

REWRITING THE PSALTER

CLASSICAL POETICS AND LATE ANTIQUE STYLISTICS IN BEDE'S METRICAL PSALMS

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THE VENERABLE BEDE'S achievements as an Anglo-Latin poet have been overshadowed by his reputation as an historian, computist, and biblical exegete. Michael Lapidge, in his 1993 Jarrow Lecture "Bede the Poet," lamented that the lecture series until that point contained little to no indication that Bede was a Latin poet or, indeed, that he would have spent a good deal of his time teaching students the art of poetry.¹ Stephen Harris observed that "Bede's poetry, with a handful of exceptions, has escaped the attention of critics."² Classical and Late-Antique Latin poetry was a commonplace element of the early medieval monastic curriculum, so it is not surprising that Bede would have dedicated himself to studying, composing, and teaching Latin poetry.³ Bede and poetry are not synonymous despite his handbook, *De arte metrica*, functioning as one of the most prominent instructional works in this field from the eighth century up until the end of the sixteenth century.⁴ Harris emphasizes this point, indicating that "Generations of poets studied Bede's virtually flawless Latin verses. His hymns were incorporated into liturgies that to this day echo off the walls of Saint Paul's Church at Jarrow."⁵ Recent scholarly developments invite a reassessment of Bede's contribution to the traditions of Latin poetry, namely the publication of *Bede's Latin Poetry* by Michael Lapidge and the launch of

* Many thanks to Dr François Chatton, the Revd Dr Alasdair Coles, Dr Colleen Curran, Fr Martin McNamara, Dr Christine Rauer, Professor M. J. Toswell, and the anonymous reviewer for their helpful and sensible input on this piece. I am grateful to Professor Calvin B. Kendall and Dr Greti Dinkova-Brunn for helpfully sharing secondary materials.

1 Lapidge, "Bede the Poet," 1. Compare Ward, *Bede and the Psalter*.

2 Harris, "Bede," 152.

3 See Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 174–274 and 274–342.

4 Heikkinen, "Vergilian Quotations in Bede's *De arte metrica*."

5 Harris, "Bede," 152.

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the digital database, *A Consolidated Library of Anglo-Saxon Poetry (CLASP)*.⁶ The complete corpus of Bede's extant poetry has been edited and translated in Lapidge's edition, while the innovative digital tools incorporated into the CLASP database enable Bede's poetry to be analysed in greater detail than before.

Bede is best known as an historian, computist, and exegete, but there is generally a great deal of overlap between these genres, and it is no different with his substantial body of poetic works: his verse frequently intersects with his practice as a biblical textual critic and exegete. This chapter focuses on a short series of metrical adaptations of the Psalms by Bede. The decision to reformulate certain psalms in the style of classical and Late-Antique verse indicates anxieties on the part of Bede and his culture about the linguistic and literary character of the Latin Psalter. His psalm paraphrases are an exercise in biblical textual criticism and exegesis, but are also motivated by aesthetic concerns. The Psalter is the Bible's most important book of poetry, but, strikingly, none of its different Latin versions adhere to the classical and Late-Antique conventions of Latin prosody. This chapter analyses how Bede's metrical Psalms reformulate biblical texts in terms of classical poetics and Late-Antique Christian stylistics.

Bede's Versions of the Psalms

Bede produced a series of Anglo-Latin poetic revisions of a number of psalms. The complete adaptations that are extant include metrical reworkings of Psalms 41 (*Sicut cervus*, "As the hart"), 83 (*Quam amabilia sunt tabernacula tua Domine uirtutum*, "How amiable are Your tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts"), and 112 (*Laudate pueri Dominum*, "Praise the Lord, ye children").⁷ The complete adaptations are largely faithful to the biblical psalms they revise. Bede's Psalm 41 consists of forty-six lines and is composed in dactylic hexameters. Psalm 83 is made up of twenty-one verses written in elegiac couplets (where a line of dactylic hexameter is followed by a line of dactylic pentameter). Psalm 112 is formed of twelve lines of dactylic hexameters.⁸ Single-line fragments have survived of Bede's poetic revisions of Psalms 3

⁶ Bede, *Bede's Latin Poetry*; CLASP, <https://clasp.ell.ox.ac.uk/db-latest/>.

⁷ On which, see Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, 59–64. Psalms are identified by the Greek Septuagint numbering system. Titles are given according to the *Psalterium Romanum* on which the revisions are based. For the texts, see Bede, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 340–47; Bede, *Bedae Venerabilis, opera*, pars IV, 447–50. Lapidge and Fraipont number the poems differently in their editions.

⁸ Bede, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, XIV, XV, XVI, 340–47.

(*Domine quid multiplicati sunt*, “Why, O Lord, are they multiplied [that afflict me]?”), 66 (*Deus misereatur*, “May God have mercy on us”), and 70 (*Deus in te speravi*, “In Thee, O Lord, I have hoped”).⁹ The three complete texts were edited by Johannes Fraipont, alongside Bede’s Breviate Psalter, and again most recently by Lapidge.¹⁰ All versions are based on the *Psalterium Romanum*, the standard text of the Latin Psalter used in the liturgy and throughout early medieval England at this time. It is unclear if Bede’s psalms represent occasional compositions or whether they form part of a larger project that was never fully realized. The three surviving fragmentary lines were probably once part of longer adaptations such as those of Psalms. 41, 83, and 112.¹¹

A distinction must be made between the metrical revisions at hand and Bede’s Breviate Psalter, which is—as its title suggests—a condensed reworking of the Psalter in Latin, and much more widely known.¹² In the Breviate Psalter, most of the one hundred and fifty psalms are summarized in a few lines of verse with some longer exceptions.¹³ The Breviate Psalter is based on the *Psalterium Hebraicum* of Jerome, which was the least common Psalter version in circulation.¹⁴ Bede’s condensed Psalter served both

9 For these fragments, see Bede, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 346–46; Bede, *Bedae Venerabilis, opera*, pars IV, 451. No precise dates can be adduced for any of Bede’s psalm adaptations. Lapidge is unsure whether these lines are complete or incomplete fragments of longer texts, Bede, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 107. The latter seems most likely in light of the three complete psalm versions that survive.

10 On other printed editions of the metrical Psalms, see Bede, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 106–7.

11 The most comprehensive examination of Bede’s use of the Psalter is Ward, *Bede and the Psalter*. Note also that it was the Roman Psalter that Bede used from his youth, not the Gallican. The discussion of Bede’s Psalm 83 in Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, 59–64 is one of the most detailed analyses of any item in the series. Lapidge briefly discusses the texts but concludes that the metrical Psalms and the *Versus de die iudicii* are unprepossessing compared to the *Liber Hymnorum*. Lapidge, *Bede the Poet*, 3–5.

12 For the Latin text, see Bede, *Bedae Venerabilis, opera*, pars IV, 452–70; Bede, *Collectio Psalterii Bedae Venerabili adscripta*, ed. Brown. For a translation, see Browne, *The Abbreviated Psalter of the Venerable Bede*.

13 Roughly 76 per cent of the abbreviated texts consist of one to two lines in Browne’s Latin edition, while the rest are longer at around three to ten lines. The longest abbreviation, at twenty-four lines, is that of Psalm 118, which is itself the longest psalm.

14 Bede, *Collectio Bedae Psalterii*. There is some debate as to whether or not the Breviate Psalter can confidently be attributed to Bede. Compare McNamara, “Review: Benedicta Ward, *Bede and the Psalter*,” 126. Several works have erroneously been

mnemonic and devotional purposes; it distilled the essence of each psalm and provided a “key” to recalling each psalm *ex corde*.¹⁵ Although the Breviate Psalter is metrical, its devotional function places it more strongly in the realm of prayer rather than poetry.¹⁶ The artistry of the Breviate Psalter deserves consideration, but it is not the focus of the present study.

In terms of categorization, the metrical Psalms have been placed within Bede’s *Liber epigrammatum*, one of two collections of shorter poems mentioned in the catalogue of works in the *Historia ecclesiastica*.¹⁷ No intact work has survived that satisfies the description given by Bede. There are a number of short texts preserved in disparate and scattered manuscripts bearing Bede’s name or which can be attributed to his authorship that are thought to be part of the *Liber epigrammatum*. Lapidge has attempted to reconstruct the *Liber epigrammatum* by assembling twenty-two short and fragmentary poems.¹⁸ The series includes inscriptions, epitaphs, dedicatory *tituli* for church buildings and furnishings, prefatory manuscript or textual poetic epigraphs, *aenigmata* (riddles), logogriphs, prayers, and other poetic works such as versified psalm adaptations. Traditional Latin epigrams such as those of the fourth-century Pope Damasus (r. 366–384) constitute purely dedicatory works. The *Liber epigrammatum* as reconstructed by Lapidge includes dedicatory verse of this kind in addition to other poems that do not conform to this designation. Given the length of Bede’s psalm paraphrases

attributed to Bede, notably *In Psalmorum librum exegesis*, a commentary concatenated from different sources on the Psalms. The commentary consists of an *argumentum*, *explanatio*, and *commentarius* for each psalm. It was first assembled and attributed to Bede by his early modern editors. Of note, too, are the *Tituli Psalmorum* that were also erroneously attributed to Bede, but are now thought to be Irish. See Gorman, “The *Argumenta* and *Explanatio*es on the Psalms;” McNamara, *The Psalms in the Early Irish Church*, 37–39. McNamara has argued, in personal correspondence, that the Breviate Psalter might be Irish, since there are a number of such abbreviations of Irish origin. The abbreviation of the scholarly and neutral *Hebraicum* differs from the poetic adaptation of the *Romanum*, which communicates issues of identity and ecclesiology. Augustine’s *Enarrationes in Psalmos* were well-known by Bede and cited throughout his oeuvre, see Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 201. Given the disconnected nature of the devotional reflections offered in the *Enarrationes*, it is not surprising that Bede would have devised his own succinct summary of the psalms in the form of the Breviate Psalter.

15 Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, 55; Ward, *Bede and the Psalter*, 10.

16 CLASP uses the title “Oratio metrica,” which captures the text’s poetic and devotional functions.

17 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5.24, 570–71.

18 *Liber epigrammatum*, in Bede, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 315–51.

