The register of divine speech in *Genesis A*

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ABSTRACT

The article argues from an empirical study of the alliterative and metrical characteristics of the speeches of *Genesis A* that the poet made a concerted attempt to differentiate between the spoken language of God and that of mortal speakers. In particular the analysis shows that divine language is highly patterned, alliteratively ornate and unusually hypermetric. The most extreme effects are generated by the genres of benediction and malediction. The evidence shows that the poet was also able to use the rules of his poetics effectively for rhetorical ends. An attempt is made finally to link this characterising of the divine voice with the Biblical *vox tonantis*.

'Old English poetry is a spoken art and one might therefore expect that the speeches of characters in the poems would reveal an awareness of colloquial rhythms', speculates Barbara Raw in an intriguing discussion of mimesis and register in the speeches of Old English poetry.[1] She distinguishes speeches of low register, particularly in *Beowulf*, by the increased proportion of light verses (with fewer than two full stresses) that they contain, a fact which marks them out from the more formal speeches and from the narrative parts of the poem and which in her view creates 'an impression of spontaneous speech'.[2] *Genesis A*, the subject of this study, furnishes speeches with clusters of the same feature. Abimelech, for example, in a speech quite different from the terms of its biblical source – an independence which might perhaps allow for adaptation to spoken idiom – reveals to Sara how he will compensate Abraham for his wooing of her:

Ne þearf ðe on edwit Abraham settan,
ðin freadrihten, *þæt þu flettpaðas*,
mæg ælfscieno, mine træde
ac him hygeteonan hwitan seolfre

[1] See B. C. Raw, *The Art and Background of Old English Poetry* (London, 1978), pp. 198–16, at 108.

[2] Raw, *The Art and Background*, pp. 108–10, at 110. On the metrical nature of light verses, see especially A. J. Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf*, rev. edition (Oxford, 1967), chapters 2 and 10.

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deope bete. *Ne ceara incit duguða*
of ðisse eðyltyrf ellor secan
winas uncuðe, ac wuniað her.[3] (lines 2729–35)

Affecting a slightly archaic and poetic register, Kennedy translates: 'No need hath Abraham, thy lord, to reproach thee, O maiden of elfin beauty, because thou hast trod my halls. With gleaming silver will I make requital for this wrong. Care not to go forth from this folk-land, seeking elsewhere unknown friends, but dwell ye here.'[4] The content of Abimelech's speech is both less obscure and more direct than its source, the poet omits the Eastern image of the woman's veiled face which might have baffled an Anglo-Saxon audience,[5] and Abimelech states straightforwardly that Sara's husband will have no need to blame her. And if Raw's interpretation of light verses as connotative of colloquial rhythm is right then the register of Kennedy's translation is misleading, for the new directness of the message is couched in a metre in which light verses predominate: six of the fourteen verses of the speech are metrically light (here italicized),[6] a proportion which is about double their usual rate of occurrence in the poetry.[7] Metrical-grammatical analysis tends to confirm this view: clauses in the poetry very commonly begin with light verses, and some common sub-types of light verses are confined to clause-initial position,[8] so that a speech with a sequence of short clauses might be expected to exhibit a higher than average density of light verses. Four of the five clauses in these seven lines

[3] Following Genesis XX.16. For the text (and subsequent quotations from the poem), see *Genesis A*, ed. A. N. Doane (Madison, 1978), but with added capitalization. The Vulgate reads 'ecce mille argenteos dedi fratri tuo, hoc erit tibi in velamen oculorum ad omnes qui tecum sunt et quocumque perrexeris mementoque te deprehensam' ('Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver. This shall serve thee for a covering of the eyes to all that are with thee, and whithersoever thou shalt go: and remember thou wast taken', from *The Holy Bible Douay Version, translated from the Latin Vulgate* (London, 1956)).

[4] C. W. Kennedy, *The Cædmon Poems, Translated into English Prose* (London, 1916), pp. 89–90.

[5] Or indeed a modern one: see *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer and R. E. Murphy (London, 1990), p. 24, the covering of the eyes 'refers to Sarah's honor, though the exact significance of the legal gesture is unknown'.

[6] These verses are, however, rich in poetic compounds (*eðeltyrf*, the tautological *freadrihten*; the *hapax legomena flettpaðas* (as emended) and *hygeteonan*) as are the light verses of the speeches quoted by Raw (see, for example. the speech of Wiglaf, *The Art*, p. 112). All the types of light verses except for a1, d1 and e1 contain compounds by definition, so that colloquial rhythm may be to some extent camouflaged by traditional poetic diction.

[7] 1358 verses of *Beowulf* are light (i.e. types a1, a2, d1, d2, d3, d4, d5, e1, 1*A*1, 1*D*1, 2*A*1, 3*E*1) or 21.3 per cent.

[8] Further on this, see E. G. Stanley, 'Some Observations on the A3 Lines in *Beowulf*', *Old English Studies in Honour of John C. Pope*, ed. R. B. Burlin and E. B. Irving, Jr (Toronto, 1974), pp. 139–64, and 'Initial Clusters of Unstressed Syllables in Half-Lines of *Beowulf*', in *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Korhammer, K. Reichl and H. Sauer (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 263–84.

