

ANAPHORA AND STYLISTIC FLEXIBILITY IN THE METRICAL CHARMS

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THE TWELVE OLD English “metrical charms,” a set of verse spells copied down in tenth- and eleventh-century medical and religious manuscripts, are unusual even within the heterogenous corpus of early medieval English remedies, personal prayers, and incantations.¹ They are referred to as “metrical” precisely because—unlike hundreds of other Old English prayers and spoken remedies—portions of these texts can be scanned according to the rules of Old English verse, as put forward by Eduard Sievers and elaborated by Alan Bliss.² Many of the charms use formulae, collocations, and compounds found in other Old English poetry, as well as techniques like variation. They also contain significant ornamental features lauded as aesthetic achievements in other Old English texts: extra alliteration, rhyme, assonance, homeoteleuton and polyptoton, paronomasia, and a profusion of half-lines of Sievers Types C, D, and E.³ We

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1 This title was bestowed by Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942). The numbering of the charms (1–12) was also assigned by Dobbie, grouping them by the manuscripts in which they appear.

2 For a full index of key technical terms used in this chapter and volume, readers should consult the Glossary of Metrical Terms in the Appendices. Eduard Sievers, *Altgermanische Metrik* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1893); A. J. Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967). On the validity of Sievers-Bliss scansion, see R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 54.

3 On these features, see for example Donald G. Scragg, “The Nature of Old English Verse,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 55–70; Andy Orchard, “Artful Alliteration in Anglo-Saxon Song and Story,” *Anglia* 113 (1995): 429–63; Adeline Courtney Bartlett, *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature 122 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935); Randolph Quirk, “Poetic Language and Old English Metre,” in *Early English and Norse Studies Presented to Hugh Smith in Honour of his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Arthur Brown and Peter Foote (London: Methuen, 1963), 150–71; Richard A. Lewis, “Old English Poetry: Alliteration and Structural Interlace,” *Language and Style* 6 (1973): 196–205; R. A. Lewis, “Plurilinear Alliteration in Old English Poetry,” *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 16 (1975): 598–602; Roberta Frank, “Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Scriptural Verse,” *Speculum* 47 (1972): 207–26; Janie Steen, *Versé and Virtuosity: The Adaptation of Latin Rhetoric in Old English Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Mark Griffith, “Extra Alliteration on Stressed Syllables in Old English Poetry: Types, Uses, and Evolution,” *ASE* 47 (2018): 69–176.

might look, for example, to Charm 2, a medical remedy usually referred to as the Nine Herbs Charm:

Ðās VIII ongan wið nygon āttrum.
 Wyrn cōm snīcan, tōslāt hē nān,
 ðā genam Wōden VIII wuldortānas,
 slōh ðā þā næddran þ(æt) hēo on VIII tōflēah. (lines 30–33)⁴

[These nine shoots against nine poisons.

A worm came crawling, it killed no one,

then Woden took up nine glory-twigs,

then struck the snake so that it flew apart into nine.]

In a section replete with structural and ornamental alliteration on *n* and *w*, with notable repeating s-clusters (“snīcan,” “tōslāt,” “slōh”), two long lines with cross-alliteration (“nygon ongan ... nygon attrum; genam Woden nygon wuldortanas”) serve as the rhetorical highlights of this short narrative. Charm 2 operates against nine flying poisons (lines 5, 12, and 19, “onflyge”), described later as “wuldorgeflogenum” (line 45b, glory-fleeing ones), suggesting in turn that the nine pieces of snake that “flew apart” when struck by “glory-twigs” are these same poisons.⁵ The charm presents an imaginative (if enigmatic) origin story for the precise categories of human suffering it combats, and the alliterative emphasis on the repeated number nine, Woden’s “taking up” of the twigs, and the snake itself serve to highlight these connections aurally.

Similar instances of extra alliteration, repetition, and echoing occur throughout the charms. We might consider, for example, a line like Charm 3’s dramatic hypermetric “Hæfde him his haman on handa, cwæð þæt þū his hæncgest wære” (It had its bridle in its hand, said that you were its steed, line 2), describing the attack of a supernatural creature. Notable *h*-alliteration, as well as assonance on *a/æ*, provides a concise summary of the line’s action—“hæfde,” “haman,” “handa,” “hæncgest”—and emphasizes the inexorable, animalistic violence it depicts. Alliteration is similarly emphatic in Charm 6, wherein a woman staves off labour complications by asking that she be pregnant “mid cwican cilde, nālæs mid cwellendum, / mid fulborenum, nālæs mid fægan” (with a living child, not a killing one, / with a full-term one, not with a doomed one, lines 5–6). The alliteration of desired possibilities (“cwican,” “fulboren”) with undesirable possibilities (“cwellendum,” “fægan”) and the repetition of the contrasting “mid ... nālæs” highlight these antithetical pairs, creating alternating verbal shifts towards and away from the speaker’s various potential postpartum outcomes.

⁴ The texts of Charms 2–6 are taken from *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: The Lacnunga*, ed. and trans. Edward Pettit, 2 vols. (Lampeter: Mellen, 2001). Citations of all other charms are taken from Dobbie, *Poems*. All translations and scansions are my own.

⁵ This suggestion was first proposed by A. R. Skemp, “The Old English Charms,” *Modern Language Review* 6 (1911): 289–301; see also Pettit, *Lacnunga*, II: 140–41.

Perhaps more interesting, however, are instances like lines 21–22 of Charm 11, an incantation designed to protect its user on an undertaking by invoking the pantheon of Christian saints:

Hi mē ferion and friþion and mīne fōre nerion,
eal mē gehealdon, mē gewældon.

