# The Genre of Old English Macaronic Verse

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## Abstract

This article considers a particular poetic form, historically known as macaronic verse. Surveying the three extant examples of verse of this type in Old English, this article argues that there was an established macaronic verse form known in early medieval England. This genre of verse appears to have been used primarily as a framing device where its conspicuous mixed-language style likely encouraged close reading and drew attention to the constructed nature of the text. The extant examples also suggest that this form was used especially to emphasize the importance of piety for salvation and where a broader message was personalized to an individual reader. Finally, the article considers whether this form of verse could have arisen alongside or in response to a mixed-language Old English prose tradition.

## Introduction

Several examples of verse survive from the early medieval period which consciously and consistently mix Old English and Latin phrases. While the small corpus of such texts makes generalizations difficult, this paper proposes that a specific "macaronic" form of Old English verse was known, at least to some authors, and that it carried with it a certain set of associations. Broadly, this paper seeks to explore what early English authors employing a mixed-language form hoped to achieve, why they found this particular verse form suited to their purposes, and finally how we can understand the appearance of verse of this type alongside other literary forms and innovations in the corpus of Old English.

The term macaronic does not occur in any early medieval sources. Instead, the description was first used in fifteenth century Italy, where it specifically referred to Latin texts in which vernacular words were also used, normally with the addition of

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Latinate endings.[1] The term tends to have a pejorative connotation in its use in romance languages, which likely relates to early works such as those by Teofilo Folengo who used a mixed-language verse form to write about funny and vulgar topics; Folegno gave his own, unflattering definition: "This poetic art is called "macaronic" from mac-arones, which are a certain dough made up of flour, cheese, and butter, thick, coarse, and rustic. Thus, macaronic poems must have nothing but fat, coarseness, and gross words in them".[2] As Folgeno suggests, the term itself is etymologically related to "macaroni", which seems to have denoted a simple type of peasant fare and was meant to indicate the unrefined nature of the verse. However, in English-language literary scholarship the term has gradually expanded to included mixed-language texts more generally and has no derogatory meaning (Wehrle, 1933, pp. xi–xii; Oxford University Press, 2023a, 2023b). It is with this neutral definition that I use the term macaronic to refer to the sophisticated verse form explored in this paper.

If we consider "macaronic verse" with the broadest possible definition, that is to be any verse that combines Old English with other languages, we could potentially have a variety of material. Some Old English poems, like *Azarias* or *Canticle of the Three Youths*, have single words or lines in Latin,[3] and other texts, such as *The Lord"s Prayer II* alternate between Latin and Old English passages.[4] While many aspects of language mixing warrant further study, works of these types are not the focus of this paper. Instead, I will consider poems that use both, or multiple, languages in a sustained way to construct sentences; in linguistics, this is referred to as intrasentential code-switching.[5] Verse meeting this narrower definition is quite rare in the corpus of Old English. Only three poems, or discrete portions of poems, fall into this category. These are: the final 11 lines of the poem known as *The Phoenix* occurring in the Exeter Book (Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501, f. 65v); the final 31 lines *The Rewards of Piety* found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 201, p. 166; and a poem of 17 lines known as *Aldhelm* which prefaces the main text of Aldhelm's prose *De Virginitate* in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 326, p. 5. Together poetry in this form constitutes less than 0.02% of the corpus of Old English.

While only a few examples of Old English macaronic verse survive, I will suggest that beyond their technical similarities, these pieces feature a variety of shared

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[1] For discussion of the early history of macaronic texts and its relationship to medieval English traditions, see Wehrle (1933); Archibald (2010).

[2] "Ars ista poetica nuncupatur ars macaronica a macaronibus derivata, qui macarones sunt quoddam pulmentum farina, caseo, botiro compaginatum, grossum, rude et rusticanum; ideo macaronices nil nisi grassedinem, ruditatem et vocabulazzos debet in se continere" (Folengo, 1928, 284); translation by Wenzel (1994, p. 3). Massimo Scalabrini comments on how Folengo used this form to mix "rustic with the urbane, the vulgar with the sophisticated" (2008, p. 189); see also Wherle (1933, p. xi).

[3] This poem includes the phrase "lux et tenebre" at l. 100. Another example is *Christ I*, which includes the phrase *sancta Hierusalem* at 50b. For a brief discussion of these examples, see Reider (2022, p. 433).

[4] Other examples in this same style include *The Lord's Prayer (III)*; *The Apostle's Creed*; *The Gloria patri (I)*. Editions and translations of these poems are available in Jones (2012, pp. 78–93.).

[5] There is an existing tradition of using the term macaronic in broadly this same meaning although individual definitions vary somewhat; cf. Cain (2001), who seems to be guided by these same principles, and Wherle (1933) who includes poems with full lines of Latin text, such as *The Lord's Prayer II*.

traits and can usefully be thought of as constituting their own poetic genre. More specifically, I will suggest that some early English poets knew a macaronic verse form and saw it as particularly suitable for use as a framing device. This unusual and attention-grabbing verse style seems to have acted as a stimulus signaling the need for close reading and for drawing attention to the literary and constructed nature of the text. The macaronic form further appears to have been frequently applied in framing contexts in which a broader message was personalized to an individual reader. This paper will also explore the possibility that some features of macaronic verse may have been influenced by, or developed alongside, a mixed-language prose tradition that has left few traces. While macaronic, or mixed-language, verse in Old English has been rarely studied by literary scholars, the existence of the genre provides an important testimony to the experimental and innovative nature of the Old English poetic enterprise.