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indeed begin with light verses.[9] This concise syntax, lacking the variation and periphrasis common to the poetry might also be mimetic of real speech.[10]

The language of this speech is unusual in another respect pertinent to its register: its alliterations fulfill the rules of the poetry in the most minimal way permissible. Each a-verse is joined to its respective b-verse with the first stress of each alliterating, as the primary alliterative rule demands – but no more than this. It is devoid of double alliteration: its three light a-verses with compounds do not exhibit 'self-alliteration'.[11] Its three normal a-verses have single alliteration. Yet 2731a *mæg ælfscieno* which is metrical type D2 with secondary stress (Bliss's type 1D2) ought to show double alliteration by metrical rule, and the poetic corpus indeed offers a verse of the same sense and prosodic type with the required extra alliteration.[12] And 2735a *winas uncuðe* (if the prefix *un-* is unstressed) belongs to a sub-type of Type A (Bliss 1A1) in which more than 90 per cent of examples in *Beowulf* have double alliteration.[13] Other supererogatory alliterative features – crossed alliteration, continued alliteration, and enjambed alliteration – are entirely absent. The speech is as muted in its assonances as it is possible for Old English poetry to be and so, perhaps, as close to an ordinary idiom as the mode allowed. But, judged in isolation, the stylistic significance of this absence is uncertain: the speech is short and factors other than register might have affected the use of alliteration. To establish whether the manipulation of sound effects contributes to the register of speeches in *Genesis A* (alongside the presence or absence of light verses) a global analysis of their use of alliteration is necessary.

Figure 1 (below) ranks the twenty-five speeches by God and the thirty-seven speeches delivered by others in order of the density of the various kinds of alliteration which exceed the minimal alliterative requirement of the line. These are: double alliteration in normal a-verses (abbreviated in the table as DA); double alliteration in the a-verse of hypermetric verses (HDA); continued alliteration, where the alliterating phoneme of one line is repeated as the alliteration of the next (CA); crossed alliteration which includes the final stress of a line in that line's alliteration in the patterns ABAB or ABBA or other variants on these schemes (CrA); and enjambed alliteration, in which the initial sound of the final stress of a line anticipates the alliteration of the next line (EA). The

[9] 2729a, 2730b, 2732a, 2733b. 2733b is type a1 in the b-verse, a licence which does not occur in *Beowulf*.

[10] Possibly oral too is the anacoluthon: *ne ceara incit ac wuniað her*.

[11] For the term and discussion of such compounds in the poetry, see D. L. Hoover, *A New Theory of Old English Meter*, Amer. Univ. Stud., Series IV Eng. Lang. and Lit. 14 (New York, 1985), 70–7.

[12] Contrast *Judith* 14a *ides ælfscinu*.

[13] See Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf*, pp. 38, 55, 124.

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Figure 1: Speeches in *Genesis A* in order of density of supererogatory alliteration.

Interlocutors	DA	HDA	CA	CrA	EA	Total	%
1. **God** to Mankind Ll. 1255–62	5	0	0	3	1	9/8	113
2. **God** to Cain 1010–21	4	5	1	3	0	13/12	108
3. **God** to Abraham 2850–9	2	5	0	1	2	10/10	100
4. Eve to God 897–902	4	0	1	0	1	6/6	100
5. **God** to Adam 873–81	7	0	0	1	0	8/9	89
6. **God** to Abraham 1787–1790a	2	0	0	0	1	3/3.5	86
7. **God** to Abimelech 2638–2641a	1	0	2	0	0	3/3.5	86
8. **God** to the serpent 906–17	5	1	0	3	1	10/12	83
9. **God** to Adam 927–38	5	0	2	2	1	10/12	83
10. Hagar to angel 2274–9	4	0	0	0	1	5/6	83
11. **God** to Eve 888–895a	5	0	0	0	1	6/7.5	80
12. *Lamech to Ada & Sella* 1093–1103	6	0	0	1	1	8/11	73
13. **God** to Noah 1296–1313	8	0	0	2	3	13/18	72
14. Angels to Lot 2500–12	4	0	1	2	2	9/13	69
15. **God** to Noah 1512–42	15	1	0	1	4	21/31	68
16. Abraham to God 2175–86	4	0	3	0	1	8/12	67
17. **God** to Eve 919–24	3	0	1	0	0	4/6	67
18. **God** to Noah 1485–92	5	0	0	0	0	5/8	63
19. **God** to Cain 1037–1043a	2	0	1	0	1	4/6.5	62
20. **God** to Adam and Eve 196–205	3	0	0	1	2	6/10	60
21. *Abraham to Abimelech* 2692–716	3	0	3	5	4	15/25	60
22. **God** to Abraham 2168–72	0	3	0	0	0	3/5	60
23. *Adam* 1111b–1116	1	0	0	1	1	3/5	60
24. *Abraham to Lot* 1900b–1919	8	0	0	2	1	11/19	58
25. Cain to God 1023–35	4	0	1	0	2	7/13	54
26. **God** to Abimelech 2655–2666a	6	0	0	0	0	6/11.5	52
27. *King of Sodom to Abraham* 2126–35	4	0	0	0	1	5/10	50
28. Adam to God 883–6	2	0	0	0	0	2/4	50
29. *Abimelech to Abraham* 2807–31	7	0	2	1	2	12/25	48
30. **God** to Abraham 2306–37	9	2	0	2	2	15/32	47

