

THROUGH AN ANCIENT LENS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE ANGLO-SAXON  
RIDDLES OF THE *EXETER BOOK* BASED UPON CLASSICAL  
RHETORICAL FORMS AND DEVICES

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BY

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The this analysis proceeds from the premise that the Anglo-Saxon riddle creator drew from the classical rhetorical forms and devices when creating the Anglo-Saxon riddle as depicted in the *Exeter Book* riddles. The study represents the detailed analysis of the rhetorical forms and devices used within the Anglo-Saxon *Exeter Book* riddles through the application of classical rhetorical forms and devices.

Chapter I includes a discussion of the historical reference for the riddle and its purpose as well as a discussion of the Anglo-Saxon riddle and its purpose.

Chapter II, Patterns of Thought, includes both Invention and Arrangement as seen within the *Exeter Book* riddles. Some of the patterns of thought which are discussed and exemplified are: Analysis and Description; Classification, Division, and Exemplification; Comparison, Contrast, and Analogy; and Narrative, Process, and Cause and Effect. The Enigma and the Anglo-Saxon basic riddle forms are also discussed. It is in this section

that I detail the various stages in the development of the riddle form—from the classical metaphor, through the Anglo-Latin riddle, and finally to the Anglo-Saxon riddle form.

Chapter III, Figures of Style, includes a brief discussion of Diction and of Figures of Speech, in greater detail, as found within the *Exeter Book* riddles. Metaphor, Methods of Repetition, Periphrasis, Prosopopoeia, Respice, Rhyme, Symbols, and Symbolic Language, are the basic examples of the classical figures language which are discussed within this chapter.

This analysis reveals the strong level of influence of the classical rhetorical forms and devices upon the *Exeter Book* riddles and the equally strong influence of the Anglo-Saxon riddle creator upon the basic riddle form.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Many scholars have been fascinated with the Anglo-Saxon riddles, and many scholars have studied their clues: today there is some kind of solution for most of them. But few scholars have suggested that the form or structure of the Old English riddles could yield valuable information about the Anglo-Saxons, and even fewer have actually approached the task of investigating the form or style of these riddles.

During Aristotle's time, the form of the riddle was obviously treated with some measure of significance, since Aristotle discusses the riddle in Chapter 21 of Book II (1394b), and again later in Book III, Chapter 2 in *On Rhetoric* (Roberts 170, 1405a). His first reference to the enigmatic is in relationship to its usefulness in conjunction with paradox. Here, he says, both the "laconic and enigmatic" are appropriate responses, depending upon the intended purpose of the orator (Roberts 134). But it is his discussion of the enigma in Book III, and again in *On Poetics* (XXII, 1458a), which is most applicable to the riddle form. Aristotle uses a riddle already popular in his time for his example:

"I marked how a man glued bronze with fire to another man's body."

Referring to the ancient practice of "cupping" the body to draw out impurities or unclean spirits, Aristotle's riddle is a simple metaphoric statement, but it fulfills the criteria for what he believed a "good riddle" to be—a vehicle for a satisfactory metaphor. The

metaphor appears as one “application” substituting for another application—the audience must mentally substitute the cupping process for the process of gluing bronze. Both processes, he notes, are akin, and therefore this metaphor suits the example. His conclusion is, therefore, that a good riddle can provide us with good metaphors, “for metaphors imply riddles.” Aristotle also asserts that the “materials of the metaphors must be beautiful—to the ear, to the understanding, to the eye, or to some other physical sense.” Aristotle introduces this same example of the riddle again in his *On Poetics*, Chapter 21 (Roberts 253), with a slightly different discussion of the riddle where he notes that “‘perfect Diction’ should aim at the clear, the ordinary, or [the] familiar.” On the other hand, he says, “Diction becomes distinguished and non-prosaic” with the use of the unfamiliar, e.g., “metaphors, and all other things that deviate from ordinary modes of speech.” A statement which is composed entirely of these deviations, he terms “a riddle,” if it contains solely metaphors; but a “barbarism,” if it is composed of “strange words.” This then, is our basis for the Greek concept of the riddle and its intent. (1458a).

