The Comparative Impact of Old English and Classical Language on the Poetics of Modern Fantasy

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Bachelor of Arts in History, University of Pittsburgh, 2022
Bachelor of Philosophy in Classics, University of Pittsburgh, 2022

Submitted to the Faculty of the

University Honors College in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2022

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

UNIVERSITY HONORS COLLEGE

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March 22, 2022

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Emerging largely in the mid-twentieth century, the modern corpus of fantasy literature has risen to cultural prominence through works such as *The Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, A Game of Thrones*, and their subsequent screen adaptations. Moreover, in each lie distinct instances of poetic interludes, a style unique to fantasy in its frequency. Yet, in order to understand the nuances of the genre, it is critical to thoroughly evaluate the landscape of linguistic traditions in which its language lies. In other words, one must consider how the style of modern fantasy exists in quasi-filial relation to past traditions. In so doing, it is possible to observe characteristics of both Classical and Old English form which have persisted into modernity. This research aims to evaluate the extent to which each tradition has impacted fantasy poetics by observing forms derived from oral-formulaic composition, figurative language, and the cultural values prioritized by alternative naming patterns. Furthermore, this work seeks to utilize J.R.R. Tolkien, due to his scholarly work in philology in conjunction with the widespread influence of his fantasy novels, as a lens through which to view the dissemination of the structures of Antiquity and to justify the practice thereof. Ultimately, this enables the reader and researcher to further discuss the subconscious values ingrained in fantasy literature through language and additionally reframes commonly accepted views as to the prominent linguistic influences behind Western literature and popular culture.

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Preface

Before presenting my research, I find it important to discuss one of the terms which I frequently employ therein: *Anglo-Saxon*. Within the foundational research that has informed my own, scholars of the twentieth century, and even of the twenty-first, commonly refer to the body of literature predating the 1066AD Norman Conquest of England as Anglo-Saxon as well as Old English. However, the term is also colored by a less-savory history of colonialism, exclusivity, and white-supremacy. This has led to a greater popularization and preference of the label *Old English* in the academic context. Nevertheless, critical works with which I have engaged, such as Albert Lord's *The Singer of Tales* and various essays by J.R.R. Tolkien, opt to utilize *Anglo-Saxon*. As a result, and often as a means to diversify my nomenclature across sentences concerning similar matters, I myself alternate between the use of *Anglo-Saxon* and *Old English*. I do not intend now to elaborate how this this term has been connected to white-supremacy movements, but I do strive to acknowledge this undesirable connotation and, hopefully, to disconnect my work from this history. Clearly stated, my inclusion of the term reflects this research's placement within the field of Anglo-Saxon studies and not any attempt to contribute to a haze of discrimination in academia.

On a lighter note, but still worth addressing, I do at times reference all of the authors of modern fantasy whose works I examined throughout the course of this research as a collective. For succinct elaboration when this is not otherwise explained, this list includes J.K. Rowling (particularly her *Harry Potter* series), George R.R. Martin (and his *A Song of Ice and Fire*), Christopher Paolini (his *Inheritance Cycle*), Susan Cooper (*The Dark is Rising Sequence*), and Neil Gaiman and V.E. Schwab across several non-serial publications. These are the individuals I

am referring to when I write ‘all authors/books examined’ or phrases of a similar nature; I do not mean to imply that the observed trends are universal to all present-day authors of fantasy. Additionally, such reference does not always include the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, although *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion*, *Beren and Lúthien*, *The Children of Húrin*, *The Fall of Gondolin*, and *Unfinished Tales*, as well as a smattering of his essays, lectures, and letters, all played an integral role in my research. This is because, as I will hopefully explain adequately throughout the essay, I utilize Tolkien’s fantasy in a way different from the others, as a lens through which the dissemination of ancient styles might be justified.

All of the authors and their respective works outlined in the above list were selected for various reasons. Most intuitively, J.K. Rowling and George R.R. Martin were chosen based on their prominence in modern popular culture and the fantasy scene, but this reasoning can be extended to others as well. In many cases, I prioritized works of fantasy published no earlier than the 1960s (therefore liable to have been influenced by Tolkien) that have been adapted for film or television as an indicator of their cultural significance. In other cases, some authors were included purely on the recommendation of my advisors. In so doing, I hope to have indiscriminately formed a sample group adequately reflective of the fantasy genre as a whole.

Lastly, in certain instances of observation regarding Classical and Old English language, I have opted to include the text in its original form. I have done such mostly in circumstances where the original language conforms to metrical or stylistic patterns not maintained through translation. Other times, I have simply believed that the intended words better impart the poetic features being examined. Regardless, I often accompany each inclusion with an English translation for comprehensive purposes.

1.0 Tracing Poetic Influence

Verse and poetry exist as one of the foremost hallmarks of human storytelling, traceable throughout the foundations of Western literature into the fantastical imaginings of the present day. They are familiar icons of Ancient Greek epic, Medieval romance, Shakespearian tragedy, and a seemingly inexhaustible list of additional sources. Yet, as has often been purported, art does not exist independently but is the product of a complex web of sociopolitical environments as well as the traditions from which it was born. Contemporary fantasy does not stand apart in this regard. For example, *The Hobbit* dragon Smaug has been attributed to the Norse story of Sigurd.[1] When so many bodies of interrelated literature form the basis of a genre, however, one must analyze objects other than the thematic to determine the influences therein. Thus, it is through the structural and philological elements of fantasy poetry that this research aims to evaluate the intersecting influences on modern composition, the means by which these traditions have been perpetuated, and what this signifies in the context of contemporary values.

In order to discern the various traditions' impact on modern poetics, it is necessary to observe where they coalesce and diverge from one another both linguistically and historically. Tracing the development of Ancient Greek epic poetry is a matter that continues to be a source of debate in scholarship, simultaneously illustrating a hitherto unseen swell in the form's literary popularity while possessing motifs steeped in Indo-European culture.[2] Nevertheless, it is clear that the resulting influential works of Homer, Hesiod, and Sappho – among others – predated the

[1] Humphrey Carpenter, ed., *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2000), 134.
[2] M. L. West, "The Rise of the Greek Epic," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 108 (1988): 151-153.

first great works of Latin verse by several-hundred years, spanning the 9th to 6th centuries BC. Notably, the Greek poetic corpus was comprised influentially of heroic poetry, following the monumental Homeric works the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, with heroic allusions across all genres.[3] In addition to this, as Albert B. Lord reflects upon in his *The Singer Resumes the Tale*, the artists of Greek culture were trailblazers of the composition of verse as "oral literature".[4] While Lord clarifies that oral tradition existed long before Ancient Greek civilization, many of his primary examples, still referenceable by a contemporary audience, focus on Homeric works and highlight their transmissible nature as crucial to the construction of subsequent poetry.[5] In this way, not only the themes of Homeric poetry but also the formulaic structure of the verse became the precedent for the Western tradition.

However, the influence of Homer was not limited to the temporal or spatial area of Ancient Greece. It is well documented how Greek literature and composition served as the aspirational foundation of the later Latin poets. Literary historians recognize, due to both the relatively slow pace at which Rome developed its own literary corpus and the great attraction of Greek culture, Latin authors intentionally utilized such works as their models through "creative imitation".[6] Perhaps the most prevalent example of this lies in Virgil's epic the *Aeneid*, which stands as a direct successor to Homer's *Iliad*, dactylic hexameter included. Movements such as that of the Neoterics only advanced this at the dawning of the Empire in the first century BC, with poets like Catullus embracing non-Homeric – but still Greek – poetic forms, such as lyric, and drawing on Sappho, among others. Additionally, this process is expounded upon even by

[3] West, "The Rise of the Greek Epic," 151-152.
[4] Albert B. Lord, *The Singer Resumes the Tale*, ed. Mary Louise Lord (Cornell University Press, 1995), 11.
[5] Lord, *The Singer Resumes the Tale*, 12-14.
[6] Mary T. Boatwright, *The Romans: From Village to Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 299-301.

writers of the time. The Augustan Age poet Horace writes in his *Ars Poetica*, "words, though new and of recent make, will win acceptance, if they spring from a Greek fount and are drawn therefrom".[7] As a result of such influence, motifs of Greek appear throughout Latin literature, often in identical meter and form, as they utilize, for instance, similar language and structural devices. Although Latin poets still created original works with themes unique to their time, herein lies the basis for observing Greek and Latin poetics together as a unified body of Classical literature for the purposes of this research.

Being divided as they are as points of comparison, the situation is not the same regarding the Anglo-Saxon language. To scholars, it is clear that the conquest of Britain by the Roman Empire in the first century AD prompted a swell of Latin literary exposure over the following centuries, for many surviving manuscripts feature known Latinate works interpolated into the native forms of the region.[8] Under these circumstances, it is reasonable to question what defines the Old English tradition as a literary foundation distinct from the Classical (or Greek) in a way that Latin does not. In small part, this is due to the understanding that prior Old English formulaic structures persisted where Latin literature succumbed to the attractiveness of Greek standards. For example, the Old English poem *The Phœnix* draws inspiration from the "De Ave Phoenice" of Lactantius and sections of "The Whale" reflect passages of the *Physiologus,* but both Anglo-Saxon works expressed these through their hallmark form of alliterative verse.[9] Additionally, while Romans broadened their embrace of Greek style across genres, Alfred the

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[7] Horace. *Ars Poetica,* trans. H. R. Fairclough (Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), ln. 52-53.
[8] Scott Lightsey, "Alliterative Poetry in Old and Middle English," in *A Companion to Old and Middle English Literature,* ed. Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 39-40.
[9] Oliver Farrar Emerson, "Originality in Old English Poetry," *The Review of English Studies* 2, no. 5 (1926), 18.

Great notably curbed the tide of Latinate prosody through his establishment of an English educational system and translation of key Latin texts, which became, for many, the dominant way in which to approach literature.[10] Thus, Anglo-Saxon compositional distinctions were perpetuated into Medieval English, forming the foundation of a separate literary tradition.

In this way, these two independent poetic source traditions exist within modern English. They follow distinct structural patterns, utilize poetic imagery by means that highlight different aspects of their object, and connect ideas through varying rhetorical devices. Nevertheless, their interwoven literary history has infused their modern descendants with thematic similitudes that make the fingerprints of influence more difficult to trace. Notions of heroic epic and fantastical motifs with which present culture is familiar are reflected in both corpora. Therefore, the means of comparing impacts herein includes poetic and syntactical trends, aiming to analyze the materials at their greatest point of distinction.

1.1 Tolkienian Poetics

In between these literary traditions, as has been shown, there is often an observable vehicle for their diffusion between Greek and Latin and, subsequently, Latin and Old English. Hitherto unaccounted for is a semi-direct connection between modern fantasy composition and the heroic verse of Greek, Latin, and Anglo-Saxon, for even by the Medieval Era, writers' familiarity with epic were waning, acquainted with Homer only loosely through Virgil. Indeed,

[10] Richard Marsden, *The Cambridge Old English Reader* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 38.

