Regularizing Rhythms: Meter as Prescription in Ninth-Century German

Katerina Somers

Monatshefte, Volume 113, Number 1, Spring 2021, pp. 30-49 (Article)

Published by University of Wisconsin Press

Regularizing Rhythms: Meter as Prescription in Ninth-Century German

Katerina Somers
University of Wisconsin–Madison

The investigation of contemporary varieties of language allows for a methodological precision of which the historical linguist can only dream. Scholars interested in Modern German, for example, can pursue almost any question of interest, confident that seemingly endless supplies of native speakers, and thus data, exist to help them answer it. Access to native speakers lets scholars tailor data-gathering to reflect their research questions exactly. The former must follow logically from the latter: imagine the erroneous conclusions one would reach if, though interested in the sociolects of Berlin teenagers, one only examined their school essays. Now consider the plight of the historical linguist, who has no access to native speakers and no ability to generate new data. She must rely on a closed corpus, which, in the case of early medieval German, presents manifold challenges: it is small, its texts linguistically and dialectally diverse—but thematically similar due to the Carolingian preoccupation with Christianity—and its authors mostly unknown.

The severe limitations on the available types of data have influenced the direction of inquiry into earlier stages of language. For example, historical linguists tend only to ask questions for which the corpus can provide reliable answers (alas, the sociolects of ninth-century teenagers will forever remain a mystery). Text genre is another constraining factor: scholars have hesitated to take seriously certain types of data from poetic texts—like those on word order—and instead have relied on the prose texts of the period, despite the fact that almost all early medieval German prose is a translation of some Latin source text. Two factors, however, have not been widely considered in the linguistic literature: the contexts of orality and literacy, which, I contend, exert significant influence on virtually every aspect of what is realized on the page.

This analysis begins with the observation that the Germanic world in which ninth-century authors write in German for the first time in history is

ISSN 0026-9271/e-ISSN 1934-2810/2021/0001/30

an overwhelmingly oral one: until the moment of innovative composition, their vernacular exists only as sound. These men are also, however, educated in written Latin. Thus, ninth-century authors have two traditions on which to draw, that of their oral heritage and that of a Latinate literacy. In this article I focus on how the diametrically opposed contexts of orality and literacy interact specifically with these writers' metrical choices and how understanding this interaction, ultimately, can elucidate linguistic structures and their substantial variation across the ninth-century corpus. I discuss the two main types of ninth-century verse as they are realized in the two most significant ninth-century vernacular compositions: the alliterative verse of the Old Saxon *Hêliand* and the rhyming verse of Otfrid von Weissenburg's South Rhenish Franconian *Evangelienbuch*. I distinguish these verse types based on how their meters accommodate the natural rhythms, or prosody, of the vernacular. Alliterative verse is influenced by a context of orality and is more closely aligned with Germanic prosody, while Otfridian rhyming verse takes its cues from a Latinate literacy, and its meter represents an abstraction of Germanic rhythms.

In the first of three sections, I define orality and literacy as methodological parameters and demonstrate that these concepts can be used to assess how the context in which early medieval writing occurs affects its linguistic structures. Next I discuss how different goals motivate the poets to compose their works, which shapes their relationships with the contexts of orality and literacy and, specifically, lead them to choose different poetic forms for their verse. In the final substantive section I argue that the *Hêliand* and *Evangelienbuch* exhibit opposite relationships between poetic meter and Germanic prosody: Otfrid uses meter to regulate vernacular rhythms for the purposes of effecting "good Frankish," while the *Hêliand* poet, who wants to appeal to Germanic tastes, leaves the rhythms of the Saxon vernacular alone.

I. Orality, literacy and ninth-century German

Koch & Oesterreicher's classic article on orality and literacy in the history of language provides the methodological underpinnings for the current analysis. Their work begins with the important observation that historical texts can be more or less oral, or, as the authors put it, influenced by *Mündlichkeit* or *Schriftlichkeit*. They define orality and literacy in terms of how time and context constrain linguistic production. At one extreme end of the continuum is the oral *Sprache der Nähe*, which is shaped by intimate, informal contexts and no planning or mediation on the part of the language producer. At the other end is the least oral *Sprache der Distanz*, shaped by formal contexts and careful planning and mediation. The context and medium in which language is produced and its associated communicative constraints interact with

the language itself, from its grammar to its content. Consider how lexically and structurally different the linguistic genres in figure 1 are from one another.

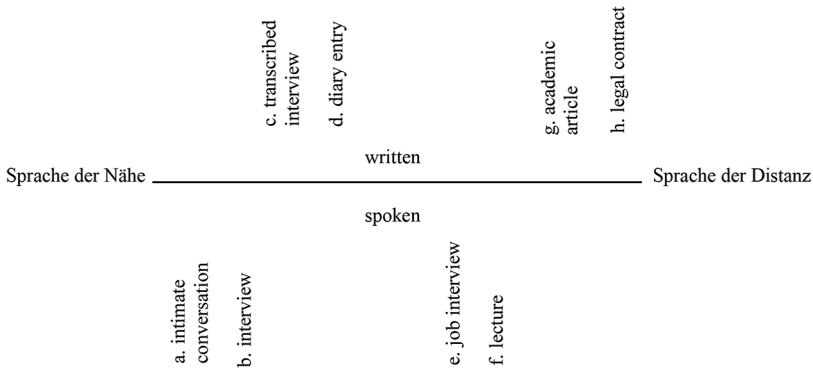


Figure 1: Adapted from Koch and Oesterreicher 18.

The figure demonstrates how medium—whether language is spoken or written—correlates with genre of linguistic output, but not all written genres are furthest to the right of the continuum, not all spoken genres furthest to the left. The authors thereby disentangle medium and the linguistic features that often, but certainly not always, characterize it. A written text can have elements of orality, as is the case in a modern-day text message, while the converse can also be true, for example, when a text is first written, then read out loud.

Koch & Oesterreicher's conceptualization of orality and literacy lays the groundwork for the sociolinguistic analysis of historical varieties. No longer must one be content with the study of forms on the page, disconnected from the people who wrote them. Their work encourages the historical linguist to imagine the contextual forces that shaped those forms. Reconstructing the relevant linguistic contexts in which early medieval varieties are produced, however, is challenging. Comparison again with Modern German is instructive: for today's speakers there is a clear picture of the linguistic varieties that map onto the *Sprache der Nähe—Sprache der Distanz* continuum. For example, language produced in less formal, less mediated contexts tends to be more regional, less standard, while formal, highly mediated contexts produce more standard, less regional language. Ninth-century German speakers, though their language is also shaped by contextual forces, have a different set of varieties at their disposal. I demonstrate in these next paragraphs how the contexts of orality and literacy elucidate these linguistic varieties and their cultural valence.

