop of souls, into the kingdom of God,
the one almighty ruler, bringing happiness to angels
and to all the holy ones who had already been dwelling
in glory in heaven, when their ruler came,
almighty god, where his homeland was.

This is a fitting conclusion for a poem concerned with the Crucifixion depicted as a glorious fight, with Christ in the role of the hero and the cross itself in that of the faithful retainer.³² While the poem itself contains ambivalent emotions and imagery – most strikingly through the shifting image of the cross, alternately drenched with blood and adorned with treasure – the conclusion is a glorious apotheosis, an article of faith expressing the certainty of salvation.

³² For analyses of heroism in *The Dream of the Rood*, see Diamond, “Heroic Diction”; Macrae-Gibson, “Christ the Victor-Vanquished”; Wolf, “Christ as Hero”; Cherniss, “The Cross as Christ’s Weapon”; Dubs, “*Hæled*”; Del Mastro, “*Dream of the Rood*”; Klinck, “Christ as Soldier and Servant”.

As noted by Elaine Treharne, the half-line *Hiht wæs geniwad* is a key element of the poem underscoring its message of salvation: “In this direct expression of hope being made new, of a regeneration of anticipation and expectation is the core impulse of the text – creating an emotive response demanding action within a Christian framework of desire, edification, union in Christ, and eternal salvation”.³³ As with the sorrow-variant, this use of *geniwad* thus conveys the idea of a dramatic reversal accompanied by intense emotion. However, the reversal works in the opposite direction: in this case, literally from hell to heaven.

It could be the case that the first slot of the *geniwad*-formula is genuinely open to any kind of strong emotion, and that *hyht* belongs to the same paradigm as *sorg*, *cearu* or *wroht*. However, the fact that *hyht* is the only positive emotion found in that context makes that hypothesis doubtful. Conversely, if one accepts that the formula was specifically meant to be associated with grief and loss, the *hyht*-formula can be interpreted as a deliberate subversion of the original pattern.

Hyht refers to a joyful hope, and it is very often associated with faith and the hope of salvation in Old English poetry. Christ is occasionally referred to as a “giver of *hyht*” (*hyhtgifa*, *Elene* 851) or directly as *hyht* (*se anga hyht*, “the only hope”, *The Phoenix* 423a, *The Panther* 73a; *se hehsta hyht*, “the highest hope”, *Paris Psalter* 90: 21a; *haligra hyht*, “the hope of saints”, *Juliana* 642a); heaven is referred to as the (more/most) hopeful home (*hyhtlic(ra) ham*, *Christ and Satan* 137 and 215a, *Judgment Day I* 24a, *hihtfulne ham*, *Genesis A* 946a, *hama hyhtlicost*, *Andreas* 104a); the phrase *lifes hyht* (“hope of life”) is also used in connection with eternal life (*Christ II*, 585a; *Guthlac A* 659b; *Dream of the Rood* 127b).

³³ Treharne, “*Hiht wæs geniwad*”, 147.

As noted by Howard R. Patch in a discussion of liturgical influences on *The Dream of the Rood*, the Latin equivalent of *hyht*, *spes*, is very often used to describe the cross in medieval hymns and in the liturgy, and is therefore closely associated with resurrection.³⁴ The *hyht*-formula mirrors the miracle of the resurrection: by subverting a formula for grief and loss, it reenacts the victory of Christ over death in a striking and powerful way.

Examination of the other extant uses of the *hyht*-formula reveals striking similarities with its use in *The Dream of the Rood*. In *Christ II*, “hope is renewed” when Christ ascends to Heaven and takes his place at the right hand of his father. The passage occurs in the centre of the poem and concludes the narrative episode of the Ascension:

ða wæs wuldres weard wolcnum bifongen,
 heahengla cyning, ofer hrofas upp,
 haligra helm. **Hyht wæs geniwad,**
 blis in burgum, þurh þæs beornes cyme.
 Gesæt sigehremig on þa swiþran hand
 ece eadfruma agnum fæder.
 Gewitan him þa gongan to Hierusalem
 hæleð hygerofe, in þa halgan burg,
 geomormode, þonan hy god nyhst