## The Poems

Although individual Old English macaronic poems, particularly *The Phoenix*, have been of considerable interest to critics, as a collective these poems have received very limited attention (Cain, 2001; Crépin, 1993; Wehrle, 1933). There are, however, features which unite these texts, both in terms of form and also, more generally, in terms of theme and intention. As these three poems or extracts are quite short, I provide here the text of all three to facilitate discussion.

The majority of the long poem *The Phoenix* is written in the traditional Old English verse form, with only the final eleven lines in a macaronic style. The final macaronic lines of *The Phoenix* read:

> Hafað us alyfed     lucis auctor
> þæt we motun her     merueri,
> goddædum begietan     gaudia in celo,
> 670 þær we motun     maxima regna
> secan ond gesittan     sedibus altis,
> lifgan in lisse     lucis et pacis,
> agan eardinga     almae letitie,
> brucan blæddaga     blandem et mittem
> 675 geseon sigora frean     sine fine,
> ond him lof singan     laude perenne,
> eadge mid englum.     Alleluia.[6]

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[6] "The *author of light* has allowed us that, while here, we may *earn* and acquire through good deeds *joys in heaven*, where we will be permitted to seek the greatest dominions and take our seats *on lofty thrones*, live in the bliss *of light and peace*, possess habitations *of generous happiness*, enjoy days of abundance, look *forever* upon the Lord of victories *as gentle and kind*, and with *unending adoration* sing out his praise, blessed as we will be among the angels. *Alleluia*." The text is Muir (2000, p. 190); translation of all three poems is Jones (2012, pp. 62–63, 134– 37, 126–27); italicization in the translation is Jones's and indicates the Latin parts of the verse.

There are difficulties of interpretation related to individual words in these lines, in particular the manuscript reading *merueri* in line 670 does not exist in Latin.[7] Nevertheless, the clear ambition of the author is that an Old English half line begins a line and governs the alliteration over a second half line which is in Latin.[8] It is difficult to use Latin in this manner, as in Old English word stress was assigned in a different way than in Classical Latin.[9] It is also clear that the aim was to have each Latin word's morphology reflect its word's usage within the Old English sentence. Overall, this ambitious and difficult form has been achieved very well in these lines.

The second example of macaronic verse examined here also forms part of a longer poem. While the macaronic lines below were once regarded as an independent poem known as.

*A Summons to Prayer* or *Oratio poetica*, Fred Robinson ([1994]/1989) argued they should in fact be considered to form a single poem with the preceding verses found in the manuscript; this argument has been widely accepted.[10] Robinson renamed this composite as *The Rewards of Piety*. The final, macaronic section of this poem reads:

|     |   | Þænne gemiltsað ðe,.N.,        mundum qui regit, |
|-----|---|--------------------------------------------------|
|     |   | ðeoda ðrymcyningc        thronum sedentem        |
| 85  | a | butan ende                                       |
|     |   | saule þinre                                      |
|     |   | Geunne þe on life      auctor pacis              |
|     |   | sibbe gesælða,      salus mundi                  |
|     |   | metod se mæra        magna uirtute,              |
| 90  |   | and se soðfæsta      summi filius                |
|     |   | fo on fultum,      factor cosmi,                 |
|     |   | se of æþelre wæs      uirginis partu             |
|     |   | clæne acenned      Christus in orbem,            |
|     |   | metod ðurh Marian,      mundi redemptor,         |
| 95  |   | and þurh þæne halgan gast.      Uoca frequenter   |

[7] While editors have sometimes corrected this form, likely it was created purposefully by the author to fit the regular meter of Old English verse (I thank Dr Rafael J. Pascual for bringing this to my attention). For a detailed discussion of points of unconventionality or confusion in the Latin text of all three poems, see Cain ([2001], pp. 277–81).

[8] The single form *author* has been used throughout. However, these verses may well have been a collaborative effort in their original form and may also have been changed or amended by later scribes.

[9] As Cain explains, this is a result of the fact that "In Germanic verse, alliteration is bound to metrical prominence, or ictus; the natural position for ictus coincides with prosodic prominence, or stress, and stress occurs word- initially […] Classical Latin word stress operates on a right-headed, quantity-sensitive algorithm where syllables at the right edge of prosodic words are extrametrical: the stress will occur on no syllable further left than the antepenultimate syllable or the penultimate syllable if it is heavy (e.g., [ɑˈmiːkus] and [imˈmoːtus]). By contrast, Germanic stress is quantity-insensitive and calculated from the left edge of the prosodic word" ([2001], pp. 281–82).

[10] Robinson's analysis drew on Leslie Whitbread's prior assertion that both pieces shared a single author ([1957]).

<pre>
        bide helpes hine,      clemens deus,
        se onsended wæs      summo de throno
        and þære clænan      clara uoce
        þa gebyrd boda      bona uoluntate
100     þæt heo scolde cennan      Christum regem,
        ealra cyninga cyningc,      casta uiuendo;
        and ðu ða soðfæstan      supplex rogo,
        fultumes bidde friclo      uirginem almum,
        and þær æfter to      omnes sancti
        bliðmod bidde,      beatus et iustus
105     þæt hi ealle þe      unica uoce
        þingian to þeodne      thronum regentem,
        æcum drihtne,      alta polorum,
        þæt he þine saule,      summus iudex,
110     onfo freolice,      factor aeternus,
        and þe gelæde      luce perhennem,
        þær eadige      animæ sanctæ
        rice restað,      regna caelorum[11]
</pre>