Orality, as a broad reference to spoken language, fails to capture the oral tradition as a specific linguistic phenomenon. For most of human history cultures were oral with no knowledge of writing nor even the possibility of writing (Ong 31). These primary oral cultures, to use Ong's term, developed spoken-language traditions: collections of stories, songs, proverbs and riddles that were passed down through the generations and explained who these people were and what they have learned. Though these cultures' linguistic output is exclusively spoken, the parameters of Koch & Oesterreicher still apply: speakers produced spontaneous *Sprache der Nähe*, mediated *Sprache der Distanz*, and everything in between. We may, furthermore, understand the planned language of the oral tradition as a particular genre of *Sprache der Distanz*.

Prehistoric language is, by definition, lost to us, but Ong (31–34) provides a way of understanding the oral heritage as a linguistic phenomenon. His approach is not unlike that of Koch & Oesterreicher: he identifies both the cognitive constraints of oral transmission and the linguistic strategies that evolved to deal with them. According to Ong, the defining limitation placed on linguistic production is the restriction of words to sounds. In primary oral cultures words are evanescent, existing only in the moment of speaking. This fact determines both one's mode of expression and thought processes, the latter of which presumably necessitated an interlocutor to assuage the difficulty of working through complicated problems alone without recourse to writing. Assuming one arrives at a satisfactory solution, how is this knowledge retained? "Think memorable thoughts," advises Ong (34). But how does one make spoken language memorable?

> [T]hought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formular expressions, in standard thematic settings (the assembly, the meal, the duel, the hero's helper, and so on), in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in mnemonic form. (Ong 34)

These mnemonic patterns are recognizable to the modern speaker as the devices of poetry. That is, in Ong's view, the language of the oral tradition was crucially poetic, its form the instrument of its survival. The constraint of memorability further implies that this genre of prehistoric *Sprache der Distanz* must be rooted in, and have a close linguistic connection with, the *Sprache der Nähe*. The language of the oral tradition could only be memorable and, thus, a secure vehicle for cultural transmission if it is linguistically similar to more spontaneous utterances. In sum, I argue that the public language of oral cultures was both poetic *and* idiomatic; it would be anachronistic to associate their poetry with grammar-defying language as modern speakers might with their own poetry.

Literacy too should be understood as a historical development and a linguistic phenomenon. German's incipient development as a written language is preceded by a century of literacy in Latin, the promotion of which increased significantly during the reign of Charlemagne. The first Holy Roman Emperor saw it as his duty to save souls, a project that required an army of trained clergymen, who could read and understand the Latin Bible (Brown 17). To achieve this goal, the Carolingians relied heavily on a long classical tradition of writings on what good, effective, aesthetically pleasing language was; their particular preoccupation, however, was grammatical study, *grammatica*, which was concerned with correct Latinity, and whose importance could not be overstated. It was the study of grammar that would elucidate the layers of meaning in the Bible and, thus, the actual Word of God, thereby guarding the Carolingians against doctrinal error, the consequences of which were believed to be severe (Brown 37, Law 99).

It was not until the eighth and ninth centuries that Carolingian literacy extended to the vernacular. Education was still exclusively in Latin and its grammar,[1] and early forays into vernacular writing were intended to foster a Latinate literacy. Thus, many early medieval German texts were glosses of Latin-language sources and translations of important prayers and catechisms. Their purpose was to help German-speaking monks understand the Latin and ensure that fundamental Christian tenets were fully understood. Use of the vernacular was a means to an end, not the focus of the text's production, which perhaps explains why so little of vernacular culture found its way into written form. Only a few extant early medieval texts—the *Hildebrandslied* and *Merseburger Zaubersprüche*—reflect a Germanic, pagan culture, which remains under the purview of the oral tradition; these isolated examples notably survive in few copies and fragments.[2] Clerical writings indicate that literates from the period found it difficult to apply their Latin-based literacy to the vernacular: the latter, as an exclusively oral variety with no graphemic conventions whatever, was an inadequate medium for writing and recalcitrant to the application of rules (Gantert 44–46). Within this context the two example texts are both audacious and anomalous: they are the only original compositions of any significant length to emerge from the ninth century; they were written, not to foster Latinate literacy, but to tell the story of Jesus to a particular audience from a particular authorial point of view.

This, then, is the framework within which a ninth-century poet composes in the vernacular: he is influenced by a context of orality because he is a native German speaker whose language and Germanic culture are still largely confined to the spoken word, a constraint that encourages a close linguistic connection between the vernacular's spontaneous, *nähesprachlich* varieties and its planned, poetic *Sprachen der Distanz*. The poet is also influenced by the nonautochthonous context of a Latinate literacy, and its ideas of what constituted "good" language. In the next section I demonstrate how

different goals prompt Otfrid and the *Hêliand* poet to draw on the contexts of orality and literacy to varying degrees, which, in turn, leads the former poet to compose in a Latin-inspired rhyming verse, the latter in autochthonous alliterative verse.

II. Different goals, different types of verse

Superficially the *Hêliand* and *Evangelienbuch* are similar: they cover the same narrative ground and do so in poetic form. Both works are Gospel harmonies, a popular genre in Late Antiquity and early medieval Europe, in which the multiple accounts are "harmonized" into one narrative. Both stem from the mid-to-late ninth century and are thousands of lines long.[3] However the poets' goals diverge substantially, which motivates them to tell the Gospel story in significantly different ways. Namely, the anonymous *Hêliand* poet, in an attempt to render Christianity more familiar and palatable to the recently converted Saxons, "Germanizes" the story's details where orthodoxy allows and composes in autochthonous alliterative verse. This particular rendition of the story of Jesus also can be understood within the historical context of Frankish expansion, of which promotion of Christianity is one aspect. While there is a political dimension to the Saxons' conversion, Otfrid's aims in the *Evangelienbuch*, on the other hand, are more overtly nationalistic: he intends to raise the status of the Frankish language—and thereby the Franks—by making the former the vehicle for a great cultural achievement, that is, his poem. His design is to elevate, rather than play to, Germanic tastes; so he chooses a verse type inspired by Latinate literacy.