The word *riddle*, as we know it, is derived from the Old English form *rædelle*, or more specifically the form *ræd*, meaning “opinion, advice, or counsel,” which, in its most common Anglo-Saxon form represented a puzzling question usually framed in such a manner that one was misled from the correct solution by the very nature of the question. These early English riddles are found mainly in two extant manuscripts. Both the Cotton Manuscript and the *Exeter Book* contain excellent examples of this highly conventionalized type of Old English verse, but it is the *Exeter Book* that contains the

richest collection of Old English riddles which we have today. These riddles are among the richest in detail and style, and most of these riddles have been “solved” to the satisfaction of scholars, with only a few perhaps unsolvable enigma remaining (due to *lacunae*). Although there has been considerable discussion regarding the actual number of riddles in the manuscript, today scholars generally agree that there are ninety-five. These riddles represent the extent of our knowledge about the form in Anglo-Saxon times, but the substantial number certainly attests to its popularity among the Anglo-Saxons.

The large number of similarities between the actual riddles recorded in the *Exeter Book* and the rules of rhetoric as set down by the ancient rhetoricians seems to indicate that the creators of the Old English riddles were more than a little familiar with ancient rhetorical concepts. For example, we know that as a result of their fascination with etymology and language the Anglo-Saxons often translated and studied Latin works, Latin riddles among them. And I contend that, indeed, we can see this fascination depicted in the very riddle form which they created—a riddle form that not only was initially patterned after the style of the classical rhetoricians but also continued to employ classical rhetorical devices. It seems to me that the greater the number of similarities, the greater the likelihood that these Anglo-Saxon riddlers intentionally emulated the style of the established authorities of such rhetorical traditions. Where the Anglo-Saxons veered from those established rhetorical traditions, it might be safe to assume that there was some attempt at originality. I believe that a study of the rhetorical form, arrangement, and

style of the Old English riddles from the *Exeter Book* will yield valuable insight about the characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon riddles and the contributions made by the Anglo-Saxons to the development of the riddle form and that the extent to which these riddles are duplicated upon established classical rhetorical grounds forms a benchmark on which to determine, perhaps, the originality which the Anglo-Saxon riddler contributed to the development of the riddle form. Specifically, a comparison of the language, form, and purpose of the ancient riddle with that of the Anglo-Saxons should reveal that the Anglo-Saxon riddle is a new riddle genre and that this originality of a new form gives us some insight into the creativity of the Anglo-Saxon riddler. Comparing and contrasting the 95 riddles of the *Exeter Book* with classical rhetorical forms and devices as developed by ancient Greek and Roman rhetoricians should show how the *Exeter Book* riddles demonstrate the familiar forms and devices of classical rhetoricians. An additional comparison of the *Exeter Book* riddle form with both the classical riddle form and the Latin riddle form will reveal that the Anglo-Saxons developed a riddle form based mainly on purpose and intent for riddling.

Secondly, these findings will form a basis showing the numerous duplications of these forms and devices by the Anglo-Saxon riddlers and give a picture of their imitative abilities, and where their forms differ from the established traditional forms, we can see evidence of originality.

Applying the rhetorical principles of the ancient Greeks helps reveal the original invention, form, arrangement, style, and purpose of the creators of the riddle form.

Further, invention, arrangement, and style are the first three of the five canons of rhetoric and as such, they are particularly pertinent to this study. Invention, the first canon of classical rhetoric, is the art of discovering relevant material on a selected subject.

Aristotle apparently put it at the top of the list, if his definition of rhetoric is any indication: “the ability to find all the available means of persuasion that apply in any given case” (*Rhetoric* I, ii 1355b). Among these means of persuasion are the proofs which are based upon a rhetor’s knowledge of the community’s commonly held beliefs and its shared history—commonologies—and which are supposed to be persuasive. Commonplaces, probabilities, enthymemes, signs, examples, and stasis (questions or issues) were all part of the discovery process of invention.

Aristotle and other early rhetoricians intended *commonplaces* and *ideology*, or *sensus communis*, to give birth to chosen rhetorical topics—topics which existed in the structures of the (Greek) language, or in the matters which affected the commonplaces (*topos*). Anyone who held “community sense” would be able to comprehend and discuss these issues. Commonplaces, also called common topics, can be seen in virtually all the riddles of the *Exeter Book*, from the simple riddle of “Ice” to the more complex and lengthy riddle of “Created Things.” In “The Rhetoric of the *Exeter Book* Riddles,” Nelson alludes to the ideology encapsulated in the rhetoric of the *Exeter Book*, when she points out the shared “frames of reference” for the audience of these riddles (421). Later, Tanke wrote about the shared “ideology” of different classes within the sexual riddles of the *Exeter Book* (21).