Medieval authors often associated epic more with moral allegory than heroic narrative.[11] This is where the author and scholar J.R.R. Tolkien appears in the twentieth century as the emergence point for what is modernly considered the genre of fantasy. While it is true that influential fantasy in contemporary language existed prior to Tolkien – one must only see *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, George MacDonald's *Phantasies*, or even centuries early William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – it is this man who is commonly heralded as the father of modern fantasy.

What distinguishes Tolkien's work from those preceding is twofold within the interests of this research. First, Tolkien uniquely engaged consciously with the establishment of a modern English cultural mythos; the second quality is to be seen in the vast degree of his success. As he describes in his letters, he sensed a poverty inherent in the English literary narrative, which was filled in part by Classical legends and Romance, and sought in the creation of his own fantasies to dedicate a body of connected legend to England.[12] The establishment of this coherent mythos via Tolkien's monumental works such as *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* is analyzed by David Day both as of the popular imagination of England and a composite of Tolkien's experience in history, philology, and folklore.[13] However, what makes Tolkien such an integral lens through which to view the modern genre is not simply that he was influential; his contemporary mythos was deliberately created by drawing from the *preexisting* corpus. It was not merely the imaginings of one man. Naturally, being himself a linguist and a poet, this fabricated history included verse. Due to Tolkien's credit as the "father of modern fantasy", this

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[11] Richard McDonald, "The Epic Genre and Medieval Epics," in *A Companion to Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 231.
[12] Carpenter, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 144-145.
[13] David Day, *An Encyclopedia of Tolkien* (San Diego, CA: Printers Row Publishing Group, 2019), 14-15.

moment of connection serves as a critical point in the enjoinment of poetry and fantasy in the popular mind.

As a child and student, Tolkien first came to experience literary pleasure in his study of Classics, in the works of Homer.[14] As a scholar and professor, J.R.R. Tolkien came in contact with works of the Anglo-Saxon and Medieval English poetic traditions, writing his own translations of *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl*, and *Sir Orfeo*. This is not, however, the extent of his engagement with these sources. As an enthusiast, Tolkien would adapt Arthurian legend into modern continuations of alliterative verse, the style in which fragments appear throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. One example lies in the "Lament for Théoden":

> Out of doubt, out of dark, to the day's rising
> he rode singing in the sun, sword unsheathing.
> Hope he rekindled, and in hope ended;
> over death, over dread, over doom lifted
> out of loss, out of life, unto long glory.[15]

Thus, it is clear that he held a vast experience with Anglo-Saxon texts and that they actively played a role in his composition. In so doing, the works of Tolkien serve as a bridge between the poetic forms of Old English and modern form.

At the same time, as previously mentioned, Tolkien began his academic life with fierce devotion to the Classics. In several of his letters, he refers to his own characters and art as "Homeric" in nature,[16] and scholars such as Miryam Librán Moreno, Robert E. Morse, and

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[14] Carpenter, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 172.
[15] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1994), 954.
[16] Carpenter, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 154, 201.

Kenneth J. Reckford have long analyzed the thematic and motific evidence of *The Lord of the Rings*' connection to Classical literature. Furthermore, as Librán Moreno evaluates, Latin in particular pervades Tolkien's language beyond the thematic. His linguistic constructions show traces of Latin in sound choice and combinations.[17] In some cases, this is conveyed consciously to the audience, but in many this is achieved through the timbre of his invented Elvish language Quenya. It is therefore logical to conclude that, due to his partiality towards the Latin language and his admitted devotion to the Classical corpus, the sound and composition of Classical poetics played a role in Tolkien's style.

Having constituted his vision of a cultural mythos from the foundations of Anglo-Saxon and Classical compositions while, at the same time, providing a coherent narrative which has been adopted into today's popular imagination, it is possible to view Tolkien as a modern era Homer. Homer's poetic interpretation of historical narrative in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* served as the inspiration behind centuries of epic, a predecessor acknowledged consciously and otherwise by Western authors; similarly have *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* altered fantasy. Through Tolkien, the genre as become inextricably linked to the traditions of these two cultural bodies in ways previously dormant, including poetic form.

1.2 The Poetry of Modern Fantasists

Despite J.R.R. Tolkien's undisputed influence on fantasy and his undisputed influence on the development of the genre as an art form, in the end, the goal of this research is not to evaluate

[17] Miryam Librán Moreno, "Use and Influence of Latin in Tolkien's Literature," in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, ed. Michael D.C. Drout (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 344-345.

this author's admitted homages to historical forms; rather it is to view Tolkien as a lens through which these forms have been admitted into the present-day sphere. In his introduction to the book *Meditations on Middle-Earth*, the modern fantasist George R.R. Martin writes, "Tolkien changed fantasy; he elevated it and redefined it, to such an extent that it will never be the same again… Most contemporary fantasists happily admit their debt to the master… but even those who disparage Tolkien most loudly cannot escape his influence".[18] Martin's words exemplify the degree to which Tolkien's subject matter, mythology, and compositional form have pervaded the genre. While not every fantasist possesses for themselves educational experience in either the traditions of Old English or Classical Language, they are connected to them through the more broadly accessible works of Tolkien.

Indeed, many of today's most prominent authors of the fantasy genre have little education in historical compositional styles, and even less show traceable exposure to poetic composition – a key exception being J.K. Rowling who studied Classics at the University of Exeter. Thus, it lends credibility to the impact of foundational poetics from the Classical and Old English traditions that a majority of the appropriate works of these writers contain verse elements. For example, Martin's popular series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the inspiration behind the HBO television series *A Game of Thrones*, contains examples of verse in every entry following the initial, eighty percent of the collection. This trend is continued across the field. In Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle*, identified by its starting novel *Eragon*, the entirety of the series showcases verse, and, of course, J.K. Rowling's iconic *Harry Potter* series does the same in every novel except *The Prisoner of Azkaban*. Moreover, within these instances are elements of

[18] George R.R. Martin, "Introduction," in *Meditations on Middle-Earth*, ed. Karen Haber (St. Martin's Press, 2001), 3.

both the Anglo-Saxon and Classical poetic traditions. In particular, of the books examined as a part of this research, nearly seventy percent contain poetic examples of alliteration, some adhering closely to the Old English alliterative verse, as will be examined later.

In addition to this structural significance, many instances of fantasy poetry follow conventions of figurative language, imagery, and metaphor as established by the Classical and Anglo-Saxon traditions, curiously without the original need behind the foundational equivalent. Notably, heroic epithets indicative of Homeric style and kennings appear throughout modern verse; yet it is commonly theorized that such descriptors were utilized for both metrical and oral compositional purposes, practices with slim sway over contemporary poetry.[19] Nevertheless, fantasy authors perpetuate the attachment of deeds and accomplishments to the titles of heroes, for who is Harry Potter if not *the Boy Who Lived*.

Thus, it is clear that, in tracing the timeline of literary influences, structures originally unique or characteristic of both Greek and Old English are being reproduced in the present day. Additionally, these forms are being recreated by writers with little to no discernable experience directly with the source literature. This bolsters the likelihood that the connection between J.R.R. Tolkien's scholarly work and his creative endeavors, so influential in the genre of fantasy, have played a key role in the philological composition of contemporary literature as well as his intended cultural mythos. Regardless, these new instances remain separated from the factors inherent in the original purposes, indicating space for updated analysis examining not only the ways in which antiquated forms appear in present verse but also how their cultural significance is reflected in the time.

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[19] John Miles Foley, "'Reading' Homer through Oral Tradition," *College Literature* 34, no. 2 (2007), 3.

2.0 The Effect of Oral Poetic Formulae

In order to understand the structures by which Tolkien's verse bridges the classical with the contemporary, it is necessary to examine the oral background from which each tradition arose. In the early twentieth century, Classics scholar Milman Parry deduced that the epic narratives of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were, as a result of being traditional epics, oral compositions.[20] Together with Albert B. Lord, the two generated the Parry-Lord theory of Homeric composition, appearing in Lord's *The Singer of Tales*. In essence, this theory purports that ancient epics followed certain compositional formulae which would aid in the singers' ability to compose the narrative impromptu and properly deploy themes of the epic-length metrical verse.[21] In respect to Homeric and other Greek epics, attributes of this formula include what Lord refers to as "stock epithets" and "repeated word groups".[22] Lord revisited this theory in his subsequent work *The Singer Resumes the Tale*, in which the same analytical insights are applied to the Northern Germanic and Anglo-Saxon literary tradition. In place of formulaic metrical word blocks, Lord discusses the use of alliterative cross-line themes to connect narrative aspects within the confines of alliterative verse.[23] While this merely scratches the surface of the Parry-Lord theory, these elements are critical for observing the modern implications of oral formulae.

While not oral in nature themselves, modern poetic form has adapted the previously described features in a possibly unconscious attempt at authenticity. In so doing, it has shifted the

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[20] Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, ed. Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy (Harvard University Press, 2000), 3.
[21] M. W. M. Pope, "The Parry-Lord Theory of Homeric Composition," *Acta Classica* 6 (1963), 2.
[22] Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 30.
[23] Lord, *The Singer Resumes the Tale*, 124-128.

intention behind such characteristics while still retaining underlying qualities of sound, value, and image. Thus, the various oral poetic formulae across the Classical and Old English corpora are one way in which the compositional traditions of previous millennia have impacted the essence of fantasy composition.

2.1 Homeric Oral Composition

As has already been identified, included in the Parry-Lord theory of Homeric composition is the claim that descriptive and heroic epithets serve a fundamental purpose in the verse of Greek epic. Those familiar with Greek poetics will know that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are written and were preformed in dactylic hexameter, a metrical form consisting of six feet, dependent on strict adherence to syllabic length. Thus, the typical Homeric line will contain a range of thirteen to seventeen syllables constituting a combination of dactyls (one long syllable followed by two short) and spondees (two long syllables). Naturally, as it would appear to many, such constrained spontaneous creation would be difficult, particularly so when continued for over twelve-thousand lines. According to Lord and Parry, preestablished epithets aided in this process, filling distinct blocks in the line structure.[24] For example one of the *Iliad*'s most common epithets is δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς (noble Achilles). Rather than refer to the epic hero simply by his name, he is frequently referred to by this description, even in the most mundane of circumstances. The reasons for this become clear when taken in the context of the line:

τὸν δ᾽ ἠμείβετ᾽ ἔπειτα ποδάρκης δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.[25]

[24] Pope, "The Parry-Lord Theory of Homeric Composition", 7.
[25] Homer, *Iliad* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1920), 1.121.