I begin with a discussion of the *Hêliand* poet's Germanization of the Gospel story and draw on several details highlighted in Bostock (169–74). First, consider the poet's depiction of Jesus himself. Emphasis on Biblical descriptions of Jesus as meek and self-effacing (for example, Matthew 11:29) would have done little to inspire devotion in a people whose oral Germanic culture was still "agonistically toned" (Ong 43), for whom being an effective warrior and bragging about it was a cultural ideal. While characterizing Jesus as a warrior king would have been heretical, the poet could foreground how powerful, wise, and courageous the Son of God is. There are frequent references to Jesus as the Ruler or Child of the Ruler, the Lord of the peoples, the guardian of the land, the (mighty) protector of many, a wise king, renowned and powerful, of the finest lineage who is courageous and powerful.[4] In addition to emphasizing qualities that would make Jesus appealing to Saxons, the poet describes the setting of the Gospels as one that looks more like Saxony than the Middle East: shepherds become horse herds (line 388) and deserts turn into forests.[5] The poet's clear sense of audience is evident when he expands the description of the wedding feast at Cana (lines 1194–2076) from its modest eleven Biblical verses to over 80 lines. This scene of Ger-

manic revelry no doubt delighted the Saxons, who would have immediately recognized this standard thematic setting from the oral tradition.

In retelling the Gospels in this way, the poet necessarily draws on his oral vernacular culture, an orientation that is reflected even in his choice of verse. The poet's choice of poetry over prose writing, for one, is wholly consistent with the cultural context of the early medieval period. Given the poet's goal of telling an approachable story, it makes sense that he would draw on an authentic linguistic variety of the time, the *Sprache der Distanz* of an oral culture, which was poetic language. In contrast, a tradition of vernacular prose writing did not yet exist.[6] The choice of alliterative verse over other (Latin) verse forms is another sign of the poet's alignment with the oral tradition. Alliterative verse is the native form of verse for all of the Germanic peoples. It is found across the first documented varieties of Germanic (Old Norse, Old English, Old High German, Old Saxon) and so, must have existed in some form when the Germanic peoples were still speaking the common parent language around 500 BCE. I extrapolate Ong's insights on the centrality of mnemonic, which is to say poetic, language in an oral culture into Germanic's prehistoric past and conclude that oral transmission was originally alliterative.

There is evidence of alliterative language's deep embedding in Germanic culture beyond the telling fact that it surfaces across the Germanic daughter languages. For example, the runic inscriptions exhibit alliteration (Owen), as seen with the early fifth-century Golden Horn of Gallehus:

(1) ek **h**léwagastiz **h**óltijaz : **h**órna táwido
I Hlewagastiz son of Holt this horn made
'I, Hlewagastiz, son of Holt, made this horn.'

These inscriptions are the earliest attestations of written Germanic; they survive in metal objects and large runestones and evince a concrete connection between an early variety of (written) public language and alliterative verse. Old Germanic naming practices provide another example, in which familial relationships were signaled by giving children names that alliterate with the name of the parent (Flom 7, 11). The famous *Hildebrandslied* illustrates this tradition with three generations of warriors having alliterating names: Heribrand, Hildebrand and Hadubrand. Finally, evidence of alliteration's resonance can be found in the alliterating word-pairs attested across the Germanic languages. Jeep details their presence in German's oldest texts, while speakers of Modern German will also recognize them in phrasings like, 'Die Stadtbewohner verteidigten sich mit **M**ann und **M**aus.'

The *Hêliand* poet's decision to compose in alliterative verse, then, was not a simple matter of aesthetics; it was the only form that would connect his work to the oral tradition in immediately salient ways for a Germanic audience. Otfrid's choice of meter, on the other hand, moves his work away from

the oral tradition and aims to transform the vernacular into a proper written language. In the second preface to the work, Otfrid explains to his bishop, Liutbert, (in Latin) why he wrote the *Evangelienbuch*:

> [. . .] I have written down a selection from the Gospels, composed by me in Frankish [. . .] so that he who shudders at the difficulty of a foreign language [. . .] may here in his own language become familiar with the most holy words and, understanding in his own language the Law of God, may, therefore, guard well against straying from it by even a little through his own erroneous thinking.[7] (Magoun 875–76)

While this statement aligns the work with the Frankish project of elucidating the true meaning of the Bible, it becomes clear that another goal motivates Otfrid.

> Indeed, the Franks do not, as do many other peoples, commit the stories of their predecessors to written record nor do they adorn in literary style the deeds or the life of these out of appreciation for their distinction. But if on rare occasions it does happen, by preference they set forth in the language of other peoples, that is, of the Romans or the Greeks. [. . .] A remarkable thing it is, however, that great men, constant in good judgment, distinguished for careful attention, supported by nimbleness of wit, broad in wisdom, famed for sanctity, should carry over all these virtues into the glory of a foreign language and not have the habit of composition in their native language. (Magoun 886–87)

A stronger statement is found in the introductory chapter to the work, where Otfrid asks, "Why don't Franks write in Frankish?"[8] The entire first chapter, in fact, justifies Otfrid's belief that Franks *should* write in Frankish: Otfrid characterizes the writing of books as a great cultural achievement (lines 1–6[9]), at which the Greeks and Romans were so adept (lines 13–16). He then argues that the Franks are just as illustrious as these classical civilizations because they are brave (lines 62–64) and rich in resources (lines 63–72); they terrify their enemies (lines 77–86), just like Alexander's Macedonians, to whom Otfrid claims the Franks are related (lines 87–92). This is why Otfrid himself writes in Frankish and, though medieval conventions of humility prevent him from forthrightly stating as much, it is clear that the monk hopes the *Evangelienbuch* will be accepted as the first entry in a canon of great Frankish-language works that brings glory to the empire.

From the outset, Otfrid's goals for the *Evangelienbuch* align the poet more with the context of a Latinate literacy than is the case for the *Hêliand*: in endeavoring to write great literature, the written classical tradition provides the only real model on which he may draw. It also becomes evident in the preface and introductory chapter that Otfrid finds Frankish, a language that he describes as rustic and unpolished (Magoun 886), ill-suited to this task. A modern literate who wants to write a great work of literature might reach for a standard variety of language, but this option is not available to ninth-century

writers, who are many centuries removed from the development of a standard language. Otfrid must innovate, so he develops his own method for turning a spoken vernacular into a proper written language. Namely, he applies a Latin-inspired, nonautochthonous poetic meter to the native rhythms of Germanic.