These lines share a clear relationship in structure with the final lines of *The Phoenix*. While not every line in *The Rewards of Piety* supplies a Latin half-line, both pieces in general appear to follow a set arrangement in which an Old English half-line is paired with a half-line in Latin. It seems clear that both pieces are attempting what must have been an established form, known to both poets (unless we assume that the author of *The Rewards of Piety* was imitating *The Phoenix* specifically). Still, a difference exists in the fact that in *The Rewards of Piety* two Latin half lines appear to be missing; there are also more "errors" here where the Latin morphology does not make sense in the syntax of the sentence. Crépin suggests that some of the mistakes may have arisen from the poet thinking about parallel Old English half-lines (1993, p. 41). He also offered the interesting suggestion that "le poète a d'abord composé, à la suite,

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[11] "On you *(insert name)* will he then have mercy *who governs the world*, the majestic king of nations, *sitting on his throne*, for ever and ever … to your soul… May the *author of peace*, *the world's salvation*, the illustrious creator grant you *by his great power* the happiness of peace during this life, and may the righteous *Son of the most high* receive you with solace, he who is *fashioner of the cosmos*, who was begotten in purity, *born from a noble virgin as Christ upon earth, the world's redeemer* and its creator, brought forth through Mary and through the Holy Spirit. *Call out often*, pray to him for help, *the merciful God* … who was sent *from the highest throne* and *with good will* announced that birth, *in a resounding voice*, to the chaste woman, announced that she was to give birth to *Christ the king*, king of all kings, *while abiding chaste herself*. And *humbly beseech* that righteous woman, pray eagerly *to the loving virgin* for help, and thereafter pray with a joyful mind *to all the saints, the blessed and the righteous*, that *with one voice* they would all intercede for you before their prince, the eternal Lord, *who rules the heights of heaven as his throne*; that he, *highest judge, eternal creator*, who graciously receive your soul and lead you *into perpetual light*, where blessed, holy souls find rest in the kingdom, *the realms of heaven*." My text of this poem is Dobbie, 1942, with line numbers changed to reflect Robinson's argument that this should be taken as a single text with the proceeding lines. I have accepted Dobbie's emendations with exception of *bodade* in line 99 where I retained the manuscript reading of *boda* (see Robinson (1994/1989, p. 195) for a discussion of this point); note that Jones' translation reflects the emendation to *bodade*.

tous ses hémistiches d'avant, en anglais, formant un tout syntaxico-sémantique coherent […] puis il les a complétés d'hémistiches d'arrière en latin" ("the poet first composed in succession all of the English front half-lines: forming a coherent syntactic-semantic whole … then he completed them with half-lines in Latin") (1993, p. 41). It is possible that rather than being the result of scribal error, these half lines were never completed. Interestingly, there are other instances of "incomplete" lines in the earlier sections of *The Rewards of Piety* in which the perceived omission also does not impair the sense of the passage. Samantha Zacher has pointed out that most of these omissions are not indicated by manuscript punctuation or spacing and suggests that perhaps this was a stylistic device used consciously by the poet to make the poem "seem more homiletic" (2003–2004, pp. 97–98). If the "unfinished" half-lines were part of an authorial style, this would be a variation on the practise seen in *The Phoenix*, although both poets were clearly working within a similar form. While perhaps the less linguistically accomplished of the two poems, the *Rewards of Piety* has a variety of ornamental features and there are several examples in which the Latin half-lines participate in interlinear alliterative patterns, for instance in lines 90–91 and 103–4.

The third poem extant in the corpus of Old English that uses a macaronic form is known as *Aldhelm*. This piece reads as follows:

> Þus me gesette     sanctus et iustus
> beorn boca gleaw,     bonus auctor,
> Ealdelm, æþele sceop,     etiam fuit
> ipselos on æðele     Angolsexna,
> 5     byscop on Bretene.     Biblos ic nu sceal,
> ponus et pondus     pleno cum sensu,
> geonges geanoðe     geomres iamiamque,
> secgan soð, nalles leas,     þæt him symle wæs
> euthenia     oftor on fylste,
> 10     æne on eðle     ec ðon ðe se is
> yfel on gesæd.     Etiam nusquam
> ne sceal ladigan     labor quem tenet
> encratea,     ac he ealneg sceal
> boethia     biddan georne
> 15     þurh his modes gemind micro     in cosmo,
> þæt him drihten gyfe     dinams on eorðan,
> fortis factor,     þæt forð simle […][12]

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[12] "Thus did *a holy and righteous man* compose me, a nobleman learned in books, *an estimable author*; Aldhelm, a bishop in Britain, *was also exalted* as a glorious poet in the country of the Anglo-Saxons. Now I, *a book*, must tell *in all their particulars the toil and the burden*, the lamentation of that young man, sorrowful *at present*; I must tell not falsehood but truth, that *lowliness* was more often a constant help to him, *hardship* in his native country, and the fact as well that he is wrongly criticized. *Even so, the self-mastery, the toil that he sustains,* shall *never* acquit him, but in the thoughts of his mind he must, while *in this lesser world*, always pray eagerly for *help*, pray that the Lord, *the mighty creator*, would grant him *the might* while on earth that he may ever henceforth …" The edition of the text is Dobbie (1942); italics in Jones' translation represent both Greek and Latin text.