[They guide and protect me, and save my life,
entirely guard me, command me.]

These lines make obvious use of rhyme, assonance, and repetition to enhance the rhetorical power of the charmer's declaration of his own salvation and safety. The insistent echoing of chiming verb endings lends structure to a declarative sequence of actions. Yet line 22 has no cross-caesura alliteration. Rhyme serves as a substitute, linking the two half-lines with repeated sound at the ends of words rather than the beginnings.⁶ The line is technically irregular, but not lacking in verbal ornament or structural and semantic connection between verses.

Indeed, the verse of the metrical charms is rife with such apparent irregularities. The charms contain lines with patterns unattested in any system of metrical scansion, particularly hypermetric verses with extended drops and long anacrusis and hypometric verses with fewer than four positions. They include lines without regular cross-caesura alliteration, lines that alliterate on the second stressed syllable of the b-verse, and lines that do not adhere to Kuhn's laws. As a result, most studies that comment on their metre treat the charms as poor verse, badly composed and incorrectly transmitted.⁷ Judith Vaughan-Sterling, the first scholar to lay out an argument for the charms' aesthetic merit, considers the charms to be only "related" to verse.⁸ Those studies that do examine

⁶ For similar examples of rhyme in lines without cross-caesura alliteration, many of which use chiming verb endings, see for example Charm 2 line 10; Charm 4 line 14; *Metres of Boethius* 20, line 195; *The Battle of Maldon* line 271; *Judgment Day II* lines 3–4. All citations of Old English poetry are taken from *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, ed. George P. Krapp and Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie, 6 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–1953).

⁷ For example, Marie Nelson, *Structures of Opposition in Old English Poems* (Amsterdam, 1989), 49; Thomas D. Hill, "The Rod of Protection and the Witches' Ride: Christian and Germanic Syncretism in Two Old English Metrical Charms," *JEGP* 111 (2012): 145–68 at 155; Godfrid Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1948), *passim*; Stephen Pollington, *Leechcraft: Early English Charms, Plant Lore, and Healing* (Ely: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2008), 221; Tiffany Beechy, *The Poetics of Old English* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 113; James Paz, "Magic That Works: Performing Scientia in the Old English Metrical Charms and Poetic Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 45 (2015): 219–43 at 226; Griffith, "Alliteration," 149–50; Kemp Malone, "The Old English Period (to 1100)," in *A Literary History of England*, ed. Albert C. Baugh, 4 vols. (London: Routledge, 1948), I: 1–105 at 39.

⁸ Judith A. Vaughan-Sterling, "The Anglo-Saxon 'Metrical Charms': Poetry as Ritual," *JEGP* 82 (1983): 186–200.

the charms' stylistic features tend to conclude that their ornamentation is primarily hypnotic in function, creating a web of arbitrary sound to lull a patient into submission and enact the placebo effect.⁹ A desire to increase performative power may well have influenced the charms' style, but, as this chapter will argue, their ornamental features are aesthetic as well as functional. As noted above, these poetic techniques consistently serve to emphasize the importance of, and connections between, the charms' central agents, actions, and concepts, and to draw an audience's attention to particular ideas and narrative details.

In his recent study of the *Beowulf* manuscript, which contains many lines that require editorial emendation to make sense, Leonard Neidorf has argued that no Old English poet ever deliberately composed an irregular line.¹⁰ Unlike the difficult verses in *Beowulf*, however, irregularities in the charms almost always occur without any accompanying deficiencies in sense, grammar, or syntax. The charms are enigmatic, but their metrically unattested lines almost always make sense syntactically and semantically. We therefore do not have evidence to suggest that the charms' inventive metre is necessarily a sign of textual corruption, and so cannot reasonably dismiss or emend their metrical features.¹¹ Moreover, the charms' irregular lines also almost always contain a significant number of ornamental features, including extra alliteration, assonance, and rhyme. The high level of stylistic complexity apparent in these texts argues against the view that they are unsophisticated or corrupt.

In a previous article, I have suggested that many of the metrical charms' irregularities are predictable and explicable.¹² I sought to demonstrate that the charms' unusual features occur within poetic structures (including anaphora, parallelism, antithesis, and others) and often appear when a given charm employs traditional magical formulae, found in analogous Indo-European charm texts, that do not fit neatly within the bounds of the Old English metrical line. These correlations suggest that the charms' utilitarian function takes precedence over strict metrical regularity. The charms seem to be composed in a more flexible prosimetric mode than the "classical" verse of a text like *Beowulf*; they are not deficient, but rather respond to a different set of literary demands. Yet more investigation of these unusual texts is required in order to expand upon this hypothesis. In particular, no study has yet examined the strong correlation in the charms

9 Marie Nelson, "Wordsige and Worcsige: Speech Acts in Three Old English Charms," *Language and Style* 17 (1984): 57–66 at 63; Victoria Symons, "Doing Things with Words: Language and Perception in Old English Riddles and Charms," in *Sensory Perception in the Medieval West*, ed. Simon Thomson and Michael D. J. Bintley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 123–40; Howell D. Chickering, "The Literary Magic of *Wið Færstice*," *Viator* 2 (1971): 83–104; Northrop Frye, *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 124–26; Beechy, *Poetics*, 86.

10 Leonard Neidorf, *The Transmission of Beowulf* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 19–20.

11 For this editorial stance, see John D. Niles, "Editing *Beowulf*: What Can Study of the Ballads Tell Us?" *Oral Tradition* 9 (1994): 440–67.

