

Chapter I

METRE AS AN EDITORIAL CONCERN IN THE ANGLO-SAXON POETIC RECORDS, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE OLD ENGLISH SOUL AND BODY POEMS

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GEORGE PHILIP KRAPP and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, the editors of the standard scholarly edition of Old English poetry, were notably loath to introduce emendations into the text of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* to remedy metrical defects.¹ Quite a few unemended lines of verse in their edition defy metrical norms.² More regrettable is that some of the emendations they have introduced are metrically implausible, suggesting that the editors' reluctance to emend *metri causa* is predicated not on any principled distrust of metre as an indicator of textual corruption—or, at least, metre made to serve as the sole criterion for emendation in any given instance—but on an insufficient grasp of the principles of Old English poetic metre. To offer one of many examples, in line 1347 of *Christ III* the Exeter Book reads “leoftum”, which is emended to “leofstum” in *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*:

“Onfōð nū mid frēondum mīnes fæder rīce
þæt wæs ær woruldum wynlice gearo,
blæd mid blissum, beorht ēðles wlite,
hwonne gē þā lifwelan mid þām lēofstum,
swāse swegldrēamas, gesēon mōsten.” (lines 1344–48)

[Receive now with your friends my father's kingdom, which was delightfully prepared before the ages, splendour with contentment, bright homeland's beauty, at a time when you will be allowed to see among those most beloved the riches of life, your own heavenly delights.]³

The emended form, however, produces a verse that is metrically no more plausible than the unemended one. Verses of this type, with just one lift, to which the honoree of this volume gave the name “light verses,” are restricted to the on-verse, and then they normally appear

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¹ *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, 6 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–1953).

² Dozens of editorial defects in the edition, many of them metrical, have been pointed out by Daniel Donoghue, *Style in Old English Poetry: The Test of the Auxiliary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 178–99.

³ All poetry is quoted from Krapp and Dobbie's edition, but macrons have been added as an aid to scansion. Translations are the present writer's.

only in the clause onset.⁴ Moreover, the form *lēofstum* makes no phonological sense. The vowel of the superlative suffix is not normally syncopated in verse.⁵ It is syncopated in a few adjectives in West Saxon, but only those that normally show umlaut, such as *hiehsta* (highest) and *ieldest* (oldest). The superlative of *lēof* (beloved) is never so syncopated in any dialect. Moreover, nearly all Old English poetry presents evidence of having been composed in an Anglian dialect, and so syncope should not normally be expected in superlatives in verse. The correct form here in line 1347, as both grammar and metre demand, is *lēofostum*. Presumably, Krapp and Dobbie emended to the syncopated form because they wished to tamper with the manuscript reading as little as possible.

Similarly, following in the track of Christian Grein and subsequent editors, Krapp and Dobbie supply the word “frōfre” (consolation) in line 658 of *Juliana*, to mend the alliteration and the sense:⁶

	Ponne ēow miltse giefēð
fæder ælmihtig,	þær gē frōfre āgun
æt mægna gode,	mæste þearfe
æfter sorgstafum.	(lines 657b–60a)

[Then the father almighty will grant you mercy, if you shall have consolation from the God of hosts, the greatest requirement after your troubles.]

The word *frōfre* is not in the manuscript, and the metre, alliteration, grammar, and sense require that a noun alliterating on *f* be supplied here. Ferdinand Holthausen objected to *frōfre*, calling it a metrically impossible restoration, and his point is well taken: this would have to be a verse of Bliss’s Type 2A1a with disyllabic anacrusis, though Bliss points out that this type never takes even monosyllabic anacrusis in *Beowulf*.⁷ Holthausen suggested *frīdes* (peace), or *gefēan* (joy), and Moritz Trautmann suggested *freme* (advantage).⁸ Any of these would furnish good sense, syntax, alliteration, and metre.

To offer one further example, in Krapp and Dobbie’s edition of the Exeter Book they have emended line 84 of *Riddle 40*, a translation of Aldhelm’s *Riddle 100*, *Creatura*:

Ic eorþan eom	æghwær brædre
ond wīðgelra	þonne þes wong grēna;
ic ūttor ēaþe	eal ymbwinde,
wrætlice gewefen	wundorcræfte. (lines 82–85)

4 A. J. Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 6–23.

5 For definition of syncope and other key terms in this chapter and volume, readers should consult the Glossary of Metrical Terms in the Appendices.