With the name Ἀχιλλεύς filling out three syllables (one short, two long), it does not fit inside the required metrical parameters of the final foot. However, the addition of δῖος provides a preceding pair of long and short syllables, making δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς succinctly fill the final two feet. In this way, the name with the addition of the epithet forms a sort of building block, designed to fulfill metrical requirements at the end of a line of Homeric verse. Similarly, epithetical blocks exist to complete feet at the start of a line:

Ζεῦ πάτερ ἠδ᾽ ἄλλοι μάκαρες θεοὶ αἰὲν ἐόντες.[26]

Because Zeus (Ζεῦ, voc.) itself consists of only one long syllable, the following πάτερ (father) provides two short syllables, making Ζεῦ πάτερ a perfect dactyl and one complete foot.

Nevertheless, this characteristic of Homeric oral composition loses its intended purpose when interpolated into the written context. For this reason, many contemporary translations of the *Iliad* refer to Achilles simply by his name. Regardless, as a student of the Classics and a lover of Homer, this traditional practice of epithets is well stewarded by J.R.R. Tolkien in *The Hobbit*. Following the defeat of Smaug the dragon, Tolkien's dwarves sing,

> Under the Mountain dark and tall
> The King has come unto his hall!
> His foe is dead, the Worm of Dread,
> And ever so his foes shall fall.[27]

Most notably, Smaug is referenced as "the Worm of Dread", and this construction bears striking resemblance to the form of Homeric oral composition. Here, Tolkien writes in iambic tetrameter, lines comprised of eight alternating short and long syllables (four feet). In the same way that δῖος

[26] Homer, *Odyssey* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 5.7.
[27] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (London, England: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 239.

Ἀχιλλεύς completes the final two feet of dactylic hexameter, so too does ‘the Worm of Dread’ in the iambic tetrameter, where ‘the Worm’ would only form one foot and ‘Smaug’ an incomplete half.

Patterns of this appear throughout the rest of *The Hobbit*, regardless of the meter Tolkien employs. In iambic trimeter the men of Lake-town sing,

> The King beneath the mountains,
>
> The King of carven stone,
>
> The lord of silver fountains
>
> Shall come into his own![28]

All three noun-epithet pairs form a complete line of three iambic feet (the first and third with feminine endings). Here it is observable that the epithets serve a dual purpose, much like δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς. In addition to providing compositional filler, the descriptors add a heroic significance or grandiose atmosphere to the subject, whether it be Thorin Oakenshield or the greatest of the Greek warriors. Thorin is set into the geographic and picturesque expanse of Tolkien’s dwarven kingdom, and Achilles is related to divinity, both legendary traits that elevate the character. It is likely a combination of the two aspects, both sound and substance, that are responsible for the practice’s adoption from ancient oral composition into modern written form.

In a similar manner, whether consciously or otherwise, many of the most prominent fantasists following Tolkien have utilized Homeric style epithets to denote nobility, divinity, and legendary character nature within blocks of verse. In several of J.K. Rowling’s entries in the

[28] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 182.

Harry Potter series, the bardic Sorting Hat relates the deeds of the four Hogwarts founders. In this example from *The Order of the Phoenix,* the Sorting Hat narrates,

> In times of old when I was new
> And Hogwarts barely started
> The founders of our noble school
> Thought never to be parted:
> ...
> While the bravest and the boldest
> Went to daring Gryffindor.
> Good Hufflepuff, she took the rest,
> And taught them all she knew.[29]

While herein it is clear that the structural formulaic quality of Homeric epithets is diminished in significance, it, nevertheless, plays a role. The first four lines conform to English common meter, made possible in Rowling's third line by the epithet 'noble', notably the same epithet previously attributed to Achilles. However, in the subsequent section, Rowling's adherence to common meter is loose; so, while "daring Gryffindor" and "good Hufflepuff" are reminiscent of 'noble Achilles', they are perhaps more purposeful in the establishment of figures within the fantastical legendarium than as structural pieces. Still, through Rowling's example it is shown that epithets born originally from the Homeric oral tradition serve an important function in modern fantasy.

[29] J.K. Rowling, *The Order of the Phoenix* (New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2003), 204-205.

Continuing this trend, George R.R. Martin composes his hymns, dedicated to deities of his Westeros, in trochaic tetrameter. In the same way that Rowling's use of epithets establishes legendary figures, Martin's indicate divinity:

Gentle Mother, font of mercy,
save our sons from war, we pray,
stay the swords and stay the arrows,
let them know a better day.

Gentle Mother, strength of women,
help our daughters through this fray,
soothe the wrath and tame the fury,
teach us all a kinder way.[30]

This fantasy hymn follows the same pattern previously seen in this section and contributes evidence to the diffusion of Homeric form into modern verse. The repeated epithet-noun pairing of "Gentle Mother" constitutes a half-line block (two feet) of Martin's tetrameter, and, as had been observed in all previous examples, is situated either at the beginning of the poetic line or at the end, which allows the block to align with the other in-line fragments. Thus, by examining these instances, it is evident that, while the methods of Homeric recitation and composition are no longer prevalent in the modern era, its key attributes such as formulaic epithets remain utilized by present poetics to distinguish legendary figures within the mind of the audience and lend authenticity to the sound of created verse.

[30] George R.R. Martin, *A Clash of Kings* (New York, NY: The Random House Publishing Group, 1998), 613.

2.2 Models Within the Anglo-Saxon Formula

The retention of antiquated oral poetic formulae is by no means limited to Greek structures and Homeric epithets. Yet, what these structures consist of varies greatly within the Anglo-Saxon tradition. As theorized by Albert Lord, much of Old English literature's place within the argument of oral formulaic composition concerns the cyclical or enveloping nature of the poetry or the appearance of similar alliterative phrases across sources.[31] Due to the common character of modern verse in fantasy (i.e., short-form with non-narrative themes), these aspects are difficult to trace reliably and attribute confidently to Anglo-Saxon form. However, while Lord's theories of Homeric orality are generally accepted, many researchers continue to debate whether extant Old English sources were conceived primarily within the oral tradition rather than the written. The result is that scholars such as Alexandra Hennessey Olsen describe most of our known Anglo-Saxon pieces as transitional texts, demonstrating features of oral-formularity while possibly containing marks of literary craftmanship.[32] This sentiment is echoed by *Beowulf* translator Seamus Heaney regarding the nature of that poem.[33] Thus, it is likely that what is observable in our corpus of Old English literature is the beginnings of the adaptation of older oral formulae into a partially literary structure.[34]

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[31] Lord, *The Singer Resumes the Tale*, 124-130.
[32] Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, "Oral-Formulaic Research in Old English Studies: II," *Oral Tradition* 3 (1988), 155-156.
[33] Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf* (London, England: W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2000), xxviii.
[34] The debate regarding the nature of Anglo-Saxon formulaic composition as oral, literary, or transitional continues in the academic community, as far as I have been able to discern. Even Lord at times acknowledges the possibility of the works being transitional while at other points identifying transitionality as incompatible with his theories of oral formulaic composition. However, supporting either side of the discussion is not the intention of my research. Thus, based on the seeming legitimacy behind such claims, I have opted to herein observe them as transitional as theorized by Olsen. Yet, it should be noted that this is not a universally reached conclusion.

In this case, the process of comparing the influence of this body of literature on modern composition would then evaluate the marks of evident structures, for it is unlikely that unknown oral literature predating transitional Anglo-Saxon texts would inform the writings of twentieth century authors such as Tolkien in an identifiable way. Of these structures, the one that best embodies the Anglo-Saxon tradition, both a hallmark of its formulaic nature and an indicator of its transitional state, is alliterative verse. Via inscribed artifacts and sociological evidence, contemporary scholarship notes that alliterative poetry and the oral practices thereof precede Old English composition through prehistoric Germanic cultures.[35] In addition, inclusions of performative alliterative interludes within known literature, such as the Finn episode in *Beowulf*, illuminate Anglo-Saxon familiarity with the style of oral poetics.[36] An earlier example of this phenomenon lies in the Venerable Bede's story of Cædmon, and yet another in "The Scōp or Scald's Tale" of the *Exeter Book.* In the latter of the two, the speaker describes,

> *ðon pit* ***sc****illing* [_] ***sc****iran reorde*
>
> *for uncrum* ***s****ige-bryhtne* [_] ***s****ong ahofan*
>
> ***h****lude bi* ***h****earpan* [_] ***h****leoþor spinsade*[37]

With phrases such as "*song ahofan*" ([I] raised the song) and "*bi hearpan*" (about the harp), the performative and musical nature of these poetic composers is made clear. Moreover, details such as "*for uncrum sige-bryhtne*" (before our victorious lord) and the earlier "*fore mengo* / *in meodu-healle*" (before the multitude in the mead-hall)[38] provide the setting and context for which such

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[35] Lightsey, "Alliterative Poetry in Old and Middle English", 37.
[36] Mark C. Amodio, "Embodying the Oral Tradition: Performance and Performative Poetics in and of *Beowulf*," in *John Miles Foley's World of Oralities* (Arc Humanities Press, 2020), 56-57.
[37] Benjamin Thorpe, ed., "The Scōp or Scald's Tale," in *Codex Exoniensis* (London, England: FB &c Ltd, 2018), 324.; alliterative features have been set in bold to introduce the structure of alliterative verse. Additionally, the *caesura* (pause) between each half-line and which I have denoted by an underscore is a key feature of alliterative verse form.
[38] Thorpe, *Codex Exoniensis*, 321.

displays would be conducted. Thus, while alliterative verse structure alone does not itself form the mnemonic patterns examined by Lord and Parry, it is, nevertheless, an aspect inherited from the oral formulae of Anglo-Saxon's preceding traditions and therefore an orally originating model of the Anglo-Saxon poetic formula.

Although the process is somewhat obscure when tracing the dissemination of alliterative verse from the solely oral Germanic languages into the transitional Old English texts, the influence of the formula thereafter remains evident. While it may have taken a lesser position in much of England to the emergent rhyming verse, as noted by Geoffrey Chaucer in "The Parson's Tale" of his *Canterbury Tales*,[39] Medieval English verse continued to produce impactful pieces in alliterative verse such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In this way, alliterative structure remained a significant part of epic and Medieval romance, genres formative to modern fantasy. This was a concept of which J.R.R. Tolkien was aware, and which, consequently, he may have reenforced by taking personal interest in *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and the legends of King Arthur. Of these first two works he wrote extensively, discussing them in lectures, guiding others on how to read them, and compiling his own translations of both. In these translations, Tolkien strived to maintain the alliterative structure, showing his familiarity with the form:

Original *Sir Gawain* text	**Tolkien's *Sir Gawain* translation**
Then haylsed he ful hendly tho hatheles uchone,	Then he greeted graciously those good men all,

[39] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Parson's Tale," in *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. David Lawton (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2020), ln. 42-43.