12 Caroline R. Batten, "The Style of the Old English Metrical Charms," *RES* 72 (2021): 1–20.

between metrical irregularity and the use of anaphora, plurilinear sections in which the same words or phrases are employed at the beginning of successive clauses. In this chapter, I will closely examine multiple anaphoric structures in the metrical charms to argue that the charms' metre becomes elastic and irregular precisely to accommodate anaphoric repetition. I will suggest that this kind of metrical flexibility is itself a stylistic feature of the charms, disrupting the audience's expectations and drawing attention to the texts' magical language, which is both far more ornamented than prose and unconstrained by the usual limits of normal verse.

Repetition and Irregularity in the Metrical Charms

All of the metrical charms employ anaphora, most often in plurilinear clusters; many of the charms have multiple such clusters, each demonstrating anaphora on a different word or phrase.¹³ Anaphoric catalogues like these appear throughout Old English poetry, though only rarely at such a high density. These catalogues may be partially inspired by repetitive structures in Latin verse known to Old English composers, but the use of anaphora in Old English poetry is notably more frequent, and often more extensive or involved, than in its Latin inspirations.¹⁴ In all cases, anaphora serves to heighten a given text's rhetorical power, and to drive home essential concepts with a relentless rhythmic beat. Anaphoric clusters are used to create a tone of sermonic instruction in *The Wanderer*, for example, or to convey the ineffable nature of Paradise in *The Phoenix* and *Guthlac B*.¹⁵ The use of multiple anaphoric clusters within a short span of lines, however, is also a particularly common feature of medieval European charms and curses, including those in Old High German, Old Saxon, Old Norse, and Middle English, suggesting that this kind of intense repetition may be a genre feature.¹⁶ A majority of these structures in the

13 See Charm 1 lines 2–3, 16–21; Charm 2 lines 4–6, 46–57; Charm 3 lines 7–9; Charm 4 lines 18–24; Charms 5 and 10, prose; Charm 6 lines 1–3; Charm 7 lines 2–6; Charm 8 lines 2–4; Charm 9 lines 2–7; Charm 11, lines 2–5, 8–9; Charm 12 lines 8–10.

14 For *ne* catalogues, see *The Wanderer* lines 66–69; *The Seafarer* lines 44–46, 95–96; *The Phoenix* lines 14–18, 21–25, 51–61, 134–38, 612–14; *Guthlac B* lines 579–80, 698–99, 828–30; Riddle 35 lines 5–8. For *sum* catalogues, see *The Wanderer* lines 80–83; *The Gifts of Men* and *Fortunes of Men* throughout; *Juliana* lines 473–90; *Elene* lines 131–36; *Christ II* lines 668–80. For *opþe* catalogues, see *Judgment Day II* lines 132–34, 138–39; *Beowulf* lines 1764–66. On anaphora in Old English poetry as compared to its Latin sources, see Steen, 45.

15 See line numbers above.

16 See, for example, Merseburg Charms 1 and 2 (texts in Wilhelm Braune, ed., *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*, 10th ed. (Halle: Niemeyer, 1942)); *Contra malum malannum* (text in *The Old High German and Old Saxon Charms: Text, Commentary, and Critical Bibliography*, ed. and trans. Carol Lynn Miller (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1982)); *Buslubæn*, in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 4 vols. (Reykjavík: Bókauktgáfan Forní, 1943–1944). For Middle English charms, see Jonathan Roper, "Towards a Poetics, Rhetorics, and Proxemics of Verbal Charms," *Folklore* 24 (2003): 7–49.

metrical charms contain a mix of regular and irregular lines, and indeed a significant proportion of the irregular lines found in the metrical charms appear within plurilinear anaphoric structures. The obvious rhetorical requirements of these clusters make them ideal case studies for examining irregularities in the metrical charms, because their stylistic exigencies, and the way in which unusual verses participate in meeting those aesthetic demands, can be easily parsed.

Charms 4 and 6 provide a clear example. Both medical remedies—the former for a stabbing internal pain, anthropomorphized as a troop of spear-wielding female riders, and the latter for a variety of childbirth and postpartum complications—make use of a similar, repeated formula:

Charm 4:

x x x / x / x x **ⓧ** x x x / x / x x **ⓧ**
 þis ðē tō bōte ēsa gescotes, ðis ðē tō bōte ylfa gescotes, ?|?¹⁷

x x x / x / x x x **ⓧ** x x x x / x
 ðis ðē tō bōte hægtessan gescotes; ic ðīn wille helpan. ?|a (ll. 23–4)

[This to you as a cure for gods' shot, this to you as a cure for elves' shot,
 this to you as a cure for witches' shot; I will help you.]

Charm 6:

x x x / x x x / x / \ x
 þis mē tō bōte þære lāþan lætbyrde **a|D**

x x x / x x x / x / \ x
 þis mē tō bōte þære swæran swærtbyrde **a|D**

x x x / x x x / x / \ x
 þis mē tō bōte þære lāðan lambyrde. **a|D** (lines 1–3)

[This to me as a cure for the loathsome late birth,
 this to me as a cure for the grievous dark-coloured birth,
 this to me as a cure for the loathsome disabled birth.]

In both cases, these lines are metrically unusual. In Charm 4, the verse patterns of lines 23a to 24a are unattested in any system of metrical scansion—including Nicolay Yakovlev's hyper-flexible system for scanning hypermetrics.¹⁸ In Charm 6, the lines lack structural alliteration, with the only cross-caesura echo falling on a secondary

¹⁷ For all scanned half-lines in this chapter, I have listed the Sievers-Bliss types in bold next to the full poetic line. A question mark indicates that a half-line contains a stress pattern not attested in Sievers-Bliss or Bliss' full scansion of *Beowulf*.