(the adaptation of Psalm 41 is 46 lines in total and cannot be regarded as an epigram), these works do not naturally belong in this collection. The *Liber epigrammatum* clearly represents a broader category that is used by editors as a catch-all for Bede's miscellaneous poetic works. Some items in the reconstructed collection are early, while others are late, indicating that the collection developed over Bede's career. Whether these works ever travelled together as a single collection is unclear. Given their different dates of composition, this seems unlikely. In whatever form it was transmitted, it was not treated as a cohesive collection by early medieval authors who drew on these works. Milred, Bishop of Worcester (d. 744), selected and repurposed certain poems from this group, demonstrating the collection's disparate nature.¹⁹ We can only be certain that Bede thought of these various poems cohesively as a collection by the time he completed the *Historia ecclesiastica*. Whether or not he included the metrical Psalms in this collection is another question.

Vernacular Verse and the Spiritual Practice of Poetry

Bede's appraisal of vernacular verse provides pertinent context for understanding his practice as an Anglo-Latin poet. Bede's poetic output was not limited to Latin: Cuthbert the Deacon relates that Bede composed poetry "in our own language, for he was familiar with English poetry, speaking of the soul's dread departure from the body."²⁰ Cuthbert informs us that shortly before his death, Bede repeatedly recited a poem he composed about the soul's departure from the body (Bede's Death Song), as well as various psalms and antiphons.²¹ Unlike Bede's recording of "Cædmon's Hymn" in Latin, Cuthbert relates "Bede's Death Song" in its vernacular form within his Latin letter to Cuthwin.²² The five-line epigram circulated with some manuscript copies of Cuthbert's letter. The Northumbrian version reads as follows:

¹⁹ Bede, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 112.

²⁰ Cuthbert the Deacon, *Epistola de obitu Bedae*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 580–81.

²¹ Cuthbert relates that Bede was ill from before Easter until Ascension Day, 735 CE. We are told that Bede continued to teach, instruct, and direct those who nursed him during his illness. The parallel with Christ who remained to instruct His apostles intermittently during the period from His Resurrection to His Ascension must have resonated with the community and its hagiographers given that Bede's demise occurred in the liturgical season of Easter.

²² For the text, see Bede, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 553–55.

Fore them neidfaerae naenig uuiurthi
 thoncsnotturra, than him tharf sie
 to ymbhycggannae aer his hiniongae
 huaet his gastae godaes aettha yflaes
 aefter deothdaege doemid uueorthae.

Before the inevitable journey [i.e. death] no man shall become wiser in thought than he has need in order to reflect, before his going hence, what in respect of good or evil is to be judged of his soul after this death-day.²³

According to Cuthbert, Bede persisted in his scholarly endeavours up until his final moments, working on a vernacular prose translation of the Gospel of John on his deathbed, which he supposedly dictated to Wilberct, and on a translation of Isidore's *De natura rerum* (referred to as the "*Liber Rotarum*").²⁴ The vernacular translation projects that Bede was engaged in on his sickbed were part of a larger program of vernacular work, which included translations of the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed, for the benefit of those less proficient with Latin.²⁵ "Bede's Death Song" is generally thought to be authentic, although the obvious parallels with the miracle of "Cædmon's Hymn" could suggest that Bede's vernacular poetic output was the invention of his hagiographers. Bede's skills as an Anglo-Latin poet and native speaker of Old English indicate that he would have been able to compose Old English verse, too. As Lapidge suggests, "there is no need to deny Bede the authorship of this modest little poem."²⁶ If genuine, the poem is arguably part of Bede's vernacular program of writing, although the supposedly spontaneous conditions of its composition and its overall religious and artistic purposes differentiate it from the vernacular pedagogical and catechetical works that Bede is said to have produced. The poem is a sobering and simple meditation on Judgement and the fate of the soul after death, which is unknowable to man in this life; an implicit reminder to the faithful to face death with humility and contrition.

While "Bede's Death Song" adheres to the conventions of Old English alliterative poetry, its language and style is more prolix than that of classical, copybook Old English verse such as "Cædmon's Hymn." Bryan Weston Wyly

²³ Bede, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 554–55.

²⁴ Cuthbert the Deacon, *Epistola de obitu Bedae*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 582–83. On this point, see Rauer, "The Earliest English Prose," 489–91. The article discusses the suggestion that Bede's deathbed translations might have been into poetry not prose.

²⁵ Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*; Bede, *Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*.

²⁶ Bede, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 555.

remarks that “Bede swamps his salutary message in a quagmire of adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, and conjunctions. From the little this poem gives us of his vernacular work, it appears that Bede has modelled his Old English syntax on the devices of Latin rhetoric.”²⁷ Bede presents a particularly favourable picture of vernacular poetry in his account of Cædmon, an uneducated layman who produced “the most melodious verse,” although Bede chose to record only a Latin translation of “Cædmon’s Hymn” in the *Historia ecclesiastica*.²⁸ Despite the high esteem in which he held Cædmon and the early Northumbrian practice of vernacular religious poetic composition, Bede’s only surviving Old English poem is more indebted to Latin style than to vernacular poetic diction.²⁹

Bede’s approval of Cædmon’s divinely inspired creativity rests not in his admiration of native literary forms *per se*, but in the modest cowherd’s ability to present the grand schemes of biblical and salvation history in an elevated poetic diction. The difference between the artistic projects of Cædmon and Bede is linguistic: the highest artistic register known to Cædmon was the vernacular alliterative poetry of the hall and the feast; for Bede, it was the strict prosody of Latin verse that he was exposed to and mastered throughout his education and subsequent career.

Latinity and the Classical Background to Bede’s Metrical Psalms

Classical and Christian Latin poetry figured prominently in the development of an Anglo-Latin poet. Beyond quotidian liturgical use, facility with the Latin language would have been consolidated through the academic study of biblical exegesis and treatises on Latin grammar, rhetoric, and the mechanics of writing.³⁰ Understanding the strict rules of Latin poetry played a part in the mastery of Latin for more advanced scholars.³¹ Sarah Foot sug-

27 Wyly, “How Did OE Literature Start?”

28 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 4.24, 418–19.

29 On vernacular poetry, see Ireland, *The Gaelic Background of Old English Poetry*, 49–86; Ireland, “Vernacular Poets in Bede and Muirchú.”

30 See Cornelius, “Grammars and Rhetoric;” Gneuss, “The Study of Language in Anglo-Saxon England;” Knappe, “Classical Rhetoric in Anglo-Saxon England;” Law, “The Study of Latin Grammar;” Steen, *Verses and Virtuosity*.

31 In his discussion of Aldhelm’s technique, Lapidge remarks on the difficulty of composing poetry in a foreign language according to foreign rules. While Aldhelm might not have mastered these rules fully (at times his verse resembles Old English poetics), the rules of the craft nevertheless were strict and required meticulous study. See Lapidge, “Aldhelm’s Latin Poetry.”

gests that “Once a student had mastered sufficient Latin, he would go on to read the wisdom books of the Old Testament and then start to explore the more demanding poetic texts of the school curriculum in Late Antiquity together with examples of Christian Latin poetry.”³² Although Bede’s use of the non-Christian classical poets is not as wide-ranging as that of his predecessor Aldhelm, a representative selection can be detected in his works. The pagan classical poets whom Bede cites, alludes to, or possibly drew on in his work include Cicero, Claudian, Horace, Juvenal, Lucan, Martial, Ovid, Persius, and Vergil.³³ Some of the Late-Antique and early medieval Christian Latin poets that Bede drew on in his work include Aldhelm, Arator, Avitus, Claudius Marius Victorius, Dracontius, Juvenius, Licentius, Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius, Paulinus of Nola, Prosper of Aquitaine, Prudentius, Sedulius, and Venantius Fortunatus.³⁴ From among these, Vergil is the poet whom Bede cites most frequently.³⁵ This is closely followed, unsurprisingly, by the Christian poets Arator, Juvenius, and Sedulius.

It is important to be cautious when discussing Bede’s classical sources; some might have been known first-hand from the library of Wearmouth-Jarrow and beyond, while some works might have been used as indirect sources that were accessed second-hand through grammatical materials, Patristic authors, and Carolingian or Irish works that drew heavily on the classics.³⁶ For example, Vergil is cited widely in the work of Jerome of Stridon, Augustine of Hippo, and Isidore of Seville.³⁷ It is clear that a range of classical and Late-Antique poets were known to Bede in one way or another, and used in his work. Following Neil Wright, it is reasonable to assume that when Bede drew upon or echoed the verse of a classical poet he knew their work relatively well; recollecting individual lines of classical verse from a mental database of snippets found here and there in secondary material seems like an unnatural way to use sources and a difficult methodology, even

32 Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England*.

33 Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 191–228.

34 Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 191–228.

35 Wright, “Bede and Vergil.” Wright conclusively shows that Bede accessed Vergil’s poetry first-hand, in contrast to Peter Hunter Blair’s understanding of Bede’s second-hand use of Vergil; see Blair, “Bede to Alcuin.” Lapidge refutes the idea that Bede recollected lines from treatises on metrics, arguing that Bede knew poets like Vergil directly; see Lapidge, “Bede and the Poetic Diction of Vergil,” 740.

36 This also applies to other poets from the period. Rosalind Love shows how Bede used sources from both his own library and a large borrowing network of scholars throughout England; Love, “The Library of the Venerable Bede.”

37 See Ziolkowski, “Vergil.”

for a scholar with an encyclopaedic mind such as Bede.³⁸ Given all we know about how Bede remembered and used the Bible and the Church Fathers, however, it follows that he knew his favourite Latin poets like Vergil in the same way: directly, in-depth, and *ex corde*. While acknowledging the arguments of Lapidge and Wright concerning Bede's direct use of sources, it is clear that some Anglo-Latin like Aldhelm—and Bede—did, indeed, recollect and refashion classical and Late-Antique verse from memory. The Bible and the Church Fathers were known because of their ubiquity. It is plausible that a scholar-poet like Bede would also have utilised his capacious memory to commit bits and pieces of formally refined Latin poetry to his mental repertoire to be drawn on and alluded to throughout his creative career.

Grammar is another way in which Bede might have encountered classical poets second-hand. There is good evidence that classical and Christian Latin poets were relatively well-represented in early medieval English libraries.³⁹ *Grammatica* rely on classical poetic examples and would have provided Bede and other poets in early medieval England with additional access to the classics. Some grammarians known by Bede in one way or another and cited in his works include Aquila, Audax, Flavius Caper, Cassiodorus, Flavius Sospater Charisius, Cledonius, Consentius Gallus, Diomedes, Donatus, Julian of Toledo, Mallius Theodorus, Martianus Capella, Phocas, Priscian, Sergius, Servius, and Virgilius Maro Grammaticus.⁴⁰ Some other grammarians whose work has been detected in the writings of other early medieval English authors include Agroecius of Sens, Comminianus, Caper, Euticius Mallius Theodorus, Maximus Victorinus, and Pompeius Grammaticus.⁴¹ Classical models and examples are presented as archetypal in grammatical texts, which must have engendered a deep appreciation of the “profane” authors among early medieval monastics, even if they sought to offer alternative examples in their own reworkings on the subjects of language, style, and rhetoric.⁴² Moreover, the study of earlier treatises would have clearly centred these periods as the highpoint of linguistic and literary achievement in Latin and encouraged positive attitudes towards poets like Vergil.⁴³ Facility with Latin poetry was achieved through a combination of first- and second-hand knowledge of the classics.