And mony proud mon ther presed, that prynce to honour.	and many were proud to approach him, that prince to honour.
Alle hasped in his hegh wede to halle thay hym wonnen,	All hasped in his harness to hall they brought him,
Ther fayre fyre upon flet fersly brenned.[40]	where a fair blaze in the fireplace fiercely was burning.[41]

Most importantly for the purposes of this research is that both Tolkien (in his translation) and the Gawain-poet take a loosened approach to the rigidity of alliterative verse. The poet of *Sir Gawain* introduces a bob-and-wheel pattern at the end of each stanza, which was not present in typical Old English writings, and warrants questioning as to the adherence to only four stressed syllables per line, as witnessed in the second line of the above passage. Although prominent Middle English scholars such as Derek Pearsall and J. P. Oakden encourage the reading of such lines within the established framework by filtering nonessential words, or thematically insignificant stresses, the inclusion of these ambiguous lines have prompted debate and reexamination of the form, labelling these as hypermetric or expanded lines.[42] Even if such prudent filtering is performed, the presence of academic debate in this area indicates that the pattern is not unmistakable as in the general Old English hypermetric form.[43] This can, thus, be interpreted as drift or minor divergence from an original pattern. In essence, *Sir Gawain*'s poetic form depicts an already-present trend towards adaptation with rhyme and explorative alliterative structure.

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[40] Simon Armitage, trans., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), ln. 829-832.
[41] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London, England: HarperCollins Publishers, 2021), II.35.19-22.
[42] A. T. E. Matonis, "A Reexamination of the Middle English Alliterative Long Line," in *Modern Philology* 81, no. 4 (1984), 353-355.
[43] Matonis, "A Reexamination of the Middle English Alliterative Long Line", 354-355, 358-359.

This mirrors the approach taken by J.R.R. Tolkien in his twentieth century adaptation of the alliterative formula. Within his fantasy lie clear examples of such verse in the classic format, such as the lyrics of the Ents:

Learn now the lore of Living Creatures!
First name the four, the free peoples:
Eldest of all, the elf-children;
Dwarf the delver, dark are his houses;
Ent the earthborn, old as mountains;
Man the mortal, master of horses[44]

In these lines, there are succinctly four stressed syllables, a discernable caesura dividing each half-line, and three of the four stresses alliterating. This is recapitulated in the later poem of the "Mounds of Mundburg", which again highlights this formulaic construction of Old English in original modern form:

...
Death in the morning and at day's ending
lords took and lowly. Long now they sleep
under grass in Gondor by the Great River.
Grey now as tears, gleaming silver,
red then it rolled, roaring water:
foam dyed with blood flamed at sunset;
as beacons mountains burned at evening;[45]

[44] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1994), 453.
[45] Tolkien, *Return of the King*, 831.

While not every line therein contains exactly three alliterating consonants or vowel sounds, both previously illustrated by "The Scōp or Scald's Tale" and as will be later discussed, this is typical of Old English alliterative verse. In addition to the presence of alliteration across each verse and the caesura which defines each half-line, instances such as line two of the passage feature enjambment, which is prominently observable in Old English poetry. This characteristic allowed the narrative elements of verse to conform to the metrical style of the period, and in so doing prioritized compositional ideals over the syntactical. Indeed, this example of Tolkien's, through the poems metrical form and patterns of syllabic stress, is the epitome of Anglo-Saxon form. Yet, *The Lord of the Rings* features more creative ventures in non-standard alliterative verse:

> Where now the horse and the rider? Where is the horn that was blowing?
> Where is the helm and the hauberk, and the bright hair flowing?
> Where is the hand on the harpstring, and the red fire glowing?
> Where is the spring and the harvest and the tall corn growing?
> They have passed like rain on the mountain, like a wind in the meadow;
> The days have gone down in the West behind the hills into shadow.
> Who shall gather the smoke of the dead wood burning,
> Or behold the flowing years from the Sea returning?[46]

In this, Tolkien's language of the Rohirrim alliterates closely to the typical Old English precedent and shows light caesurae (e.g., the break between "on the mountain" and "like a wind" in line five), but the alliterative formula's significance is diminished to allow for the post-Anglo-Saxon rhyme scheme and absence of enjambment. This is most interesting as much of Tolkien's poetry attributed to the Rohirrim is strictly alliterative verse in form. Notably herein, the poem

[46] Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 497.

increases the stressed syllable count of the *a*-line from two to three, a phenomenon not foreign to Old English but outside the normal.[47] This may be admissible in several of the verses, but to do so becomes difficult when regarding line five, for neither of the initial two lifts contribute to the alliterative structure. Moreover, several lines can be read with three lifts in the *b*-line, which would be foreign to alliterative verse. In fact, the final lines break from the alliterative pattern altogether, reminiscent of *Sir Gawain*'s stanza-ending bob-and-wheel. However, a clear explanation for Tolkien's divergence from this structure lies in the *Exeter Book* poem "The Wanderer". In this case, Tolkien is reflecting the *ubi sunt* passage of that work. To demonstrate this, line ninety-two of "The Wanderer" reads, "'Where did the steed go? Where the young warrior? Where the treasure-giver?"[48] Assuming the same hypermetric structure across the *a* and *b*-lines and occasionally deemphasizing alliterative qualities, this clearly resembles the opening line of Tolkien's previous poem. As a result, the "Lament for the Rohirrim" may not stand as an innovation unseen in Old English, but, more importantly, through Tolkien it serves as a contemporary popularization of prior irregular alliterative verse form, since it is given as a prominent example of his poetic composition in *The Two Towers*. Thus, otherwise controversial methods allowing for hypermetrics, defective lines, and the like become essential when examining modern practices; for, with Tolkien as the lens for its diffusion, alliterative style becomes less adamantly tied to the standardized rules of classic Old English form and takes liberties within its composition.

Thus far, all this has been to show that the alliterative style of the contemporary age is a continuous expansion of the language, not an unrelated sound device due to its distance from the

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[47] *The Dream of the Rood* is one such instance of blocks of hypermetric verses in Old English.
[48] Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 120.

formulaic structure. In the same way that the alliterative verse in the transitional Old English texts is a carry-over from the older Germanic oral traditions and that the alliterative revival of *Piers Plowman* and *Sir Gawain* were an adapted response to English tradition,[49] the utilization of alliteration by Tolkien and subsequent fantasists depicts a restructuring of preexistent devices, ultimately attributed to an ancient oral tradition. So, while few instances within fantasy poetics adhere strictly to the Anglo-Saxon model, the majority examined throughout the course of this research (roughly seventy percent on average) include deliberate alliteration as poetic language, sometimes overstuffing lines with more than three alliterative syllables, using secondary prepositions to form the structure, or alternating between alliterative and unrelated lines. Nevertheless, they present as the descendants of the alliterative formula in one way or another.

Of the reiterations of alliterative structure in modern fantasy, individual lines adhere most faithfully to their Anglo-Saxon models; I have found no fantasist after Tolkien that has taken up the task of composing a full-length alliterative piece. For example, in the lay by the dragon Eragon in Christopher Paolini's *Eldest*, the third line reads, "On frigid winter's final day".[50] In much the same manner as the Old English formula, the line contains four lifts, with 'frigid' and 'final' alliterating across both halves of the verse. This abides by the understood rules of traditional alliterative verse, in which lines will occasionally demonstrate only a pair of alliterative stresses among the four.[51] Multiple times this pattern emerges in Paolini's same poem, one instance (the second line quoted) a perfect reflection of Old English alliteration across three of four lifts:

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[49] For further discussion regarding distinguishing marks of Middle English poetry and their adaptations of alliterative verse see Rev. W. W. Skeat's "An Essay on Alliterative Poetry" in *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript: Ballads and Romances* Vol. III.
[50] Christopher Paolini, *Eldest* (New York, NY: Golden Books Publishing Company, 2005), 463.
[51] Marsden, *The Cambridge Old English Reader*, 32.

Was born a man with but one task:

...

Under oaks as old as time,

He ran with deer and wrestled bears,

...

In the dark before the dawn,

...

Bent the foe and from the man[52]

In this selection of lines, the third and fourth reproduce the style previously analyzed, two of the four lifts alliterating in either half. In the first and fifth, however, the stressed alliteration runs through rhetorically insignificant words, such as the conjunction 'but' and the preposition 'from'. Although demonstrating drift from the Old English formula, this is a poetic license occasionally granted to later Middle English alliteration (including the lifting of words not naturally bearing stress), and, therefore, still indicative of the alliterative model.[53] Bearing these qualifications in mind, many more individual lines are applicable throughout Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle*:

1. "Ever to be torn twixt the trees and the waves"[54]
2. "With a beat and a bang on the bones of the land"[55]
3. "She tore a Rider from the shadows rife .../... The hour has arrived for joy to reap"[56]
4. "Stood a wee, small man with a silver sword"[57]

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[52] Paolini, *Eldest*, 463-464.
[53] Matonis, "A Reexamination of the Middle English Alliterative Long Line", 341.
[54] Christopher Paolini, *Eragon* (New York, NY: Golden Books Publishing Company, 2002), 169.
[55] Paolini, *Eldest*, 42.
[56] Paolini, *Eldest*, 168.
[57] Paolini, *Eldest*, 640.

5. “Else upon your mind they'll place a mark”[58]

Not included in this list are verses that alliterate solely within one half of the line and those that rely on repetition of words or phrases to achieve this effect. As previously stated, methods of qualifying instances of alliterative verse outside the standard as creative license become unavoidable in the examination of modern poetry. However, by reapplying these filters, no differently than has been done with Medieval poetics, many contemporary instances still distinguish themselves as alliterative verse, not simply containing freeform alliteration but reflecting the older English model. Such a variety of examples from Paolini’s fantasy falling under this expanded category typify this claim and strongly support the notion that Anglo-Saxon compositional structures have influenced modern fantasy style.

Despite the extensive supporting evidence provided by Paolini’s *Inheritance Cycle*, it would not be valid to form such conclusions from the stylings of one author. Indeed, the persuasiveness of this argument comes from the widespread adoption of these techniques by present-day fantasists. In the most prominent works of the age, *Harry Potter* author J.K. Rowling writes, “Come seek us where our voices sound, .../... An hour long you’ll have to look, .../... But past an hour – the prospect’s black” and later “your time’s half gone, so tarry not”.[59] This is far from Rowling’s only use of alliteration in a way that reflects the Anglo-Saxon model, but it is, perhaps, her most consistent example in one coherent poetic interlude. Then, George R.R. Martin writes in his “Song of the Seven”,

He weighs our lives, the short and long,

...

[58] Christopher Paolini, *Inheritance* (New York, NY: Golden Books Publishing Company, 2011), 491.
[59] J.K. Rowling, *Goblet of Fire* (New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2000), 463.

The Mother gives the gift of life,

and watches over every wife.