¹⁸ Nicolay Yakovlev, "The Development of Alliterative Metre from Old to Middle English" (unpublished DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 2008), 84–86.

compound element (“byrde”), which should not normally bear full stress. Both sets of lines are rife with ornamental effects: cross-alliteration in Charm 4 (“esa ... scot ... ylfa ... scot”), as well as the only known English occurrence of the Old Norse poetic collocation *æsir/álfar*; double alliteration in the off-verse in Charm 6, with two lines of *l*-alliteration forming an envelope pattern around the echoing *s* alliteration of *swæran swært*.¹⁹ The phrase “þis ... to bote,” in both cases, seems to be essential to the function of the charm: it is the verbal declaration, and thus the actual magical enactment, of the patient’s healing. The appearance of this phrase in both Old English texts and in several medieval German charms (“daz dir ze byoze”) suggests it was a known magical formula in the early medieval European charm tradition.²⁰ Charm scholars often note that spoken charms must use “correct,” prescribed magical language to be perceived as effective; they must use traditional or formulaic incantations.²¹ Using such a formula in a plurilinear anaphoric structure adds rhetorical emphasis, a hammering declaration of the charm’s purpose and the charmer’s desires. The use and anaphoric repetition of an incantatory formula, in these texts, seems to take precedence over Sieversian metrical norms. Metre bends to accommodate function, but these lines still exhibit ornamentation typical of verse: extra and patterned alliteration, assonance, echoing. They are not necessarily poorly composed. Rather, they are composed with a different set of stylistic priorities than those that informed *Beowulf* or *Genesis A*.

Indeed, unusual lines in anaphoric clusters across the charms behave in this way: accommodating traditional magical formulae or essential word choice, and maintaining the incantatory, exhortatory aural effects of the anaphora itself. Charm 7, for example, is the earliest known English version of the *Neque Doluit Neque Tumuit* charm type, which appears in Middle English, Middle High German, medieval Irish, medieval Latin, and early modern Eastern European and Baltic incantations.²² These incantations are intended to heal wounds or skin lesions, and they are defined by anaphoric sequences on “neither / nor”:

¹⁹ For the Norse collocation, see *Lokasenna* st. 2, 13, 30; *Grímnismál* st. 4; *Hávamál* st. 159–60; *Brymskviða* st. 7; *Völuspá* st. 49; *Fáfnismál* st. 13; *Skírnismál* st. 7, 17–18. All citations from *Eddukvæði*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, 2 vols. (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2014).

²⁰ Examples in Pettit, *Lacnunga*, II: 254. See also the twelfth-century charm *Contra rehin* in Miller, *Charms*.

²¹ See, for example, Roper, “Poetics,” 17–18; John Miles Foley, “Epic and Charm in Old English and Serbo-Croatian Oral Tradition,” *Comparative Criticism* 2 (1980): 71–92.

²² Jonathan Roper, *English Verbal Charms* (Helsinki, 2005), 66, 114; Lea Olsan, “The Three Good Brothers Charms: Some Historical Points,” *Incantatio* 1 (2011): 48–78.

x / x x / x x / x
 swā benne ne burnon, ne burston A|?

x / x x x  x
 ne fundian, ne feologan d|?

x / x x x / / x x
 ne hoppettan, ne wund waxsian d|D

x / / x x x x x / x / x / x
 ne dolh dīopian, ac him self healde hāle wæge. D|? (lines 2–5)

[so the wounds do not burn, nor burst,
 nor grow evilly inward, nor putrefy,
 nor throb/rankle, nor the wounds grow,
 nor sores deepen, but may (I) myself preserve him by means of healthful water.]

In every extant version of this charm type, in every language in which it appears, the choice of verbs is limited. The anaphora always begins with “neither ache nor swell,” then offers a list of prohibited actions that only ever include festering, putrefying, rankling, growing, spreading, and bleeding. Charm 7’s unattested verse patterns (lines 2b, 3b, and 5b), long lines lacking in cross-caesura alliteration (lines 4–5), and unusual anacrusis (lines 4b and 5a) therefore accommodate prescribed language within a required rhetorical structure.²³ Moreover, in spite of their irregularity, these lines display a wide variety of poetic ornamentation: rhyming verb endings, double alliteration, doublets of alliterating verbs, numerous D Types, end-rhyme, and close assonance on “burnon ... burston,” and a patterning effect similar to cross-alliteration (“**ne burnon, ne burston, ne fundian, ne feologan**”). This repeated, multifaceted command is exhortative and incantatory, and the consistent alliteration of wound terms with prohibited verbs increases the charmer’s verbal power over those same wounds. Pointing added after each verb in this sequence by the scribe suggests an awareness of this repetition as a deliberate rhetorical effect.²⁴ These lines are thus unlikely to be the result of error, corruption, or lack of poetic skill or interest. Rather, their unusual features again indicate that anaphora, the use of traditional formulae, and the presence of aurally striking techniques like assonance and rhyme were prioritized over regular metre in the charms. Although a line like “ne fundian, ne feologan” in *Beowulf* might suggest a lacuna or scribal alteration, in a metrical charm it performs a function both practical and poetic.

Similar three-position half-lines appear in an anaphoric structure in Charm 9, a ritual to recover stolen cattle:

²³ On *feologan* and *hoppettan*, see *Dictionary of Old English A to I Online*, ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018) s. v. “Feologan,” “Hoppettan”.