The *Exeter Book* riddles give us a snapshot of Anglo-Saxon culture at the time they were written. It is true that Anglo-Saxon culture was a fusion of other cultures, drawing from many sources for a common and shared ideology. This common culture included familiar stories, elements, symbols, and languages—an ideology which stemmed from a variety of traditions (heroic, folkloric, patristic, and Christian) which also accommodated erotic, social, and gender awareness. Members of the Anglo-Saxon community would share the common strong tradition based on the glorification of heroes that aided in their ability to solve the riddle of the “Badger” or any of the other riddles that appear to be connected with warring efforts (more than one-eighth of the total number in a manuscript prepared for a Bishop)—the “Shield,” both “Horn riddles,” the “Ballista,” the “Sword,” the “Bow,” the “Mailcoat,” the “Battering Ram,” the “Swordrack,” the “Helmet,” the “Iron Weapon,” and the “Lance.” The folkloric images and themes in the riddle of the “Cock and Hen,” the three “Storm” riddles, the riddle of the “New Moon and Sun” would also have strong connections with Anglo-Saxon folklore. Likewise, the Anglo-Saxon community would recognize the implicit and explicit references in the riddles which contain some reference to an inference about the new emerging theological concept of Christianity—for instance, Riddle 57 [59]<sup>1</sup>, “Paten,” or “Chalice;” and Riddle 73 [75], “The Savior.” And since the ancient runes were no longer used exclusively for sacred purposes, we may safely assume the ability to read them was relatively common among Anglo-Saxons, meaning that many in the Anglo-Saxon audience would recognize and be able to decipher the runic messages in the

riddles of the “Bow,” the “Magpie,” the “Sun,” or the “Swan.”<sup>2</sup> These shared ideologies could well account for the apparent popularity of the riddles among the Anglo-Saxons and their surprising ability to survive for so many centuries.

These topics of invention can be represented as static or as progressive. Static modes can be more fully identified with such compositional categories as analysis, classification, comparison, contrast, definition, description, enumeration, and exemplification; while progressive modes can be more fully defined as narration, process, and cause and effect. The process of thought in each of these categories often works together with the processes of the others in the *Exeter Book* riddles, just as it did for the ancient rhetoricians.

The second canon of classical rhetoric, arrangement, governs the selection and arrangement of the arguments to be used in the issue. The process involved organizing selected material in a sound structural form—the ways of arranging the introduction, narrative, and conclusion, along with other elements. For ancient rhetoricians, composition and the arrangement of its parts was based on predictions of the reaction of the listener or reader. Likewise, the composition and arrangement of the riddles of the *Exeter Book* was driven by the intended and anticipated reaction of the audience. The arrangement comes to fruition when the categories of thought are applied to the individual argument.

Nelson came closest to describing the form of the *Exeter Book* riddles when she termed them “definitions.” (424) But I believe them to be more closely related to the

classical rhetorical form of descriptions. Often, however, they closely resemble the classical form of the narrative and also take other forms—the enigma, and the systematic, or process forms—all of which are described in Chapter II. Like ancient rhetoricians, Anglo-Saxon creators of the riddles chose their forms based on content; for example, if the riddle represented the technique for making a book (Riddle 24 [26]), then the form would take the shape of a series of steps involved in the process. On the other hand, where the riddler focused on the anticipated response of the reader or listener to humorous or erotic subject matter, the careful selection of language helped to create the particular form and style.