38 On remembered reading, see Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 126–224.

39 Lapidge, “The Study of Latin Texts in Late Anglo-Saxon England.”

40 Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 191–228.

41 Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 175–274.

42 De arte metrica, 17–19.

43 See Law, “Late Latin Grammars in the Early Middle Ages.”

David Knowles discusses the “mental climates” of Cassiodorus and Benedict of Nursia, who differ in their understanding of the value of the classics.⁴⁴ In Bede’s Northumbria, where copies of classical and Christian Latin poets were available and where classical treatises on grammar were studied and abridged, the “mental climate” was one that admired classical poetry as a model to be emulated. There is also a sense of “cultural aspiration” regarding the use of classical models, especially in the works of Aldhelm and Alcuin.⁴⁵ One wonders to what degree *antiquitas* and *ueteres* would have been viewed as prestigious; “classical” was not a term used at this time, and ancient works, although pagan, might have carried a certain pedigree by virtue of their historical pedigree.⁴⁶ As Seppo Heikkinen indicates, early medieval poets and metricists expressed anxieties about pagan poetry, but also a strong awareness of the indebtedness of Christian Latin verse to earlier models.⁴⁷ In Bede’s work, we encounter anxieties about the use of pagan Latin poets: exempla drawn from the sources of his treatises on metre and stylistics, *De arte metrica* and *De schematibus et tropis*, are purged and replaced with alternative examples from the Bible and from Christian Latin poets such as Sedulius and Venantius Fortunatus.⁴⁸ The great Christian Latin biblical epics of Late Antiquity were foundational to the early medieval monastic poetic curriculum, but as Calvin B. Kendall remarks, “it seems doubtful that the existence of a new body of poems by Christian authors could have sustained in and by itself the study of poetry and rhetoric,” thus necessitating engagement with classical poets and the synthesis of new works such as Bede’s *De arte metrica*.⁴⁹ There is both a dichotomy and a continuity between classical poetry and its Christian successor.

Overall, Latin poetry seems to have been viewed in the same way as biblical exegesis and commentary: as a direct continuation of earlier learned Christian traditions. Classical Latin poetry is the basis of and, indeed, the apogee of the tradition of Latin verse in terms of form, structure, and technique. The standard is set by Vergil, but best realized for Christian audiences

⁴⁴ Knowles, “The Preservation of the Classics,” 138.

⁴⁵ Love discusses “cultural aspiration[s]” in her essay, “The Library of the Venerable Bede,” 620.

⁴⁶ See Copeland, “Introduction,” 3.

⁴⁷ Heikkinen, “Re-classicizing Bede?,” 2–6.

⁴⁸ On the tension between classical and Christian poets, see Heikkinen, “Re-classicizing Bede?,” 2–6.

⁴⁹ *De arte metrica*, 18.

by the Late-Antique Christian schoolroom poets. Bede is working within and continuing this mixed inheritance. Rosalind Love remarks:

There is a sense in which the use of elevated Latin, not merely as a means of communication but with the degree of elegance and sophistication that can be found in some of Bede's prose and certainly in his verse, suggests a desire, even if half-conscious, to be part of a larger continuum than that of the apostles of Rome, St Peter and St Paul.⁵⁰

In the epigram to his reworking of Adomnán's textual geography and gazetteer of biblical locations, Bede writes:

Descripti breuiter fines situsque locorum,
pagina sacra magis quae memoranda refert,
Baeda, sequens ueterum monumenta, simulque nouorum
carta magistrorum quae sonat inspicuens.
Da, Iesu, ut patriam semper tendamus ad illam,
quam beat aeternum uisio summa tui.

I, Bede, following the witness of the ancients and likewise the things which the probing writings of more modern masters expound, have briefly described the territories and sites of those places which the Bible says are most memorable. Grant, O Jesus, that we may always strive towards that homeland, which the exalted sight of Yourself enriches eternally.⁵¹

These verses refer to Bede's methodology in recasting Adomnán's text, but underscore the correlative importance of tradition and continuity to his overall work. Poetry is not only an ornament used to preface scholarly treatises written *sequens ueterum monumenta* (following old traditions) but is itself a tradition to be continued.

The Tradition of Psalm Paraphrases before Bede

The term "paraphrase" is often used in connection with Bede's metrical Psalms, and it is useful with some clarification. The modern English term has connotations of summary, reduction, expansion, departure, or simplification. However, Bede's Psalms are more ornate than their Latin source texts. The term "paraphrase" frequently applies to schoolroom exercises aimed at developing skills in one language or another.⁵² Παράφρασις (*paráphrasis*) in Greek denotes an alternative means of expression. Rachel Ricceri

⁵⁰ Love, "The Library of the Venerable Bede."

⁵¹ Bede, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 330–31.

⁵² Faulkner, "Paraphrase and Metaphrase," 211.

notes, regarding the Byzantine context, that μεταφράζω (*metafrázō*) “to paraphrase” is used to designate an alteration in terms of rhetorical beauty, stylistic improvement, a change in genre, and higher linguistic choices compared to “paraphrase,” which tended to denote formal equivalence and an alteration in wording.⁵³ Therefore, Bede’s texts might more accurately be described as metaphrases aimed at stylistically improving the biblical text by stylisation and transposition into a higher literary register.⁵⁴

The practice of metrical paraphrases of the Psalms began with Pseudo-Apollinaris of Laodicea’s hexametrical *Metaphrasis Psalmorum*.⁵⁵ Pseudo-Apollinaris’s “Homeric Psalter” is a product of the Late-Antique cultural impulse towards adapting the Bible in verse. The practice of Psalter versifying is first realized in the Latin tradition by Paulinus of Nola in his *Carmina* 7–9, which recast certain psalms into verse in the same way as his poetic version of the Gospel of Luke. The proem to Pseudo-Apollinaris’s *Metaphrasis Psalmorum* discusses the text’s attempt to recast the Greek Psalter back into the medium of poetry that was used in the original Hebrew version as the “grace” of metre was lost in the process of translation (since the Septuagint Psalter, like its later Latin counterpart, is not poetic).⁵⁶ The particular move towards classicizing scriptural poetry including psalm paraphrases does not only derive from anxiety about the contents of pagan literature, but an aesthetic attachment to the form and style of classical literature. The edict of the pagan emperor Julian the Apostate in 362 CE banning Christians from teaching classical literature (if Christians want to learn literature, they have Luke and Mark) would have further motivated this switch to Christian texts in classical clothing, although its influence has been much overestimated. Paulinus of Nola’s *Carmina* 7–9 are based on Psalms 1, 2, and 137 and are a possible model for Bede’s own psalm adaptations. Bede knew the poems of Paulinus and cited them in the *Vita metrica sancti Cuthberti*, *De arte metrica*,

53 Ricceri, “Two Metrical Rewritings of the Greek Psalms,” 224–26.

54 Churik, “Greek Explicating Greek,” 68–69; see also Constantinou, “*Metaphrasis*: Mapping Premodern Rewriting.” See Faulkner, “Paraphrase and Metaphrase,” 214 and Ricceri, “Two Metrical Rewritings,” 225–26. There is some debate about whether the two terms were used interchangeably alongside other terms such as μεταβολή (metabolē).

55 Socrates of Constantinople, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 3.16; Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5.18. This text was erroneously attributed to Apollinaris in Late Antiquity, whose father was also reported to have produced scriptural paraphrases in verse.

56 Faulkner, “Paraphrase and Metaphrase,” 214.

De orthographia, and the *Commentarius in Lucam*.⁵⁷ Bede knew Paulinus' psalm paraphrases and these might have been the original inspiration for Bede's own adaptations, which in their extant form also number three.

Adapting the Language of the Latin Psalter

The Psalms played a preeminent role in the liturgical, devotional, intellectual, and literary cultures of early medieval monasticism.⁵⁸ Cuthbert the Deacon provides an account of Bede's devotional activity in his final days, illustrating the centrality of the Psalms: "et nobis suis discipulis cotidie lectiones dabat, et quicquid reliquum fuit diei in Psalmorum cantu prout potuit occupabat" (and he gave lessons to us his students every day, and spent the rest of his day in chanting the Psalter, as best he could).⁵⁹ As a poet steeped in classical and Late-Antique poetry, Bede would have been aware that the historical Latin Psalters do not adhere to classical prosody. Bede's versions constitute artful reworkings in classical verse of these important examples of biblical "poetry."

The *Psalterium Romanum* was the standard text used in England and Rome. No version of the Psalter conforms to classical Latin prosody or literary standard. The *Romanum* was used in the daily cycle of the divine office and in the liturgy in early medieval England, although the *Psalterium Gallicanum* and the *Psalterium Hebraicum* were also known and used in other contexts.⁶⁰ Bede adapted the *Romanum* in his metrical Psalms. Meditating on novel recastings of familiar psalmic texts would have generated new meaning and understanding, piercing the individual heart and soul, and moving the faithful towards devotion in the tradition of *compunctio cordis* (sting of the heart). As Elena Malaspina notes, the use of the liturgically familiar *Romanum* indicates that these adaptations held a devotional and meditative function and were not simply technical or artistic conceits.⁶¹

Reworking the Psalms into new metrical forms is ultimately devotional, but it is primarily a linguistic and aesthetic project. From the perspective of

⁵⁷ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 221–22.

⁵⁸ Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, 39–93; Gross-Diaz, "The Latin Psalter;" Brown, "The Psalms as the Foundation of Anglo-Saxon Learning;" Atkin and Leneghan, *The Psalms and Medieval English Literature*.

⁵⁹ Cuthbert the Deacon, *Epistola de obitu Bedae*; Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 580–81. Translation adapted from 581.

⁶⁰ See Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, 23–29; Billett, *The Divine Office in Anglo-Saxon England*.