²⁴ London, British Library, Royal MS 12 D.xvii, fol. 125r–125v.

x x x x x x / x x x x x / x
 þæt hē nǣfre nǣbbe landes þæt hē hit oðlǣde, a|a

x / x x x x x x
 ne foldan, þæt hit oðferie, ?|a

x / x x x x x / x
 ne hūsa, þæt hē hit oðhealde. ?|a (lines 5–7)

[May he never have any land, because he leads it away,
 nor an extent of territory, because he carries it off,
 nor shelter, because he withholds it.]

Once again, the repetitive structure and maintenance of alliteration and grammar suggests that nothing is missing from these short lines. The anaphoric formula tightens as it progresses, to maintain emphasis and patterning. The things barred to the thief—land, fields, and buildings (or, metaphorically, shelter)—alliterate with the incorrect actions he has performed. The prohibition of “landes ... foldan ... husa” also echoes late Old English religious excommunication formulae, which condemn the sinner to be cursed at all times, while doing all actions, and in all locations.²⁵ One formula curses the victim “on huse 7 on æcere ... on wætere 7 on lande 7 on eallen steden” (in a building and in the field ... on water and on land and in all places).²⁶ A similar anaphoric structure also appears in a legal code declaring that the speaker will not be deprived of any part of his inherited property: “ne plot ne ploh, ne turf ne toft, ne furh ne fotmæl, ne land ne læse, ne fersc ne mersc, ne ruh ne rum, wudes ne feldes, landes ne strandes, wealtes ne wæteres” (neither plot nor plough-land, neither turf nor enclosed field, neither furrow nor footprint, neither land nor pasture, neither fresh water nor marsh, neither rough land nor open land, woods or open fields, lands or shores, wolds or waters).²⁷ The use of an alliterating *ne* structure and shared terms of domestic geography (“land,” “feld”) in both charm and legal code, two verbal rituals used to prevent another person from taking ownership of the user’s property, suggests that these texts perhaps draw on shared exhaustive, prohibitive language that is authoritative enough to be legal and incantatory enough to be a performative speech act. A verse like *ne foldan* or *ne husa* is not regular, but nor is it necessarily corrupt or aesthetically disappointing.

²⁵ For examples, see John D. Niles, “The Problem of the Ending of *The Wife’s Lament*,” *Speculum* 78 (2003): 1107–50.

²⁶ E. M. Treharne, “A Unique Old English Formula for Excommunication from Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303,” *ASE* 24 (1995): 185–211.

²⁷ Text from Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 1:400, 3:236; see also Stephanie Hollis, “Old English Cattle-Theft Charms: Manuscript Contexts and Social Uses,” *Anglia* 115 (1997): 139–64.

Another representative example occurs in Charm 2's invocation of the herb greater plantain:

x x / \ x / x / x
Ond þū, Wegbrāde, wyrta mōdor, d|A

/ x ∪ x / x / x x
ēastan opene, innan mihtigu; A|D

x x x ∪ x / x x x x / x / x
ofer ðý cræte curran, ofer ðý cwēne rēodan, C|hypermetric A

x x x / x ∪ x x x x / x / x
ofer ðý brýde bryodedon, ofer þý fearras fnærdon; hypermetric A Types

x x x x x / x x x ∪ x
eallum þū þon wiðstōde 7 wiðstunest. a|a (lines 7–11)

[And you, Waybroad, mother of plants,
open from the east, mighty within;
over you carts creaked, over you queens rode,
over you brides cried out, over you bulls snorted;
you withstood and dashed against all then.]

Numerous metrical features define these lines as a poetic unit and draw attention to the anaphoric structure, describing *wegbrade's* encounters with various antagonists. These lines make use of the same metrical pattern for several verses in a row: lines 7b and 8a are Bliss Type 2A1a(i), and lines 9b–10b and 12a are Bliss Type a1c(2A1a). Alliteration on *w*—structural in line 7, ornamental in line 11—frames the narrative in an envelope pattern. Three of the four half-lines documenting *wegbrade's* encounters with violent antagonists feature double alliteration on paired nouns and verbs. Line 10, however, lacks cross-caesura alliteration, and instead displays end-rhyme, as well as disallowed double alliteration in an off-verse. We might compare similar lines in Charms 6 and 11, cited above, as well as lines like Charm 4 line 14 (“*Syx smiðas sætan, wælspera worhtan*,” Six smiths sat, worked slaughter-spears). Line 10 is necessarily metrically irregular, but the use of double alliteration and rhyme maintains the two half-lines as a balanced, contrasting pair within the anaphoric structure. Again, prioritization of incantatory repetition and parallelism may allow for abnormal poetic syntax. The “bryde” (brides) and “fearras” (bulls) are symbols related to female and male sexuality, respectively. They are stylistically opposed, without cross-caesura alliteration to connect them, but also perfectly balanced across their metrically and syntactically identical half-lines. Again, there is nothing about these lines that suggests corruption has occurred, or the composer(s) were unaware of Old English metrical rules—rather, their heavy aural ornamentation and the contrasting pairing in line 10 suggests an interest in the style and performative effect of the recited verse. Metrical deviation in service of emphatic, incantatory plurilinear repetition was apparently permissible in the metrical charms in a way not found in other extant Old English verse.