6 *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie*, ed. Christian W. M. Grein, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Wigand, 1857–1858).

7 Ferdinand Holthausen, Review of Chr. W. M. Grein, *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie*, ed. Rich. P. Wülcker, vol. 3, pt. 1 (2nd ed., 1897), *Beiblatt zur Anglia* 9 (1899): 353–58 at 356; Bliss, *Metre*, 40.

8 Moritz Trautmann, “Berichtigungen, Erklärungen und Vermutungen zu Cynewulfs Werken,” *Bonner Beiträge zur Anglistik* 23 (1907): 85–146 at 97.

[I am on all sides broader than the earth and more widespread than this green expanse;
I easily encompass everything from the outside, woven magnificently with amazing skill.]

The word “ēaþe” (easily) in line 84 is not in the manuscript, and in this instance, unusually, the editors have emended solely to remedy a metrical defect, though that defect is of the most elementary and striking sort, seeing as a verse must contain at least four syllables. In this case, ironically, it was Holthausen who proposed the unmetrical emendation, which produces the same illicit type as in the last example, though with monosyllabic rather than disyllabic anacrusis, and in the on-verse, where the problem is less obvious.⁹ The word *ēaþe* corresponds to nothing in Aldhelm’s poem, but at all events these lines are only a very loose translation of Aldhelm’s hermeneutic Latin. The comparative form of the same word, *ȳð*, which is monosyllabic, would produce a metrical verse, but the comparative form is never used in poetry without the comparative particle *þȳ*. Trautmann supplied “fela” (greatly), corresponding to “multo” in Aldhelm’s poem, and this seems the most probable solution.¹⁰

The emendation that is the topic of this chapter is likewise motivated by the consideration that a verse must contain more than three syllables. In line 5 of *Soul and Body II* in the Exeter Book the manuscript reads “saw!”, which Krapp and Dobbie have emended to “sawle”:

Hūru, ðæs behōfaþ	hæleþa æghwylc
þæt hē his sǣwle sið	sylfe bewitige,
hū þæt bið dēoplic	þonne sē dēað cymeð,
āsundrað þā sibbe,	þā þe ær somud wæron,
lic ond sǣwle! (lines 1–5)	

[By all means, it behooves every hero that he attend to the destiny of his own soul, how profound it will be when death arrives, parts that relationship, those which were formerly united, body and soul!]

Manuscript *saw!* would be nominative, in apposition to “þā þe” (those which) in the preceding line, the subject of “wæron” (were), whereas “sǣwle” is accusative, appositive to “þā sibbe” (that relationship), also in the preceding line. The emendation has the support of the other version of this poem, preserved in the Vercelli Book (*Soul and Body I*), where in the corresponding line the manuscript reads “sawle”.

Yet despite the seeming need for the extra syllable to satisfy the requirements of the metre, the emendation is actually unnecessary. In Old English, the nominative singular of the word for “soul” is spelt alternately as a monosyllable and as a disyllable: the commonest spellings are *sawl*, *saul*, *sawel*, *sawol*, and *sawul*. The nominative singular of the word appears at one other place in *Soul and Body II*, where it is likewise spelt as a

⁹ Ferdinand Holthausen, “Zur Textkritik altenglischen Dichtungen,” *Englische Studien* 37 (1907): 198–211 at 208.

¹⁰ Moritz Trautmann, *Die altenglischen Rätsel (Die Rätsel des Exeterbuchs)* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1915), 27, 104.

monosyllable: “ond þē þīn sāwl sceal” (57b). Despite the spelling, a disyllabic scansion is required to produce a verse of Sievers’s Type B, as otherwise the verse would be defective: verses of just three metrical positions, though permissible in the on-verse when they begin a verse clause, ought not to appear in the off-verse. In the version of the poem in the Vercelli Book, the corresponding verse (62b) is spelt identically. It is therefore quite possible that in line 5a of the poem in the Exeter Book, manuscript “sawl” is to be scanned as a disyllable. The question to be settled, then, is whether the emended or the unemended form in 5a is to be preferred.