The third canon of rhetoric, style, is based on consideration of the appropriate manner for the matter and occasion. All of the familiar figurative language, figures of thought, ornament, and tropes fall into this important area. Distinguished from grammar, style involves the persuasive or extraordinary use of language. Consequently, it would have been from this canon that Anglo-Saxons emulated the metaphoric, runic, and periphrastic style present in many of the riddles. Furthermore, by their very nature, the riddles are mostly protreptic (hortatory), in nature, because they ask the listener to make (or to give) a response—either mentally or audibly in their conclusion. Fewer than half of the riddles contain personification or are representative of prosopopoeia—that classical rhetorical method which abounds in Browning’s dramatic monologues and involves the depiction of the character of a fictional person, while many include descriptions created from the first-hand knowledge or wisdom of the riddler. The riddles include many

examples of kennings, only a few examples of the familiar litotes, and even fewer examples of rhyme.

Although the riddles of the *Exeter Book* appear in manuscript form and have been recorded for posterity, scholars have come to believe that the Anglo-Saxons practiced the art of riddling as part of an oral tradition. Therefore, an audience's response would have been an important consideration for the composition and delivery of the riddles. Memory and Delivery, the fourth and fifth canons of rhetoric, would have provided many examples and methods of preparing material for oral presentation. The importance of the audience, its responses, and its perceptions would have been extremely important to the Anglo-Saxon scop. All of these issues directly affected his livelihood and the esteem in which he was held. As one of the only "professionals" within the community, the scop was responsible for transmitting its values, legends, and history through stories presented to the community. One of the major stages in the development of the Anglo-Saxon riddle from the original classical form to a new riddle genre results from the need for oral transmission of information to an audience, and the additional growing importance of the scop and his audience.

The Anglo-Latin riddle represents the second link between the Classical riddle and the Anglo-Saxon riddle genre. A comparison with the Anglo-Saxon riddle will reveal the Anglo-Latin riddle as an important basis for the Anglo-Saxon riddles. But it will also reveal, through its differences, the additional development of the riddle by the Anglo-Saxon riddlers into another art form. These differences in form, arrangement, and style, I

believe, are based primarily on the purpose and audience of the Anglo-Latin riddle and the Anglo-Saxon riddle.

The Anglo-Latin riddle creators had both a different purpose and audience than the Anglo-Saxon riddlers. Having a strong didactic purpose and fascinated with the study of meter, Symphosius produced a collection of riddles which were composed some time in the fourth-century and which were regular in form having three hexameter lines each. Taetwine, Archbishop of Canterbury, composed mostly theological and didactic riddles. Eusebius, abbot of Wearmouth and a disciple and friend of Bede, added forty to Taetwine's original sixty, and focused on the grammatical element of the riddle. Other various Latin riddles, including the *Flores* and *Icoseria*, have been attributed to Bede (Lendinara 277). Twenty enigmata on the vices and virtues are believed to have been written by Boniface, who lived during the first half of the eighth century. It is also known that Alcuin, who lived in the late eighth or early ninth century, used a form of Symphosius' riddles for elementary instruction. Of all of the Anglo-Latin riddles, Aldhelm's are the closest in form to the Old English riddles, but the form, arrangement, style, and purpose are still clearly different.

A late seventh and early eighth-century Anglo-Latin writer, Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury (later Bishop of Sherborne), composed a series of 100 versified riddles which he set out in a treatise, *Epistola ad Acirium*, addressed to King Ealdfrith of Northumbria. Aldhelm's riddles varied in length, but it is clear that they were influenced by Symphosius' earlier 100 *Enigmata*. Aldhelm, whose ultimate purpose would have

been to foster a proficiency in Latin in order to focus study on the Bible, stated that his riddles were intended to “exemplify the metrical features” as set out in his *Epistola*, and he also stated that he patterned some of his riddles after those in the Bible. The following riddle is of the type that would have been available to Aldhelm:

“Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness.”<sup>3</sup>

The metaphoric development in this riddle exchanges the lion for a “strong eater” and the honey for “sweetness.” An example of the nature of one of Aldhelm’s riddles follows:

(No. XXXV)

My nature appropriately reproduces my name in two aspects, for the shadows have part of me, and the birds the other part. Only rarely does anyone see me in the clear light, particularly since at night-time I frequent hiding-places beneath the stars. It is my custom to chatter in mid-air in a harsh voice. I am recorded in Romulean books, although my name is Greek, while I inhabit nocturnal shadows through my name. (Wrenn 61)

The word given as the title is “night-raven.” Drawing from the two parts of the name—“night” and “bird,” the riddle here is a lesson in etymology.