⁶¹ Malaspina, "Tre meditazioni salmiche di Beda il Venerabile," 978.

a Latin poet, it would be striking that none of the Psalter versions conform to the conventional structures of Latin poetry (similarly with the Greek Septuagint with respect to classical Greek prosody).⁶² Vincent Hunink remarks:

These Latin Psalms, being a literal translation based on a literal translation from another language, present numerous difficulties that reflect their complex genesis. With their uncommon genre and textual structure [Latin Psalms seem unlike either classical prose or classical poetry], vulgate forms, uncommon metaphoric language, Graecisms and Hebraisms, they strike the average reader of Classical Latin as highly curious texts.⁶³

The Latin of the *Vetus Latina*—of which the *Psalterium Romanum* is arguably a representative—has variously been described as vulgar Latin, Late Latin, or as a form of Christian *Sondersprache* (subvariety of a language understood only by one group).⁶⁴ It might also be described as a type of *Schriftsprache* (a high-level standardized written language), *Fachsprache* (technical language or jargon), *Kirchensprache* (cultivated ecclesiastical language), *Mischsprache* (mixed language), or *Übersetzungsmedium* (translation medium).⁶⁵ While its sociolinguistic dynamics are difficult to define, we can conclude that biblical Latin is a particular idiolect that represents the non-literary Latin of the day being applied to translate documents from another language, texts that are themselves littered with solecism and peculiarity of idiom and expression.

Francis Leneghan observes that Jerome utilized prose for both his *Psalterium Gallicanum* and *Psalterium Hebraicum*, the same form that was used by the earlier translator(s) of the *Psalterium Romanum*.⁶⁶ While none of these constitute classical prosody *per se*, they present elements that might be regarded as poetic in nature. The *Vetus Latina* and *Psalterium Romanum* utilize a sense-for-sense method of translation that probably precluded the possibility of rendering the Greek text closely into Latin while also adhering to classical metrical forms. Similarly, interest in the sense of the text seems to have taken precedence over any desire on the part of Jerome or earlier translators to realize the *Romanum*, *Gallicanum*, or *Hebraicum* in classi-

62 On the style of the Greek Psalter, see Jones, *Translation and Style in the Old Greek Psalter*.

63 Hunink, "Review of David J. Ladouceur, *The Latin Psalter*."

64 See Burton, *The Old Latin Gospels*, 151–56.

65 On the sociolinguistic dimensions of Anglo-Latin, see Timofeeva, "Anglo-Latin and Old English."

66 Leneghan, "Making the Psalter Sing," 174. Toswell discusses the difficulties of categorizing Psalter translations and glosses. Toswell, "Genre and the Dictionary of Old English," 239 ff.

cal verse. Bede's metrical Psalms attempt to rectify the formal and stylistic shortcomings of the Latin Psalter. One might argue that poetic translations must adhere to the conventions of poetry in the target language to be regarded as successful.⁶⁷ Latin translations of the Psalter do not follow the conventions of classical prosody, because these conventions do not define biblical and liturgical Latin, although these conventions were current in the contemporary literature.

The *Romanum* and *Gallicanum* exhibit all the problems that faithful and literal translations entail, such as Hebrew or Greek solecism and other kinds of lexical, grammatical, and stylistic "translationese."⁶⁸ Although it does not constitute prosody, Jerome's *Hebraicum* is the most artful and idiomatic Latin Psalter translation. However, it never eclipsed the other versions despite its dignity and regardless of their deficiencies. Of course, the Latin liturgy is replete with rhythmical prose that is not metrical in classical terms, such as musical chants, tropes, proses (*prosulae*), sequences (*sequentiae*), and commonplace hymns like the *Te Deum* and the *Te decet laus*. Most of the liturgy's chants, introits, propers, graduals, antiphons, and collects are based on scripture. Sometimes these texts are metrical, but frequently they reformulate scripture in a rhythmical style that is not prosodical in classical terms. During the early medieval period, these aspects of liturgy were still in development and such additions were formulated without concern for classical poetic convention.⁶⁹ While such texts consciously emulated psalmic and biblical language, the techniques governing their composition were not regulated by the rules of classical verse. It is, therefore, fair to delineate between rhythm, music, and artistry regarding liturgical "poetry" on the one hand, and formal classical verse on the other. It is worth noting that Christian biblical and liturgical Latin, as they developed, were not constrained by classical style; even within the Roman tradition, classical Latin prosody developed from Greek influence on the literature of the late Republic.⁷⁰

67 Anglo-Latin verse could be idiosyncratic and imperfect in how it realized classical poetics. See Lapidge, "Aldhelm's Latin Poetry," 209–31.

68 Ladouceur, *The Latin Psalter*, 10–11.

69 Iversen, "Vergil, the Psalms, and New Poetic Genres."

70 Catullus and Lucretius had polished the Latin poetic language before Vergil's time. Compare the register and diction of the section on rituals in Cato, *De agri cultura*. Compare also the language of Prudentius and the corpus of Ambrosian hymns. On the development of Early Latin, see Adams, Chahoud, and Pezzini, *Early Latin*. The earliest biblical Latin texts were recorded in a less rigid form than the elevated style of contemporary Roman literature. This is because Latin as a biblical language was a grass-roots movement and deliberately adopted a different style than

The genre of the Psalter is also difficult to define. Translations of the Psalms into (Greek and) Latin maintain features of repetition and parallelism that define the poetic diction of the original Hebrew texts. As such, Latin Psalter versions could be regarded as “poetic” since they mirror in translation the poetic characteristics present in the original Hebrew source texts. It should be noted that just because Latin texts do not adhere to classical Latin prosody, that does not mean they are not poetic, as alternative or new poetic aesthetics might be at work. Many cultures do not distinguish between prose and verse, but between sung texts and spoken texts; sung texts can be lyrical or rhythmical, but do not need to be metrical. The musical application of the Psalter in the Latin liturgy pushes these texts beyond mere prose. However, in Latin, the chanted, non-metrical poetry of the Psalter is the exception; all other poetry in this language conforms to metrical constraints.⁷¹ The early Latin versions are a form of poetry, although it is artificial to have chanted poetry in Latin that is not metrical. The Septuagint Psalter was produced because Hebrew was no longer understandable amongst the Alexandrian Jewish diaspora and this non-metrical version influenced subsequent Latin translations.⁷²

The fact remains that early Christian Latin does not follow the elevated literary style of its day and the Latin Psalters do not follow the basic conventions of prosody. This is because the Latin Psalters are constrained by the aim to provide functional translations of the Greek scriptures, which invite features of “translationese” or *Fachsprache*. The *ad verbum* translation methodology of the Greek Septuagint Psalter encompassed features such as formal equivalence, calques, solecism, and textual obscurity, which

the traditional literary language of the day. See Mohrmann, *Liturgical Latin*, 38 ff. That is not to say that biblical Latin was barbarous, but it did not satisfy the norms of classical Latin literature in its register and form, which, in terms of authoritative and literary writing, had become the norm for Christians and non-Christians alike. The evolution of biblical and ecclesiastical Latin into a hieratic language is complex.

71 Chanted non-metrical texts are common in other languages and cultures that value other features in their definition of poetry. Despite traditional objections, there is an argument to be made that the Qur’an is an example of such non-metrical poetry. So too are the Ugaritic hymns and epics. Isidore Okpewho describes how Congolese bards compete to see who could fit the most syllables into a drummed line or stanza, which is a metrical behaviour of sorts, but not at all what westerners think of as “metre.” See Okpewho, *African Oral Literature*. However, historically in the west, metre defines verse.

72 Late Greek compositions of Hellenistic Judaism such as Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus lack the main features of biblical poetry except where they borrow from earlier works, which translate these features in Greek.

were repeated in the Latin versions.⁷³ Christine Mohrmann observes that the early translations of the Latin Bible were viewed with embarrassment by educated Christian Latin elites who were familiar with classical stylistic conventions.⁷⁴ Lactantius saw Latin biblical style as an impediment to the religion's advancement. Lapidge remarks that Juvenius's Gospel paraphrase, the *Evangeliorum libri quattuor* (*Evangelia*)—one of the earliest Christian Latin poets to write in an elevated poetic Latin style—came about because “there was a need for a ‘new’ version of the Gospels—a version cast in an elegant register of Latin rather than the stumbling colloquial prose ‘translationese’ that is the *Vetus Latina*.”⁷⁵ Lapidge acknowledges, however, the existence of “elegant Latin prose by highly articulate rhetors” before Juvenius, such as Tertullian and Lactantius.⁷⁶ Juvenius began a tradition of ornamented Christian Latin poetry that was continued by Proba, Paulinus of Nola, Prudentius, Cyprianus Gallus, Sedulius, and Bede.⁷⁷ The distance of the biblical Psalters from earlier Latin of poets would have been all too apparent to Bede who sought to revive archaic poetic standards.

Bede's Metrical Psalms

Bede utilized a classical diction as ornament for the biblical texts. An example of embellishment can be seen in Bede's treatment of Psalm 112.1, which reads as follows:

Psalterium Romanum (henceforth PsRom) and *Psalterium Gallicanum*: Laudate pueri Dominum, laudate nomen Domini (Praise the Lord, ye children: praise ye the name of the Lord).⁷⁸

Psalterium Hebraicum: Laudate servi Dominum, laudate nomen Domini (Praise the Lord, ye servants, praise the name of the Lord).

73 Ladouceur, *The Latin Psalter*, 9–11.

74 Mohrmann, *Liturgical Latin*, 39.

75 Lapidge, “Versifying the Bible in the Middle Ages,” 13; McGill, *Juvenius' Four Books of the Gospels*, 1–14.

76 Lapidge, “Versifying the Bible in the Middle Ages,” 13.

77 See Hardie, *Classicism and Christianity in Late Antique Latin Poetry*.

78 All references to the *Psalterium Romanum* are taken from Weber, *Le Psautier Romain*. All translations are taken from the Douay-Rheims English translation and adapted as required to reflect the *Romanum*. References to the *Psalterium Hebraicum* and *Psalterium Gallicanum* are taken from *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, ed. Weber and Gryson.

This verse is rendered by Bede as:

Laudate altithronum, pueri, laudate tonantem!