Anaphora and Single Half-Lines in the Charms

In the standard edition of Charm 7, found in the sixth volume of *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, Elliot van Kirk Dobbie prints “ne dolh diopian, ac him self healde hale wæge” as a single long line, lacking cross-caesura alliteration and with an unattested hypermetric b-verse, as I have presented it above. However, I would suggest that both the absence of structural alliteration and the irregular off-verse can be remedied without emendation, simply by re-lineating the text. The phrase “ac him self healde hale wæge” in fact scans as a regular long line, suggesting the following lineation is to be preferred:

x / / x x
ne dolh diopian, D

x x x / x / x / x
ac him self healde hāle wæge a|A

As the *ne* catalogue concludes, the text pivots on the new conjunction *ac*, indicating a turn towards the creation and affirmation of health after the negation of disease is complete. The conclusion of a *ne* sequence with a pivotal *ac* is a flourish found in both Old English and Old Saxon verse, used to emphasize fundamental contrasts.²⁸ Line 5 now consists of a single half-line, but there is nothing inherently undesirable about such a scansion. As Alan Bliss has demonstrated, single half-lines do occur in Old English poetry, particularly the wisdom poems, and may be employed for aesthetic effect.²⁹ Here, line 5 punctuates and concludes the seven-part anaphoric structure. Indeed, two other metrical charms contain anaphoric structures with an odd total number of elements that conclude with a single half-line. Charm 9 offers the following five-part sequence:

/ x / x $\acute{x}$ x /
find þæt feoh and fere þæt feoh B|B

x $\acute{x}$ x / x / x /
and hafa þæt feoh and heald þæt feoh, B|B

x x x / x /
and fere hām þæt feoh. B³⁰ (lines 2–4)

28 R. D. Fulk, “Rhetoric, Form, And Linguistic Structure in Early Germanic Verse: Toward a Synthesis,” *Interdisciplinary Journal for German Linguistics and Semiotic Analysis* 1 (1996): 63–88 at 70. *Ac* is most often found in a b-verse-initial position after a *ne* sequence, but does sometimes appear in an a-verse-initial position, as proposed here for Charm 7. See *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, ed. Antonette diPaolo Healey, John Price Wilkin, and Xin Xiang (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2009), Boolean Search, “Ne [...] Ac.”

29 A. J. Bliss, “Single Half-Lines in Old English Poetry,” *N&Q* 216 (1971): 442–49.

30 Without cross-caesura alliteration, scansion here is conjectural. Note that to scan the line in Sievers-Bliss, the undisplaced finite verb *fere* must here be unstressed, though it bears alliteration two lines earlier. If we scan *fere* as stressed, with *hām* and *feoh* also fully stressed (as we cannot determine whether either should be secondarily stressed) the line is an unattested hypermetric. Such a scansion would also provide an aurally striking conclusion to the anaphoric cluster.

[find those cattle and lead those cattle,
and take possession of those cattle and guard those cattle,
and bring home those cattle.]

These lines are ornamentally bound together: line 2 has double *f*-alliteration, line 3 has cross-alliteration on *f* and *h*, and then both *h* and *f* sounds appear in line 4. The single half-line thus provides a suitable aural climax for the section and a punctuating conclusion for the repetitive sequence. Charm 11 includes a similar three-part sequence:

x x x / x *ú*x x x x / x *ú*x
wið þane sára stice, wið þane sára slege, **B|B**

x x x / x *ú*x
wið þane grymma gryre, **B**

x x x *ú*x x / x x x / x /
wið ðane micela egða þe bið ēghwām lāð, **hypermetric A|B**

x x / x / x x x / / x
and wið eal þæt lāð þe in tō land fære. **B|C** (lines 2–5)

[against the grievous stabbing pain, against the grievous blow,
against the savage horror,
against the great terror that is loathsome to everyone,
and against all that loathsomeness that travels into the land.]

Line 3 upholds the rhetorical structure and provides contrasting double alliteration on *g* to punctuate two verses with echoing on *s*-clusters, before the charm concludes the overall anaphoric construction on *wið* with a bipartite sub-structure linked by repetition of the word “lāð”. The first, tripartite structure also recalls lines 18–19 of Charm 4:

x x x x x / *ú* x x x x x x / *ú* x
Gif ðū wære on fell scoten, oððe wære on flæsc scoten, **C|C**

x x x x x / *ú* x
oððe wære on blōd scoten, **C**

x x x x x / *ú* x x x x x x / x / x
oððe wære on lið scoten, næfre ne sý ðīn līf ātæsed. **C|hypermetric A**

[If you were shot in the skin, or were shot in the flesh,
or were shot in the blood,
or were shot in the limb, never may your life be harmed.]

The exhaustive protection of a patient’s bodily substance (usually some combination of skin, flesh, blood, bone, limbs, joints, and hair) is a traditional anaphoric formula found in numerous Indo-European texts of varying dates and in varying languages,

from the Sanskrit *Atharva Veda* to medieval German worm charms.³¹ Several editors add a b-verse to Charm 4 line 19 (“oððe wære on ban scoten”) to remedy a perceived lacuna and supply the second member of the common collocation “blod ... ban,” a poetically congruent addition but one that is not necessary for the sense of the charm.³² “Fell,” “flæsc,” and “blod” might well be a tripartite unit, with the fourth element (“lið”) following in the subsequent long line so as to alliterate with, and punningly echo, “lif.”

Indeed, the Old High German Merseburg Charm 2 draws on the same traditional magical formula as Charm 4—the enumeration of bodily substances like flesh and blood—and similarly invokes only three such body parts, resulting in an unattached half-line:

sose benrenki, sose bluotrenki,
sose lidirenki,
ben zi bena, bluot zi bluoda,
lid zi geliden, sose gelimida sin.³³ (lines 6–9)

[be it bone-sprain, be it blood-sprain,
be it limb-sprain,
bone to bone, blood to blood,
limb to limb, so may they be stuck together.]