This poem is clearly different in form from the others surveyed. The first three lines follow the model of completing an Old English line with a Latin half-line (suggesting that the poet was familiar with this verse format). However, in the remaining portion of the poem Old English is mixed with words in either Latin or Greek, which can be found in both sides of the line. Although *Aldhelm* is the only member of this group to make use of Greek, this poem shows the lowest level of grammatical command in its use of non-English languages (Cain, 2001; Robinson, 1994/1989, p. 185), making possible translations of some lines tentative; nevertheless, like in *The Rewards of Piety*, the poet involves both languages in ornamental alliterative schemes, as can be seen in the continued alliteration on vowels in all three languages found in lines 2–4 and 9–11. *Aldhelm* also appears at first glance to differ from the others in standing by itself, rather than as part of a longer piece, although this point will be discussed in more detail below.

Together these pieces represent the existing corpus of macaronic verse in Old English. Notably none of the three texts place vernacular words into a Latin poetical metre, as is common in the later continental tradition from which the term "macaronic" derives. Instead, these poems place Latinate (and in the case of *Aldhelm*, Greek) words in the traditional Old English poetic verse form, creating a particular type of poetry not seen elsewhere. As stressed above, writing verse of this type was not a simple task. It required knowledge of Latin grammar as well as Latin patterns for assigning stress. While the general approach of mixing languages is found in other early medieval traditions, such as in early Irish, and also continues into the later English tradition where you see different types of poetic techniques employed not just in mixing Middle English and Latin but also French, the Old English poetry provides a distinctive and cohesive chapter in an ongoing narrative of macaronic poetry.[13] The invention of this new poetic form was surely a creative act, one demonstrating a fundamental belief in the broad utility of traditional alliterative verse forms.

## The Genre of Macaronic Verse

The poem *The Phoenix* depicts the landscape and life of a marvelous bird, which it uses to allegorically explain the lot of humankind who, like the bird, also die and have the chance to be reborn. The macaronic lines come at the end of a section of the poem focused on the life of man, but narrow further, moving from the general-ized human experience to become a warning about the individual salvation of the reader. This section makes use of first-person pronouns ("we", "us") instead of the third person plural pronouns that are primarily used in the preceding portion. The focus of the macaronic section is on attaining the joys in heaven (*gaudia in celo*) and the reader/listener is reminded that these joys need to be earned (*merueri*) by good deeds (*goddædum*) in life. These concluding verses underline that the allegory

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[13] For the text and discussion of the Old Irish macaronic hymn *Sén Dé*, attributed to Colmán ua Clua-saigh (d. 661), see Bernard and Atkinson (1898) and Clarke (2018). For a survey of some of the forms of Middle English macaronic poetry, see Archibald (2010) and Wehrle (1933).

undergirding *The Phoenix* is not only general, relating to the salvific history of man-kind, but is also meant to be apply to the individual reader of the poem.

Unlike the macaronic conclusion to *The Phoenix*, the mixed-language section of *The Rewards of Piety* does not differ significantly in theme from the rest of the poem, all of which is generally devoted to providing advice on living a pious life and striving for heaven. Nevertheless, the macaronic section sets itself apart through its choice of subject. The non- macaronic lines of the poem are addressed to a generalized *man leofne* "dear one" (l. 1), who is later referred to as a *har hilderinc* "grey-haired warrior" (l. 57). Unspecified second person singular pronouns are also used throughout these verses.[14] The macaronic section departs from this universalizing form by asking the reader or speaker to insert the name of a specific addressee. This is accomplished by the use of the ecclesiastical abbreviation N (*nomen*) (l. 83) in the first line, which indicates that a personal name should be inserted. This device is not used elsewhere in the corpus of Old English poetry.[15] It clearly serves here to make this final section of the poem less abstract and more personal to the reader. The first lines of this portion act as a sort of prayer for the named person, asking that they may be granted peace in this life and reception by the son of the most high one (*summi filius*). The named person is then instructed to pray frequently to God (*Uoca frequenter / bide helpes hine*) as well as to the virgin and the saints in order to be led into the realms of the heavens (*regna caelorum*).

As the modern title suggests, the first lines of the poem *Aldhelm* describe the learning and virtue of the seventh and eighth century poet-bishop. This account is told in the first person; the book itself ("biblios ic") explains the great man's biography. However, there appears to be a subtle shift in subject as the poem progresses. In line eight, the third person pronoun ("him") clearly applies to the bishop, but in the final lines, although the poem continues to use "he", the sense of this has shifted towards a different referent. From line 13, "he" becomes more general, seemingly giving advice to the readers; this change is also reflected in the use of tense, as Aldhelm's attributes are described in the past tense (*wæs*, l. 8) but the following sentence is in the present (*sceal*, l. 12). This final section again dwells on the necessity of good deeds (*labor*) in life and the need for prayer. The poem seems to be incomplete, ending with an unfinished sentence, as the extant portion ends with a promise of power on earth (*dinams on eorðan*) it seems likely that another phrase would have complemented this with a focus on eternal rewards in paradise.

Several features unite these three poems. Aside from all mixing languages, these three pieces all are at least partially concerned with providing practical advice about the value of good works and prayer for achieving salvation. They also represent moments where a more figurative, or more general message is applied to the reader; each in their own way operates to personalize their texts. Another theme bringing together these poems is that each shows an interest in themes of creation and authorship. The Latin term "auctor" is placed prominently in each poem, occurring

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[14] The description "man leofne" is reminiscent of the typically homiletic formula *men þa leofestan ("dearest men").*

For discussion, see Zacher (2003–2004, p. 88).