(Praise the Almighty, you children, praise the Thunderer!).⁷⁹

The term “pueri” is used in the two most prominent Psalter versions, the *Psalterium Romanum* and the *Gallicanum*; the *Hebraicum* has “servi.” Bede’s retention of “pueri” anchors his metrical adaptation in the biblical-textual tradition. The Breviate Psalter adapts the text of the *Psalterium Hebraicum* 112.1 as follows:

Sit nomen Domini benedictum, a modo usque in aeternum

Blessed be the name of the Lord from now and forever.⁸⁰

The Breviate Psalter is closest to biblical vocabulary of the Psalter. While retaining a biblical connection, Bede’s metrical adaptation augments the principal sense of the verse through the use of classical grand epithets; alternative and more poetic appellations for God that communicate the majesty of the divine more strongly than the familiar wording of the *Romanum* and transposing it into a higher poetic register. Bede’s lexical choices clearly communicate his objectives: “Altithronus” derives from Juvenius and Venantius Fortunatus, a designation that was also picked up by Aldhelm in the *Carmina ecclesiastica* (2.25) and the *Carmina de virginitate* (961, 1289, 1695); by Alcuin in the *Versus de patribus, regibus et sanctis Euboricensis ecclesiae* (632); and by Oswald the Younger of Ramsey in his “Prayer to Christ in retrograde verses” (6), as well as the anonymous Anglo-Latin author of the *Hymnus Nynie episcopi* (1, 2).⁸¹ The epithet “tonans” derives from both Vergil, Ovid, and Lucan’s description of Jupiter and was commonly used as an appellation for the Christian God, first by Juvenius and later by Sedulius, Avitus, and Cyprianus Gallus. By echoing his classical and Christian predecessors’ epithets, Bede affords heightened expression to the Latin of the *Romanum*. *Nomina sacra* are used throughout the biblical texts with different implications for style and meaning. Bede’s decision to “classicize” the names of the Lord in his revision of Psalm 112 indicates his overall literary aim.

⁷⁹ Bede, XVI.1, Bede, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 346–47.

⁸⁰ Bede, *Collectio Psalterii*, 112; Browne, *The Abbreviated Psalter of the Venerable Bede*, 73.

⁸¹ For editions of these and other texts mentioned for comparison below, refer to CLASP.

The decision to adapt Psalm 112 is potentially linked to its role in the liturgy of the hours (it was read in the office of Vespers for Easter), its resemblance to the Magnificat and the angelic *gloria* at the Nativity (Luke 2:14), or its position as a source for Ambrose's hymn, *Te Deum*; the manageable length and straightforward theme of praise make it particularly suitable as a first foray into psalm versification. Its exhortation to praise—like Psalm 148 but on a smaller scale—might also have been seen as a particularly worthy subject for adaptation. Modern biblical scholarship tells us that this might have been one of the psalms that Christ and the disciples sang at the last supper (Mark 14.26). Its simple theme of worship encapsulates Psalmody as a genre. All people at all times, from the rising of the sun to its setting, are called to praise the Lord who is high above all nations:

Excelsus gentes Dominus supereminit omnes,
eius et astriferos transcendit gloria caelos

The heavenly Lord is high above all nations/
and His glory transcends the starry heavens!.⁸²

Bede's vocabulary for "stars" is quite *recherché*: "astriferos" is a particularly poetic term that crops up a handful of times in the corpus of Latin verse. It is used by the classical poet Statius in his *Thebais* (8.83), and by the Late Antique Christian poet Juvencus in his *Evangelia* (3.225); in the Anglo-Latin corpus, it occurs only in Aldhelm (whose diction is famously recondite and classicizing) in his *Aenigmata* (35), and Wulfstan of Winchester's *Narratio metrica de Sancto Swithuno* (2.14). Bede's use of a highly specialized poetic diction that appeals to classical and Late Antique—Bede certainly knew Juvencus—positions this versification firmly as a "cosmetically classical" versions of PsRom. 112.⁸³ Etymologically, "astriferos" means "star bearing," which is a particularly poetic as a morphological combination. The lines cited above adapt PsRom.112.4:

Excelsus super omnes gentes Dominus et super caelos gloria eius

The Lord is high above all nations and his glory above the heavens.

The inclusion of the gentiles foreshadows the Christian Gospel and might have been particularly appealing to an early medieval English poet and audience. Bede's Psalm 112 is the metaphrase that follows its biblical source most closely, which is probably connected to its short length. The language of

82 Bede, XVI.5–6, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 346–47.

83 To adapt a phrase from Heikkinen, "Re-classicizing Bede?," 3.

the biblical verse is poetic and communicates the numinous, but is straightforward—qualities that Bede mirrors in his version.

PsRom.112.6:

quis sicut Dominus Deus noster qui in altis habitat et humilia
respicit in caelo et in terra

Who is as the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high and looketh down on the
low things in heaven and in earth?.

Bede:

Quis Domino est similis, sedes cui perpes in altis?/ Respicit ast
humiles caelo terraque benignus

Who is like the Lord, Whose eternal dwelling is on high?/ But He mercifully
looks upon the humble citizens in heaven and on earth.⁸⁴

Bede's description of the Lord looking down "mercifully" on humankind penetrates the meaning of the biblical verse and the psalm as a whole: God does not regard the faithful loftily from afar, but humbles Himself and looks mercifully upon His people whom He guides closely. In this instance, Bede stays close to his biblical sources—in both content and language—but with a minor qualification ("benignus") that brings out more strongly the sense of the biblical text. In this way, Bede interprets the psalms and translates these texts for his audience even though he is working within a single language. The immanence of God in this psalmic hymn is contrasted with His position "above the heavens;" the contrast serves to bridge the gap between both domains; God is both elevated and immanent.

Bede's transformation of the sacred text from prosaic biblical Latin into a highly aureate poetic style resembles Juvenius's version of the *Pater noster* from the *Evangelia* (1.589–600): Juvenius's rendering of Matthew 6.9 replaces "in caelis" (in heaven) with the more elaborate "in uertice caeli" (in heaven's starry peak), another Vergilian reference to Jupiter from the *Aeneid*.⁸⁵ Both Juvenius and Bede follow the sense of their source text, but in a heightened stylistic fashion. The language of the Bible is elevated by Bede, repositioning the Psalter in the style of the Late-Antique Christian poets who were fundamentally central to the monastic curriculum in this context.⁸⁶ By

84 Bede, XVI.7–8, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 346–47.

85 On Juvenius' imitation of classical models, see McGill, *Juvenius' Four Books of the Gospels*, 5–18.

86 On the curriculum, see Lapidge, "Versifying the Bible in the Middle Ages," 11–40; McBrine, *Biblical Epics in Late Antiquity*, 55–61. See also Green, *Latin Epics of the*

echoing the phrasing and diction of his models, Bede is, in essence, writing Latin poetry from early medieval England into this literary history and canon. However, Bede's psalms are not centos (that is, assemblages of lines from other poets, a classical type of "found poetry") nor is Bede an epigone (a less distinguished follower or imitator, from Latin *epigonus*, "successor"). The metrical psalms resemble a sort of pastiche, works that borrow, emulate, and pay homage to earlier Latin verse.⁸⁷

Juvencus's *Evangelia* attempted to transform non-literary biblical Latin into what Scott McGill termed "a culturally prestigious idiom."⁸⁸ Bede's project pursues similar aims by recasting the Psalms into classical metre. Bede's Psalms 41 and 112 are presented in canonical dactylic hexameters, the standard metrical form used in epic poetry such as Vergil's *Aeneid*. Bede's Psalm 83 is composed in elegiac couplets, a variety of metre that is less grand than epic hexameters.⁸⁹ The use of heroic metre elevates Psalms 41 and 112 to the level of classical epic verse, investing these texts with heightened aesthetic value and appeal. However, the use of elegiac couplets for Psalm 83—alongside its more liberal adaptation of its source text—could be seen as antithetical to the task of elevating the biblical text to the highest possible style and register. Was Bede's version of this psalm a looser adaptation than his other revisions? In a culture that produced poetic texts of all kinds in hexameters and elegiacs, it is difficult to make sharp generic distinctions in how different metres were applied. However, Malaspina makes the point that Bede's deployment of the hexameter exactly follows classical technique (for example, use of the semiquinary caesura and dactyls in the fifth foot).⁹⁰ It is possible that Bede specifically chose the hexameter for his more faithful psalm revisions because of its associations with classical epic, notwithstanding its various contemporary applications.

The formal and stylistic interplay between metrical forms is more complex, however. Malaspina points to *De arte metrica* in which Bede presents the idea that the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 and other Psalms were

New Testament; Lapidge, "Bede and the Poetic Diction of Vergil," 739–48; Heikkinen, "Virgilian Quotations in Bede's *De arte metrica*," 69–94; Wright, "Bede and Vergil," 361–79.

87 Green argues that psalm paraphrases are neither centos nor pastiche, but the latter term is useful and need not suggest that Bede's Psalms are entirely derivative, Green, "Poetic Psalm Paraphrases," 461.

88 McGill, *Juvencus' Four Books of the Gospels*, 9.

89 Bede's innovation as a metricist is discussed in Lapidge, "Bede and Vergil."

90 Malaspina, "Tre meditazioni salmiche di Beda il Venerabile," 975.

written in elegiac verse whereas Job was written in “plain hexameters.”⁹¹ Indeed, as Malaspina notes, Bede includes a hymn on virginity in elegiac couplets in his *Historia ecclesiastica*, contending that the Bible contains texts in similar verse and metre.⁹² As such, Bede’s Psalm 83 does not reject the metrical tradition of classical epic poetry and heightened style, but, rather, gestures to the biblical tradition of elegiac couplets that he believes is ultimately the original source of this form. One wonders, however, whether Bede is really imitating “original” biblical style or the Vergilian epic verse he so clearly admired. It is, of course, the assertion that the Bible contained similar poetic styles that legitimised the continued study of classical Latin prosody.⁹³

Bede’s metrical style is not rigidly classical, however, in that he deploys leonine verse (where the final syllable of a dactylic hexameter or pentameter rhymes with the final syllable before the caesura in the same verse); classical poets generally avoided rhyme, but the Leonine verse became popular in Late Latin and the medieval period, and was adopted by Bede in imitation of schoolroom poets such as Sedulius and Arator. For example, leonine verse is used in the following two verses of Bede’s Psalm 83:

“Spiritus hoc **meus**, hoc ipsi laetantur et artus”

My heart and my very limbs rejoice in this.⁹⁴

“Da modo, summe, **tui**, genitor, mihi lumina uerbi”

Grant to me now, mighty Creator, the illumination of Your Word.⁹⁵

91 Malaspina, “Tre meditazioni salmiche di Beda il Venerabile,” 974. Bede points to the Hieronymian idea that Job and other biblical texts like the Deuteronomy 32 (*Canticum Moyses*) and Psalms 118 and 143 were written in comparable verse forms in Hebrew: “When the pentameter is joined with the hexameter, the verse is called ‘elegiac.’ For scholars speak of elegiac poetry as sad, and the modulation of this verse, where the first line is a hexameter and the next a pentameter, is suited to the lamentations of the miserable. It is said that the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy [32] and Psalms 118 and 144 were written in this meter in Hebrew, while the book of the blessed Job was written in plain hexameters,” Bede, *De arte metrica*, 10.41–44, ed. and trans. Kendall, 99. Kendall discusses how, for early Christians “the schemes and tropes of rhetoric could be found in the Bible. Neither the real nature of Hebrew poetry nor the rhetorical practices of the Evangelists had much to do with this conviction. Christians of the first centuries A.D. found hexameters and Sapphics, schemes and tropes in the Bible because they wanted to find them. It was a part of their quest for intellectual respectability,” Kendall, *The Art and Rhetoric of Poetry*, 18.