III. Regulating the rhythms of Germanic (or not)

In the previous section I explained how the poet's choice of meter reflects an orientation toward orality, as is the case in the *Hêliand*, or literacy, as in Otfrid's *Evangelienbuch*. In this section I demonstrate how meter either reflects or distorts Germanic rhythm: the alliterative verse of the *Hêliand* is rooted in—and thus overlaps with—vernacular prosody, while Otfrid's meter manipulates or regulates it. The congruity of meter and prosody makes the *Hêliand* a logical starting point for this discussion. The next several paragraphs explain how alliterative verse works and what is known about Germanic rhythm.

Sievers (1893), still the most widely accepted account of alliterative verse, identifies its two main features: alliteration and five basic rhythmic categories, "*Fünftypenlehre*."[10] Beginning with the structure of the former, the basic metrical unit, the "long line," contains four principal lifts (*Hebungen*), or stressed syllables, of which a maximum of three may alliterate with one another. A depiction of the three alliterative patterns in descending order of frequency is in Table 1.

Table 1. Alliterative patterns

Alliterative lines	Examples from the *Hildebrandslied*, ll. 42–44
1. a x : a x	dat **s**ágetun **m**í : **s**é**ol**ídante
2. a a : a x	**w**éstar ubar **w**éntilseo : dat inan **w**íc fur**n**ám
3. x a : a x	**t**ót ist **H**íltibrant : **H**éribrantes **s**úno[11]

a = alliterating lift, i.e., stave
x = non-alliterating lift
: = pause between verses

The long line comprises two verses which have one or two alliterating stressed lifts, i.e., staves. The third lift, which always alliterates, is the strongest lift of the long line, while the fourth, which never alliterates, is the weakest. Note that alliteration links to stress in that only stressed syllables stave; e.g., in the sequence *Gott*, *Geld*, *Gelehrte* only the first two words alliterate (are staves) in the classic Germanic sense.

Stave assignment, which raises stressed syllables to positions of metrical prominence within the long line, is lexically determined; words that convey

meaning, i.e., have lexical content, are more likely to alliterate. Suzuki (255–56) identifies three classes of words: the most lexical of these is class 1, which contains substantives, i.e., nouns (a poem), adjectives (poetic) and substantive & adjectival verbs (I have **composed** a poem; those poems are **written**). These words are usually staves. Class 3 words are the least lexical and include grammatical function words, e.g., articles, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, words that are hardly ever staves. Class 2 words, which include finite, i.e., conjugated, verbs (I **have** composed a poem) and adverbs (I speak **poetically**), are sometimes lexical, sometimes function words and so might be staves.

Suzuki's categories of stave assignment have prosodic corollaries in Germanic, in which lexical words are stressed in connected speech, while function words are not. Evidence of this tendency can be seen in the frequent reduction and cliticizations of function words onto other, usually lexical, words.[12] These phonological processes affect those words in connected speech that are unstressed, i.e., function words, never lexical words, which are always stressed. The lexical-function word dichotomy also elucidates Suzuki's mixed class 2 words, which contains finite verbs and adverbs that might be staves. Words belonging to these categories are sometimes lexical, sometimes functional.

Table 2. Class two words

	Lexical	Function
Finite verb	I **recited** loudly.	I **haven't** recited poetry in years.
Adverb	If you're going to recite poetry, you have to do it **right**.	**Right**, let's recite some poetry now.

In sum, the metrical categories of alliterative verse, in particular the assignment of staves, overlap with prosodic categories in Germanic, in particular the assignment of stress in connected speech.

The second poetic feature of alliterative verse identified in Sievers is the five rhythmic classes. As was true for alliteration, there are prosodic underpinnings to the "five types;" in fact, their congruity with—and resultant failure to regulate—the natural rhythms of Germanic has led scholars, most notably Heusler and Leornard, to question the types' validity. The rhythmic possibilities for the verse are presented in Table 3. Note that verses are distinguished by how they arrange their two stressed lifts vis-à-vis unstressed dips (*Senkungen*).

Table 3. The five rhythmic classes (Sievers)

Type	Rhythmic pattern	Example
A	lift-**dip**-lift-**dip**	handsome husbands
B	**dip**-lift-**dip**-lift	a handsome man
C	**dip**-lift-lift-**dip**	a smart lady
D	lift-lift-secondary lift-**dip** lift-lift-**dip**-secondary lift	smart school-children smart lady's-maids
E	lift-secondary lift-**dip**-lift lift-**dip**-secondary lift-lift	ill-favored men badly dressed men

Each type is rhythmically flexible in that they allow more dips to be added to the verse through various metrical means.

Table 4. The five rhythmic classes, with additional dips

Type A: lift-**dip**-lift-**dip** 'handsome husbands'

Metrical process	Rhythmic pattern	Example
Resolution	lift-**dip**-**dip**-lift-dip	clever accountants
"Free-filling" of dips	lift-**dip**-**dip**-**dip**-lift-dip	teachers and their pupils
Anacrusis	**dip**-**dip**-lift-dip-dip-dip-lift-dip	with the teachers and their pupils

Together these processes of dip-expansion[13] give the poet the freedom to accommodate most conceivable rhythms within the constraints of the two-lift verse. Multiple dips can occur before, after and between lifts, and the *Hêliand* poet made good use of the rhythmic classes' ability to expand and incorporate more unstressed dips into the verse (Suzuki 161–67 on the expansion of anacrusis, for example; Lehmann 49 on unstressed dips more generally). Here is an example (lines 2908b–2911a) of how two rhythmic types are instantiated in the *Hêliand*:

	(Skred lioht dages)	
súnne uuard an **s**édle	the **s**éo**l**ídandean	**s** = stave (i.e., alliterating lift)
s d d d **s** d	d **s** **x** d d	**x** = non-alliterating (stressed) lift
➔ Type A	**➔ Type D**	d = unstressed dip
náht **n**ébulo biuuarp	**n**ádidun **é**rlos	
s **s** d d d d	**s** d d **x** d	
(foruuardes an flod)[14]		
➔ Type D	**➔ Type A**	

Given the rhythmic elasticity captured by Sievers's model, one may ask if the *Hêliand* has a poetic meter in the first place. According to Preminger & Brogan's definitions of rhythm and meter, the answer is no (772). They define rhythm as something that "becomes manifest in speech (as well as prose and verse) when elements are repeated in series close enough together so as to be noticed, even if the repetition is variable and irregular." The stressed lifts are the repeatable element, kept close to one another within the metrical unit of the long line. Meters, on the other hand, are "species of rhythm [. . .], namely the most regular, strict or rigid species." Meter abstracts language away from its natural prosody; it is not meant to be a direct reflection of it (Preminger & Brogan 768). If abstraction, regularization and rigidity define meter, then the *Hêliand* has rhythm but not a meter. Heusler takes the argument one step further and concludes that meter as regularized rhythm crucially defines poetry, that "wiederkehrende Zeitspannen" distinguish it from prose (*Versgeschichte* 17). It is no surprise, then, that Heusler rejects Sievers's rhythmic types: if they are a true representation of beat patterns, the *Hêliand* is not poetry.