[15] I base this statement on a search of the *DOE corpus*.

in the first line of the macaronic section of *The Phoenix*, the second line of *Aldhelm,* and the fifth line of the macaronic portion of *The Rewards of Piety*. This word could mean "originator" or "founder" and the primary referent of the word in each instance cited above is clearly God, the supreme creator, a reference which places all three poems within a tradition found elsewhere in Old English poetry of referencing the creation, the first event, near the beginning of poems.[16] This traditional theme was interrelated, with an emphasis on the poet's role as creator (Wehlau, 1994). In signalling an interest in God as "auctor", the poets suggest a more general meditation on writing and authorship, something particularly fitting either at the beginning of a text (as is the case of *Aldhelm*) or at the end of the text where a conventional scribal colophon, sometimes naming the author or scribe, would be found.

In keeping with these themes, it can also be observed that these pieces all function as distinctive framing portions of longer texts. As has already been established, the macaronic lines from *The Phoenix* and *The Rewards of Piety* act as the conclusion, or even an addendum, to longer poems. As Robinson points out, *Aldhelm* acts as a type of preface to the prose text of Aldhelm's *De virginitate* and was probably meant to lead into the prose work. The poem is not marked in the table of contents and its placement following this table but immediately before the opening salutation presents it as forming a part of the text (1994/1989, p. 184). Robinson also broached the possibility that the final words of the poem "þæt he forð simle" ("that he may ever henceforth") rather than representing a corrupted or incomplete text, may instead be meant to lead into Aldhelm's salutation to the nuns of Barking which begins *De virginitate*.[17] If this meaning was intended, it would provide a further parallel to the other pieces in this genre and in particular to the macaronic lines of *The Rewards of Piety* which begin with adverb "þænne", which serves to connect it with the previous lines. Robinson concluded, however, that this reading was on the whole unlikely, and I agree. Nevertheless, the poem is in the voice of the book, *De virginitate* itself, so it may well have concluded with some portion more explicitly linking it to the text following. Robinson saw a parallel in the presentation of this poem with both *The Phoenix* and *The Rewards of Piety*; he supposed that the normal form was to conclude a poem with macaronic verses and that "The "Aldhelm" poet reversed the procedure and made a macaronic introduction" (1994/1989, p. 186). It seems to me more probable, however, that the macaronic form was associated more generally with framing texts, given that we see a similar flexibility and variety in other Old English framing traditions, as discussed below.

While being attached to longer poems (or, in the case of *Aldhelm,* a prose work), the scribes responsible for copying these texts in their extant manuscripts all made sure to visually mark the macaronic lines as distinct from the surrounding content. In the case of *The Rewards of Piety* the beginning of this section is signalled in the

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[16] This idea is made explicit in *Maxims I* which instructs: "God sceal mon ærest hergan/ fægre, fæder userne, forþon þe he us æt frymþe geteode lif ond lænne willan" "One ought to first praise God, our father, fittingly, because he provided for us, at the beginning, life and transitory pleasure" (cited in Wehlau, 1994, p. 67); see also Soper, 2023, pp. 16–17.

[17] In accordance with this idea, Robinson provides the following possible translation: "… so that the Lord, the creator of strength, may give him power on earth so that he henceforth always [may send] to the most reverend virgins of Christ… his best wishes for perpetual prosperity." (1994/1989, p. 185).

manuscript by a large thorn, the initial capital of the poem. An indentation of two lines has been made to accommodate the letter; as Bredehoft has pointed out, this capital is larger than the others used earlier to mark subsections of the poem (1998, p. 7; CCCC 201, p. 166). *Aldhelm* is also distinguished from the table of contents which proceeds it by a large thorn (CCCC 326, p. 162). In the case of *The Phoenix*, the marking of the macaronic verses is more subtle. No large initial marks this portion of the poem, yet this section still attracts visual attention, as it is much more heavily pointed than other parts of the poem.[18] In all three cases, it appears to have been seen as important that the macaronic section was marked out visually on the page as separate from the main text; an effect likely enhanced by the subtle script variations used to distinguish between languages in these extracts in all three manuscripts. I would suggest that these features indicate that these pieces are operating in some fashion as framing texts rather than as fully integrated portions of larger texts.

Given that all extant examples of Old English macaronic verse appear to function in some way as framing texts, it is worth comparing these texts to other prefacing or framing traditions occurring in early English literature. One connection, which has already been noted in relationship to individual macaronic texts, is with the runic signatures of Cynewulf found in *The Fates of the Apostles*, *Elene*, *Christ II*, and *Juliana* (Zacher, 2003–2004, p. 98). Each of these poems has a concluding section in which runic letters forming the name Cyn(e)wulf are interspersed in several lines of Old English verse. These signed colophons have elicited significant scholarly attention, much more than macaronic verse. While the different signatures function in different ways, all four Cynewulfian texts have a riddling aspect not found in the extant macaronic examples. Nevertheless, the mixing of alphabets in these lines also works to draw attention to their contents, separating them from the previous portion of the poem in a way similar to the use of Latin in the macaronic texts.

When Tom Birkett discussed the possible function behind the signature portions of Cynewulf's poems, he concluded: "they signal the moment where the story told becomes directly applicable to the reader engaged in unlocking the meaning of the passage, and thus represent a progression to an anagogical understanding of how the passage, and the poem, may relate to the fate of the individual soul" (2017, p. 789). While Old English macaronic texts do not need to be unlocked, or at least not in the same way and to the same degree, they share a general purpose with Cynewulf's poetic signatures. The macaronic sections of *The Rewards of Piety* and *The Phoenix* work to signal a turn towards the personal and the salvation of the individual soul, something also seen in *Aldhelm*'s final lines. This aspect in both types of texts may relate to the genre of scribal colophons. One of the most common features in colophons is to ask for prayer for the scribe, who can be either named or unnamed. A relationship of some sort with scribal colophons is often assumed in Cynewulf scholarship, although the nature of this connection is obscure. While none of the extant macaronic poems record the name of an author, as stated above all three

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[18] Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501, f. 65v. Overall, *The Phoenix* has very few points, with Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe estimating only 0.16 points per line on average. Instead, the eleven macaronic lines receive 13 points. For discussion, see O'Brien O'Keeffe (1990, pp. 161–362); Reider (2022, pp. 447–448).

examples show an interest in authorship and the poetical art of creation consonant with that tradition.