³⁴ Patch, “Liturgical Influence”, 254–55. *Spes* is consistently glossed as *hiht* or *hyht* in Old English extant texts. *The Dictionary of Old English Corpus* has 160 instances of *spes* in its glosses, found in 23 different manuscripts (though not necessarily different texts, as the list contains several manuscripts of the same Psalms). Most texts and all versions of the psalms use *hiht/hyht* as the translation for *spes*. A handful of texts (*Liber Scintillarum*, a prayer found in London, British Library, MS Arundel 155, and *Psychomachia Titles* in London, British Library, MS Cotton Cleopatra C. VIII) use *hopa* instead. According to R. D. Fulk, *hopian* and related forms such as *hopa* are “a late addition to Old English vocabulary” by comparison with the earlier *hyhtan* and *hyht* (*History of Old English Meter*, 335–36: note 147).

up stigende eagum segun,
hyra wilgifan. (*Christ II* 527-537a)
Then the guardian of glory was surrounded with clouds,
the king of the archangels, up over the roofs,
the protector of saints. **Hope was renewed,**
bliss in the cities, through the coming of that man.
He sat triumphant at the right hand
of the eternal author of happiness, his own father.
The strong-hearted heroes then departed
for Jerusalem, the holy city,
sad of mind, from where they had just
seen God ascending with their eyes,
their giver of all things good.

At first sight, this passage might seem contradictory: hope is supposedly renewed, but the first thing we are told about the apostles is that they are sad at the departure of their beloved lord. The implication cannot be that their elation is short-lived. Clearly, the two statements are not meant to be read on the same level. The apostles' sadness is a personal emotion, but the hope expressed by the formula has a universal value: it is the promise of salvation, the covenant between God and his people. Here, as in *The Dream of the Rood*, "the implication of renewed hope extends to all humanity, past, present, and future".³⁵

To some extent, the sorrow-formula already had a communal dimension. The impersonal structure, which does not specify any particular experiencer for the emotion, favours an open interpretation regarding who it might apply to.³⁶ In practice, in our

³⁵ Treharne, "*Hiht wæs geniwad*", 147.

³⁶ The surrounding verse may supply that information, with a noun phrase in the dative, as in *Beowulf* 1323a: *Denigea leodum*, "for the Danish people", but it is not part of the formula itself. This distinguishes the formula from a close analogue found in Psalm 38.3 of the Vulgate, which contains a possessive adjective: *dolor meus renouatus est*, which is

admittedly limited corpus, instances where the emotion is felt by a single individual do not seem to be the norm: sorrow is felt by Hrothgar and all the Danes (and Grendel's mother) after Æschere's death, and by all the Egyptians in *Exodus*. In *Beowulf*, *wroht* may arise from the dragon's personal fury, but the meaning of *wroht* ("quarrel", "strife") suggests something mutual, which affects the whole community living in the area as well as the dragon itself. As for the wanderer's sorrow, it is experienced in loneliness, but by a generic figure who could be almost anyone, or at least any person living in solitude.

In recent years, considerable attention has been paid to the way in which Old English texts conceptualize emotions, as something that is contained within the breast, and which shares properties with liquids or with material treasure.³⁷ With this formula, however, it rather seems that the emotion is external or independent from the human body. In most instances, the sorrow is not located anywhere in particular, it is merely there, and everyone within its ambit cannot help but feel it. The closest thing to a localization is found in *Beowulf* 1303b-1304a (*cearu wæs geniwod, geworden in wicun*, "grief was renewed, had happened in the dwelling") and it is large, encompassing the whole building, or perhaps even the whole settlement.³⁸

translated in Old English in the interlinear glosses of the Salisbury Psalter as *sar min geniwod is*, "my sorrow is renewed". There are 7 other Old English translations of that part of the Psalms recorded in *The Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, but they all use the verb *geedniwian* rather than *geniwian* and they all retain the possessive adjective. In spite of the striking lexical similarity, it thus seems unlikely that the Latin phrase could be the source of our formula.

³⁷ See in particular Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies* and Mize, "The Representation of the Mind" (see also Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities*).

³⁸ *Wic* (found in numerous place names such as Norwich, Cheswick, Ipswich, etc.) can be used in a fairly abstract way, to mean a dwelling, or the place where someone or something

The *hyht*-variant, such as it appears in the two passages above, seems to retain and amplify these characteristics: the feeling of hope is shared widely and seems to permeate the whole land (*blis in burgum*, “bliss in the cities”) rather than be located within a particular body. The two other instances of that variant, however, have a rather more intimate setting.