Attempts to impose recurrent measures on, i.e., to regularize, the *Hêliand*'s verses, as Heusler (*Versbau*) does, are not terribly successful. I invite the reader to try it now with the same two lines from above. Heusler's measured verses require that there be equal time between the four main lifts of the long line, regardless of how many unstressed dips occur between them.

súnne uuard an **s**édle the **s**éo**l**ídandean **s**únne uuard an **s**édle the **s**éo**l**ídandean

náht **n**ébulo biuuarp **n**ádidun **é**rlos **n**áht **n**ébulo biuuarp **n**ádidun **é**rlos

On analogy to musical time, Heusler imagines the verse divided into two bars of equal length, each containing four quarter-length beats, i.e., 4/4 time.[15] Every bar begins with one of the verse's lifts, and verse-initial, "anacrustic" dips are subsumed within the preceding bar. Using Heusler's principles, Bostock (1976: 312) scans the lines as in figure 2.[16]

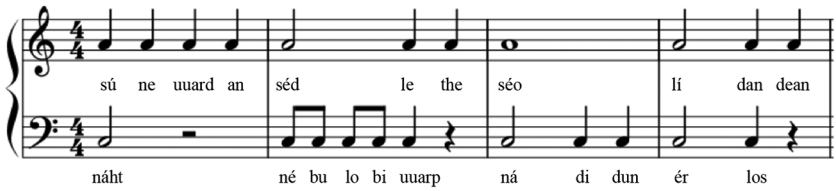


Figure 2: Musical Scansion (adapted from Bostock).

Note the difficulty in maintaining equal time between lifts. Bostock must either allot four whole beats to the monosyllabic lift, *séo*, or two beats to the lift, *náht*, followed by a two beat rest. Bostock solved the problem of accommodating the five syllables of *nébulo biuuarp* within a four beat measure through the creative use of 1/8 beats and a quarter rest. The result is not especially easy to recite, nor does it lend particular metrical prominence to the staves, which presumably constitute the most important features in a long line. Ultimately, Heusler's scheme is unsuccessful in finding any rhythmic regularity in the alliterative verse of the *Hêliand*. Instead it tries, and fails, to impose regularity onto the irregular rhythms of the vernacular. A modern literary scholar would certainly find his definition of poetry too narrow, unable to encompass nonrhythmic free verse, for example. With respect to the *Hêliand* though, Heusler's fatal error is one of anachronism; he does not consider the context of orality in which the *Hêliand* was composed and what poetry, which for him is pure literary art, was in an oral culture. One can sympathize with Heusler, himself a literary scholar: he wants to secure the work's status as a great achievement in the German language. To take meter away from the *Hêliand*, in his mind, is to render it mere prose, a less literary reflection of vernacular rhythms. His anachronistic orientation means he cannot see the value of this testament to a native prosody and the Germanic oral tradition.

In sum, the *Hêliand*'s verse reflects the poet's orientation toward a context of orality in that it explicitly taps into the Germanic oral heritage in what would have been salient ways. It features alliteration, which has a long tradition stretching back into prehistory; identifiable rhythmic patterns describe, rather than prescribe, the prosody of Germanic.[17] Based on this characterization, I propose that the language of the *Hêliand* is informed by an authentic variety of the *Sprache der Distanz* of a still largely oral culture.

Otfrid's *Evangelienbuch* provides an instructive contrast: the poem is not alliterative but instead uses end-rhyme to bind the two verses. It also evinces a different relationship between the rhythms of Germanic and the poem's meter, which is more demanding on the former. These characteristics reflect the poet's orientation toward the context of literacy; he does not draw explicitly on the oral tradition as the *Hêliand* poet does and, thus, his language is pulled away from authentic linguistic structures.

Otfrid can claim a number of firsts: he is the first named German author and the first (known) poet to use end-rhyme in German. Unlike the *Hêliand* poet, who looked to the autochthonous oral tradition for inspiration, Otfrid takes his poetic cues from Latin models, a decision that reflects his orientation toward the context of literacy. His likeliest sources are the Ambrosian hymns, as well as the Latin hymns of Rhabanus Maurus, Otfrid's teacher while at the monastery school at Fulda (Bostock 208–09). The Ambrosian hymns feature a similar beat pattern, and the latter's work exhibits end-rhyme. While the

rhythms of the *Hêliand* are those of Germanic, Otfrid's meter in the *Evangelienbuch* represents an intentional abstraction away from vernacular patterns. His Latin-based meter has the potential to distort Germanic prosody. Table 5 demonstrates how the meter works.

Table 5. Otfrid's metrical scheme

	A-verse	**B-verse**
Masculine	Lás ih iu in ala**wár** x d x d x d x	in einen búachon ih weiz **wár**[18] (d) x d x d x d x
Feminine	sie in síbbu joh in **áhtu** (d d) x d x d m x̀	sin Alexándres **slahtu**[19] (d) x d x d m x̀
Trisyllabic	Ther wórolti so **githréwita** (d) x d x d d x d x̀ (d) x d d x d x d x̀	mit suértu siạ al **gistréwita**[20] (d) x d x[21] d x d x̀

Key: x = stressed syllable, lift
d = unstressed syllable, dip
(d) = anacrustic unstressed syllable
m = monosyllabic metrical foot in verse-final word
x̀ = lift with secondary stress (only in verse-final word)

The three cadence types are determined by whether the rhyming verse-final word is monosyllabic ("masculine"), bisyllabic ("feminine") or trisyllabic. Each cadence features an oscillating stress-dip pattern; metrical feet usually comprise one stressed lift followed by an unstressed dip.