While the Cynewulfian signatures offer the closest parallel to the Old English macaronic poems in their form and function, it is valuable to also compare this genre of texts with the famous group of framing texts associated with the literary production during the reign of King Alfred and his successors. The corpus of these texts can be difficult to define, as they vary dramatically in form, voice, and association with the texts they frame (Irvine, 2014, p. 145). Nevertheless, the idea that framing texts, whether prologues or epilogues, enhanced in some way the works they accompanied seems to have been well-accepted among those responsible for this body of works. None of these "Alfredian" texts are macaronic, but they do frequently participate in the same themes found in these poems. Several of these texts have a clear didactic or pastoral aspect: the verse epilogue to the *Pastoral Care*, for instance, compares the wisdom of God to streams of water, lamenting how "sume hine lætað ofer landscare" ("some let it run away over the lands") and encouraging the reader to "hladað iow nu drincan" ("draw yourselves water now to drink") and to repair his leaky vessel or risk losing the drink of life (Irvine, 2023, p. 84, text and trans.); the preface to the Old English *Soliloquies* also employs a metaphor, in this case one of constructing a building out of the words of the holy fathers with the goal of obtaining the final eternal dwelling in heaven. Like the macaronic section of *The Rewards of Piety*, the "Alfredian" texts can in some cases extend into prayer, as is the case of the epilogues to the Old English *Boethius* and the Old English *Bede*.[19] As Irvine notes, while being influenced by Latin prefatory models, the Alfredian prefaces and epilogues may also reflect the influence of Old English poetry, as frames of different types are found in a variety of prominent poems.[20]

Of the extant examples of macaronic verse in Old English, only one has previously drawn comparisons with Alfredian texts– *Aldhelm*. This poem shares a trope found in a variety of Alfredian framing pieces: the book speaking in its own voice.[21] The use of this trope is not exclusive to "Alfredian" texts. Nevertheless, the speaking book appears to have been particularly popular in the literary communities responsible for these pieces and has drawn considerable scholarly interest (Faulkner, 2023; O'Brien O'Keefe, 2005; Earl, 1989). Amy Faulkner, analysing this trope, suggests that "by speaking and referring to itself, the book highlights its own agency in the reader's journey to heavenly happiness" and that "the reader is constantly reminded of the material nature of the book, and their own physical interaction with it" (2023, p. 28 and 29). In a similar vein, James Earl reflects on the use of this device: "Texts that address us directly as readers, texts which themselves speak in the first person, to us in the second, of the author in the third, invite us to meditate on

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[19] Both of these pieces are only found in a single manuscript. This epilogue to the *Boethius* survives in the late- eleventh or early-twelfth-century manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 180; the epilogue to the Old English *Bede* occurs in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 41, dating from the first half of the eleventh century. For more discussion of these pieces, see Irvine (2014, pp.161–62, 167–68).

[20] Irvine refers specifically to "the first fifty-two lines of *Beowulf*, the epilogues to the Cynewulf poems, the narrator's words at the beginning and end of *The Dream of the Rood*, and perhaps the five lines bordered by "swa cwæð" at each end of *The Wanderer*" (2014, p. 145).

[21] Irvine compares *Aldhelm* particularly with the verse preface to the Old English *Boethius* (2017, pp. 9–10).

their textuality" (1989, p. 54). These reflections are clearly true of *Aldhelm*, in which the book (seemingly *De virginitate* itself) praises its author and instructs the reader. From a broader perspective, however, they are also true of the other macaronic poems, which with their difficult and unusual form—a stark departure visually and stylistically from what comes before—also call the reader to meditate on their textuality and composition. Further work could still be done on framing pieces and their use, audience, and purpose in early English texts; such a study might provide a more subtle analysis of areas of commonality and difference between various forms and approaches used for framing in early Medieval England.

As we have seen, the extant examples of macaronic verse share a variety of features, both thematic and stylistic. Although surviving examples of verse in this style are few, their commonalities suggest that the verse forms used in these poems were not the independent innovations of their authors. I suggest that Old English verse of this style can meaningfully be said to have constituted its own genre in the period. While the definition of term genre has elicited substantial debate, I use it here to signify that similarities between these poems are not coincidental, but instead that the authors responsible for Old English macaronic verse were aware of writing in a tradition with certain recognizable features.[22] While it is likely not possible now to recover all characteristics of this genre, it appears to have had points of similarity with other literary developments, such as the runic signatures used by Cynewulf and the prefacing tradition associated with King Alfred's court. Texts in these ancillary traditions also sometimes exhibit features shared with macaronic verse, such as emphasizing the importance of piety for salvation, serving to elicit contemplation of creation and the constructed nature of written discourse, or personalizing a more general message.