92 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 4.20, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 396–97.

93 On which see *De arte metrica*, 17–19.

94 Bede, XV.3, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 344–45.

95 Bede, XV.17, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 344–45.

Bede utilizes this metrical flourish throughout his works, although it is not a classical form of adornment. This embellishment indicates that Bede uses formal techniques to render the biblical text into recognizably poetic and prosodic language. While greatly indebted to classical poets like Vergil, Bede found the Late-Antique and medieval poets equally admirable. Sedulius was his gold standard, according to the examples provided in *De arte metrica*. Indeed, appreciation of the “profane” poets is motivated by the esteemed in which they are held by the Christian Latin poets. Again, it can be observed that Bede’s aim seems to have been to render the psalm in question into conventional Latin verse.

Bede’s version of Psalm 112 is sophisticated in its poetic language, techniques, and rhetorical devices. His adaptation follows the biblical text verse-for-verse and sense-for-sense, indicating an intention to elevate the psalm in terms of language, style, and poetic technique. Synchysis is used where the word order of the source text is scattered or disrupted to create bewilderment and closer engagement with its meaning. This can be seen, for example, in Bede’s version of Psalm 112.2. The *Psalterium Romanum* reads as follows:

Sit nomen Domini benedictum ex hoc nunc et usque in saeculum
Blessed be the name of the Lord, from henceforth now and for ever.

Bede refashions this verse in the following way:

Sit magnum Domini benedictum in saecula nomen
Let the mighty name of the Lord be blessed forever.⁹⁶

The object of veneration in the biblical psalm—the Lord’s name—is moved to the end of the line in Bede’s version. The effect, for readers or hearers familiar with the *Romanum*, invites pause and contemplation over what the text is asking us to venerate. This organization mimics the syntax of classical poetry and stands in contrast to the plain diction of the Bible. Bede achieves a similar affect with his revision of PsRom.112.3:

A solis ortu usque ad occasum laudate nomen Domini
From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same,
praise the name of the Lord.

96 Bede, XVI.2, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 346–47.

The somewhat prosaic biblical verse is rendered more elegantly into two hexameters as:

Solis ab exortu Dominum laudate potentem;/
solis ad occasum in hymnis persistite laudum

From the rising of the sun praise the omnipotent Lord;
persevere in your hymns of praise up until the setting of the sun.⁹⁷

These lines follow the sense of the biblical verse, but in more sophisticated and poetic language. The addition of “persevere in your hymns of praise up until the setting of the sun” augments the sense of the biblical text and mirrors the poetic technique of the Hebrew psalms where ideas are repeated over successive verses for emphasis.

A further example of ornamentation occurs in the case of Psalm 112.4. The text of the *Romanum* reads:

Excelsus super omnes gentes Dominus et super caelos gloria eius
The Lord is high above all nations; and his glory above the heavens.

This Psalm verse is realized by Bede in a heightened style as:

Excelsus gentes Dominus supereminit omnes,/
eius et astriferos transcendit gloria caelos
The heavenly Lord is high above all nations,
and His glory transcends the starry heavens.⁹⁸

“Excelsus...Dominus” (heavenly...Lord) is a descriptive appellation for God in the biblical text that emphasizes His divinity; “excelsus” adds to the general usage of “Lord” and further communicates God’s divine sovereignty. Bede builds upon the Psalmist’s language through the collocation “astriferos...caelos” (starry...heavens), which further emphasizes the divine aspect through adjectivisation. The description poetically elevates the unadorned biblical text, which simply reads “caelos.”⁹⁹

The strategy throughout this poetic adaption is to augment the style of the biblical psalm. Bede recrafts the slightly prosaic and repetitious (a feature of Hebrew poetry) language of PsRom. 112.8, which reads:

Ut collocet eum cum principibus cum principibus populi sui
That he may place him with princes, with the princes of his people.

⁹⁷ Bede, XVI.3–4, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 346–47.

⁹⁸ Bede, XVI.5–6, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 346–47.

⁹⁹ PsRom. 112.4; Bede, XVI.5–6, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 346–47.

The verse is recast more elegantly as:

primates inter populi sublimat opimos
and sets them up with the lofty leaders of the people.¹⁰⁰

The poetic version frequently amplifies the sense of the biblical text and emphasizes its core themes. Throughout Bede's paraphrase, single biblical verses are expanded into two hexameters, such as PsRom. 112.3 (XVI.3–4) and 112.9 (XVI.11–12). Thus, we see that Bede's version seeks to recast biblical text in terms of language and style, but not content. The close of PsRom.112 reads:

qui habitare facit sterilem in domo matrem filiorum laetantem
Who maketh a barren woman to dwell in a house,
the joyful mother of children.¹⁰¹

The verse is elaborated upon in a highly expansive manner and cast into a more poetic diction following the style of the Late-Antique Christian poets.

In sterilemque habitare domo miseratur et amplo/
laetari tribuit natorum germine matrem
And in His mercy He permits the barren woman to dwell in the house,
and grants that,/ having become a mother, she may rejoice in the abundant
reproduction of children.¹⁰²

The sophistication of these lines compared to the style of the biblical text illustrates that Bede's Psalms were an aesthetic-linguistic project aimed at achieving an *interpretatio classica* of the Latin Psalter.

Of the three complete adaptations, Psalm 83 is the least rigid. Bede's version does not mirror the biblical text line by line. This rearrangement resembles the use of synchysis in Psalm 112, but in terms of verse order rather than syntax; the effect is similar, encouraging the audience to engage more closely with the text by trying to discern how the two versions correspond. Bede embellishes the text stylistically without reservation. A similar strategy can be observed with PsRom. 83.2:

“Quam amabilia sunt tabernacula tua Domine uirtutum.
How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts.¹⁰³

100 Bede, XVI.10, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 346–47.

101 PsRom. 112.9.

102 Bede, XVI.11–12, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 346–47.

103 PsRom. 83.2.

This verse of the *Romanum* is refined, elevated, and reordered into classical poetic style as:

“Quam dilecta tui fulgent sacraria templi”

How the delightful sanctuaries of Your temple gleam.¹⁰⁴

Bede uses the verb “flugere” in order to make the beauty of the Lord’s dwelling place tangible in physical terms. The beauty is reflected and amplified in more a lyrical cadence than the biblical text provides. In this line, anastrophe is also used to subtly alter the traditional word-order of the psalm; thus, “How lovely are thy tabernacles” becomes “How the delightful sanctuaries of your temple gleam,” the effect of which causes us to pause and consider these lines in comparison to the *Romanum*.¹⁰⁵ Further embellishment occurs with PsRom. 83.3, which reads:

Concupiscit et deficit anima mea in atria Domini, cor meum et caro mea
exultauerunt in Deum uiuum

My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord, my heart and my
flesh have rejoiced in the living God.¹⁰⁶

The verse is elevated and expanded into three poetic lines as:

atria cuius amor flagrat ad alma meus!/ Spiritus hoc meus, hoc ipsi
laetantur et artus,/ uiuentem ut liceat mente uidere Deum

for whose holy courts my love burns!/ My heart and my very limbs
rejoice in this/ that it might be possible to see in spirit the living God.¹⁰⁷

The passion of the Psalmist’s desire for God is amplified with particularly poetic expression that contrasts with the more prosaic biblical diction. Bede’s Psalm 83.3 is markedly Vergilian in colour: “Spiritus hoc meus, hoc ipsi laetantur et artus” consciously echoes “... dum spiritus hos regit artus” in the *Aeneid*, once again illustrating Bede’s classicizing poetic and linguistic aims.¹⁰⁸ Compared to the straightforwardness of the biblical verse, the language of Bede’s version is highly ornate, florid, and somewhat overblown with one verse spun into three effusive lines. The soul, heart, and flesh of the psalm becomes the heart, limbs, and sight in Bede’s version, which com-

104 Bede, XV.1, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 344–45.

105 Ps. 83.2; Bede, XV.1, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 345.

106 PsRom. 83.3.

107 Bede, XV.3–4, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 344–45.

108 Vergil, *Aeneid*, 3.336.

bine to create a burning love that consumes the worshipper's whole being. Bede employs specifically poetic vocabulary such as "artus," a term used in this specialized sense by Corippus, Lactantius, Livy, and Cyprianus Gallus. Although it does not have a biblical referent, Bede's synecdochical use of "polus" for "caelus" ("poli pax" [peace of heaven], 83.15) again constitutes an appeal to classical and Late-Antique poetic language, since "poli" is used by Vergil and a range of Late-Antique Christian poets, as also noted by Malaspina.¹⁰⁹ Thus, it can be seen that in his metrical Psalms, Bede strives for more elegant expression than the biblical text offers. Through the conscious use of language that echoes classical and Late-Antique models, Bede positions his metrical version in this literary milieu.

Elaboration is a common technique in Bede's metrical Psalms, though contraction is also deployed regarding PsRom. 83.5–6:

Beati qui habitant in domo tua Domine in saeculum saeculi laudabunt
te. Beatus uir cuius est auxilium abs te Domine ascensus in corde eius
disposuit

Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, O Lord, they shall praise thee for
ever and ever. Blessed is the man whose help is from thee, in his heart he
hath disposed to ascend by steps.¹¹⁰

These lines—which are echoed in the beatitudes of Matt. 5:3–12 and Luke 6:20–22—are collapsed and recast in classicizing poetic language as:

Felices, habitant qui illius in aedibus aulae/
laus in saecula pios qua tua perpes alit

Blessed are those who dwell in the chambers of that hall/
where Your eternal praise nurses the virtuous forever.¹¹¹

The distinction in the psalm between the priest who dwells in the Temple and the pilgrim worshipper who approaches God in Temple become one and the same in Bede's text. The blessings of the faithful declared in PsRom. 83:5–6 (and later at 83.13) are collapsed into a single blessing upon all the faithful who are nurtured through their love and worship of God.