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31. Angel to Hagar 2281–95	3	0	1	2	1	7/15	47
32. **God** to Noah 1328–55	6	0	0	4	3	13/28	46
33. **God** to Abraham 2408–18	3	2	0	0	0	5/11	45
34. Angel to Abraham 2914–22	3	0	0	0	1	4/9	44
35. **God** to Abraham 2188–215	9	0	1	0	2	12/28	43
36. *Abraham to Sara* 1824–43	7	0	0	0	1	8/20	40
37. Adam to God 867–71	1	0	0	0	1	2/5	40
38. Abraham to God 2348–52	2	0	0	0	0	2/5	40
39. *Abimelech to Abraham* 2675–90	3	0	2	0	1	6/16	38
40. *Sara to Abraham* 2221–33	2	0	1	0	2	5/13	38
41. *Sara to Abraham* 2783b–2791a	1	0	1	1	0	3/8	38
42. *Abraham to King of Sodom* 2139–61	5	0	1	0	2	8/23	35
43. *Abraham to Sara* 2258–60	0	0	0	0	1	1/3	33
44. *Melchisedec to Abraham* 2107–19	3	0	0	0	1	4/13	31
45. *Sodomites to Lot* 2478–2484a	2	0	0	0	0	2/6.5	29
46. *Lot to the Sodomites* 2466–75	3	0	0	0	0	3/10	30
47. Angels to Lot 2528–34	1	0	0	0	1	2/7	29
48. **God** to Abraham 2797–2803	2	0	0	0	0	2/7	29
49. *Abimelech to Abraham* 2723–6	1	0	0	0	0	1/4	25
50. **God** to Abraham 1746–66	4	0	0	0	1	5/21	24
51. **God** to Abraham 2390–8	1	0	1	0	0	2/9	22
52. *Sara to Abraham* 2247–55	2	0	0	0	0	2/9	22
53. **God** to Abraham 2355–69	3	0	0	0	0	3/15	20
54. Abimelech to God 2643–52	1	0	1	0	0	2/10	20
55. Lot to angels 2514–2526a	2	0	0	0	0	2/12.5	16
56. Cain to God 1006–1008a	0	0	0	0	0	0/2.5	0
57. Angel to Hagar 2271–2	0	0	0	0	0	0/2	0
58. Angels to Lot 2437–40	0	0	0	0	0	0/4	0
59. *Abimelech to Sara* 2729–35	0	0	0	0	0	0/7	0
60. *Abraham to his servants* 2881–4	0	0	0	0	0	0/4	0
61. *Isaac to Abraham* 2890–2	0	0	0	0	0	0/3	0
62. *Abraham to Isaac* 2895–6	0	0	0	0	0	0/2	0

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list gives for each speech the identity of the speaker and that of the addressee together with the relevant line numbers of the text. Divine speeches in the list have their speaker in bold. Speeches only between human interlocutors are italicized. The total number of features is expressed finally as a percentage of the total number of lines in the speech. Obviously, arithmetical calculation of this sort has its weaknesses as a tool for the critical interpretation of poetry. The counting is inevitably somewhat crude. It must be presumed that some of these features must occur occasionally by chance. Also the different types of alliterative supererogation might be given different weightings, for two lines with continued alliteration on three main staves of each line might have been more obvious to a listener than enjambed alliteration where the non-alliterating stress of the line comes into a kind of retrospective prominence. A different way of counting would undoubtedly produce a somewhat different ranking.[14] And in a short speech a single instance of adornment has a greater effect upon position in the table than the same in a longer speech. The overall distribution and the contrast between the top and the bottom are, accordingly, its most important features.

The spectrum revealed is extremely broad; at the top, a handful of speeches show alliteration beyond the minimum in nearly every line or have lines with multiple alliterative features; at the bottom, seven speeches have no additional alliteration of any sort at all in even a single line. The most important trend revealed is the correlation between position in the Table and the identity of the speaker: divine speeches top the list (eight of the top ten and fifteen of the top twenty). Only one of the lowest ten is divine utterance. Only one of the top twenty has both human speaker and human addressee (of twenty-one of this sort). Fifteen of these twenty-one are in the lower half of the table and the bottom four are all of this sort. Scattered in-between are speeches by angels to humans and by humans to God, the register of which is in the main not distinctive. There can be no doubt of the most obvious conclusion: in *Genesis A* God speaks more alliteratively than anyone else and human speakers speaking to humans (such as Abimelech to Sara, ranked here as fifty-ninth out of sixty-two) speak with the least.

Implicit in this conclusion from empirical analysis is a claim that supererogatory or non-functional alliteration is often *ornamental*, i.e. deployed by the poet to achieve meaningful effects and not merely accidental or random in nature.[15]

[14] It is a moot point, for example, whether continued alliteration linking the first or last line of a speech with its preceding or following line should be counted. Here, it has been included. Excluding this would very significantly affect the place of God's speech to Abimelech in 2638–2641a where both first and last lines are so linked.

[15] This is not at odds with the fact that double alliteration is compulsory in certain metrical types: the poet chooses his metre.

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The interlocking use of functional and non-functional alliteration in two divine speeches confirms in a stylistic rather than an empirical way the poet's awareness of the rhetorical potential offered by these broader alliterative possibilities:

Temað nu and wexað, tudre fyllað
eorðan ælgrene incre cynne,
sunum and dohtrum. Inc sceal sealt **wæter**
wunian on gewealde and eall worulde gesceaft.
Brucað blæddaga and brim**hlæste**
and heofon*fugla*. Inc is halig *feoh*
and wilde deor on geweald geseald
and lifgende, ða ðe land tredað,
feorheaceno cynn ða ðe flod wecceð
geond hronrade. Inc hyrað eall.[16]
(196–205)

Tymað nu and tiedrað, tires brucað,
mid gefean fryðo; fyllað **eorðan**,
eall geiceað. Eow is eðelstol,
holmes **hlæst** and heofonfuglas
and wildu deor on geweald geseald,
eorðe ælgrene and eacen feoh . . .
Weaxað and wridað, wilna brucað,
ara on eorðan; æðelum fyllað
eowre fromcynne foldan sceatas,
teamum and tudre. Ic eow treowa þæs
mine selle þæt ic on middangeard
næfre egorhere eft gelæde,
wæter ofer widland.[17]
(1512–17, 1532–8)

God's blessing on Adam and Eve (Vulgate I.28, *Genesis A* 196–205) is repeated when he blesses Noah and his sons (Vulgate IX.1, *Genesis A* 1512–42) and the covenant betrayed by the Fall is renewed after the purging of the Flood. The two speeches share the genre of benediction, and most of their ideas and much of their wording are the same in the Vulgate (except for the proscription of murder in the second),[18] and the poet of *Genesis A*, alert to the repetitions of his source, reproduces them in his verse, but the replication goes beyond straightforward repetition. The many repetitions – here underlined – include most of

[16] 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the green earth with your seed and increase, sons and daughters. And ye shall have dominion over the salt sea, and over all the world. Enjoy the riches of earth, the fish of the sea, and the fowls of the air. To you is given power over the herds which I have hallowed, and the wild beasts, and over all living things that move upon the earth; all living things, which the depths bring forth throughout the sea, shall be subject unto you.' Kennedy, *The Cædmon Poems,* p. 13.