The meter may distort Germanic prosody in two ways. The first relates to the principle of stress assignment discussed for the *Hêliand*: that lexical, content-carrying words are stressed in discourse, while grammatical function words are not. The second has to do with stress assignment within the word itself. Namely, in Germanic stress is fixed on the first lexical (content-conveying) syllable of the word: wéstar 'westward', wíc 'battle', furnám 'took.' This fixing of stress can also apply to function words if they are spoken in isolation or emphasized in discourse for pragmatic or metrical reasons, e.g., *íhnen*, *díesen*. The examples in Table 6 demonstrate how stress patterns interact with the meter; all lexical words in the table are bolded.

Specific distortions of Germanic stress patterns are manifold. First, the bisyllabic word that occurs in verse-final position has a different metrical pattern to the bisyllabic word that occurs elsewhere, e.g., *slahtu*, onto whose second syllable the meter places secondary stress, while *wége* is more consistent with Germanic prosody with its initial stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable. Note also how the meter raises the prominence of function words, like *íra* (her), so that they are metrically equivalent to lexical words like *kúning* (king). Violations of Germanic initial stress are less com-

Table 6. Otfrid's metrical scheme, violations and distortions

Citation	A-verse	B-verse
I 1, 88	sie in **síbbu** joh in **áhtu** (d d) x d x d m x̀	sin **Alexándres slahtu** (d) x d x d m x̀
III 10, 1	Sus in **wége quam** ein **wíb** x d x d x d x	**wéinota** thaz **íra** lib[22] x d x d x d x
III 11, 4	joh **báz** in thereru **nóti** (d) x d x d d m x̀	thanne ther **kúning dati**[23] (d) x d x d m x̀ x d d x d m x̀
III 11, 24	thia **thúrft** imo **giklágoti** (d) x d x d x d x̀	io after **rúafenti**[24] x x d x d x̀

Key: x = stressed syllable, lift
d = unstressed syllable, dip
(d) = anacrustic unstressed syllable
m = monosyllabic metrical foot in verse-final word
x̀ = lift with secondary stress (only in verse-final word)

mon, but attested: *íra* and *imo*, both function words not often stressed in everyday discourse, receive metrical stress here, but only *íra* in a way that is consistent with Germanic initial stress. Overall, there is a persistent tension between the oscillating stress-dip pattern of the meter and the stress patterns of the vernacular, which is caused by their inherent incompatibility.

I have argued that there is a clear difference in how the two example texts accommodate the rhythms of the vernacular: while Otfrid's meter represents a significant abstraction of Germanic prosody, much less rhythmic abstraction is evident in the *Hêliand*. Otfrid's manipulation of rhythms is particularly apparent if we directly compare his text to the *Hêliand*: his meter encourages monosyllabic dips, while the *Hêliand* poet is comfortable with multiple dips separating lifts; the first several lines of the Lord's Prayer illustrate this point (table 7).

Direct comparison also demonstrates how Otfrid's meter effects a mismatch between what is lexically and rhythmically prominent, while the *Hêliand*'s most salient poetic feature—the alliterating staves—evinces an alignment of what is rhythmically and lexically prominent.[25]

Syllables that would receive lexical stress by virtue of Germanic prosody are bolded,[26] while those receiving metrical stress are underlined. Alignment, then, is indicated in the table when a syllable is both bolded and underlined. In the *Hêliand* excerpt metrical and lexical stress align 75% of the time (12 of 16 metrical lifts), while in Otfrid's verses alignment occurs only half the time (16 of 32 metrical lifts).

The foregoing discussion reveals a tension between Otfrid's stated goal of making the Gospels more comprehensible to monolingual Franks, on the

Table 7. Unstressed dip tolerance

Otfrid (II 21, 27–30)		***Hêliand* (ll. 1600–1603)**	
Fáter únser gúatò	bist drúhtin thú gimýatò	Fádar ûsa	firiho barno
s **d** s **d** s s	**d** s **d** s **d** s s	s **d** s **d**	s **d d** s **d**
in hímilón io hóhèr	wíh si námo thínèr	thu bist an them hôhon	himila rîkea
d s **d** s **d** s s	s **d** s **d** s s	s **d d d** s **d**	s **d d** s **d**
Biquéme uns thínaz ríchì	thaz hóha hímilríchì	geuuîhid sî thîn namo	uuordo gehuuilico
d s **d d** s **d** s s	**d** s **d** s **d** s s	**d** s **d d d** s **d**	s **d d** s **d d**
thára wír zua io gíngèn	joh émmizígen thíngèn	Cuma thîn	craftag rîki
s **d** s **d d** s s	**d** s **d** s **d** s s	s **d** s	s **d** s **d**

Key: s = stressed lift
d = unstressed dip

Table 8. Mismatch or alignment in lexical and rhythmic prominence

Otfrid (II 21, 27–30)		***Hêliand* (ll. 1600–1603)**	
Fáter únser **gúa**tò	bist **drúh**tin thu gi**mý**atò	**Fá**dar ûsa	**fi**riho **bar**no
in **hí**milón io **hó**hèr	**wíh** si **ná**mo thínèr	thu bist an them **hô**hon	**hi**mila **rî**kea
Bi**qué**me uns thínaz **rí**chì	thaz **hó**ha **hí**mil**rí**chì	ge**uuî**hid sî thîn **na**mo	**uuo**rdo gehuuilico
thára wír zua io **gín**gèn	joh **ém**mizígen **thín**gèn	**Cu**ma thîn	**craf**tag **rî**ki

one hand, and elevating the Frankish language by writing a great work in it, on the other. Namely, the poem's meter, in abstracting rhythms away from native patterns, contravenes the work's accessibility. Still, Frankish, in Otfrid's opinion, requires some level of prescription: it is rude, unruly and "unused to being restrained by the regulating curb of the art of grammar," writes Otfrid (Magoun 880). So the poet must strike a balance between authenticity and prescription. In service to the former, he defers to Frankish over Latin syntax; e.g., he produces double negatives, though Latin prescribes against this practice, and Frankish gender assignments even when they conflict with Latin (*Ad Liutbertum*, ll. 90–99). The meter itself is Otfrid's way of disciplining and elevating the language. I return to Otfrid's statement of purpose in the first chapter of Book 1. In lines 21–28 he discusses how strict adherence to a meter helped the Greeks and Romans achieve purity and refinement in their writing.