In *Andreas*, the formula occurs when saint Andrew comes to liberate saint Matthew from prison in Mermedonia, where he has been kept in captivity by cannibals.

Duru sona onarn
þurh handhrine haliges gastes,
ond þær in eode, elnes gemyndig,
hæle hildedeor. (...)
Geseh þa under swegle swæsne geferan,
halig haligne. **Hyht wæs geniwad.**
Aras þa togenes, gode þancade
þæs ðe hie onsunde æfre moston
geseon under sunnan. Syb wæs gemæne
bam þam gebroðrum, blis edniwe. (*Andreas* 999b-1014)

The door yielded at once
through the hand’s touch of the Holy Spirit,
and the hero brave in battle, mindful of courage,
went in there. (...)
He saw then his own companion under the sky,
a saint looked at another saint. **Hope was renewed.**
He rose then to meet him, thanked God
for the fact that they were ever able to see each other
unhurt under the sun. Friendliness was mutual
for the two brothers, bliss made new.

belongs, but also to designate a whole town or village (“Wíc”, Bosworth & Toller, eds., *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 1212–13).

As noted by others before, Andrew’s trip to Mermedonia as a whole, and this episode in particular, are strongly reminiscent of the theme of the Harrowing of Hell, which was hugely popular in Anglo-Saxon culture and during the medieval period more widely.³⁹ In medieval Christian thought, the theme of bondage and freeing from bondage is strongly connected to the theme of redemption: humans are bound by their sins and can only be set free through the sacrifice of Christ.⁴⁰

In other words, the impersonal *hyht*-formula can be read on a literal level, as applying to Matthew who is finally released from captivity and from the threat of being eaten, but it is almost certainly meant to be understood on a figural level as well, as applying to humanity to whom the sacrifice of Christ on the cross has brought the hope of eternal life.

In *Guthlac B*, the formula occurs when Guthlac is on his deathbed: Guthlac is increasingly oppressed by illness, but we are repeatedly told that he is eager (*afysed*, *fus*) and cheerful (*blibe*) while he is waiting for the inevitable end. In this passage, God touches Guthlac as a mark of his favour.

ða se ælmihtiga
 let his hond cuman þær se halga þeow,
 deormod on degle domeadig bad,
 heard ond hygerof. **Hyht wæs geniwad,**
 blis in breostum. Wæs se bancofa
 adle onæled, inbendum fæst,
 lichord onlocen. (*Guthlac B* 950b-956a)

³⁹ See in particular Heatt, “The Harrowing of Mermedonia” and Rendall, “Bondage and Freeing from Bondage”. Similarities between Andreas’ arrival in prison and Grendel’s arrival in Heorot have also been noted, but they are less relevant to the topic at hand.

⁴⁰ Rendall, “Bondage and Freeing from Bondage”.

Then the almighty
let his hand come to where the holy servant,
bold of mind in his secluded place, awaited, blessed with power,
brave and strong-minded. **Hope was renewed,**
bliss in his breast. The bone-chamber (= the body)
was set afire by disease; fastened by internal bonds,
the treasure of his body was unlocked.

At first glance, several aspects of this passage can be considered puzzling. In what way is hope renewed, since Guthlac has never once wavered in his faith and been eagerly waiting for the time when he would join God in heaven? Why use the formula *x-hord onleac/onlocen* (“a treasure of X onlocked”), which elsewhere refers to a highly positive action involving the sharing of words or wisdom?

As noted by Megan Cavell, the use of the image of bondage in connection with disease is fairly conventional (e.g. the phrase *adle gebundne*, “bound with disease”, found both in *Christ III* and *Guthlac B*), but disease is usually represented as what binds the body, not what releases it from bondage. Yet, *Guthlac B* uses the *x-hord onleac/onlocen* formula three times in that way, which is highly unconventional.⁴¹

In this passage, the bonds are positive and constructive – they are what hold the body together. Yet, with the attack of disease, Guthlac faces a disintegration of his bodily bonds, which once held so firmly together.⁴²

Cavell also notes the fact that, in the episode relating Guthlac’s death (1141b-5a), the formula is associated with the image of cunning keys, a symbol also conventionally associated with wisdom and enlightenment:

⁴¹ Cavell, *Weaving Words and Binding Bodies*, 202–11.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 208–9.