[17] 'Be fruitful and multiply, enjoying honour, delighting in peace. Fill all the earth with your increase. To you is given the home of your fathers, dominion over the fish of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the field, over all the green earth and its teeming herds . . . Be fruitful and multiply, enjoying grace on earth and every pleasant thing. Fill all the regions of the earth with your increase, your issue and your seed. And unto you I give My covenant that never again will I bring the waters upon the earth or a flood on the wide-stretching land.' Kennedy, *The Cædmon Poems,* pp. 54-5]

[18] Compare I.28 'benedixitque illis Deus et ait: crescite et multiplicamini et replete terram, et subicite eam et dominamini piscibus maris et volatilibus caeli et universis animantibus quae moventur super terram' and IX.1–2 'benedixitque Deus Noe et filiis eius . . . et dixit ad eos: crescite et multiplicamini et implete terram, et terror vester ac tremor sit super cuncta animalia terrae, et super omnes volucres caeli cum universis quae moventur in terra, omnes pisces maris manui vestrae traditi sunt', etc.

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the key words. There is an identical opening to both as in the Vulgate. A whole line of verse (202 and 1516) is reproduced in its entirety, a very rare feature in the poetry, which is highlighted by the equally unusual internal rhyme of its b-verse.[19] Other ideas are varied in diction (*wexað: tiedrað*; *sunum and dohtrum: teamum and tudre*; *blæd: tires*; *brim: holmes*). Most importantly, however, the two speeches display a playful relationship between functional and non-functional alliteration, enjambed alliterations in the one being transformed into primary alliterations in the other (both marked in bold). In 197a *eorðan æl-* alliterates normally but in 1513b and 1514a is transformed into enjambed alliteration, *eorðan/ eall*, before being picked up again in normal alliteration in 1517a (now with the repeat of the whole a-verse from 197a). The second element of the periphrastic *brimhlæst* ('ocean-burden', 'fish') is enjambed with *heofonfuglas* in 200b–201a (in a line with crossed alliteration, here italicized), but then promoted to full alliteration with the same compound *heofonfuglas* in 1515 in the phrase *holmes hlæst* (synonymous with *brimhlæst*). 198b *wæter*, also in enjambed alliteration with the following line, similarly re-appears in functional alliteration in 1538a. The concentration of enjambed alliteration seems strongly to suggest artistry, and its effect seems to be to focus our attention on the principal elements of the divine commitment, the land and the sea and all the earthly creatures which are placed in human control. The difficulty of achieving this in a highly rule-governed system whilst simultaneously poeticising a source which called for the utmost respect should not be underestimated. The contrivance seems appropriate both to the majesty of the speaker and to the sanctity of the utterance.

Nevertheless, neither of these speeches, relatively ornamental though they are, displays the heaviest concentration of alliterative features, being respectively twentieth and fifteenth in the Table. Heading the Table is God's speech to mankind in lines 1255–62:

> Ne syndon me on ferhðe freo from gewitene
> cneorisn caines ac me þæt cynn hafað
> sare *abolgen*. Nu me Sethes *bearn*
> torn *niwiað* and him to *nimað*
> mægeð to gemæccum minra feonda
> þær wifa wlite onwod grome,
> idesa ansien and ece **feond**,
> folcdriht *wera* þa ær on friðe *wæron*.[20] (lines 1255–62)

[19] On the well-known repetition of *Beowulf* 1410 and *Exodus* 58, see *The Old English Exodus, edited with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary*, ed. E. B. Irving, Jr. (New Haven, 1953), pp. 25–6. Whilst this instance may be accidental, the multiplicity of correspondences between these two speeches is clearly self-conscious.

[20] 'I have not been unmindful of the sons of men, but the tribe of Cain hath sorely angered Me. The sons of Seth have stirred My wrath against them; they have taken them wives from

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As Doane points out, this is God's curse on mankind soon to be made manifest in the Flood, and the poet 'freely develops God's speech from the material inherent in the preceding passage'.[21] The divine malediction has its genre intimated by its lexis (*sare abolgen . . . torn*), by the terms of its introduction (1253–1254a 'þa reordade rodera waldend/ wrað moncynne') and by its following conclusion that men had become hateful to God (1269b *metode laðe*) – and it expresses the wrath of the Lord with alliterative and metrical intensity. Its ten lines contain six clauses, but not a single verse is metrically light. Assonance heightens the effect of the opening (*ferhðe*, *freo*, *from*; *cneorisn*, *caines*, *cynn*). Enjambed and crossed alliteration (in bold and italics respectively), also with further assonance (*wera*, *wæron*), ornament the end. And in the middle, a most unusual feature, consecutive lines of crossed alliteration in 1257 and 1258 (with inflectional rhyme in *niwiað* and *nimað*) – the only place in the poem with such repetition on fully stressed syllables.[22] That this occurs not with the commonest word-initial phonemes *w-* or *h-* or *s-* or vowels, but the considerably more difficult *b-* and *n-* further suggests contrivance rather than accident.[23] It is also rich in double alliteration, particularly in prosodic types where it is metrically optional (2A1: 1256a, 1261a; 3B1: 1255a, 1260a). As double alliteration cannot occur in lines with crossed alliteration on the main staves, all the a-verses in this speech which lack the latter display the former. The status of the speaker and the awesomeness of the moment draw out a higher style from the poet.