> They did it all so delightfully, and **the feet shaped it metrically in this way,** the long and the short syllable, so that it might become pleasing. They took care that not a syllable went amiss. They could not but pay attention, as the verse-feet required; **and all of these time measurements, they counted them precisely**, and this kind of scale measures it without deviation. With this **they achieve great purity and the utmost refinement**, similar to the thorough cleaning of grain [emphasis added].[27]

Otfrid specifically mentions the measured verse; he seems to share Heusler's opinion that true poetry requires rhythmic regularity. Otfrid states later in the chapter (lines 41–48) that the Franks can use meter in the same way.

> Let God's law be sweet unto you, **then feet, tempo and rules, will also shape it [Frankish]**; indeed, those are the words of God himself. If you have in mind to adhere to the meter, **create prestige in your language and create beautiful verse**, strive to fulfill God's will all the time; then the servants of the Lord will write in Frankish **in accordance with the rules; let your feet proceed in the sweetness of God's law; don't let time escape you: then beautiful verse is created forthwith** [emphasis added].[28]

Otfrid intends to discipline the unruly Frankish language through the application of regulating poetic structures: the meter and end-rhyme. The relevant "rules," then, are metrical ones. Note the double meaning of the words "feet" and "time" in the final sentence and how these poetic devices create beautiful language.

In this analysis I have shown that the contexts of literacy and orality—and their different relationships with the rhythms of Germanic—help us realize two ninth-century poets as sociolinguistic actors, despite the relative remoteness of the early medieval period. Specifically, I demonstrated that the poets' choice of poetic structure crucially depends on their orientation toward literacy or orality: alliterative verse and rhyming verse are not two equal options with the same cultural valence. The poets select the form that aligns best with their works' goals. Otfrid's ambitions for his text and, consequently, his reliance on the Latinate tradition of literacy prompts him to choose a Latin-inspired meter that distorts vernacular prosody in the service of turning Frankish into, what for him is, a proper written language. In contrast, the *Hêliand* poet's desire to appeal to Germanic tastes yields a poem that, I propose, is linguistically closer to an authentic variety of Germanic, the *Sprache der Distanz* of the oral tradition. Of course, the *Hêliand* is also influenced by the literacy trends of the early medieval period: it is after all a written text, not an oral song. Some level of abstraction away from the purely oral vernacular was required to produce the work in the first place.[29] However, the foregoing analysis indicates that the *Hêliand* poet did not share Otfrid's prescriptive tendencies. For the historical linguist interested in ninth-century syntax and syntactic variation, this work offers a clear research program in which scholars try to link differences in grammatical structures to the distinct contexts in which ninth-century texts are produced. For literary and cultural scholars, who themselves are naturally oriented toward a culture of literacy, this work should serve as a reminder of the influence of orality on medieval German literature, especially poetry.

[1] One is still many centuries away from Wolfgang Ratichius (1571–1635) arguing before the Imperial Diet in Frankfurt that studying German first builds a reasonable and common foundation for the formal study of foreign languages (Walmsley 1990).

[2] Though Charlemagne's biographer, Einhard, reports that the Emperor "wrote out the barbarous and ancient songs, in which the acts of the kings and their wars were sung" (Vita Karoli 29, Grant, "Early Lives of Charlemagne"), there is little evidence this occurred. Absence of evidence implies either that Germanic culture remained oral or that songs of the oral tradition were committed to parchment but not widely copied, disseminated or safeguarded, while Latin works were copied and transmitted extensively. Each possibility points to the marginalization of vernacular written culture.

[3] Otfrid's *Evangelienbuch* was composed between 863 and 871. The *Hêliand* cannot be dated more specifically. For details on their transmission histories, I refer the reader to Bostock (1976).

[4] *Uualdand* 'Ruler' (e.g., line 2817), *uualdandes barn* 'Child of the Ruler' (e.g., 962), *uualdandes sunu* 'Son of the Ruler' (e.g., 327), *mahtig barn godes* 'the mighty Child of God' (e.g., 812), *thiodo drohtin* 'the Lord of the peoples' (e.g., 2950), *managoro drohtin* 'the Lord of many peoples' (e.g., 1999), *landes uuard* 'the guardian of the land' (e.g., 626), *manno mundboro* 'the protector of many' (e.g., 378), *mahtig mundboro* 'the mighty protector' (e.g., 1544), *ein uuiscuning, mari endi mahti [. . .]thes bezton giburdies* 'wise king, renowned and powerful, of the finest lineage' (582–84), *bald endi strang* 'courageous and strong' (599)

[5] For example, the Magi follow the star through forests (*uuegos endi uualdos huuilon*, line 603).

[6] Recall that practically all German prose writing from the period is translational.

[7] Translations of the *Ad Liutbertum*, Otfrid's petition of episcopal approbation addressed to the archbishop of Mainz, Liutbert, are from Magoun; I have lightly edited them.

[8] Wánana sculun Fránkon éinon thaz biwánkon, ni sie in frénkisgon bigínnen, sie gotes lób singen (Chapter 1, Book 1, lines 33–34)? 'Why should the Franks be the only ones who do not endeavor to sing God's praises in Frankish?'

[9] I refer the reader to Vollmann-Profe's edition of the *Evangelienbuch*, which has the original text and New High German translation side-by-side.

[10] This presentation of alliterative verse also draws on Bostock (304–17), particularly his English-language examples.

[11] (1) Seafarers told me that, (2) westwards across the the Wendel sea, that battle took him: (3) dead is Hildebrand, Heribrand's son

[12] For example, the functional pronoun *wir* in the Modern German sequence "Gehen wir?" often reduces phonologically and cliticizes onto the lexical verb *gehen*, yielding "Geh'ma" or "Gemma." Function words reduce and cliticize; lexical words do not.

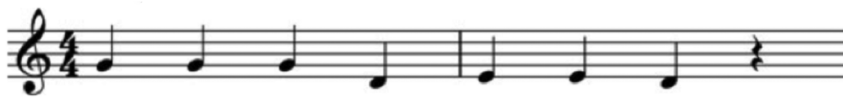
[13] See Bostock (1976:304–17) for details on how they work.

[14]

[. . .]	(The light of day turned)
the sun was in its seat	night the seafarers
surrounded with fog	The earls strove
(forward on the flood)	[. . .]