Perhaps the most fundamental principle of textual editing is that emendations should not be introduced without need, a principle akin to Occam’s razor. Since the verse “līc ond sāwl” is not defective, either metrically or in any other way, it should not be emended. Yet the question remains which is likelier to be what the author intended, the nominative form in the Exeter Book or the accusative in the Vercelli manuscript. To be sure, the nominative affords simpler syntax, since it shares the case of the nearer antecedent, which must be skipped over if the author intended an accusative form, in agreement with the more remote antecedent. Yet if *sawle* in the Vercelli Book is not the correct form, it must be assumed that the Vercelli scribe (or an antecedent scribe in the poem’s transmission history) altered *sawl* to *sawle* for the sake of the metre, and it has been shown with abundant evidence that, in general, Anglo-Saxon scribes usually paid no attention to the metre when they copied native poetry.¹¹ Still, it is difficult to see why the Exeter scribe would have changed *sawle* in his exemplar to *sawl*—a change more difficult to explain than the Vercelli scribe’s putative change of *sawl* to *sawle*—and the use of *sāwl* as a nominative form later in the Vercelli poem tends to support the assumption that “līc ond sāwl” in the Exeter Book is more original.

Yet if *sāwl* is the more original form, it remains to be explained why this should have been substituted for the disyllable *sāwul* (or similar) apparently intended by the poet. On first examination, this seems counterintuitive. It is a familiar pattern that when West Germanic forms like **taikna* lost the inflection, the stem remained monosyllabic for a time, just as, for example, Modern Icelandic *vatn* (water), from **watna*, is monosyllabic to this day. Only later was the final resonant syllabified, with the result that Old English *tācen* (sign) occurs beside *tācn*. The monosyllabic form is thus the earlier of the two. Why, then, should a scribe have substituted monosyllabic *sāwl* for an earlier disyllabic form? The opposite sort of substitution might have been expected, given the chronology.

This peculiarity of the word *sāwl* was remarked already nearly thirty years ago by the present writer.¹² Some of the chief reference grammars then available assumed that *sāwl* represents the reflex of Proto-Germanic **saiwalō* by loss of medial *a*, with subsequent loss of

11 On scribal disregard of the metre, see especially Rafael J. Pascual, “On a Crux in *Beowulf*: The Alliteration of Finite Verbs and the Scribal Understanding of Metre,” *SN* 87 (2015): 171–85; and Leonard Neidorf, *The Transmission of Beowulf* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017).

12 R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 91n55.

the inflection.¹³ A problem with this analysis, however, is that wherever in poems that appear to be early compositions the metrical value of the word can be determined, it is consistently disyllabic. This would be rather a surprising scansion if the word became monosyllabic at an early date. For example, in *Beowulf*, the syllabic value of pertinent examples of the word can be determined in four instances (1406b, 2693a, 2820a, 3033b), and in each instantiation the word is disyllabic. Non-parasiting—that is, failure of a final sonorant consonant (*r*, *l*, *m*, *n*) following an obstruent to develop an excrescent vowel before it, for example as in *tācn* rather than *tācen*, as determined by the metre—is exceptionally common in *Beowulf*, with twenty-two indubitable instances, whereas parasiting is comparatively rare, at just five instances. Given that four out of four metrically unambiguous instances of *sāwul* in *Beowulf* must be regarded as disyllabic, it is implausible that the word should have been rendered monosyllabic at an early date. Even more significant is the observation that etymologically nonsyllabic *l* in the relevant phonological environment never undergoes parasiting in the corpus of poetry on which these conclusions are based, and this seems a rather severe impediment to the supposition that monosyllabic *sāwl* is an early form and disyllabic *sāwul* a later development. The spelling evidence in Anglian prose texts also tells decisively against the supposition that *sāwul* could have been reduced early to a monosyllable, since the spelling is almost exclusively *sawul* in the Old English gloss on the Vespasian Psalter, whose language represents a relatively early stage in the development of the West Mercian dialect, and whereas the spelling *saul* does occur occasionally in late Northumbrian texts, the usual spelling is *sauel*. Both metrical and orthographic considerations thus point to the conclusion that monosyllabic *sāwl* is a relatively late development, probably of the ninth century. This conclusion agrees with the evidence of early texts, such as that on the Bewcastle Column, probably of the seventh or early eighth century, in which the word is spelt *sowhula* (a plural form).¹⁴ Medial vowels had almost certainly undergone syncope before this.¹⁵ Accordingly, a disyllabic nominative form could not have arisen at this time on an analogical basis, since there would have been no disyllabic stem in the paradigm to serve as a model. Neither is monosyllabic *sāwl* likely to be a form characteristic of a particular Anglian dialect, given the Anglian evidence offered above.