That malediction indeed generates artifice is confirmed by the poem's other examples of the form. Genesis contains three further divine curses whose genre is explicitly labelled in the Vulgate: against the snake (Gen. III.14 *quia fecisti hoc maledictus es*), against Adam (Gen. III.17 *maledicta terra in opere tuo*), and against Cain (Gen. IV.11 *nunc igitur maledictus eris super terram*). These are given voice by God in the poem respectively in lines 906–17 (eighth in the Table), 927–38 (ninth), and 1010–21 (second). The poet's awareness of their shared genre is suggested by recurrence of the word *lað*: the snake is hateful (917a *lað leodsceaða*), God's pronouncement on Adam is a hateful message (926b *lað ærende*), his last word to Cain is that he is hateful to his kin (1021b *winemagum lað*), and the adjective *laðlice* recurs (910b, 931b). It is also remarkable that all

among the daughters of My foes. Woman's beauty and woman's grace and the eternal fiend have taken hold upon this people who dwelt of old in peace.' Kennedy, *The Cædmon Poems,* p. 46. The sense of the first sentence is unclear. Cf. *Genesis A*, ed. Doane, p. 257, which offers '(The descendants of Cain) have not departed from my spirit immune (from punishment).'

[21] *Genesis A*, ed. Doane, p. 257.

[22] Elsewhere in *Genesis A* only at 1796–7, 2907–8, 2491–2, 2548–9 (on secondary stress in 1796. 1797, 2098, 2492, 2548).

[23] Alliteration on these sounds in Old English poems over fifty lines in length occurs at the following rates: *w-* 12.2%, *h-* 10.3%, *s-* 10.0%, vowels 18.4%, *b-* 5.3%, *n-* 1.7%.

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three are of exactly the same length (twelve lines each), where no other divine speech in the poem is of this length. Comparison of the first two of these is fruitful:

Þu scealt wideferhð, werg, þinum **breostum**
bearme, tredan bradre eorðan,
faran feðeleas þenden þe feorh wunað,
gast on *innan*. Þu scealt greot *etan*
þine lifdagas swa þu laðlice
wrohte onstealdest þe þæt wif feoð,
hatað under heofnum and þin heafod tredeð
fah mid fotum *sinum*. Þu scealt fiersna *sætan*
tohtan niwre. Tuddor bið gemæne
incrum orlegnið a þenden standeð
woruld under wolcnum. Nu þu wast and canst,
lað leod*sceaða*, hu þu lifian *scealt*.[24]
(lines 906–17)

Þu scealt oðerne eðel secean,
wynleasran **w**ic, and on **w**ræc hweorfan
nacod nied***w***ædla neorxna***w***anges
dugeðum bedæled. Þe is gedal witod
lices and sawle. Hwæt, þu laðlice
wrohte onstealdest. Forþon þu winnan scealt
and on eorðan þe þine andlifne
selfa geræcan, wegan swatig**hleor**,
þinne **h**laf etan, þenden þu **h**er leofast
oð þæt þe to **h**eortan **h**earde gripeð
adl *unliðe* þe þu on æple *ær*
selfa forswulge. Forþon þu sweltan scealt.[25]
(lines 927–38)

Whilst it might be expected that malediction would be rich in the language of 'must' and 'shall', both speeches begin and end with identical repetitions of this ilk (*Þu scealt*; *þu scealt*; in the second case with a sense of antithesis between the infinitives *lifian* and *sweltan* arising from the parallel context). They are constituted as a paired example of the so-called 'envelope' pattern, with the language of the repetition calling attention to the genre.[26] And a further remarkable repetition links the two speeches: at exactly the same juncture in each speech, in the b-verse of the fifth and a-verse of the sixth lines (910b–911a and 931b–932a) there are near verbatim repeats: 'swa/ hwæt þu laðlice wrohte onstealdest'. The verb *onstellan* occurs only at these two points in *Genesis A*. Both the snake and Adam stand accused of the same crime, between them they have established

[24] 'All thy life upon thy belly shalt thou go to and fro upon the fields of the broad earth, accursed, so long as life and spirit dwell within thee. Dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life for the grievous evil thou hast wrought. The woman shall loathe and hate thee under heaven. Her foot shall crush thy head, and thou shalt bruise her heel anew. There shall be strife between your seed for ever, while the world standeth under heaven. Now thou knowest clearly, thou foul tempter, what thy life shall be.' Kennedy, *The Cædmon Poems,* pp. 36–7. Following, in 906b–907a, Doane's handling of the difficulties; for a different view, see *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. G. P. Krapp (New York, 1931), pp. 172–3.

[25] 'Thou shalt seek another home, a joyless dwelling. Naked and needy shalt thou suffer exile, shorn of thy glory. Thy soul and body shall be cleft asunder. Lo! Thou hast sinned a grievous sin. Therefore shalt thou labour, winning thy portion on the earth by toil, eating thy bread in the sweat of thy brow while thou dwellest here, until that grim disease, which first thou tasted in the apple, shall grip hard at thy heart. So shalt thou die.' Kennedy, *The Cædmon Poems,* p. 37.

[26] The term is applied to 'any logically unified group of verses bound together by the repetition at the end of (1) words or (2) ideas or (3) words and ideas which are employed at the beginning', A. C. Bartlett, *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (New York, 1966), p. 8.

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hateful sin in the world. Neither of these statements closely follows its source and these repetitions are not found in the Vulgate: the shaping of these two speeches as a pair is the poet's doing.