Most instances of both the formula *x-hord onleac/onlocen* and the imagery of keys unlocking hoards occur in a positive religious context. *Guthlac B*, on the other hand, takes that diction and converts it to refer to disease attacking the body.⁴³

It seems to me that a reading of the poem which acknowledges the fact that the *hyht-* formula is meant to be an obvious reference to the resurrection makes the choice of imagery much less incongruous. Indeed, I am not sure that the bonds holding the body together are “positive and constructive” here: if one sees the body as a prison for the eternal soul,⁴⁴ then Guthlac is being released from bondage, and disease is merely the instrument of his liberation.

God’s touch immediately precedes that release and may actually be interpreted as causing it: much like Andreas, who touches the gates of Matthew’s prison and immediately causes them to open (with the help of the Holy Spirit, summoned by the saint’s prayer), God touches Guthlac’s bodily prison and kindles the disease that will finally set the saint free. The scene can thus be read as yet another reenactment of the harrowing of hell, played in the smaller setting of a man’s body.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that, as noted by many critics, *Guthlac B* is once again a poem closely connected with the resurrection.⁴⁵ It opens with a discussion of the original sin and the beginning of mortality and culminates with the

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁴⁴ Such an interpretation is supported by the opening of the poem *Soul and Body II*, for instance, which explicitly compares the body to a prison oppressing the soul.

⁴⁵ See in particular Rosier, “Death and Transfiguration”; Calder, “Theme and Strategy”; Bridges, “Anglo-Saxon Translation”; Musseter, “Type as prophet”; Hennessey Olsen, *Guthlac of Croyland*; Lucas, “Easter”; Rambaran-Olm, ‘*John the Baptist’s Prayer*’, 134–35.

death of Guthlac during Easter Week. Daniel G. Calder thus writes that “the poet turns Guthlac’s death into a symbolic recreation of Christ’s Passion and Resurrection”.⁴⁶

Hope is renewed then, not merely for Guthlac himself, who never allowed doubt to lead him astray, but for all believers who, through the saint’s passage into heaven, are given another proof of God’s mercy and redemption. Seen in that light, the choice of formulas makes a lot more sense, including the use of *x-hord onleac/onlocen*: not only is the dissolution of physical bonds positive for Guthlac whose soul is released into heaven, but Guthlac’s *passio* (both the event itself and the poem) conveys a precious message of Christian wisdom. The poet does not subvert a traditional formula for the expression of wisdom; rather, he adapts it to a new idea while retaining its traditional connotations.

A similar analysis can be made for the poem *Juliana* (another poem by Cynewulf, like *Christ II*, and also found in the Exeter Book), which includes a pairing of *hyht* and *geniwad* in a very similar context, albeit in a different form:

ða wearð þære halgan hyht geniwad
ond þæs mægdnes mod miclum geblissad,
siþþan heo gehyrde hæleð eahtian
inwitrune, þæt hyre endestæf
of gewindagum weorþan sceolde,
lif alysed. (*Juliana* 607-612a)

Then, the hope of the holy one was renewed
and the mind of the maiden was much rejoiced,
when she heard the man devise a malicious plan,
that the end of her days of struggle was to come,
and her life to be released.

A similar formulation of the collocation is also found in *Judith*, but this time there is no

⁴⁶ Calder, “Theme and Strategy”, 239.

direct connection to resurrection and eternal life. Judith is alone with Holofernes, who is in a drunken stupor, and she has just prayed for the Trinity to give her the courage to kill him:

Hi ða se hehsta dema
ædre mid elne onbryrde, swa he deð anra gehwylcne
herbuendra þe hyne him to helpe seceð
mid ræde ond mid rihte geleafan. þa wearð hyre rume on mode,
haligre hyht geniwod; (*Judith* 94b-98a)

Then the highest judge inspired
her at once with courage, as he does for each of the people
living in this world who seek help from him for themselves
with intelligence and with the right faith. Then her mind became spacious,
the hope of the holy one renewed.