The use of anaphoric structures with an odd total number of elements, resulting in a single half-line, thus seems to be a generic feature of the Old English charms rather than a flaw. It may well have been permissible in other Germanic verse charms, though we lack sufficient evidence aside from the second Merseburg Charm to draw such a conclusion. Ivar Lindquist, however, proposed in 1923 that any instance of tripartite anaphora, consisting of a long line and a single half-line and alliterating a-a-b(b), is an example of a putative pan-Germanic metre he refers to as “galderform.”³⁴ This “charm

31 *Atharva-Veda-Samhita: Text with English Translation, Mantra Index and Names of Rsis and Devtas*, ed. Nag Sharan Singh, trans. William D. Whitney, 2 vols. (Delhi: Nag, 1987), Book 4, Hymn 12; *Pro Nessia and Contra vermes* in Braune, *Lesebuch*. For other analogues, see *Monumenta Serbocroatica: A Bilingual Anthology of Serbian and Croatian Texts and Translations from the 12th to the 19th Centuries*, ed. and trans. Thomas Butler (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic, 1980), 465; Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmsdorf, *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1991), 164–68.

32 Storms, *Magic*, 142; J. H. G. Grattan and Charles Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine: Illustrated Specifically from the Semi-Pagan Text “Lacnunga”* (London: Cumberlege, 1952), 174), and Pettit, *Lacnunga*, I: 92, suggest the emendation. For the collocation, see *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, Boolean Search, “Blod [...] Ban.”

33 Text in Braune, *Lesebuch*.

34 Ivar Lindquist, *Galdrar de gamla germanska trollsångernas stil, undersökt i samband med en svensk runinskrift från folkvandringstiden* (Gothenburg: Elanders, 1923). Lindquist’s claims are refuted by F. Ohrt (“Om Merseburgformlerne some Galder,” *Danske Studier* 38 (1938): 125–37).

metre" is supposedly an ancestor of Old Norse *ljóðaháttr* and *galdralag*, and also marks the metrical charms. Yet the anaphora found in Charms 7 and 9 are not tripartite structures, but more properly seven- and five-part structures. A-a-b(b) alliteration patterns are not consistently found in the pairings of long and short lines cited above. The use of tripartite anaphora, moreover, is not limited to charms, and is common in folk verse from many periods and in multiple languages.³⁵ As Bliss has noted, such pairings of long and short lines, some exhibiting a-a-b(b) alliteration, also appear in Old English gnomic poetry, and numerous single half-lines in broadly tripartite structures can be found in the poems of the Junius Manuscript.³⁶ Bliss observes that the use of Old English short lines is sporadic while their use in *ljóðaháttr* is systematic, and that short lines continue the alliteration of the preceding line (i.e. an a-a-a pattern) more frequently than in Old Norse, but concludes that the two forms were historically related in some way.³⁷ However, although it is entirely possible that the short lines in the charms reflect a form related to Old Norse metre or derived from a common ancestor, the instances cited above share no formal characteristics with *ljóðaháttr* aside from the short lines themselves. *Ljóðaháttr* does allow for verses of two or three metrical positions in the on-verse of the long line (compare half-lines in *Hávamál* like "ösviðr maðr" and "deyr fé" with Charm 9's "ne husa") but such verses in the charms do not generally occur in conjunction with single half-lines.³⁸

Anaphora and the Style of the Charms

Rather than attribute the use of single half-lines in the charms to the hypothetical persistence of pan-Germanic forms or Norse influence, we should consider instead Bliss's identification of numerous grammatically sound, aesthetically permissible single half-lines in a significant number of Old English poems. The likeliest conclusion to be drawn is simply that such verses were an acceptable tool of the Old English poet, a plausible stylistic choice rather than evidence of error or loss.

The single half-line punctuates a rhetorical unit within a text—a "local climax," as Jonathan Roper puts it.³⁹ More specifically, in the metrical charms cited here, I suggest

35 Jonathan Roper, "The Metre of the Old English Metrical Charms," in *Oral Charms in Structural and Comparative Light: Proceedings of the Conference of the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers, and Charming 27–29 October 2011, Moscow*, ed. Tatyana Mikhailova, Jonathan Roper, Andrey Toporkov, and Dmitry S. Nikolayev (Moscow: Probel-2000, 2011), 116–21.

36 Bliss, "Half-Lines," 442–49.

37 Bliss, "Half-Lines," 448.

38 *Hávamál* stt. 22, 76–77. R. D. Fulk, "An Introduction to Eddic Metres," in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 252–70.

39 Roper, "Metre," 120.

that single half-lines in anaphoric structures conclude a given internal section of the incantation and allow the charm to pivot to a new structure or theme. Charm 7's single half-line "ne dolh diopian" facilitates the charm's transition from *ne* to *ac*, and from the prevention of harm (limiting the actions of wounds) to the creation of health (the "holy" or "health-giving" water bestowed on the patient). Charm 9's single half-line "and fere ham þæt feoh" concludes the portion of the charm that asks for the return of stolen cattle, and highlights the subsequent shift to an anaphoric sequence prohibiting shelter to the thief. As noted above, Charm 11's "grymma gryre" creates two rhetorical sub-units, each linked by syntax and repetition, within a greater plurilinear structure. This consistency suggests, again, that short lines in the charms require no emendation and are in fact aesthetic features of these performative texts, even a particular feature of their genre. Though only certain subsets of the twelve metrical charms can be considered to be textually related to one another, they do form a loose corpus, bound by their similar semiotic functions, their mix of traditional and literate material, and the simple fact that they all contain alliterating verse where hundreds of other Old English remedies do not.

