

# Rhythmical Prose



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*Ubi sunt (qui ante fuerunt)*

## Tolkien's *ubi sunt*

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? (*The Two Towers*)

## Homiletic *ubi sunt*

Hwar syndon þas rican caseres and þa cyningas þe iu wæron,  
oððe þa ealdormenn þe bebodu setton?  
hwar is heora domera domstow?  
hwar is heora ofermedla butan mid moldan beþeht and on witum gewrecen?  
[...]  
Hwar com middaneardes gestreon?  
Hwar com þyssere woruld welan?  
Hwar com foldan fægernyss?  
Hwar comon þa þæ geornlicost æhta tyledon and oðrum eft yrfe læfdon?

(Napier homily 49)

## Paranomasia and Etymology

Abraham se halga heahfæder þisne dæg on unarimedum þingum · ge mid wordum ge mid  
dædum · **towearðne wyscte 7 wiste** (Vercelli homily I)

## Enumerations

Ðær is þonne heof. and wop. and cyrm. and granung. and cwanung. and toða gristbitung. and  
ðær is seo singale niht. and ðær syndon þa ecan þystru. and ðær ne bið næfre nænig leoht  
geseald. ac þær bið se hearda hungor. and se bitera þurst. and ðær is wanunga and wita. ma  
þonne æniges mannes earan ahlystan magon.

(Bazire–Cross homily 11)

## Binomial Pairs

þær biþ cele and brene. and broga. attor and ofer geþyld **granung and gnornung wroht and  
wop. man. and morþor. sar. and susl.** *(The Devil's Account of the Next World)*

## Wulfstan's Two-Stress Phrases

Her syndan mannsлагan 7 mægslagan  
7 mæsserbanan 7 mynsterhatan;  
7 her syndan mansworan 7 morþorwyrhtan;  
7 her syndan myltestran 7 bearnmyrðran  
5 7 fule forlegene horingas manege;  
7 her syndan wiccan 7 wælcyrían.  
7 her syndan ryperas 7 reaferas  
7 woroldstruderas  
7, hrædest is to cweþenne,  
10 mana 7 misdæda ungerim ealra.

*(Sermo Lupi)*



## Ælfric's Alliterative Prose

- 38 Hleotan man mot mid geleafan swa þeah  
on worulddōingum, butan wiccecræfte,  
þæt him deme seo ta, gif hi hwæt dælan willað;  
41 þis nis nan wiglunġ, ac bið wissunġ foroft.  
Eallswa gelice se ðe gelyfð wiglunġum,  
oððe be fugelum oððe be fnum  
44 oððe be horsum oððe be hundum,  
ne bið he na cristen, ac bið forcuð wiðersaca.

*(On Omens)*

## Syllable-Counting

“The average length of a half-line of *Beowulf* is something just under 5 syllables, and the usual range only between 4 and 6. In the *Sermo ad Anglos* the average length is a little over 6 syllables, and while the normal range is between 5 and 7, there are something like 8 per cent of phrases with 8, and 3 per cent with 4 syllables. In the *Life of St. Oswald* the average length is nearly 7 syllables, and half-lines with only 4 are entirely absent.”

(McIntosh 120)

## From Ælfric's Latin Preface to the First Series of *Catholic Homilies*

Even if rashly or presumptuously, we have, nevertheless, translated this book from Latin works, namely from Holy Scripture, into the language to which we are accustomed for the edification of the simple who know only this language, either through reading or hearing it read; and for that reason **we could not use obscure words, just plain English**, by which it may more easily reach to the heart of the readers or listeners to the benefit of their souls, because they are unable to be instructed in a language other than the one to which they were born. (Wilcox 127)

## From Ælfric's Latin Preface to the Second Series of *Catholic Homilies*

But because you have too much praised our zeal, graciously receiving that translation, we have hastened to translate the following book just as the grace of Almighty God dictated it to us, **not with garrulous verbosity nor in unfamiliar diction but in the clear and unambiguous words of this people's language, desiring rather to profit the listeners through straightforward expression than to be praised for the composition of an artificial style**, which our simplicity has by no means mastered.

(Wilcox 128)

## From Ælfric's Old English Preface to His *Genesis*

Nu is seo foresæde boc on manegum stowum swiþe nærolice gesett, and þeah swiðe deoplice on þam gastlicum andgite, and heo is swa geendebyrd, swa swa God silf hig gedihte þam writere Moise, and we ne durren na mare awritan on Englisc þonne þæt Liden hæfþ, **ne þa endebirdnisse awendan, buton þam anum þæt þæt Leden and þæt Englisc nabbað na ane wisan on þære spræce fadunge. Æfre se þe awent oþþe se þe tæcþ of Ledene on Englisc, æfre he sceal gefadian hit swa þæt þæt Englisc hæbbe his agene wisan, elles hit biþ swiþe gedwolsum to rædenne þam þe þæs Ledenes wisan ne can.**

(Wilcox 118)

## From Ælfric's Latin Preface to the *Lives of Saints*

We have not been able in this translation always to translate word for word but, rather, we have taken care to translate diligently according to the sense, as we find it in Holy Scripture, in such **simple and clear phrases** as will profit our listeners.

(Wilcox 131)

# Bibliography

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