Indeed, the only unambiguous instances of the nominative singular scanning as a monosyllable in Old English verse are these:

þæt sīo sāwl wære (*Metres of Boethius* 20.182b)

Swā dēð monnes sāl (*Metres of Boethius* 20.210b)

þæt sīo hālige sāwl (*Soul and Body I* 127b)

13 See A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, reprinted from the corrected sheets of the first edition of 1959 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977); and Karl Luick, *Historische Grammatik der englischen Sprache*, ed. Friedrich Wild and Herbert Koziol, 2 vols. (only vol. 1, in two parts, published), 1914–1940 (rpt. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

14 See, for example, Éamonn Ó Carragáin, “Christian Inculturation in Eighth-Century Northumbria: The Bewcastle and Ruthwell Crosses,” *Colloquium* 4 (2007). The text of the inscription is edited in Henry Sweet, *The Oldest English Texts* (London: Oxford University Press, 1885), 124.

15 Luick, for example, *Historische Grammatik*, I, 1, 321, dates the loss of the medial vowel in **sāwalu* > **sāwlu* to the end of the sixth century.

It is of no small significance that the instance in *Soul and Body I* corresponds to nothing in *Soul and Body II*, but it is contained in the address of the saved soul to the pious body, which several scholars have argued is a late addition to the Vercelli poem, as suggested by some of its formal peculiarities.¹⁶

We are now in a better position than we were thirty years ago to understand why *sāwl* behaves in this surprising fashion. It is true that it is to be expected that unstressed *a* should have been syncopated in a medial open syllable after a heavy syllable, as in, for instance, the Proto-Germanic dative plural **þeudānumiz* > **þeudānum* > OE *þeodnum* (lords). There is an exception, however. It has been pointed out more recently that in the conservative language of the Old English gloss on the Vespasian Psalter, showing a relatively early state of the Mercian dialect, syncope does not occur when the inflection is *-u* (nominative singular feminine or nominative/accusative plural neuter), as with feminine *īdelu* (vain) < **īðalō*, and neuter *lumberu* (lambs) < **lambazō*.¹⁷ This must originally have been the case in all the Old English dialects, but the irregularity that the nominative singular feminine and the nominative/accusative plural neuter were the only cases bearing a vocalic inflexion without syncope of the middle vowel led to analogical changes within the paradigm in all dialects, though those changes are only inchoate in early Mercian. Therefore, it is to be expected that the middle vowel would have remained unsyncopated in **saiwalō* > **sāwulu*, and monosyllabic forms of the nominative singular, both orthographic and metrical, are due to the later analogical extension of the monosyllabic stem from the oblique cases, where syncope had taken place, into the nominative.

It remains to be explained, then, why the nominative singular of OE *sāwul* does not end in *-u*. This word appears to be the only feminine common noun with an originally