Further examples of the phrase *þu scealt* recur in this group of speeches: (to the snake) 909b, 913b, (to Adam) 932b, (to Cain) 1013b, 1018b, 1020b. The sentence on the snake is structured around four such pronouncements, the first three based fairly closely on Gen. III.14–15: that, henceforth, it shall crawl (906–909a), eat dirt (909b–911a), be trodden on by woman (911b–916a), and finally be conscious of how it must live (916b–917). The parallelism of syntax and wording (906–7 *þu scealt tredan*, 909b *þu scealt etan*, 913b *þu scealt sætan*, 917b *þu lifian scealt*) is sharpened by alliterative rhetoric. The gap between the opening modal and its dependent infinitive is partly closed by the enjambed alliteration (*breostum/ bearme*). In each of the other three lines – and only in these three lines in this speech – crossed alliteration (here italicized) is used in a schematic fashion to give prominence to the verbs, to the infinitives in 909 *innan: etan* and 913 *sinum: sætan*, and to the modal in 917 *–sceaða: scealt*. Extra alliteration is notable too in God's words to Adam, though without the same thematic patterning. Continued alliteration occurs in 935–6. Crossed alliteration is found in 929, which continues the alliteration of 928. Crossed alliteration in 937 (assuming alliteration on the prefix *un-*) also involves an alliterative feature unique to this line in the poem: double alliteration in both the verses of the line. AAAA alliteration is a pattern found in only a handful of lines in the entire poetic corpus (and several of these are dubious for one reason or another).[27] Neither speech makes much use of light verses.[28]

God's exchange with Cain after the murder of Abel casts further light on speech register in the poem, juxtaposing sublime and evil registers:

> Him ða se cystleasa cwealmes wyrhta
> ædre æfter þon andswarode:
> 'Ne can ic Abeles or ne fore,
> hleomæges sið. Ne ic hyrde wæs
> broðer mines.' Him þa brego engla,
> godspedig gast, gean þingade:
> 'hwæt befealdest *þu* folmum *þinum*
> wraðum on wælbedd wærfæstne rinc,
> broðor þinne, and his blod to me
> cleopað and cigeð? Þu þæs cwealmes scealt
> **w**ite **w**innan and on **wr**æc hweorfan,

[27] Elsewhere at (with possible emendations) *And* 1627 (read *geador* for *eador*), *Vain* 76, *Rim* 71 (read *scræf* for *græf*), *Soul II* 103 (unetymological *h* in *tohleoþade*), *Beo* 2296, *Pr* 18, *MCharm* 7, and in a hypermetric line, *Res* 7.

[28] 906a, 910a, 910b, or 12.5% in the first; 927a, 929b, 931b, 933b, 936a, or 20.8% in the second.

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a**w**yrged to **w**idan *aldre*. Ne seleð þe **w**æstmas *eorðe*
wlitige to **w**oruldnytte ac heo **w**ældreore swealh
halge of handum þinum. Forþon heo þe hroðra oftihð,
glæmes grene folde. Þu scealt geomor hweorfan,
arleas of earde þinum swa þu Abele wurde
to feorhbanan. Forþon þu flema scealt
wid*last* wrecan, winemagum *lað*.'[29]
(lines 1004–21)

Cain's two brief, lying clauses follow the Vulgate quite closely (IV.9 *nescio, num custos fratris mei sum*), but with slight changes which further characterise his mendacity. Whilst his slippage from present *can* to preterite *wæs* (beside the consistent present tenses of the Vulgate) possibly betrays what he hopes to conceal, his knowledge that Abel *is* no more, the single-word clause *nescio* is elaborated and the added series of nouns *or* 'outset', *fore* 'course', and *sið* 'journey' even though they form the objects of the negated verb (*ne con*), all misleadingly imply a power of movement of which Cain's brother is no longer able.[30] And his allusion to his brother as *hleo-mæg*, a 'near relative . . . who offers or expects help or protection',[31] is, in the circumstances, ironic. But his words lack all alliterative adornment. In sharp contrast, God's reply is filled with alliterative devices (and is virtually devoid of light verses – only 1020a). Just as God's curse on mankind is carefully topped and tailed, so this opening and closing are marked with alliterative flourishes: both 1010 and 1021 have crossed alliteration. The alliteration on the varied second person pronoun in the first (*þu*, *þinum*) initiates a series of such pronouns and focuses our attention on the guilty party. That on *last* and *lað* at the end lends more force to the final word which sums up the nature of Cain's murderous act: it is hateful. Several of the divine speeches in the poem

[29] 'Quickly the cursed fashioner of death made answer unto Him: "I know not the coming or going of Abel, my kinsman, his lot or portion; I was not my brother's keeper." And the Gracious Spirit, Lord of angels, made answer unto him: "Why hast thou slain that faithful man thy brother in thy wrath, and his blood calleth and crieth unto Me? Accursed for ever, driven into exile, thou shalt be punished for this deed of death! The earth shall not yield thee of her pleasant fruits for thy daily need, but by thy hands her soil is stained with holy blood. Therefore the green earth shall withhold from thee her beauty and her delights. In sadness and dishonour shalt thou depart from thy home, because thou hast slain thy brother, Abel. Loathed of thy kinsmen, an exile and a fugitive, shalt thou wander on the face of the earth.' Kennedy, *The Cædmon Poems,* pp. 39-40.

[30] *Genesis A*, ed. Doane, Glossary, p. 388 gives the sense of *sið* here as 'how a thing goes for somebody, fate', Bosworth–Toller offers 'a proceeding, course of action, way of doing, conduct'; the root sense is 'journeying, travel'. J. Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. T. N. Toller (Oxford 1898).

[31] *Genesis A*, ed. Doane, Glossary, p. 364, adapting Bosworth–Toller, *hleow-mæg*, 'a near relation, one who is bound to offer shelter or help'.