The other, more unusual irregularities found in the anaphora of the charms—three-position verses, unattested metrical patterns, lines lacking regular cross-caesura alliteration—have received little critical attention, but they also represent a stylistic choice on the part of a putative composer or composers. The examples cited above demonstrate that, within the metrical charms, rhetorical structures are preserved over adherence to strict metre of the type that characterizes *Beowulf*. These texts adhere to a slightly different set of aesthetic standards from those found in other Old English verse, one in which four-position scansion with restricted drop expansion and specific alliterative patterns is a flexible rather than absolute requirement.

The use of unusual lines generates its own kind of stylistic power, which may well have been noticeable to the charms' audiences, including the practitioners who recited them and the patients, clients, and collaborators who witnessed them performed. Metre, as well as other aural ornamental features like extra alliteration, rhyme, and assonance, was almost certainly audible to audiences in the early medieval English period: Rafael J. Pascual has recently demonstrated that Old English metre was designed to enable audiences to follow alliterative patterns across the long line, while Daniel Donoghue has explored the myriad ways in which early medieval English audiences with differing levels of poetic competence could have internalized the conventions of metre and aural ornament.⁴⁰ Metre and ornament were designed to be noticed. It follows, too, that

40 Rafael J. Pascual, "Oral Tradition and the History of English Alliterative Verse," *SN* 89 (2017): 250–260; Daniel Donoghue, *How the Anglo-Saxons Read Their Poems* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 5.

lines which do not adhere to the general rules of Old English verse would have been noticeable to a medieval audience because they violate expectation. This kind of poetic disruption can be, and arguably was, used in Old English poetry for aesthetic effect.⁴¹ The contrast between a rigorously maintained rhetorical structure and its increasingly flexible and unusual metre would have drawn an audience's attention. We can plausibly speculate about the effect of such a device: it may have enhanced the verbal power of the anaphoric structure itself. The insistent repetition is magical language and therefore, perhaps, is allowed to be exceptional or non-normative. Unusual metre separates these incantations from both ordinary speech and ordinary verse; the magical speech act is not beholden to the limits of the poetic line.

Such speculation is bolstered by the fact that these plurilinear clusters seem to be essential to the function of the metrical charms. As noted above, all of the charms contain anaphoric structures, most of which constitute the defining "speech act" of the text in which they are found—that is, the lines in question explicitly demand the change in reality the practitioner seeks to effect with his performance of the text. Anaphoric structures enact the actual healing of the patient and the cessation of pain in Charms 4 and 7, and return stolen property and prevent the escape of the thief in Charm 9. The concluding lines of Charm 3 (lines 7–9) demand permanent protection for both patient and charmer with a syntactically repetitive anaphoric structure on "oððe," using a series of parallel auxiliaries ("moste ... mihte ... cuþe"). Charm 2 (lines 46–52) exorcises nine coloured poisons from the patient in an exhortatory series of ten half-lines adhering to the formula "wið ðy ... attre." Charm 12 shrinks a swelling or tumour away to nothingness in a series of syntactically identical commands ("cling þu alswa col on heorþe, / scring þu alswa scerne awage / and weorne alswa weter on anbren," may you shrink up just like coal on the hearth, may you dry up just like dung on a wall, and fade away just like water in a vessel, lines 8–10). Though not a sign of "galderform," these clusters enhance the verbal power of performative texts by prioritizing repetition and echoing, features that are also demonstrably important to "normative" or "classical" Old English poetic style. Within the extant corpus, metrically unusual anaphora is a defining feature of the Old English verse charm genre, and the particularities of this genre demand greater scholarly and editorial respect than they have yet received.

It is often tempting to treat systems of Old English metrical scansion as sets of immutable laws, to which a given poem does or does not adhere. Texts that do not "follow the rules" are described with the language of "deficiency," "violation," and "failure." Yet such language does the metrical charms a disservice. The charms prioritize aural ornament, repetition, and patterning over Sieversian metrics, yet still

⁴¹ Quirk, "Language," 155–56; Griffith, "Alliteration," 137; Niles, "Editing," 450–52. Examples of unusual lines arguably used for poetic effect include *Wulf and Eadwacer* lines 3, 8, 17, 19; *The Riming Poem* line 77; *Christ and Satan* lines 145, 204.

adhere to regular metre and exhibit “classical” poetic features in many instances. The irregularities they contain are remarkably and consistently explicable in context, and should be treated as examples of meaningful difference—which is, of course, the substance of any literary style. Our systems of scansion are not prescriptive but descriptive, seeking to offer explanations for a specific set of poetic data. The data provided by the charms suggests that our current systems of metrical scansion may in fact describe only one verse style among several available to Old English poets, or one end of a stylistic spectrum; depending on the genre and purpose of a given text, poets could choose to adhere rigorously to metrical rules or treat them with a kind of flexible impressionism. Old English verse was, in the words of Eric Stanley, an “unfettered” and “living art form,” and regularities observed by modern scholars do not necessarily constitute a unilateral or unconditional standard of Old English style and skill.⁴² The charms offer a glimpse of a more expansive, varied poetic landscape in pre-Conquest England—one in which disruptive, inventive metre provided poets, physicians, priests, and patients with the ability to command the world around them, defending human bodies and communities from chaos, suffering, and destruction.

⁴² E. G. Stanley, “*The Wonder of Creation: A New Edition and Translation, with Discussion of Problems*,” *Anglia* 131 (2013): 475–508.