Immediately after this, Judith drags Holofernes by the hair and beheads him. That *hyht* is not to be understood as the mere hope of success, but as the hope granted by faith in Christ is obvious. On the other hand, the idea of eternal life is not prominent here in the way it is in *Guthlac B* and *Juliana*, for instance. Admittedly, Judith's fight against Holofernes has been interpreted as an allegory of Christ's fight against Satan,⁴⁷ which itself brings to mind the Harrowing of Hell, but the connection is tenuous at best.

It is worth noting that *Judith* is not found in the Exeter Book or the Vercelli Book, but in the Nowell Codex (like *Beowulf*), and that linguistic tests suggest it is likely to be significantly later than *Andreas* and Cynewulfian poetry.⁴⁸ Since the *hyht*-formula is only found in two of the four major poetic manuscripts and in no poem presumed either early or late on linguistic grounds, it is quite possible that it only

⁴⁷ See for instance Astell, "Holofernes's head", 118.

⁴⁸ Fulk, *History of Old English Meter*, 197.

existed as a formula for a limited period, and perhaps was only used by a relatively small group of poets.

The pattern found in *Juliana* is close enough to the *hyht*-formula in terms of context of use that it may rely on that formulaic intertext to convey its message of salvation, and the pattern in *Judith* is itself close enough to that found in *Juliana* in terms of phrasing to suggest a possible connection (direct or indirect) between the two poems, but it looks as if the specific formulaic intertext conveying the idea of victory over death through Christ's sacrifice on the cross is no longer active in *Judith*.

Outliers?

If the *geniwad*-formula has two main variants, one for intense loss and sorrow and another (based on the first) for the hope of salvation granted by resurrection, what are we to make of the two instances where the initial empty slot is filled by a word that does not denote an emotion?

One of them is very easily explained. It occurs in *The Phoenix*, a reworking of the Latin poem by Lactantius which spells out the allegorical significance of the phoenix in Christian thought, as an image of resurrection. The burning is over and the phoenix is back to full strength:

ðonne afysed bið
agenne eard eft to secan.
þonne fotum ymbfehð fyres lafe,
clam biclyppeð, ond his cyþþu eft,
sunbeorht gesetu, seceð on wynnum,
eadig eþellond. **Eall bið geniwad**
feorh ond feþerhoma, swa he æt frymþe wæs,
þa hine ærest god on þone æþelan wong
sigorfæst sette. (*The Phoenix* 274b-282a)

Then he is eager
to seek his own land again.
Then he grasps what's left of the fire with his feet,
seizes it with his claws, and joyfully seeks
his native country once more, a sunlit abode,
his blessed homeland. His life and his plumage
is entirely renewed, just as he was at the beginning,
when triumphant God first placed him
in that excellent place.

The Phoenix, which, like *Christ II*, *Guthlac B* and *Juliana*, has come down to us in the Exeter Book, is another text whose stylistic proximity to Cynewulf's canon has been noted.⁴⁹ It uses the word *geniwad* a second time (580b, in a non-formulaic manner), when the poet explains the Christian allegorical meaning of the very same episode. It would seem extremely unlikely that the poet had no knowledge of the *hyht*-formula and its connotations. The fact that the initial slot of the formula has been filled with a rather unusual word, which does not fit the usual syntactic or semantic pattern, may suggest a more self-conscious manipulation of the formula, but it is clear that the formula's connection to resurrection is meant to be understood.

The second instance is *Riddle 13*, which I quote here in full, and which is also found in the Exeter Book:

Ic seah turf tredan, X wæron ealra,
VI gebroþor ond hyra sweostor mid;
hæfdon feorg cwico. Fell hongedon
sweotol ond gesyne on seles wæge
anra gehwylces. Ne wæs hyra ængum þy wurs,
ne siðe þy sarre, þeah hy swa sceoldon
reafe birofene, rodra weardes

⁴⁹ See above, footnote 24.

meahtum aweahte, muþum slitan
 haswe blede. **Hrægl bið geniwad**
 þam þe ær forðcymene frætwe leton
 licgan on laste, gewitan lond tredan.
 I saw them walk on the ground, there were ten of them in all,
 six brothers with their sisters;
 they were alive. The skins hung
 visible and in plain sight on the wall of the hall,
 for each of them. None of them was the worse for it,
 and it did not make their journey more painful, though they thus had to
 tear ash-coloured fruits with their mouths,
 deprived of clothes, awoken through the powers
 of the guardian of heaven. **Clothing is renewed**
 for those who, before they appeared, let ornaments
 lie in their wake; they start to walk on the land.