## Macaronic Verse and Macaronic Prose

Having argued for the genre of Old English macaronic verse in a broader poetic tradition, I will now consider its position alongside mixed-language prose texts. As in verse, "code-switching" or mixed-language writing is comparatively rare in the prose texts of pre-Conquest England, especially as compared to the Middle English period (Schendl, 2005; Schendl & Wright, 2011). Charters are the most common documents displaying extensive use of multiple languages within single texts from the period. According to Schendl, around ten percent of the texts found in Robertson's vernacular *Anglo-Saxon Charters* feature at least some use of Latin, "predominately of a formulaic nature" (2005, p. 56). In the royal charters or diplomas written in Latin you additionally see Old English used, especially for place names, and by the tenth century a boundary clause in Old English had also become typical.[23] Outside of charters, there are some other instances where prose texts mix

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[22] For discussion of some of the historical debates over the term genre, especially as applied to novels, see Fowler (1991).

[23] For more extensive discussion of this progression, see Schendl (2005, pp. 58–63); see also his in-depth study of Worcester's charters, in which code-switching is particularly extensive (2011).

Latin and English. For example, Ælfric's *Grammar* combines both languages for the pedagogic purpose of teaching Latin. Similarly, in Old English homilies there are sometimes Latin biblical quotations that are translated into English, frequently introduced with the phrase *þæt is on englisc* ("that is in English"); scientific texts also can employ language mixing, such as Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion* which makes frequent use of Latin terms which are then explained in English (Schendl, 2017, pp. 41–47). These examples have something to reveal about the status and use of Latin and Old English in the period.[24] Nevertheless, charters and mixed-language texts of these sorts do not appear to relate particularly closely to the macaronic poetry we have considered above.

A closer parallel to the macaronic verse surveyed here is found in the text known as the Old English *Exhortation to Prayer*. The *Exhortation to Prayer* is an incomplete text which prefaces a Latin collection for private prayer known as the *Book of Cerne* (Cambridge, University Library MS Ll.1.10). The prayerbook was likely copied in the first half of the ninth century; it begins with gospel extacts and continues with a wide variety of prayers and devotional material. Michelle Brown, in her book-length study of the prayerbook, has suggested that the Old English *Exhortation* was probably written by the same scribe as the main text (1996, pp. 59–60, 129). The text is acephalous which makes it difficult to determine its original length; the extant portion reads:

[…] 7 ðe georne gebide gece 7 miltse fore alra his haligra gewyrhtum and geearningum. 7 boenum b . . . num ða ðe domino deo gelicedon from fruman middangeardes. ðonne gehereð he ðec ðorh hiora ðingunga. Do ðonne fiorðan siðe ðin hleor ðriga to iorðan, fore alle godes cirican, 7 sing ðas fers. Domini est salus; saluum fac populum tuum domine praetende misericordiam tuam sing ðonne Pater noster gebide ðonne fore alle geleaffulle menn In mundo ðonne bistu ðone deg dælniomende ðorh dryhtnes gefe alra ðeara goda ðe ænig monn for his noman gedoeð 7 ðec alle soðfeste foreðingiað. in caelo et in terra. Amen.

[And earnestly pray for help and mercy for the sake of the good deeds and merits and prayers of all his saints … those who have been pleasing to *domino deo* since the beginning of the world, then he hears you [*sing.*] through their intercession. Then thrice put your face to the earth at the fourth time [*or*: for the fourth time], in front of all the Church of God, and sing this verse: *Domini est salus. Saluum fac populum tuum domine. Praetende misericordiam tuam.* Sing then the *Pater noster*. Pray then for all believing people *in mundo*. Then, that day you will be a sharer through the grace of the Lord in all the good works which any person does for his name and for you all honest [people] will intercede *in caelo et in terra*. Amen] (text Kuypers (1902), translation mine).

This text calls for the supplicant, indicated in the singular (*þu*), to recite certain prayers and verses, the titles or words of which are given in Latin. More interestingly,

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[24] See, for example, Stephenson (2015) and Roberts and Tinti (2020) which explores "the ways in which the vernacular could be invoked as a strategy of identification" in Frankish and English charters of the late eighth to late ninth century.

however, its main text also switches back and forth from Old English to Latin, with the phrases *domine deo*, *in mundo*, and *in caelo et in terra* inserted in a grammatically logical way within the syntax of the Old English sentences. Although this text is prose, the Latin phrase *in mundo* may perhaps have been chosen for alliteration with the preceding *menn*; this phrase also echoes the well- established Old English poetic half-lines *men ofer moldan* and *men on moldan*.[25] The phrase *domine deo* may perhaps also have been chosen for its alliterative quality. In general, however, this text does not consistently attempt to achieve rhythmical or alliterative prose.

It cannot be overstated that this piece is very short, a fact which makes it difficult to generalize about its style and purpose. No other texts easily comparable to the *Exhortation* survive from the ninth century. However, it must be remembered that this text comes from a period poorly represented in the manuscript record. Among the four extant early Insular prayerbooks, only *Cerne* is accompanied by such a text. However, one of these collections is fragmentary and a second is missing its first quire, making it conceivable that either could have possibly included similar texts.[26] It remains possible that there may have been a practice of sometimes including prose prefacing pieces with private devotional texts in this period, although whether these would have included the macaronic elements seen in *Cerne* is impossible to say. Nevertheless, the Old English *Exhortation to Prayer* provides an interesting example of a mixed-language prose text being used as a preface to a single language work. Of the three poetic examples considered above, the clearest parallel is to *Aldhelm* in CCCC 326, in which we find the Old English mixed-language poem prefacing a Latin prose text. But as a macaronic framing text, the *Exhortation* provides a general parallel to the other poems as well.