109 Bede, XV.15, ed Lapidge, 344–45; Malaspina, "Tre meditazioni salmiche di Beda il Venerabile," 979.

110 PsRom. 83.5–6.

111 Bede, XV.7–8, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 344–45.

The reference to “alteria” at PsRom. 83.4 is developed into two verses that meditate on the salvific aspect of worship:

Dulce tua redolet quod dextera condidit altar,/ turicremo purgans
crimina cuncta lare

The altar which your right hand established is sweetly fragrant/
cleansing all sins with its incense exuding flame.¹¹²

These lines reformulate the biblical verse:

Etenim passer inuenit sibi domum et turtur nidum ubi reponat pul-
los suos **alteria** tua Domine uirtutum rex meus et Deus meus

For the sparrow hath found herself a house, and the turtle a nest for
herself where she may lay her young ones, thy altars, O Lord of hosts,
my king and my God.

Apart from the mention of altars, these two lines are without biblical precedent and represent Bede’s own extrapolation on the psalm. Bede passes over the avian image and uses synecdoche to convey the sense of the verse: the “incense exuding flame” of God’s altar, which “cleans[es] all sins” stands for the Church and righteous practice as the route to salvation.¹¹³ Bede eschews the literary image of the Hebrew psalm to deftly bring together the text’s two groups, the priestly and general believers.

Aside from the lexical shifts he made, Bede felt at liberty to reduce the text of the psalm to its essential meaning. The sparrow is a recurring image throughout the Psalter and in this psalm signifies the soul of the faithful finding consolation in the house of its Father.¹¹⁴ As noted by Toswell, Bede’s version omits the sparrow, focusing on the Psalmist’s relationship with God.¹¹⁵ Bede refines the psalm by clarifying and focusing the biblical metaphor of the sparrow on its meaning; the soul spiritually encountering the living God in His temple. Psalm 83 was often used in the dedication of church buildings. This is one of the “Zion songs,” psalms glorifying God’s presence in Jerusalem. The psalm alludes to the priestly caste of the Temple, the pilgrim worshipper, and the rejoicing praise (PsRom. 83.3, 83.4) offered by both. The periphrastic prose of the biblical verse is reduced and refocused into succinct and stylistically elevated elegiac lines of dactylic pentameter. Similarly, other figures and images in the psalm are omitted such as the vale of tears (verse 7), the law-

112 Bede, XV.5–6, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 344–45.

113 Bede, XV.6, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 345.

114 Toswell, “Bede’s Sparrow and the Psalter in Anglo-Saxon England.”

115 Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, 59.

giver (8), the divine epithet “God of Jacob” (9), the Christ or “anointed one” (10), and the tabernacle of sinners (11). Although the sparrow provides a creative opportunity (sparrows are common and that even they find a home in God emphasizes the Lord’s capaciousness), Bede instead fastens in on meaning, namely the relationship between the believer and the divine. While Psalm 41 (which Bede adapted) expresses the Psalmist’s yearning for God’s presence and laments the Lord’s separation from His temple, Psalm 83 resounds with joy in God’s proximity to His people through the Temple. The exultation of the psalm is amplified in Bede, Psalm 83.5–6, cited above. Bede would have viewed the sacramental life of the Church as God dwelling fully among His people. Bede’s elision of the sparrow metaphor and focus on the cleansing flame of the altar emphasizes the divine presence in the world and, in lines 13–14, gestures with eschatological hope towards seeing the living God.¹¹⁶ Bede’s refocusing of the sacred text draws out the meaning and relevance of the psalm for a contemporary Christian audience while remaining close to the devotional-liturgical context of the original Hebrew psalm. Thus, it is clear that the metrical Psalms are not simply literary transpositions, but are also examples of interpretation and exegesis.

As Toswell observes, Bede engages in world-play between “Solyma” (the historical name for Jerusalem) and “sole” (sunlight).¹¹⁷ Bede’s use of alliteration and consonance draws our attention to these lines:

Cerneris inque Sion castris, Deus alme deorum/
celsa tuo Solymae moenia sole replens

You are seen among the chaste in Sion, Holy God of gods,
filling the ramparts of heavenly Jerusalem with Your sunlight.¹¹⁸

The turning point in the text between the exposition of the value of the house of the Lord and the anagogical meditation on the world to come is marked alliteratively.

Bede’s aim is not to Christianize the psalm explicitly, however, despite the prominence of Christological exegesis as a hermeneutic for the Psalms. PsRom. 83.10 reads:

Protector noster aspice Deus et respice in faciem Christi tui

Behold, O God our protector, and look on the face of thy Christ.¹¹⁹

116 Bede, XV.13–14, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 344–45.

117 Bede, XV.10, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 344–45.

118 Bede, XV.9–10, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 344–45.

119 PsRom. 83.10.

The verse is omitted by Bede in his version, which excludes this mention of the *prosopeon* or “divine persona.” The “tabernacula” of PsRom. 83 is replaced with *sacraria* (sanctuaries), subtly shifting the sense of text from Old Testament Temple worship to a more recognizable Christian context. An extended Christian doxology (lines 15–20) is provided at the close of his poetic paraphrase that extends beyond the psalm text. The doxology mentions Christ twice *nomina-tim* and is a meditation on the transience of life and the eternity of heaven that entreats the Creator to grant the speaker of the text “the illumination of Your Word.”¹²⁰ Bede’s paraphrase omits the rubric of PsRom. 83, “In finem pro torculabius filiis Core psalmus” (Unto the end, for the winepresses, a psalm for the sons of Core), although such titles and subscriptions accompany the Psalms in the medieval manuscript tradition and were regarded as integral. The extended doxology and prayer Bede offers at the end of his version replaces this function by providing a gloss on what he understands to be the psalm’s overall meaning; the ascription to the Corites is less meaningful to an early medieval audience. The inclusion of a prayer compelling God indicates the devotional function Bede believes interpreting and recasting the Psalter holds. It also demonstrates that his metrical Psalms are both devotional and literary.

It is noteworthy that both 41 and 83 both focus on praise.¹²¹ There is a clear correspondence between the two: the first expresses yearning for the Temple, while the second celebrates it. Bede’s revision of Psalm 41 is, by far, the most elaborate in terms of linguistic ornamentation.¹²² Eleven psalm verses are expanded into forty-six elegant and tightly wrought classical hexameters. Each psalm verse is expanded into a minimum of two and maximum of six lines. For example:

PsRom. 41.2:

Sicut ceruus desiderat ad fontes aquarum ita desiderat anima mea ad te Deus
As the hart panteth after the fountains of water; so my soul panteth after thee, O God.

Bede Ps. 41.1–2:

Ceruus ut ad fontes sitiens festinat aquarum,/ sic mea mens ardet te, condi-
tor alme, requirens

As the thirsting hart hastens to the water-fountains,/ so does my soul burn
in longing for You, merciful Creator.¹²³

120 Bede, XV.17, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 345.

121 In biblical studies, Ps. 83 is considered a hymn or pilgrimage Psalm.

122 Bede, XIV, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 340–41.

123 Bede, XIV.1–2, *Bede’s Latin Poetry*, 340–41.

In a similar vein to Bede's Psalm 112, his Psalm 41 introduces the Christian epithet "conditor" (Creator) to replace the "Deus" of PsRom. 41.2. "Conditor" is a term used by Avitus, Arator, Boethius, Caelius Sedulius, Cyprianus Gallus, Dracontius, and Prudentius, among others. This terminology brings the text firmly into the ambit of Late-Antique Christian poetry. The adjective "alme" here and later in at line 21 ("alme Creator" [kindly Creator]) is not in the biblical lexicon and represents a conscious decision to emulate the language of the Christian poets.¹²⁴

Bede's version heightens the intensity of the Psalmist's desire for God by connecting thirst with burning. Hebrew poetry depends upon repetition; Bede creates a more elegant Latin line by removing the repetition and enriching the biblical metaphor.

Bede Ps. 41.4–6:

O quando **optati ueniat mihi tempus** amoris,/ quando **tuam liceat faciem**
speciemque tueri?/ Namque diu lacrimis pastor, **noctemque diemque**...

O when will the fulfilment of my loving desire come to me,/ when it will be
possible to gaze on Your face and beauty?/ For I am long fed on tears; my
lamentation accompanies me day and night...¹²⁵

In these lines, Bede draws on a range of models to recast the psalm in classical and Late-Antique clothing: his verses draw on the line "opato ueniat dum tempo in anno" by Cyprianus Gallus; "tuam faciem" is used by both Paulinus of Nola and Venantius Fortunatus; while "noctemque diemque" is used twice in Vergil's *Aeneid* (5.766 and 8.94).¹²⁶

Bede Ps. 41.10:

...afficior, totusque anima exultante resoluor...

...am buoyed up by my joyful prayers, and with my soul exulting I am wholly
liberated.¹²⁷

The line contains two lines that directly echo Prudentius ("ne totus eam resolutus inane" and "exultante anima carnis ad exitium").¹²⁸ The level of inspiration taken from Prudentius in this single line indicates that Bede's agenda is

124 See also "alme deorum," Bede, XV.9, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 344. Malaspina, "Tre meditazioni salmiche di Beda il Venerabile," 980.

125 Bede, XIV.4–6, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 340–41.

126 On which see Lapidge's apparatus, Bede, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 340.

127 Bede, XIV.10, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 340–41.

128 Bede, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 340.

to present a Late-Antique Christian poetic version of his biblical source. In his linguistic choices, Bede also positions the text within the milieu of Late Latin Christian hymnography: the use of “*spes unica uitae*” (one hope of my life) at line 31 and “*tibi sit spes unica Christus*” (let Christ be your sole hope) again at 43 echo Venantius Fortunatus’ hymn, *Vexilla regis proclami*.¹²⁹ The repetition of “*lacrima*” (tears) in different forms (XV.6, 18) emphasizes the biblical usage (PsRom. 41.4) and subtly hints at, or is analogous to, famous uses outside Christian literature such as the *Aeneid* (1.462, “*lacrimae rerum*” [tears of things]). A wealth of other classical, Late-Antique, and Christian allusions are made throughout the remaining thirty-six verses of Bede’s adaption, but the examples outlined above serve to illustrate his working methodology.

Moving away from language, however, it is possible to make some suggestions about the program overall. Psalms 41 and 83 were possibly chosen to complement one another, as meditations on the Psalmist’s distance from and closeness to God. The correspondence between both texts suggest that they were chosen by Bede for contrast. Psalm 112 was selected as a straightforward praise psalm, a text that exhibits the primary function of the Psalms; songs that praise God and give thanks. It is possible, therefore, that Bede selected three representative psalms as an experiment in producing classicizing Anglo-Latin metrical psalms. For whatever reasons, Bede did not attempt to recast the entire Psalter, although he had produced an abbreviated version. Benedicta Ward outlines the centrality of the Psalms in Bede’s religious and intellectual life, but the fact remains that Bede never produced a complete commentary on the Psalter. Bede’s metrical Psalms might constitute a foray into an area of biblical scholarship and textual criticism that did not arrest his full attention and which did not compel him to produce a complete poetic revision.