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open and/or close with similar rhetorical effects.[32] The centre of the speech, dominated by the details of the malediction, also displays two prominent and overlapping alliterative (and in the second case also metrical) features. Lines 1014–16 show consecutive alliteration in three successive lines; and though this is not unique in the poem, it is certainly rare,[33] and connects together the principal ideas of the speech: tormented (*wite winnan*), exiled (*on wræc*) and accursed for ever (*awyrged to widan aldre*), Cain will forego the earth's fair fruits (*wæstmas . . . wlitige*). Lines 1015–19 form a cluster of hypermetric verses, each of its a-verses with double alliteration, the whole contributing significantly to the very high occurrence of this here (nine of the twelve lines of the speech). As 1015 also has crossed alliteration (*aldre*, *eorðe*), it possesses every kind of alliterative device apart from enjambed alliteration. These lines also differ from the others of the speech in conjoining across each line of the sequence, and in an intricately patterned way, ideas which are violently antithetical, on the one hand, the cursed status of the killer, the blood of the murdered victim, Cain's hands, his misery, and dishonour (1015a *awyrged*, 1016b *wældreore*, 1017a *handum þinum*, 1018b *geomor*, 1019a *arleas*) in an ABABA pattern, against, on the other hand, the fruits, the beauty, the pleasures, the brightness of the earth, and Abel (1015b *wæstmas*, 1016a *wlitige*, 1017b *hroðra*, 1018a *glæmes*, 1019b *abele*) in the opposite order BABAB. The interlace is precise and mannered. In brief, we can see here in these vernacular speeches a contrast of rhetoric not evident in the Vulgate: Cain's speech is marked by *tropes* (dissimulation and irony),[34] but *schemes* express the divine word (patterns of alliteration, antithesis and chiasmus).

Hypermetric verses exist at the opposite end of the scale of metrical weight from light verses: where light verses by definition have fewer than the two main stresses of the normal verse, hypermetric verses never have less than two, and the hypermetric a-verse has three stresses with double alliteration on the first two.[35] Accordingly, a line of two light verses contains only two main stresses whilst a line of hypermetric verses would usually contain five. The different effect of the two in performance was surely considerable. The hypermetric cluster of 1015–19 therefore characterises the divine register (both metrically and alliteratively), as contrastively with the human register dominated by the light

[32] Note the following openings: 906, 2638 (continuing the alliteration of the speech introduction), 919 (continued), 2168 (hypermetric); and the following closings: 881 (crossed), 917 (crossed), 1042b–1043 (enjambed), 1262 (crossed), 2174–5 (continued), 2641 (beginning alliteration continued after the close of the speech) 2859 (hypermetric). Possibly compare Ælfric's use of alliteration 'to produce a concluding flourish', *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, ed. M. Godden, EETS ss 18 (Oxford, 2000), xxxvi–ii. Godden calls this 'original', but it may have here a source in traditional poetry.

[33] See also 35–7, 2445–7, 2807–9. Lines 1645–9 show five consecutive lines of vowel alliteration.

[34] But note the jingling assonance of 1006b *ōr ne fōre*.

[35] See Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf*, ch. 14 and Appendix D.

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verse as the metre of Old English poetry allows. And at certain points these two rhythms contrast sharply in close juxtaposition. A clear example is Abraham's speech to the King of Sodom in 2139–61 and God's words to Abraham just following in 2168–72. Abraham generously declines to accept the King's offer of the treasure of the Sodomites in words called 'noble' or 'lordly' by the narrator (2138b *dribtlice spræc*), but they cannot compare in register with the holiness of the divine word (2166b *halige spræce*). The latter contains not a single light verse in its ten verses and begins with a hypermetric cluster (2168–70); the former has no expanded lines, but eighteen of its forty five verses (40 per cent) are light.[36] The five lines of this divine speech contain twenty one full stresses and sixty six syllables; the first five lines of Abraham's speech only thirteen stresses and forty syllables.[37] Given that both operate according to a common set of prosodic rules, this is a most surprising difference. Or we may contrast God's speech to Abraham commanding the sacrifice of Isaac in 2850–9 and the three short speeches which follow, of Abraham to his servants 2881–4, of Isaac to his father in 2890–1, and the reply of Abraham to his son in 2895–6. The first has only two light verses in ten lines (2850a and 2854a, or 10 per cent), but ten of its verses are hypermetric. It also has a remarkably contrived conclusion with consecutive lines of enjambed alliteration (2857–8) preceding a last line of crossed alliteration. The speeches of Abraham and his son show six light verses in nine lines (2882a, 2883a, 2884a, 2891a, 2892a, 2895a or 33.3 per cent), and are wholly devoid of hypermetric verse, double alliteration and the other types of alliterative ornament.

Broader empirical analysis confirms the picture. On the one hand, of the ten speeches which show the greatest use of light verses, not one is a divine speech.[38] On the other hand, it is extremely significant that the hypermetric verses of the poem crowd in the divine speeches. Bliss lists the hypermetric verses of the poem as lines 44–6, 155–6a, 913, 1015–19, 1522b–3, 2167–70, 2174, 2328–9, 2406–7, 2411–12, 2855–9 (apart from 2857b), 2866–9, a total of

[36] The light verses in 2139–61 are 2139a, 2140a, 2141a, 2141b, 2142b, 2144b, 2147a, 2147b, 2148b, 2151a, 2151b, 2152b, 2153a, 2154a, 2154b, 2156b, 2159b, 2160a.

[37] Resolved syllables are counted as single. 2143a is a single half-line with single alliteration which does not continue the alliteration of the previous line; see A. J. Bliss, 'Single Half-Lines in Old English Poetry', *N&Q* 216 (1971), 442–9.