The solution of the riddle is generally taken to be ten newly-hatched chickens, the skin on the wall corresponding to the membrane inside an egg and the new garment to the new down.⁵⁰ As often, the riddle hinges on a series of contrasts and paradoxes. The most striking one is between the insistence on the well-being of the mysterious creatures and the ominous details scattered throughout the text: the skin on the wall, of course, but also the mysterious grey fruit, whose meaning has proved elusive, and the lack of clothes, which is expressed through a formula characteristic of the theme of exile.⁵¹

The meanings associated with the *sorh*-variant of the formula do not fit this context. On the other hand, the meanings of the *hyht*-variant add depth and humour to it.

⁵⁰ Ammon, “Commentary for Exeter Riddle 13”.

⁵¹ Greenfield, “Formulaic Expression”, 127: “The chief formula for the exile’s deprivation is in an A-verse consisting of the instr. or gen., sg. or pl., of the ‘property’ removed together with the pp. of a verb of deprivation.” Greenfield lists *bereafian* among the verbs most frequently used in that formula, though not its synonymous cognate, *bereofan*, which is the one found here.

The destruction of the egg and the birth of the chickens is a very humble sort of resurrection and the use of the *geniwad*-formula draws attention to that interpretation.

It is impossible to know whether the riddle-poet may have known *The Phoenix* or a poem much like it, but for the reader of the Exeter Book, who has come across *The Phoenix* before reaching the riddles, the potential intertext certainly adds piquancy to the riddle, which can be read almost as a parody, the miracle of the mythical bird being replaced with a very common event, which is nevertheless a miracle of creation in its own way.

This contributes to the second paradox on which this riddle (and many others) hinges: that between the elevated tone of the clues and the down-to-earth solution. The use of a formula for resurrection, the reference to the guardian of heaven and the mention of precious ornaments all hint at sublimity, while the solution is to be found very close to the ground. As often, the riddle can be read on several levels: as a tongue-in-cheek parody of a more prestigious poem, or as a sincere meditation on the miracle of life.

Conclusion

By comparison with the enormous corpora available for Present-Day English, the size and distribution of the extant Old English poetic corpus makes it very difficult to track the life cycle of any given construction, and the difficulty is only compounded by the difficulties in dating individual poems relatively to each other. Any hypothesis must also take into account the existence of a large amount of “dark matter” no longer accessible to us, but which must have played an important role in shaping the poems

that have come down to us.⁵²

However, examination of all occurrences of the *geniwad*-formula shows that it pays to keep in mind the fact that formulas are not fixed, eternal entities, universally and homogeneously shared by all poets, but subject to language change and variation like everything else. Thus, based on the evidence available, it seems likely that a formula for renewed sorrow gradually came to denote very intense grief over the loss of someone or something precious (with or without any reference to any anterior emotion) and that, at some point, in a group of closely-related texts, that formula was subverted and reversed to express the miracle of resurrection.

This case study confirms that it cannot be assumed that all instances of a given formula will rely on the same formulaic intertext to convey meaning. Therefore, analysis of a given formula should not necessarily focus on finding what *all* or even *most* occurrences have in common. Rather, it is useful to identify clusters of closely-related uses (both in terms of form and meaning) and plausible explanations for how distinct clusters may have emerged over time, so as to gain a more precise understanding of a formula's implied meaning in any given context.

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⁵² I borrow the expression from Daniel Donoghue, who uses it to refer specifically to "the pervasive presence of oral poetry among the general population" which can no longer be observed directly, but whose existence must be supposed to account for many features of the extant corpus. I extend Donoghue's definition slightly, in applying the expression both to the oral tradition itself and to the written documents from the period which have not come down to us, but which must also have exerted some influence on the extant corpus. Donoghue, *How the Anglo-Saxons Read Their Poems*, 6.

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Figure 1. Exemplar Cloud for *hyht wæs geniwad*.