Other Metrical Psalter Traditions

Taking the Late-Antique Christian poets as the model, Bede’s versifications respond to earlier debates about style and the differences between classical, biblical, and Late Latin poetry. No other Latin metrical Psalmic revisions survive from early medieval England. Examples can be found from the Continental context that exhibit the same impulse towards reimagining the Psalms in classical Latin poetic diction and form.¹³⁰

129 Malaspina, “Tre meditazioni salmiche di Beda il Venerabile,” 983–84.

130 See Orth, “Metrische Paraphrase als Kommentar”; Stotz, “Zwei unbekannte metrische *Psalmenparaphrasen*.” A versification of Psalm 1 from the twelfth or

After Bede's day, the language and form of the Psalter continued to be revised. Old English poetic versions of the Psalms survive as glosses in the *Royal Psalter* (London, British Library, Royal 2. B. v) and the *Eadwine Psalter* (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.17.1), as individual poetic translations such as Kentish Psalm 50, and as more comprehensive versions of complete quinquagenes in the case of Metrical Psalms 51–150 of the *Paris Psalter* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS. lat. 8824). In each of these cases, the Psalms are not only translated into Old English, but also into the medium of alliterative verse. The diglot *Paris Psalter* is significant because it contains a complete vernacular translation of the Book of Psalms (with the Roman Psalter *en face*) at a time when scriptural translations were rare.¹³¹ The first quinquagene of the *Paris Psalter* is a vernacular prose paraphrase. It is supplemented with versions of the two further quinquagenes in the pattern of alliterative verse; the supplementary quinquagenes were clearly part of a complete vernacular poetic Psalter that is no longer extant.¹³² The interest in recasting the Psalms into the more familiar structure of vernacular alliterative verse suggests that the style of the Latin Psalter was still an issue of dispute in the tenth century.

The combination of prose and poetry is curious and raises questions that are beyond the scope of the present examination. However, the stylistic gulf between the two parts of the *Paris Psalter* might not be as great as it appears at first. As Patrick O'Neill contends,

knowing that the original Psalms were poetic compositions, the author of the Prose Psalms attempted to convey something of their literary character in his work. Although restricted by both medium (prose) and strategy of translation (exposition), his efforts to embellish the style are evident throughout.¹³³

Given the multiple variants of the Metrical Psalms which survive as glosses to the *Eadwine Psalter*, quotations in the *Menologium*, and as fragmentary texts in the *Old English Office*, Toswell concludes that the Old English

thirteenth century is the subject of Greti Dinkova-Bruun, "Samuel Presbyter and the Glosses to his Versification of Psalm 1," 154–74.

131 No comparable works survive from medieval Ireland where the Psalms do not seem to have inspired vernacular versions or even Latin metrical revisions.

132 See Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, 126–28, 307–19. Metrical fragments of Psalms 1–50 survive in the *Old English Office*. See Anlezark, "The Psalms in the *Old English Office* of Prime;" Jones, *Old English Shorter Poems*, 1.284–343. A variant of the Metrical Psalms, Psalm 117.22, appears in the *Menologium*, suggesting both versions are descended from shared sources. See Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, 314.

133 O'Neill, *Old English Psalms*, xiv.

Metrical Psalter was available in multiple libraries in the later part of the period.¹³⁴ The circulation of the Metrical Psalms indicates a broader culture of interest in reinvigorating the Psalter with the beauty and elegance of poetry, albeit vernacular.

The practice of paraphrasing the Psalms became particularly popular following the rise of Humanism and the renewal of interest in the classics.¹³⁵ However, these were not classroom exercises, nor were they translations or simplifications, and did not generally have any liturgical use. Roger Green contends that paraphrases operate with an effect of defamiliarization whereby “the biblical language is made less familiar, but the style, for the Latinate reader, more so.”¹³⁶ As Green observes, “poetic Psalm paraphrases were written for a sophisticated audience” capable of appreciating these reworking in light of their classical and Late-Antique models.¹³⁷ Although separated by over seven-hundred years from Humanism, Bede’s metrical Psalms function on precisely the same basis. These are not texts produced for the purposes of readability, but compositions with aesthetic aims directed at a literate audience with a sensibility for a dignified literary Latin medium.

The Metrical Psalms and Adaptation Theory

How can we categorize the style and methodology of Bede’s Psalm versions? Reworking the Psalms is a creative literary endeavour as well as a profound devotional and meditative act. Bede’s Psalm versions might be seen as classroom exercises, aimed at reformulating known texts into classical metrical forms for practice. However, the sophisticated literary quality of these versions indicates that they are more than trivial pedagogical or practical tasks; the importance of the scriptural source and the central position of the Psalter in the monastic practices of *ruminatio* and *lectio continua* imbue any adaptations with authority.¹³⁸ It is natural that an early medieval

134 Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, 314.

135 See Green, “Poetic Psalm Paraphrases,” 461–69; Green, “George Buchanan and Arthur Johnston;” Wursten, “Tracing Marot’s Psalm Paraphrases.” On vernacular interest in the Psalms after the early Middle Ages, see Costley King’oo, *Miserere Mei*; Sutherland, *English Psalms in the Middle Ages*; Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature*.

136 Green, “Poetic Psalm Paraphrase,” 462.

137 Green, “Poetic Psalm Paraphrase,” 462.

138 See Malaspina, “Tre meditazioni salmiche di Beda il Venerabile,” 974. See also Green, “Poetic Psalm Paraphrases.”

scholar such as Bede, with expert knowledge of the mechanics of classical Latin poetry, would turn their hand to rendering biblical Latin texts into elevated classical forms. The revisions constitute a form of adaptation and appropriation that reimagines familiar biblical texts in different, unfamiliar, or new formats. It is a process by which a series of prose or prosimetric texts are rendered into Latin verse and metre. This manner of adaptation is relatively straightforward, as the relationship to the source text is apparent and the intertextual purpose is obvious.¹³⁹ It is also a highly specific form of adaptation involving a transition from one genre to another, from prose to poetry.¹⁴⁰ This process is not necessarily linear since there is a degree of mutation, change, evolution, expansion, recycling, reduction, and variation inherent to Bede's versions.¹⁴¹ The recasting of texts that deliberately do not adhere to classical prosody into classicizing forms can be regarded as appropriation—that is, borrowing, reworking, reuse, acculturation or transculturation, and hybridization of an existing text into a form that differs substantially from the intended purpose and original conditions of the source text.¹⁴² Here, one is reminded of the literary versions of the Psalms created by Phillip and Mary Sidney, George Herbert, and Robert Alter, among many others. Given that it is hard to define whether the Latin Psalters constitute poetry or not, it is unclear whether Bede's Psalm versions comprise intramedial adaptation within the same medium (poetry) or intermedial transposition from one medium (prose) to another (poetry).¹⁴³ Whether we regard Bede's versions as intramedial or intermedial, both processes result in a new and fresh artistic creation. However, the status of the texts as either corrected versions of inspired scripture or simply literature of a religious nature is opaque. If we view Bede's Psalms as transformations from prose scripture into poetry of a creative and devotional nature, then the evolution is transformative, but not necessarily radical. If seen as intramedial, then Bede's versions are not recontextualized, but constitute revised and embellished scriptural texts. This process is radical as it implies that the translation and form of the Latin Psalter could be improved.

139 On the various ways in which texts can be reimagined, see Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*; Blom, *Glossing the Psalms*.

140 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 24.

141 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 52.

142 Mike Ingham's essay on song provides the most pertinent framework for understanding how biblical poetry is adapted, Ingham, "Popular Song and Adaptation."

143 Ingham, "Popular song and Adaption," 325.

Conclusions

Why did Bede bother to reformulate the Psalms in this way and for whom? One audience for Bede's Psalms, presumably, were the monastic students who figuratively sat at his feet to learn the techniques of Latin prosody and the particulars of different Latin literary registers. However, it must be remembered that Bede was singularly the most luminous and accomplished Latin poet of his generation. His activities in the field of Latin poetry were not part of an everyday classicizing culture that existed around him; the poets his work responded to were part of an earlier literary movement from which he was removed in terms of time, geography, and culture. While the Psalter—and, indeed, the Bible as a whole—is irreproachable as a record of divine revelation, in terms of literary Latin style, standards existed which it does not follow. To glorify God and the scriptures, the Late-Antique Latin poets recast biblical texts into a culturally prestigious idiom to achieve a positive effect on educated and artistically literate audiences. Emily Thornbury explains how Bede's poetic standards were deduced from his reading of historical literature, grammar, and stylistics, rather than his experience as part of a contemporary poetic community or movement—Bede is, in this sense, an “autodidact,” a term used by both Brown and Thornbury—which gives his poetry a particularly archaic flavour.¹⁴⁴ The elaborate Latinity of these metaphrases could indicate the work of a young scholar experimenting with his knowledge of classical and Late-Antique poetics (*De arte metrica* and *De orthographia* were both written at the very start of his career between 691 and 703, so the psalm paraphrases might be linked to this stage of production). Bede criticized pagan poetics in *De arte metrica*, but although some Late Latin linguistic developments are present in his metaphrases, his estimation of the Christian poets of Late-Antiquity as the paragon of literary excellence is undeniable. It is these poets to whom Bede's paraphrases respond and appeal. The technical skills exhibited in the metaphrases and their interest in elaborating the register of biblical Latin are unparalleled for this time and make an important contribution to the tradition of Latin scriptural poetry. It is, however, Bede's metrical and rhythmical hymns in imitation of Ambrose that remain his most enduring poetic legacy. Malaspina argues that Bede's descriptions of Jordan and Hermon (Bede Psalm 41.21–27; PsRom. 41.7–8) are closer to Bede's Northumbria by the North Sea than the Holy Land and the Mediterranean, particularly the description of the swelling sea (*aestus*).¹⁴⁵ This is, perhaps,

144 Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England*, 183–98.

145 Malaspina, “Tre meditazioni salmiche di Beda il Venerabile,” 986–87.

the only hint we get of the individual poet behind these texts. Overall, Bede's scriptural poems represent an attempt to translate and locate the Psalms of the Latin Bible, not in early medieval Northumbria, but the world of the Late-Antique Mediterranean from which he drew so much creative, intellectual, and spiritual nourishment.

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