Her gentle smile ends all strife,

...

With sword and shield and spear and bow,

...

she lives in every lover's sigh.[60]

Yet again, Martin's pattern typically includes only a pair of alliterating lifts, but, as has been elaborated, this can still fit within the Old English model when this occurs in separate halves of the four-stress line. A still greater number of authors recreate this pattern in fantasy literature. In Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* his rats chant, "We have teeth and we have tails .../... You will be here when we rise".[61] V.E. Schwab's "Witch's Rhyme" reads,

The grass, and the stones, and the far-off sea

The crows all watching on the low stone wall

...

To hear the witch and watch her play

...

Spoke to the wind and it whistled back

...

But the little boy Jack he stayed too long

...

[60] George R.R. Martin, *A Storm of Swords* (New York, NY: The Random House Publishing Group, 2000), 531.
[61] Neil Gaiman, *Coraline* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), 29.

The witch still a'singing her hills to sleep[62]

The list goes on, but this sampling illustrates how modern authors' operation within the framework of alliterative verse is not merely sporadically identifiable but is frequent and prevalent. As a result, it becomes clear that present-day composition has been impacted by the poetics of Old English verse beyond simply the narratives they convey.

In summary, according to the theoretical observations of Anglo-Saxon verse's oral formulaic composition by Lord and subsequent researchers, the hallmarks of orality across Old English literature are less definitive than in the Homeric equivalent. There are no succinct metrical blocks serving as mnemonic and performative devices therein – as in Greek epithets – other than common idioms and phrases. Therefore, much of contemporary scholarship concerning oral Anglo-Saxon composition centers around the formula of alliterative verse. When examining this formula in its strictest sense, very little of modern fantasy poetry qualifies as alliterative verse – though it is notable that some instances conform to even this standard. Yet, throughout the history of Old English literature, the alliterative revival in Medieval English, and the analyses thereof, various practices have been created to account for evident formulaic divergences within the source texts themselves. When the same allowances are extended to modern works, a shockingly vast body of fantasy poetics across numerous authors becomes identifiable as the descendants of alliterative verse, beyond simple instances of unstructured alliteration. Thus, the Old English tradition is supported as having profoundly impacted the poetics of modern fantasy in a way that is traceable back to the literature's oral foundation.

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[62] V.E. Schwab, *The Near Witch* (Titan Books, 2019), 21-22.

2.3 Comparative Reception of Oral Compositional Forms

Beyond identifying structural similarities between modern fantasy poetics and the historical corpora that inspired them, it is the goal of this research also to compare the relative influences of the latter on the genre. Thus far, defining features of oral formulaic theory as it pertains to both Homeric Greek and Old English have been isolated and their equivalents identified in twentieth and twenty-first century composition. Additionally, both characteristics have been connected to the fantasy writings of J.R.R. Tolkien, who serves as a likely lens through which the dissemination of such structures from ancient sources might be accounted for. In the case of the Homeric formula, contemporary fantasists have utilized epithets to bolster associations of nobility, divinity, monstrousness, or legendary status of figures within their mythos, much as Homer does with Achilles and Odysseus, Zeus and Hera. More significantly from a structural perspective, the modern use of epithets can be seen to fulfill the same compositional role, completing verses in accordance with their meter. On the other hand, the influence of Anglo-Saxon poetry's alliterative formula cannot be understated. Hallmarks of alliterative verse are not simply common throughout fantasy literature; they are present and observable across the works of all modern authors examined. For this reason, it is supported that modern poetics display a greater degree of influence from Old English compositional stylings.

However, this is not to diminish the significance of modern fantasy's reception of epithets in verse. Observing both Rowling and Martin's epithetical descriptions of legendary and supernatural figures supports that the Homeric practice holds a cemented role in world building and the legitimization of fantasy lore. Moreover, it is remarkable to see instances where these are employed structurally in the same manner across traditions separated by millennia. Still, such occurrences were limited amongst the authors analyzed, at least in respect to their poetic

interludes. Apart from the two previously mentioned, only Paolini contributes further evidence, and of this only one is concrete, the *Brisingr* verse that ends "sweet Aethrid o'Dauth".[63] Therefore, the stylistic influences of alliterative verse are far more widespread in fantasy, because, as previously stated, variations of this form are utilized by every author addressed by this research.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that alliteration has not pervaded the present-day scene unblemished from the original formula. Much of the process of identifying verses from fantasy literature as falling within the framework of alliterative verse requires allowances for certain creative license. While these are allowances afforded to both Old and Middle English texts, they are certainly not part of the majority. The same cannot be said of the modern equivalent. Of the lines singled out, only roughly ten percent conform to the majority's standards in the Anglo-Saxon model. If only these instances were counted, none other than Martin and Paolini could be said to exhibit Old English influence, dropping the evidence of such linguistic impact to potentially inconclusive levels. In addition, not described in the previous section is that an attention-worthy portion of alliteration in modern fantasy poetry is freeform in nature, ignoring alignment in regard to stressed syllables or simply an unrepeated occurrence between two words. These instances were not prioritized throughout the course of this research, nor were they taken into consideration when discerning the degree to which such poems resembled the Anglo-Saxon formula. Yet, for some authors, such as J.K. Rowling, this is the primary way in which alliteration appears in their works. Still, the majority show preference for patterns of alliteration across stressed syllables and halves of the line.

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[63] Christopher Paolini, *Brisingr* (New York, NY: Golden Books Publishing Company, 2008), 140.

Despite these attestations of adaptation and alteration to the alliterative formula, the evidence for the foundational influence of the Anglo-Saxon formula on fantasy poetics is statistically significant. Indeed, many of the alterations fall within patterns identified in past traditions of alliterative verse and even demonstrate a living nature to the formula within the modern context. Thus, when compared to the impact of the Homeric oral compositional formula as viewed through epithets and metrical blocks, it is the view of this work that the influence of the alliterative formula is both more widespread and prevalent in the poetics of modern fantasy.

3.0 The Variances in Figurative Language – Similes and Metaphors

Unlike discussions of formulaic composition and metrical regulations, the concept of similes and metaphors as figurative language is one that is widely familiar to the English audience. This is due largely to the fact that the English literary corpus, poetic and prosaic alike, is steeped with these features; fantasy literature is no exception. However, while there is no universal formula for figurative language in either of these traditions, certain kinds or qualities of similes and metaphors rise to the surface of Classical and Old English texts, and they are observably distinct. Quite unambiguously, the most prolific form of these in Classical literature is the epic simile, to which simple similes and metaphors take a secondary position. On the other hand, Anglo-Saxon literature makes common use of simple similes and clearly demonstrates a cultural framework for recurrent metaphorical tropes, while avoiding multi-line epic similes. These two methods accomplish similar feats of poetic imagery, but as will be elaborated, the long and short forms create variations in mental associations. In turn, this displays differences in the ways authors process the worlds both real and fictitious, for as the philosopher Hannah Arendt proposes, conscious metaphors are how individuals establish intercommunication with the world.[64] Thus, in some ways, the process of discerning relation between Classical or Old English figurative language is a matter of observing length, but in others, it concerns a deeper analysis of the inherent associations behind each image.

[64] Wout Cornelissen, "Thinking in Metaphors," in *Artifacts of Thinking*, ed. Roger Berkowitz and Ian Storey (Fordham University Press, 2017), 77.

To begin with, the short Anglo-Saxon simile exemplifies the very basics of such constructions. For example, as Seamus Heaney translates, the *Beowulf* poet describes the hero's ship: "Over the waves, with the wind behind her / and foam at her neck, she flew like a bird".[65] The simile forms a simple association between the boat and the speed and effortlessness of a bird in flight. The passage does not further elaborate this relationship or the role of the bird, but instead functions based upon the presumed experiences of the audience. This appears again in a later scene as the poet writes, "the place brightened / the way the sky does when heaven's candle is shining clearly".[66] This is undoubtedly a simile, even if Heaney's translation breaks from the layman's expectations of 'like' or 'as'; but, if this were ever to be a point of contention, alternative translations, such as that by Frances Gummere, do opt to interpret the Old English *swā* in this context as 'as'.[67] Once again, the *Beowulf* similes limit additional clarification regarding the associated object, relying on the intuited conceptualizations of the audience. In this second case, only the slightest expansion beyond the single noun is put forth, and this can potentially be attributed to the additional clarity demanded by the kenning "heaven's candle".[68] Lastly, to illustrate this phenomenon as one belonging to Anglo-Saxon verse beyond merely *Beowulf*, in the Venerable Bede's "The Story of Cædmon", Cædmon (in translation) sings, "He first created for men's sons / heaven as a roof".[69] In the same manner previously described, Bede relates God's formation of heaven, as illustrated in the biblical passages of Genesis, to the erection of a roof over a house. He does not delineate the function or nature of such a

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[65] Heaney, *Beowulf*, ln. 217-218.
[66] Heaney, *Beowulf*, ln. 1570-1572.
[67] Francis Barton Gummere, trans., *Beowulf* (Project Gutenberg, 1997).
[68] The kenning "heaven's candle" refers to the sun. The Anglo-Saxon practice of kennings will be explored at length in a later section and is, at this point, only a coincidental feature of this simile.
[69] Greenblatt, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 31.

construction but allows for the receivers' individualized knowledge of the object. Thus is the pattern throughout the vast majority of Old English literature.

It is the practice of this research to first relate the poetic structures of antiquity to the works of Tolkien with the idea that he serves as the primary vehicle by which more uncommon or specialized features of verse are passed into the modern environment. Although, in this case, such a process may be unnecessary, owing to the traceable continuity of simple similes as a feature of English literature throughout the centuries, both in prose and poetry. Nevertheless, for the sake of coherency within the argument of this research, this procedure will be observed. Within *The Lord of the Rings*, Legolas' song of the maiden Nimrodel includes numerous examples of similes without extensive elaboration. In the song they read,

> And in the wind she went as light
>
> As leaf of linden-tree.
>
> ...
>
> Her voice as falling silver fell
>
> ...
>
> From helm to sea they saw him leap,
>
> As arrow from the string,
>
> And dive into the water deep,
>
> As mew upon the wing.
>
> ...
>
> Afar they saw him strong and fair

Go riding like a swan.[70]

It is not necessary to analyze each of these similes independently, for they function in generally the same way, but the first line provided highlights particularly well the deliberate ambiguity of the simple simile. It is unclear what exactly Tolkien intends by a woman going "as light", but the phrase arouses a multitude of connotational associations as it exists separately from any authorial imposition. Instead, Tolkien relies on the individual experiences of his readers and, indeed, employs this as a feature of excellence in his poetic imagery. This feature is assumed by J.K. Rowling's verses as she writes, "His eyes are as green as a fresh pickled toad, / His hair is as dark as a blackboard".[71] Furthermore, George R.R. Martin later writes, "The Dornishman's wife was as fair as the sun".[72] In all of these instances, the authors never interject the intended connotations of the parallels drawn, nor do they expand their definitions of *darkness* or *fairness*. This is the essence of the simple simile as it appears in Old English poetry.