Like the examples of macaronic verse surveyed in this essay, the passage found in *Cerne* (alongside providing practical instructions for a prayer) focuses on the good deeds of the saints and the intercession of the faithful in heaven. These are of course conventional themes and hardly unusual, but they may have been seen as particularly appropriate for a macaronic style as they would easily make use of words and phrases frequently occurring in ecclesiastical Latin.[27] It is perhaps worth mentioning that the *Book of Cerne* is generally thought to have been a bishop's book, one commissioned most likely for Bishop Æthelwold of Lichfield in the ninth century.[28]

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[25] This phrase *men(n) ofer moldan* occurs twice in the *Dream of the Rood* (ll. 12, 82) and is also found in the poem known as *A Prayer* (l. 32). *Men(n) on moldan* occurs in *The Phoenix* (l. 496), *Andreas* (l. 594), *The Death of Edgar* (l. 5).

[26] The Harleian Prayerbook (London, British Library MS Harley 7653) is fragmentary. For a discussion of whether this could have included a preface, see Singer (2012, p. 230). The *Book of Nunnaminster* was later in Winchester during the period in which many Alfredian prose texts were copied; for discussion, see Dumville (1987, p. 159); Kesling (2024, pp. 399–400). Whether or not it had a preface at this stage is impossible to say.

[27] In the case of the *Exhortation*, *in caelo et in terra* occurs in the Pater Noster, while *domine deo* and *in mundo*.

are common phrases that occur frequently in prayers and biblical passages.

[28] Two entries in the collection, one of which is an acrostic poem, mention an Æthelwold *episcopus*, although there are differences in spelling between the two versions of the name. There has been debate over whether this Æthelwold is the ninth-century bishop of Lichfield or the eighth-century bishop of Lindisfarne (Brown, 1996; Dumville, 1972). Brown's suggestion, that these references refer to the bishop of Lichfield seems the more likely.

The three manuscripts containing the only copies of the macaronic poems are also all associated with bishops or episcopal seats. While the original owner of the Exeter Book, which contains *The Phoenix*, is unknown, it is generally thought to have been in the possession of the eleventh-century Bishop Leofric of Exeter, who donated it to the cathedral (Gameson, 1996; Reider, 2022, pp. 1–3). CCCC MS 201, which contains *The Rewards of Piety*, has instead been frequently associated with Archbishop Wulfstan, as it contains a substantial number of his homilies—even if the Archbishop and lawmaker's personal connection with the book or one of its exemplars is uncertain (for discussion, see Atherton, 2016, pp. 465–67; Wormald, 1999, pp. 204–10). CCCC 326, the manuscript that contains *Aldhelm*, on the other hand, is associated with the episcopal seat of the cathedral of Christ Church Canterbury (Dobbie, 1942, xci). While the extant manuscript versions of these poems are likely copies of at least somewhat earlier works, their presence within these manuscripts could suggest that the Old English macaronic form, with its relationship to ecclesiastical Latin, may have been seen as particularly suited to texts or poems aimed at an episcopal audience, or possibly also priests with pastoral obligations.

If there were once other prose pieces similar to Cerne's *Exhortation*, it is possible that a tradition of macaronic or mixed-language prose framing texts may have had some influence on the development of the genre of Old English macaronic verse. This idea is highly speculative; there is not, in my view, sufficient evidence to prove this claim. Nevertheless, entertaining the possibility that the phenomenon of Old English macaronic verse was related in some way to prose traditions permits us to fruitfully expand the ways we consider the genre, including, for instance, its relationship to prose framing-text traditions from early medieval England.

## Conclusions on the Genre of Macaronic Verse

When Gérard Genette wrote about what he termed "paratexts", pieces of writing which surround and extend a literary work, he quoted Philippe Lejeune who described these pieces as "a fringe of a printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text" (1987/1997, p. 2). Drawing on Borges description of a preface as a "threshold", Genette emphasizes the essentially liminal nature of these items which constitute "an "undefined zone" between the inside and outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned towards the text) or the outward side (turned towards the world's discourse about the text)". While Genette was writing in the age of print and was in particular interested in the ways authors use paratexts,[29] some of his observations are also useful for thinking about medieval framing devices. Not only the first authors, but also later persons involved in the transmission of the text, made use of paratexts to shape the readers' experience of literary works.

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[29] "By definition something is not a paratext unless the author or one of his associates accepts responsibility for it" (Genette, 1987/1997, p. 9).

In this study, I have examined a particular genre of text used in early medieval England: the macaronic poem. It appears that this genre (or device) was considered to be especially useful as a framing text or as a framing section within a longer poem. This style of text was primarily used, I suggest, to draw the reader's, or hearer's, attention and to signal to them the need for a deeper and more thoughtful engagement with the poem. In the three examples surveyed, this deeper reflection seems to have been primarily directed towards propelling the reader to consider more deeply how the general message of the poem relates to the question of their own personal salvation. In this way, these texts, or portions of texts, share with modern prefaces the aim of "ensur[ing] that the text is read properly" (Genette, 1987/1997, p. 197).

As suggested above, it seems possible, given the extant examples and their manuscript contexts, that the genre of macaronic poetry was particularly associated with episcopal leadership or with those with public responsibility for souls in their care. Nevertheless, many possible audiences could have written or enjoyed poems of this sort. It is also possible that macaronic verse texts related to a tradition of mixed-language prose texts, even if comparable pieces are poorly attested. While these points cannot be asserted with any confidence, what seems clear is that Old English macaronic poetry should be viewed alongside other traditions of literary framing texts and devices from early medieval England, but that it held certain specific connotations and had its own guiding principles.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest**  The author has no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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