[38] These are, in descending order of density, the speech of the Sodomites to Lot, lines 2478–2484a (6 light types in 13 verses, or 46.2%); Abimelech to Sara, 2729–35a (6 in 14, 42.9%); Abraham to the King of Sodom, 2139–61 (18 in 45, 40%); Abraham to his servants, 2881–4 (3 in 8 verses, 37.5%); Eve to God, 897–902 (4 in 12, 33.3%); Isaac to Abraham, 2820–2 (2 in 6 verses, 33.3%); Sara to Abraham, 2221–33 (8 in 26, 30.8%); Abimelech to Abraham, 2675–90 (10 in 32, 31.2%); Abimelech to God, 2643–52 (6 in 20, 30%); the angels to Lot, 2528–34 (4 in 14, 28.6%).

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sixty-three verses.[39] Of these, 913, 1015–19, 1522–3, 2168–70, 2328–9, 2411–12, 2855–9 occur in speeches by God, this being thirty-eight of the total of sixty-three verses, or 60 per cent of the total in just 14 per cent of the text (328 lines of divine speech in 2319 lines of the text). Of the remaining twenty-five, several are more loosely associated with divine speech: five (2167 and 2406b–7) introduce God's speeches to Abraham in 2168–72 and 2408–18, and lines 44–6 contain the divine instruction creating the terrors of hell given as indirect discourse (note 44b *Heht þa*). That God frequently speaks hypermetrically has been noticed before,[40] but what has not, I think, been realised is that this is not an isolated stylistic feature, but rather a part of a system of metrical, alliterative and rhetorical features which set the divine voice apart. *Genesis A* contains two broadly distinct levels of spoken style: the human minimises alliterative ornament and tends towards concentrations of light verses, the divine, conversely, is enriched by multiple alliterative effects with clusters of hypermetric verses. The low is best suited to evil characters, Cain or the Sodomites, or to those the poet may have seen as morally dubious such as Abimelech, and the high is most apt for God in majesty pronouncing malediction, promising covenants, or demanding sacrifice.

That divine speech should take loftier form might have seemed natural enough to the poet.[41] But classical views of plain, middle and grand styles and of the suitability of high style to high subject offer a possible source for his choice, although condemnation there of the excessive use of alliteration in high style perhaps counts against the idea, as does the apparent absence of the main works of classical rhetoric from Anglo-Saxon libraries.[42] A likelier inspiration is

[39] Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf*, p. 167. Pope gives the same list but counts sixty-four verses: see J. C. Pope, *The Rhythm of Beowulf*, rev. ed. (New Haven, 1966), p. 103. It is not clear from Pope's list which additional verse he believes to be hypermetric, but possibly 156b. Doane's list of the expanded clusters is virtually the same, but he gives a longer list of isolated hypermetric verses (most, however are scannable as normal in Bliss's system); see *Genesis A*, ed. Doane, p. 229, and also T. Schmitz, 'Die Sechstakter in der altenglischen Dichtung', *Anglia* 33 (1910), pp. 1–76, 172–218, at 28–32.

[40] See *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork, J. D. Niles, 4th ed.(Toronto, 2008), p. clx: 'in some poems the use of hypermetrics is associated with narrative or dialogue of particular dignity or emphasis, as often when God speaks in *GenA*'.

[41] Compare for example 'the astonishing fact that of the very few unsyncopated [verb] forms in the Ælfrician MSS no less than six have as their subject God (or the Holy Ghost) or a pronoun standing for that word . . . it seems at least permissible to believe that it was the imposing subject of the context that influenced the scribe to use an unsyncopated form, and sometimes even the plural', J. Hedberg, *The Syncope of The Old English Present Endings: a Dialect Criterion* (Lund, 1945), p. 288.

[42] See *Ad Herennium*, ed. and trans. H. Caplan (London, 1989), IV, viii (and following) on the levels of style, and IV, xii, 18 on the faultiness of excessive alliteration in lines such as 'O Tite, tute, Tati, tibi tanta, tyranne, tulisti'. But note M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 128–9: 'unrepresented in any Anglo-Saxon library [are] . . . treatises describing the

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the poet's source, for the Bible frequently characterizes the voice of Him who 'spake as never man spake' as thunderous ('The Lord thundered from heaven and the Most High uttered his voice . . . the foundations of the world were laid bare by the rebuke of the Lord, II Sam 14–16), and fiery ('Your Word is exceedingly fiery', Psalm CXVIII.40).[43] Christian Latin poets pick this up and speak of the voice of God as the *vox tonantis*.[44] That divine thunder should resound mimetically appears also to have influenced the poetics of *Christ III* or *Christ in Judgement*, a poem now thought to have the Bible as its principal inspiration,[45] in which God's great speech to the damned in lines 1379–1514 contains the great majority of the poem's hypermetric verses and a density of consecutive alliteration unparalleled in the poetic corpus.[46]

rhetorical training required of a young gentleman (the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*; Cicero, *De oratore*; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, along with the model speeches of the elder Seneca)'.

[43] See also similar statements in Job XXXVII.4–5, XL.9, Ps XXIX.4, John XII.28–9, Rev. IV.5.

[44] See, for example, Fortunatus, *Carmina*, MGH, Auct. ant. 4.1, lib. IX, II, p. 206, v. 17; Aldhelm, *Carmina ecclesiastica*, MGH, Auct ant. 15, IV. 3, p. 22, v. 4.

[45] See *The Exter Anthology of Old English Poetry, An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, ed. B. J. Muir, vol. II, Commentary, p. 415, and 428 for the numerous biblical sources and analogues of the speech in ll. 1379–1514.

[46] 34 of the poem's 52 hypermetric verses; for a list see A. J. Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf*, rev. edition (Oxford, 1967), Index, p.164. Consecutive alliteration occurs at lines 1387–8, 1396–7, 1403–4, 1412–14, 1431–3, 1439–40, 1443–4, 1454–5, 1469–70, 1479–80, 1487–8, 1490–1, 1496–7, 1501–2, this being a total of thirty lines of 136 lines in the speech, or 22 per cent.

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