The approach taken by Ancient Greek and Latin poetry is often much to the contrary. The Classical genre of epic poetry unironically gave rise to the epic simile, in which the same figurative associations are drawn out over multiple lines, accounting for details and interpolations merely presumed by the simple simile. At their foundation, such interludes were constructed to provide relief from an otherwise lengthy narrative scene, sometimes linking multiple similes to achieve this effect.[73] This is exemplified throughout battle scenes of the *Iliad*:

> Even as a consuming fire maketh a boundless forest to blaze on the peaks of a mountain, and from afar is the glare thereof to be seen, even so from their innumerable bronze, as

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[70] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1994), 331-332.
[71] J.K. Rowling, *Chamber of Secrets* (New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 1998), 238.
[72] Martin, *A Storm of Swords*, 78.
[73] Carroll Moulton, "Similes in the Iliad," *Hermes* 102, no. 3 (1974), 382.

> they marched forth, went the dazzling gleam up through the sky unto the heavens. And as the many tribes of winged fowl, wild geese or cranes or long-necked swans on the Asian mead by the streams of Caystrius, fly this way and that, glorying in their strength of wing, and with loud cries settle ever onwards, and the mead resoundeth; even so their many tribes poured forth from ships and huts into the plain of Scamander, and the earth echoed wondrously beneath the tread of men and horses.[74]

It is not difficult to see where Homer's style diverges from that of the *Beowulf* poet. Just within the initial association, drawn along the string of epic similes, between a wildfire and the gleam of the Greeks' armor, the fire itself is firstly given greater contextualization as one burning a mountaintop forest. Then, this blaze is further identified by the visibility of the glare it produces. Only after both of these images are connected to the predicate of the simile is it finally linked to the subject, the bronze. The chain of similes in its entirety constitutes nearly thirty metrical lines in the original Greek. Unlike the composers of simple similes, the Classical poet does not rely on illustrative preconceptions among his audience and does not relinquish figurative details to the indeterminable imagination of the individual. This is in no way meant to discount the compositional skill of the epic poet; truly, the effect achieved by these structures is unrivaled in its ability to convey the enormity and monumental scale of such scenes. In fact, it is this variation in figurative priority that best embodies the stylistic difference between simple and epic similes in respect to their modern reception.

Many more instances of epic similes are prevalent across Ancient Greek and Latin literature such as the fight between Jason and the earthborn men in the *Argonautica*[75] or the

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[74] Homer, *Iliad*, trans. A.T. Murray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924), 2.455-466.
[75] Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, trans. William H. Race (Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 3.1359-1404.; Both Apollonius and Virgil write in a style deliberately engaging with the

dedication of the Carthaginian citizens in Virgil's *Aeneid*.[76] Both passages follow to a certain degree the same structure as the one from the *Iliad*, weaving interconnected trails of poetic comparisons throughout a narrative account and doing so in great detail. However, this literary corpus appears to be the terminus for the epic simile in fantasy verse, if the body of modern sources analyzed as a part of this research is taken as representative of the entire genre. Within the works of Tolkien, only a select few inclusions thereof are readily observable in *The Lord of the Rings*, and these are composed in prose.[77] So, while Tolkien does make skillful use of the Homeric simile, it is done sparingly and outside of verse. Afterwards, there are no epic similes identified in the works of modern fantasy examined whatsoever. Apart from the explication that this supports the theory of J.R.R. Tolkien serving as the primary mode of linguistic pervasion into the genre, when the first ancient poetic device not found in Tolkienian fantasy is absent in subsequent sources, this is likely due to the epic similes intended function as a break within extended poetic narratives. In the case of modern fantasy verse, narrative forms are less common, and when they do appear, they are not long enough to warrant a break mid piece. Therefore, if based exclusively on the reception of simple over epic similes, fantasy poetry reflects far more the precedent set by the Old English tradition.

Although the comparative analysis of figurative language thus far strongly favors the Old English precedent, there is still at least one significant form unconsidered: Anglo-Saxon

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Homeric precedent through imitation and critique. While an analysis of the ways in which the poets go about this task is not an objective of this research, such insights notably contribute to readings of the *Argonautica* passage in particular.

[76] Virgil, *Aeneid*, ed. Clyde Pharr (Mundelein, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2015), 1.426-436.; Due to these passages' extended nature and for the sake of brevity, I have not found it wholly beneficial to provide them herein. However, I believe they are important to mention so as to illustrate the Classical use of the epic simile outside of Homer.

[77] Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 711.; Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 928.

metaphorical motifs. As previously introduced, Old English poetry clearly displays that the Anglo-Saxon culture possessed a framework by which metaphorical language was understood, but this is not most frequently seen through metaphors as they appear in modern literature. Instead, the essential figurative structure in the Anglo-Saxon tradition is the kenning. The kenning differs from the standard metaphor insofar as it is typically a compound of two words used in place of a name or object; the subject of the comparison is intuited from the image.[78] It is this inherent comparison that distinguishes the kenning from the descriptive epithet.[79] This feature has already been observed as the coincidental inclusion of "heaven's candle" in the second example of the simple simile in *Beowulf*. Furthermore, this can be seen in "The Seafarer" as *pæl-peg* [whale-way][80] or *eard-stapa* [earth-stepper] in "The Wanderer".[81] Notably, they are incredibly condensed iterations of associations drawn figuratively between two concepts. The utilization of kennings is also taken up in the literature of Tolkien to a vast degree, comprising Frodo and Bilbo's recognizable titles of *Ring-bearer* and *Barrel-rider*. In Tolkien's verse, these appear comparably as often poetically: "golden timbers", "Sea-kings",[82] "the timeless halls", "living flame", and of course "Middle-earth".[83] In this way, Tolkien shares his deep familiarity with the Old English kenning, inserting their condensed metaphor in place of names and fictional figures as well as mundane objects throughout *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

From this point in the history of fantasy literature, following Tolkien, kennings make semi-regular appearances in verse. Martin's deity of the Mother is referred to as "strength of

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[78] Greenblatt, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 9.
[79] Thomas Gardner, "The Old English Kenning: A Characteristic Feature of Germanic Poetical Diction?" *Modern Philology* 67, no. 2 (1969), 109.
[80] Thorpe, *Codex Exoniensis*, 309.
[81] Thorpe, *Codex Exoniensis*, 286.
[82] Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 786.
[83] Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 229-230.

women" and "font of mercy".[84] Susan Cooper's *Greenwitch* introduces a manuscript reading, "the oldest hills" and "the raven boy".[85] Paolini, in Tolkienian fashion, imagines the dwarven language of his *Inheritance Cycle* to be one that incorporates Anglo-Saxon themes and composes verses therein that highlight such features. Although many of these allusions remain unexplained to the audience, the devices present themselves clearly as kennings to one familiar with the Old English precedent when reading the dwarven song:

> Down the rushing mere-wash
> Of Kilf's welling blood,
> We ride the twisting timers,
> For hearth, clan, and honor.
>
> Under the ernes' sky-vat,
> Through the ice-wolves' forest bowls,
> We ride the gory wood,
> For iron, gold, and diamond.
>
> Let hand-ringer and bearded gaper fill my grip
> And battle-leaf guard my stone
> As I leave the halls of my fathers
> For the empty land beyond.[86]

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[84] Martin, *A Clash of Kings*, 613.
[85] Susan Cooper, *Greenwitch* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 2013), 151.
[86] Paolini, *Eldest*, 147.

In these examples, the tradition of using the kenning as a compressed metaphor persists. In some cases, this is done to better illustrate the subject described, as in the hymn presented by Martin, and in others the device creates a sense of mystery in its ambiguity, such as the manuscript at the end of Cooper's *Greenwitch*. Regardless, both embrace the Old English technique in a way that establishes a literary atmosphere integral to fantasy.

Lastly, our extant corpus of Old English poetry illuminates the fact that the Anglo-Saxon people possessed a worldview conducive to metaphorical imagery, in a way separate from the direct imposition of the literary metaphor. This can be seen in the prominent creation of allegory throughout the Old and Middle English traditions, although this work does not seek to examine either Christian or moral allegory in respect to their intended messages. Still, within these allegories there are standard and consistent images that aim to better contextualize the poem's primary wisdom. This is a characteristic outlined by Gwendolyn Morgan in her essay on the English practices of religious and allegorical verse, in which she delineates the separations between Old English wisdom literature and true allegory.[87] Within many of these texts, a recurrent backdrop is that of the sea, meant to invest a notion of tumultuousness with respect to the physical and mental life.[88] The sea itself is never the subject of the allegory, but rather a familiar point of orientation and representation for the Anglo-Saxon individual.[89] In this way, despite existing itself as an aspect of a larger allegory, the sea is sometimes seen rather as

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[87] Gwendolyn Morgan, "Religious and Allegorical Verse," in *A Companion to Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 27-28.
[88] Antonina Harbus, "The Maritime Imagination and the Paradoxical Mind in Old English Poetry," *Anglo-Saxon England* 39 (2011), 22-23.
[89] Examples of this phenomenon can be observed in poems such as "The Wanderer", "The Seafarer", and "The Whale".

metaphorical in sense, indeterminately representative of life, thought, reminiscence, and journey within the enveloping verse.[90]

Again, this conventionalized practice is reproduced dramatically by Tolkien across several instances, sometimes adapting the image of the sea into other forms, more relatable to a modern audience, but maintaining the associations of the sea in the Anglo-Saxon mindset. Perhaps Tolkien's most impactful reiteration of this is in Bilbo and Frodo's song reflected upon throughout *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*:

> Roads go ever ever on
>
> Under cloud and under star,
>
> Yet feet that wandering have gone
>
> Turn at last to home afar.[91]

In Tolkien's image of the road, just as in the Old English sea, the association is formed regarding the journey undertaken as well as the mental state of the hobbits and a larger statement of life. Moreover, this poetic framework is mirrored in the modern genre by Neil Gaiman's use of the nursery rhyme "How Many Miles to Babylon" in *Stardust*[92] and Paolini's lay over the "land of shadows",[93] among others. Thus, the metaphorical framework represented by the sea in Old English literature exists in similar forms in the contemporary scene.

As presented by the adoption of the simple simile, kennings, and consistent metaphorical frameworks, the evidence strongly supports the prevailing substance of the Old English tradition.

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[90] Harbus, "The Maritime Imagination and the Paradoxical Mind in Old English Poetry", 23.

[91] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 273.
[92] Neil Gaiman, *Stardust* (New York, NY: HarperTeen, 2009), 80.
[93] Paolini, *Eldest*, 463-464.