¹⁶ Some of the departures from metrical norms in this portion of the poem are these: *gōde word sprecað* (131b) is a verse of type D*, a type restricted to the on-verse in most poetry because of the requirement of double alliteration; *ealles swā micles* (149a, alliteration on *m*) is a light verse that occurs in the middle of a clause rather than at its start; *ond āhōfe mē on ēcne drēam* (151b, alliteration on *h*) is a hypermetric verse paired with a normal verse, and the verb *āhōfe* (raised) bears the alliteration that rightly belongs to *ēcne* (everlasting); and in *ac þæt wolde god* (154b) the verb similarly takes alliterative precedence of the noun *god* (God). Peter Orton, following the earlier lead of Stopford Brooke, and supported by Douglas Moffat, argues for later composition of the Blessed Soul portion of the poem by an inferior poet. See Orton, "Disunity in the Vercelli Book *Soul and Body*," *Neophilologus* 63 (1979): 450–60; Orton, "The Old English *Soul and Body*: A Further Examination," *MÆ* 48 (1979): 173–97; Stopford A. Brooke, *The History of Early English Literature*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1892), II, 166; Douglas Moffat, *The Old English Soul and Body* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), 41–44. Orton discusses 154b ("Disunity," 454). He also says that *swylc* in 141 ought to be stressed because it is an indefinite adjective that follows the word it modifies (*wuldor*), and the monosyllabic value of *sāwl* in 127b is inconsistent with the earlier poet's usage ("Disunity," 455–56).

¹⁷ See R. D. Fulk, "The Roles of Phonology and Analogy in Old English High Vowel Deletion," *Transactions of the Philological Society* 108 (2010): 126–44. On the reconstruction of the latter form, see R. D. Fulk, *A Comparative Grammar of the Early Germanic Languages* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2018), §7.38.

disyllabic stem and a heavy initial syllable.¹⁸ All other originally disyllabic stems of feminine common nouns had a light initial syllable, and thus they would have lost *-u* in the nominative singular by regular phonological rule. And disyllabic stems that developed from monosyllabic stems, for example *ceaster* (town) < **ceastr* < **cæstru* < **kastrō*, had also lost *-u* on a regular phonological basis. It is thus no improbable supposition that **sāwulu*, being morphologically so isolated, followed the pattern of other disyllabic feminine nouns and lost *-u* on an analogical basis.

On the basis of the preceding analysis, it may be concluded that the manuscript reading *sawl* at *Soul and Body II* 5a need not be emended to accusative *sawle* for the sake of the metre, since the form *sawl* may stand for earlier *sawul*. Since verse 5a appears to contain just three syllables, fewer than the minimal four required, it might be argued that *sawl* should be emended to *sawul*. Yet the editors of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* do not make it a policy to emend *metri causa* in connection with apparent disruptions of the metre due to parasiting. For example, they do not alter *hleahtr* to non-parasited *hleahtr* in the verse “hihtleasne hleahtr” (*Genesis A* 2389a), though this unmetrical verse would be rendered a normal Type E if they did so. Rather, readers of the standard edition of Old English verse who are metrically minded are accustomed, with few exceptions, to thinking of the text as a diaphane to be looked through, with older and dialectally different linguistic forms employed by the poets underlying the forms used by late scribes who brought the linguistic forms into closer alignment with their own usage.

Yet a broader and more significant conclusion may be drawn from these observations about the metrical behaviour of Old English *sāwul*. In the end it may be seen that the metrical and orthographic behaviour of OE *sāwul*, with treatment from an early date as a disyllable, far from being a worrisome defeat of expectations, is precisely what recent analysis of syncope and apocope in Old English should lead one to expect. That analysis and the conclusion that the treatment of certain words as monosyllables or disyllables in the scansion of Old English poetry is indicative of poetic chronology are thus mutually supportive, and all the more so because, prior to a close examination of the derivation of *sāwul*, the word might have been thought to contradict the usual chronological conclusions. That it instead supports those conclusions thus seems of no small consequence.

18 So say Karl Brunner, *Altenglische Grammatik nach der Angelsächsischen Grammatik von Eduard Sievers*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1965), §254.2; and Richard M. Hogg and R. D. Fulk, *A Grammar of Old English, Volume 2: Morphology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), §2.36. Campbell, *Old English Grammar*, §588.5n5, mentions two proper nouns in early texts that retain *-u* (later *-o*): *Wantsumu* (a river) and *Aebbino* (a woman's name). Compare also *sowhula* on the Bewcastle Column, cited above. Some nouns bearing the PGmc. suffix **-ipō* would originally have had a structure parallel to that of **sāwulu*, but these must have levelled the syncopated stem of the oblique cases into the nominative singular at an early date: see Fulk, “Roles of Phonology and Analogy,” 140–41.