The example also shows the poem's characteristic mismatch between sense and metrical units, known as *Hakenstil*. The sense unit begins in the b-verse of 2908 and ends with the a-verse of 2911, while the basic metrical unit is the long line.

[15] An example of 4/4 or common time is the children's song *Old MacDonald had a farm*:



[16] I present scansion as musical notation, which is easier to read than Bostock's notation.

[17] This argument is reminiscent of the one made in Daunt (1946) for *Beowulf*.

[18] I read it for you indeed in a book, I know truly (I 1, 87)

[19] In terms of attitude and kinship they are of the tribe of Alexander (I 1, 88)

[20] The world, so threatened, they crushed them with the sword (I 1, 89)

[21] Otfrid sporadically uses the dot to indicate when a syllable should be elided.

[22] So a woman came on the path, lamented her life.

[23] And much better in her need than the king had done.

[24] Bewailing to him her misfortune, calling after him

[25] This point is also made in Lehmann (1971:3).

[26] Recall that the first content-conveying syllable of lexical words receive stress.

[27]
Sie dúent iz filu súazi, joh mézent sie thie fúazi,
thie léngi joh thie kúrti, theiz gilústlichaz wúrti.
Éigun sie iz bithénkit, thaz síllaba in ni wénkit,
sies álleswio ni rúachent, ni so thie fúazi suachent.
Joh állo thio zíti, so záltun sie bi nóti;
iz mízit ana bága al io súlih waga.
Yrfúrbent sie iz réino joh hárto filu kléino,
selb so mán thuruh nót sinaz kórn reinot.

[28]
Thaz láz thir wesan súazi: so mézent iz thie fúazi,
zít joh thiu régula; so ist gótes selbes brédiga.
Wil thú thes wola dráhton, thu métar wolles áhton,
in thína zungun wirken dúam joh sconu vérs wolles dúan.
Il io gótes willen állo ziti irfúllen,
so scribent gótes thegana in frénkisgon thie regula.
In gótes gibotes súazi laz gángan thine fúazi,
ni laz thir zít thes ingán: theist sconi férs sar gidán.

[29] The various monuments to alliterative verse across the Germanic corpus would require their own analysis of the extent to which the contexts of literacy and orality shape their poetic and linguistic structures. For example, the Skaldic verse of Old Norse with its rigid poetic patterns might be an instance of the context of literacy exerting greater influence on the composition of alliterative verse.

Works Cited

Bach, Adolf. *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache*. 9th edn. Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1970. Print.

Bostock, J. Knight. *A Handbook on Old High German Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976. Print.

Brogan, T.V.F. *English Versification, 1570–1980*. Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins, 1981. Print.

Brown, Giles. "Introduction: the Carolingian Renaissance." *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*. Ed. Rose McKitterick. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. 1–51. Print.

Daunt, Marjorie. "Old English Verse and English Speech Rhythm." *Transactions of the Philological Society* 45.1 (1946): 56–72. Print.

Erdmann, Oskar, ed. *Otfrids Evanglienbuch*. 5th edn. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1965. Print.

Flom George T. "Alliteration and Variation in Old Germanic Name-Giving." *Modern Language Notes* 32.1 (1917): 7–17. Print.

Gantert, Klaus. *Akkommodation und eingeschriebener Kommentar. Untersuchungen zur Übertragungsstrategie des Helianddichters*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1998. Print.

Gentry, Frank. "Von der karolingischen Reform bis zur Rezeption der höfischen Literatur Frankreichs." *Aus der Mündlichkeit in die Schriftlichkeit: höfische und andere Literatur, 750–1320*. Ed. Ursula Liebertz-Grün. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1988. 46–83. Print.

Grant, Arthur, ed. *Early Lives of Charlemagne by Eginhard and the Monk of St Gall*, 1905. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/48870/48870-h/48870-h.html. [October 22, 2020]. Web.

Green, D. H. *Medieval Listening and Reading. The Primary Reception of German Literature 800–1300*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1994. Print.

Heusler, Andreas. *Über germanischen Versbau*. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1894. Print.

Heusler, Andreas. *Deutsche Versgeschichte mit Einschluss des altenglischen und altnordischen Stabreimverses* (erster Band, Teil 1 und 2). Berlin und Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1925. Print.

Heyne, Moritz, ed. *Hêliand mit ausführlichem Glossar*. 3rd edn. Paderborn: Druck und Verlag von Ferdinand Schöningh, 1883. Print.

Jeep, John. "Alliterating word-pairs in Old High German: approaching a rhetorical evaluation." *American Journal of Germanic Linguistics & Literatures* 8.1 (1996): 33–67. Print.
Koch, Peter and Wulf Oesterreicher. "Sprache der Nähe – Sprache der Distanz. Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit im Spannungsfeld von Sprachtheorie und Sprachgeschichte." *Romanistisches Jahrbuch* 36 (1985): 15–43. Print.
Law, Vivian. "The study of grammar." *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*. Ed. Rose McKitterick. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1994. 88–110. Print.
Lehmann, Winfred. *The Development of Germanic Verse Form*. New York: Gordian Press, 1971. Print.
Leonard, William. "*Beowulf* and the *Nibelungen* couplet." *University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature* 2 (1918): 99–152. Print.
Magoun, Francis. "Otfrid's *Ad Liutbertum*." *PMLA* 58. 4 (1943): 869–890. Print.
Ong, Walter. *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*. 30th anniversary edn. London/New York: Routledge, 2012. Print.
Owen, Francis. "Alliteration in the runic inscriptions." *Modern Philology* 25.4 (1928): 397–408.
Preminger, Alex and T.V.F. Brogan, eds. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. New York: MJF Books, 1993. Print.
Sievers, Eduard. *Altgermanische Metrik*. Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1893. Print.
Suzuki, Seiichi. *The Metre of Old Saxon Poetry. The Remaking of Alliterative Tradition*. Cambridge: Brewer, 2004. Print.
Vollmann-Profe, Gisela, ed. *Otfrid von Weissenburg. Evangelienbuch. Althochdeutsch/Neuhochdeutsch*. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun. GmbH & Co, 1987. Print.
Walmsley, John Brian. "Wolfgang Ratke (Ratichius) and educational writings." PhD diss., Durham University, 1990. Print.

Katerina Somers
University of Wisconsin–Madison
1220 Linden Drive, Van Hise 842
Madison, WI 53706
USA
kisomers@wisc.edu