Indeed, modern authors show a characteristic preference for brevity. Where similes appear, they are often short and at the end of the poetic line, as in “fair as the sun” or “like a swan”, and metaphorical associations are succinctly formed, either in a single phrase or merely implied as with kennings. This inclination for contemporary authors to utilize only short-form figurative devices is one of the phenomena better observed and understood through this process of linguistic comparison, exemplifying the goals of this research. The practice of Anglo-Saxon metaphorical comparisons simply allows for image-rich verse without requiring an extended detraction from the main narrative. However, to deemphasize the involvement of the Classical precedent in modern figurative language based alone off of this evidence alone would be premature; to do so assumes Classical poetry to be devoid of simple similes and metaphors, which is inaccurate. In the *Aeneid*, for one, Virgil describes Aeneas as touched by the *glow of youth*,[94] and, additionally, Apollonius illustrates Eros’ arrow as burning within Medea *like a flame*.[95] Therefore, while Classical epic may be characterized by the epic simile, this is by no means the exclusive form of figurative language seen throughout. For these reasons, the evidence collected from this body of fantasy literature is not notable in a way of rejecting Classical structures as much as it is for highlighting those of Old English. Thus, it is supported that modern fantasists in poetic composition are preferential towards figurative language that is simple and concise, drawing associations without the cumbersome length of the epic simile, which is most consistent with the Old English model.

[94] Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.590-591.
[95] Apollonius, *Argonautica*, 3.287.

4.0 A Reexamination of Epithets, Kennings, and Patronymics

So far, both epithets and kennings have been analyzed as devices of separate poetic systems, the epithet as a metrical construction in Homeric oral formulaic composition and the kenning as a condensed iteration of Old English figurative language. Not yet examined are the naming phenomenon of patronymics, in which case individuals are referred to with respect to their father or bloodline. Examples of patronymics appear within both the Classical and Old English tradition. While all of these methods of naming fulfill diverse functions in their respective sources, they notably impart and prioritize different descriptive values through their natures. For example, the nature of the Homeric epithet is to make salient a characteristic, sometimes literal, of the individual described,[96] as a result prioritizing either physical capabilities, status, or achievement in direct connection to the figure. On the other hand, kennings impart features more abstract in their understanding. These can reflect duties and physical acts, such as in the case of "ring-giver", in reference to the various lords in *Beowulf,* but are often utilized separately from any concrete realization of these deeds. Additionally, a true kenning contains an inherent metaphor, implying a connection between two ideas.[97] In this way, the compact metaphors are meant to impart connotational rather than literal or allusive significance, a means for the audience to better envision the nature of the character. As Tolkien himself describes in his essay "On Translating *Beowulf*", these figurative associations would have conjured image-rich connections within the audience of the time, regardless of a literal

[96] Eleanor F. Rambo, "On Homer's Epithets," *The Classical Journal* 28, no. 2 (1932), 128.
[97] Gardner, "The Old English Kenning: A Characteristic Feature of Germanic Poetical Diction?", 109.

sense.[98] Lastly, the patronymic is clear in its intent: to place the figure within the broader context of the narrative, connecting them through allusion and cultural ties to the achievements of their forefathers. This embodies the ancient significance of familial relations, a tradition less tangible in modern society.

Then, with the understanding that each custom of naming in poetry carries unique priorities in their impartations, it becomes increasingly relevant to observe such patterns in modern fantasy, the results supporting theories of our own hierarchy of values. In this case, the prevalence and frequency of each practice is of greater importance than their mere presence. Thus, below lies the data gathered from the modern fantasy sources included in this study. The

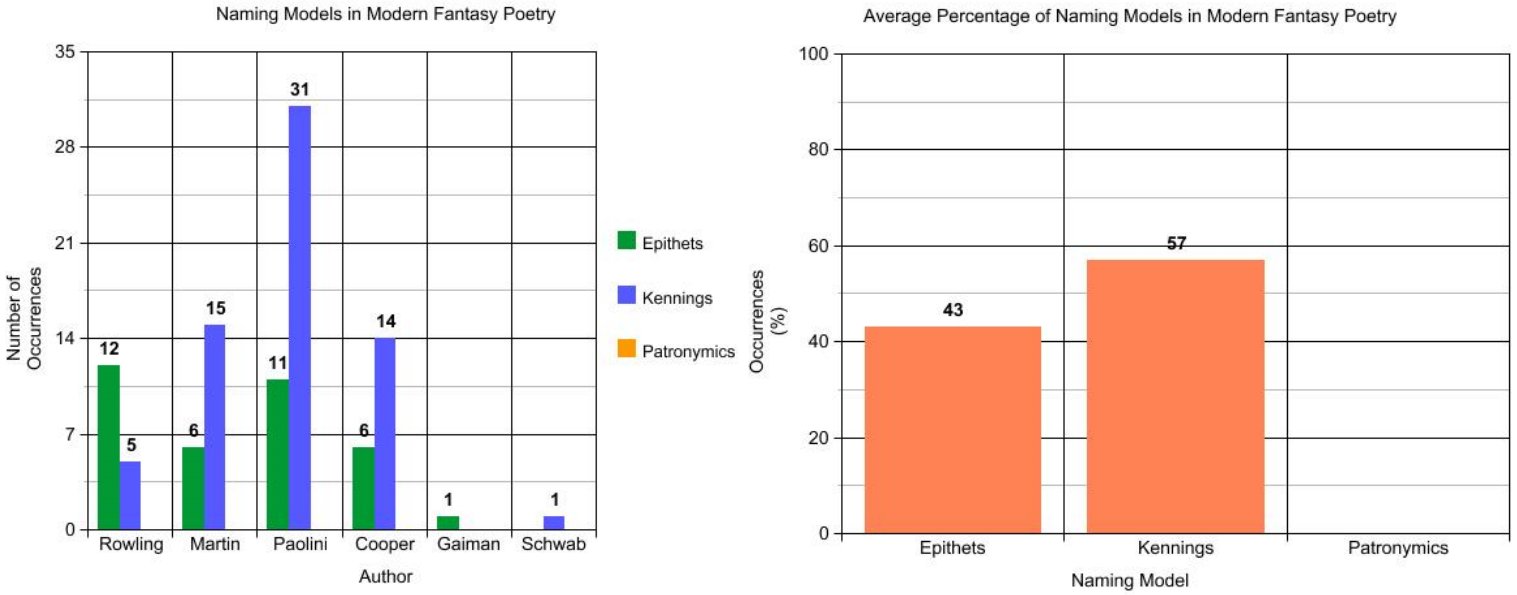

Figure 1 Data of Naming Models Frequency

data shows that, amongst the majority of modern authors, kennings were more prominent a feature than representations of the Homeric epithet, the exceptions to this being Rowling and Gaiman. However, on average, kennings and their contemporary equivalents comprised

[98] J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Translating *Beowulf*," in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London, England: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 60.

approximately fifty-seven percent of the observed naming practices used by each writer. Yet epithets, constituting an average forty-three percent of each fantasist's use of non-standard naming, maintain a significant secondary position in modern composition. Patronymics were absent in all cases.

What, then, does this mean about the values expressed by modern poetics? For one, it implies that the honor and status conferred on a host by familial connections is held in lesser esteem by present-day writers and audiences. This would account for the diminished popularity of the patronymic.[99] For, although Agamemnon is referred to as "Ἀτρείδης [son of Atreus]" throughout the *Iliad*,[100] Harry Potter is never called "the son of James", nor is Tyrion Lannister referred to as "son of Tywin", at least not within the context of each series' verse interludes. Switching to one of the more popular models, the position of epithets was previously noted in section 2.2 for their ability to legitimize legendary characters in the fantasy mythos. Sometimes this is accomplished with simplicity and clarity, as in "γέρων ἥρως Ἐχένηος [the old hero Echeneus]" in the *Odyssey*[101] or "Odo the hero" in *Harry Potter*.[102] In other cases, it is done by establishing the characters as an embodiment of prominent virtues within the narrative, such as "Bold Gryffindor", "Sweet Hufflepuff", "Shrewd Slytherin",[103] and "wise old Ravenclaw".[104] These forms encompass the majority of epithets in modern fantasy poetics. First, they form characterizations based on prioritized aspects of each individual, either from their societal status (i.e., "hero") or their representation of popular values. This supports that the use of epithets

[99] For further discussion of patronymics and their significance in Homeric poetry see John A. Scott's "Patronymics as a Test of the Relative Age of Homeric Books", which was used as a reference for the discussions herein.
[100] Homer, *Iliad*, 1.7.
[101] Homer, *Odyssey*, 11.342.
[102] J.K. Rowling, *Half-Blood Prince* (New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2005), 488.
[103] Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 176.
[104] Rowling, *Sorcerer's Stone*, 117.

reflects a continued engagement with cultural values as a means to legitimize fantasy figures. In other words, modern fantasists firmly establish their legendary figures through their perceived value by others. Second, this concern with *perceived* value takes shape in the epithets surrounding the physical achievements of the individual. For example, in the same way that Ajax is denoted "bulwark of the Achaeans" for his large stature and defensive prowess when holding back the Trojans,[105] Harry Potter is labelled "The Boy Who Lived", due to his unique experience surviving the killing curse.[106] Thus, authors continue to depict characters as the embodiment of a particular deed or action. This, in turn, implies that such figures are appraised based on their prior contributions to the society within the literary work. Third, and still of consequence within poetics, such adjectival epithets as used to describe the Hogwarts School founders suggest the prominence of ornamentation in verse. In cases both ancient and modern, epithets, on occasion, contribute tangibly to the narrative reception of a verse; other times they contribute more the sound of the poem, being ornamental in nature.[107] This, in addition, suggests that the authors prioritize the quality of poetic composition in order to legitimize their figures and work.

However, it is likely that kennings fulfill partially divergent roles. Instead of attaching to characteristics, internal, physical, or social, they depend largely on the intuited sense of an object. Kennings are a "partial and often imaginative or fanciful description of a thing" and are thus meant to inspire particular associations regardless of literal connections.[108] In the same way that epithets accomplish the poetic function of sound and ornamentation, kennings serve as compressed figurative language, which might be seen as a feature of legitimate verse. Yet, more

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[105] Homer, *Iliad*, 3.229.
[106] J.K. Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows* (New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2007), 704.
[107] A. E. Harvey, "Homeric Epithets in Greek Lyric Poetry," *The Classical Quarterly* 7, no. 3/4 (1957), 206.
[108] Tolkien, "On Translating *Beowulf*," 59.

so, kennings prioritize the evocative connotation of relating the character through metaphor. This can be seen in Martin's illustration of the Mother deity, for "font of mercy" conjures different images than "merciful Mother".[109] Rather than emphasize the character quality of the Mother as merciful, she is instead related to a reservoir of mercy, evoking a liquid sense of outpouring and provision. This further contributes to the context of the poetic interlude, in which Sansa Stark, one of Martin's protagonists, prays for divine dispensation of safety and safekeeping. By utilizing this kenning for the Mother, Martin encourages his audience to believe in the predisposition of the gods of Westeros to provide for mortals, beyond simply possessing attributes of mercy. Furthermore, modern fantasy authors can sometimes employ kennings to create an atmosphere of mystery surrounding a figure, ultimately subverting the prior expectations of their readership upon reveal. In Cooper's *The Dark is Rising*, the final verse section foretells the trials to come across her subsequent books, including the phrase "the green witch".[110] In a manner similar to that of *Sir Gawain*'s Green Knight, a green witch imparts images of dark magic and countercultural tendencies against a backdrop of the uncivilized and uncultivated mystery of the forest. However, after this gripping assumption has been formed within the minds of her audience, Cooper ultimately reveals the Greenwitch to be a benevolent spirit residing within a wooden effigy. In both of these cases, the authors utilize kennings as a means to better illustrate intended depictions of figures to the audience, drawing them into the atmosphere of the scene, either to fulfill or subvert the expectations of such connotated responses.

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[109] Martin, *A Clash of Kings*, 613.
[110] Susan Cooper, *The Dark is Rising* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 2013), 271.

Thus, via the data obtained regarding naming conventions in modern fantasy, we gain insight into present-day cultural values and how authors respond to these standards. Because of the absence of patronymics, it is likely that the honor and status conferred on a host by familial connections are perceived as highly by contemporary writers and audiences. On the other hand, the tradition of establishing figures based on their observable characteristics, virtues, physical capabilities, and achievements remains alive and strong, accounting for only slightly less than half of modern naming practices in poetry through the epithet. Lastly, with the kenning or condensed metaphor comprising more than half of the identifying structures in fantasy verse, it is supported that writers are prioritizing audience reception, allowing for images formed outside of their pieces to contribute significantly to a narrative understanding. In this notion lies a recognition of connotational sense and imagery serving a paramount purpose in fantasy poetry.

4.1 The Dark Lord and Other Villainous Fiends

Over the course of this research, a great deal of investigation was given to critical analyses of modern fantasy as undertaken by other scholars. While much of this involved the symbolic representations of the antagonists therein, none discussed the poetic significance of their names and titles. This was particularly surprising with respect to one of the recuring names in the fantasy genre: The Dark Lord. The Dark Lord has been a title utilized by Tolkien referring to both Sauron and Morgoth, by Rowling regarding Voldemort, and, though it lies outside the realm of literature, the cultural relevance of George Lucas' Dark Lord Darth Vader in his *Star Wars* trilogy is not lost in its significance to popular fantasy. Yet, none of the sources analyzed identified this trope as a representation of the Old English kenning. By addressing the various

approved kennings used by the *Beowulf* poet to describe Grendel, it becomes possible to recognize the Dark Lord within this framework.

As put forth by Tolkien, kennings are imaginative descriptions meant to inspire particular associations in the audience, without particular regard to literal connections.[111] This is applicable to the Dark Lord title in two ways, firstly in the concept of darkness.[112] While darkness can very much be understood in the literal sense as the absence of light or inability to see, it often takes on a connotation of evil, the supernatural, or psychological fear. This phenomenon is explored by Verlyn Flieger in her article "Defying and Defining Darkness". In this article, Flieger identifies darkness in the context of Tolkien's works as a character operating within the physical spaces of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* as much as within the internal struggles of Frodo Baggins.[113] In this way, the concept of darkness as employed by the modern fantasist embodies far more than an actual darkened space and adopts a more imaginative sense, which Tolkien defines as a quintessential aspect of kennings. Similarly, in *Beowulf*, Grendel is connected to the idea of darkness. From the Old English *sē þe in þȳstrum bād*, Heaney translates this instance as "prowler through the dark".[114] While Grendel's situation is, at first, ambiguous as to a literal or metaphorical interpretation, for the creature truly does attack Heorot at nighttime, this becomes clearer when taken in conjunction with the following verses. In these lines, the *Beowulf* poet places his description of Grendel in immediate opposition to that of the Almighty, which he

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[111] Tolkien, "On Translating *Beowulf*," 59-60.
[112] While not necessarily a subject of this work, the negative implications of darkness as a symbol of evil or moral depravity carry large ramifications when placed within the context of racism in literature. For further reading on this subject, I encourage beginning with Helen Young's "Diversity and Difference: Cosmopolitanism and *The Lord of the Rings*" in the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* Vol. 21, No. 3 (2010).
[113] Verlyn Flieger, "Defying and Defining Darkness." *Mallorn: The Journal of the Tolkien Society*, no. 61 (2020), 15-16.
[114] Heaney, *Beowulf*, 8-9.

connects to the figures of the sun, moon, lamplight, and lanterns.[115] Therefore, the darkness associated with Grendel takes on a metaphorical and psychological meaning as well as the literal, contrasted with divine goodness. As a result, 'Dark' becomes an essential metaphorical aspect of the Dark Lord kenning.

To add to this conceptualization, Voldemort, the Dark Lord of Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, has little to no literal darkness about him. In fact, during his reemergence in *The Goblet of Fire*, Voldemort is described as "whiter than a skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes".[116] Voldemort himself is described as pale, light, and colorful – although not with positively connotated colors – and only his robes are illustrated as black. Consequently, it can be concluded that the aspect of darkness in his title is purely metaphorical in its sense.

The second way in which non-literal associations are drawn from the name of the Dark Lord lies, naturally, in the second word of the compound: Lord. For those familiar with Rowling's *Harry Potter*, the illustrative feature of the word becomes immediately clear, for Voldemort is a lord in no literal manner. Even if some semblance of regality is granted to Tom Riddle through his ancestral ties to Salazar Slytherin, Slytherin himself is never referenced by titles of nobility. However, the title of lord holds connotative associations with both power and command – and, perhaps, dominance over others – which are more so the characteristics intentionally attributed to Voldemort in Rowling's writings. Positions of power or the lack thereof are images with a precedent of employment in Old English kennings. On the opposite end of the spectrum from *lord*, Grendel is described by the *Beowulf* poet during his fight with Beowulf as a "hell-captive" or, in Heaney's translation, a "hell-serf".[117] In the inverse manner

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[115] Heaney, *Beowulf*, 9.
[116] Rowling, *Goblet of Fire*, 643.
[117] Heaney, *Beowulf*, 52-53.

that *lord* imparts a sense of power and authority to Voldemort, Grendel is relegated to a stance of powerlessness as he succumbs to Beowulf and the fate dealt to him by his evil deeds. Thus, in the same pattern tied between darkness in *Beowulf* and the Dark Lord, these two elaborations illustrate that nouns of social status and power contribute to a metaphorical understanding of names in modern fantasy.

With these two analyses in conjunction with each other, the modern title of the Dark Lord is supported as a kenning. Due to the common nature of this title in modern fantasy literature, it may be strange to think of it within the context of antiquated poetic language. Yet, even this lends additional credibility to the identification of the Dark Lord within the Anglo-Saxon concept of kennings, for, as Tolkien notes, certain kennings became lexicalized through familiarity in the cultures of the time, becoming common synonyms for their objects.[118] Still, each element of the compound structure can be traced to an accepted precedent in Old English literature, particularly through *Beowulf*'s initial fiend, Grendel. In the association drawn between the monster and the dark, darkness becomes a connotational setting of psychological importance, inspiring fear and suggesting subversive deeds, especially when taken in the context of its subsequent opposition to light and divinity. Then, with Grendel labeled as a captive or serf to symbolize his powerlessness in the face of Beowulf and fate, the inverse function of *lord* is legitimized as a metaphorical picture of power and authority. Thus, the Anglo-Saxon precedent supports reading the Dark Lord as a modern kenning. When this is accepted, the prominence of kennings in modern fantasy is heightened greatly, as the trope of the Dark Lord becomes ever more popular throughout works of fiction.

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[118] Tolkien, "On Translating *Beowulf*", 58-59.

5.0 Conclusion

From the beginning, the preliminary goal of this work has been to trace a discernable pathway of dissemination from the poetic stylings of Classical and Anglo-Saxon literature into the modern age. In large part, this has been done through examination of the life and works of J.R.R. Tolkien, to whom almost all modern fantasists attribute inspiration in some form. As a result of his deeply rooted connections to both eras, it has appeared prudent to utilize Tolkien as a lens through which these poetic patterns might impact authors and readers less familiar with the source material. The results of the data gathered herein support this notion, for features of Classical and Old English poetry prevalent in *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*, and Tolkien's related works were found in statistically significant amounts throughout the sampling of the modern genre, whereas those mostly absent in Tolkien's fantasy were also absent within contemporary sources.

In addition, this research has sought to compare the impacts of both the Classical and Old English literary corpus by identifying reflections of their hallmark characteristics in modern verse. In many cases, the effects of Old English form were found to be more widespread than those of Greek and Latin. Lines conforming to the framework of alliterative verse were found across the works of all authors sampled, simple similes and condensed metaphors as kennings were found in far greater supply than definitively Classical epic similes, and instances of the kenning outnumbered those of the Homeric-resemblant epithet by a slim margin. Moreover, by referencing the various kennings used by the *Beowulf* poet, this work purports that, in the case of the Dark Lord, present-day fantasy tropes, previously unaddressed within the context of antiquated poetics, contribute to the body of the contemporary reception of these poetics. Due to

the prominence of these tropes, this claim further supports the popular continuation of Old English linguistic styles. Ultimately, the data gathered regarding the observed forms supports a preferential reception of Old English compositional forms.

Nevertheless, there was substantial evidence to support the additional continuance of Classical forms. This can be seen primarily through the application of epithets. As discovered in section 2.1, not only do modern authors utilize epithets to legitimize their characters within their mythos, but they also fulfill nearly identical roles within the context of verse and meter as examined by the Parry-Lord theory of Homeric oral composition. With Anglo-Saxon poetry not emphasizing or conforming to a particular metrical pattern, the use of epithets to compose metrical blocks by modern writers is a trait distinctly reminiscent of the Classical form. Moreover, these epithets are common in modern fantasy, only slightly less popular than Old English naming practices in poetry, and they illustrate characters by highlighting values similar to those expressed in Homeric epics. Thus, the impact of Classical poetics is not diminished by the preferential reception of Old English stylings.

In the end, both Classical and Old English forms are represented within the genre of modern fantasy literature. Naturally, not all key aspects of these forms remain present. Due to the shortened nature of modern poetic interludes, epic similes have faded out of cycles of reiteration, and, possibly due to shifting cultural values, patronymics have become unpopular in the process of naming and addressing characters. However, as a result of J.R.R. Tolkien's enthusiastic work to pull the poetic styles of antiquity into the present age, historic artistry has persevered, coming alive through the expression of fantasy authors.

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