While the content of the riddles was beginning to develop, with the inclusion of various exercises in linguistics, the true development of the riddle would not take place until the Anglo-Saxon riddlers began to use the riddle as a word-play game. This shift from the didactic to the entertaining signals one of the most important stages in the development of the riddle genre.

As revealed in Chapters II and III, the final development of the riddle form insured that the riddle would continue to move forward into the modern era to become a household word and recognizable form.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Numbering of the riddles as in Williamson (1977), followed by the traditional numbers as in Krapp-Dobbie (1936) between square brackets.

<sup>2</sup> Paige reminds us that the continued use of runes, which were often inserted alongside of Roman script, was encouraged by the Christian church.

<sup>3</sup> The solution is “What is sweeter than honey; what is stronger than the lion.” Samson posed this riddle to the thirty Philistines, who were able to solve it only by enticing Samson’s wife to discover its solution.

## CHAPTER II

### PATTERNS OF THOUGHT:

#### INVENTION AND ARRANGEMENT IN THE *EXETER BOOK* RIDDLES

##### **Classical Patterns of Thought**

The simplest way to analyze how the ancient rhetorical methods apply to the *Exeter Book* riddles is to focus upon the patterns of thought which governed the creation of such riddles. Such a focus not only defines and describes the invention of the topics and the arrangement of composition and form, but also reveals similar and dissimilar characteristics in all three of these classifications. As mentioned earlier in this study, all principles of composition are, in effect, ways of thinking. Like the ancient rhetoricians who gave careful thought and attention to the selection and arrangement of applicable “proofs” for their “arguments” or compositions, the Anglo-Saxons gave careful consideration to the selection and arrangement of their riddle patterns. It should be noted that both the ancient rhetoricians and the Anglo-Saxons riddlers gave careful consideration to their audiences as well in creating their arrangements. All of these patterns of thought dictated the content and ultimately the arrangement of the content into a unique riddle form.

Some of the riddles from the *Exeter Book* represent distinct examples of single modes of invention derived from classical models. Others deliberately contain examples of more than a single mode. That the line between forms is blurred may be intentional.



## Analysis and Descriptions

Many of the *Exeter Book* riddles analyze or describe their subject-matter. The riddle breaks the subject into its various components—analyzes it—and then selects some feature, or features, to describe. Additional features, chosen for their connection or relationship to the other features, create a whole image. A conclusion based on these components is then revealed.

One example of analysis as a form appears in the riddle of the “Family of Lot”:

### Riddle 44 [46]

	<i>Wer sæt æt wine</i>	<i>mid his wifum twam</i>
	<i>ond his twegen suno</i>	<i>ond his twa dohtor,</i>
	<i>swase gesweostor</i>	<i>ond hyra suno twegen,</i>
	<i>freolico frumbearn.</i>	<i>Fæder wæs þær inne</i>
5	<i>þara æþelinga</i>	<i>æghwæðres mid,</i>
	<i>eam ond nefa.</i>	<i>Ealra wæron fife</i>
	<i>eorla ond idesa</i>	<i>insittendra.</i>

A man was sitting at wine with his two wives and his two sons and his two daughters, gracious sisters, and their two sons freeborn and firstborn children. The father of each of these noble youths was there with them, uncle and nephew. There were in all five men and women sitting within.

The riddler has chosen the basic elements, or components, from the Biblical history of the family of Lot and his daughters and has been careful to draw the connection and relationships among all of the components. The conclusion is drawn from the relationship between all parties, or components. A previous knowledge of the story of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his two daughters and the subsequent issue from each relationship, turns the components into “clues” and helps to provide the solution to the riddle.

Enumeration is a component of analysis which, like analysis, considers the aspects or features of its subject-matter as separate units. But the process of enumeration is primarily concerned with the sequential arrangement of successive things. Enumeration is rare in the riddles, but an example appears in the riddle of the “Mailcoat,” which also can be seen as a riddle in narrative form:

### Riddle 33 [35]

	<i>Mec se wæta wong, of his innape Ne wat ic mec beworhtne hærum þurh heahcræft,</i>	<i>wundrum freorig, ærist cende. wulle flysum, hygeþoncum min:</i>
5	<i>wundene me ne beoð wefle, ne þurh þreata geþræcu ne æt me hnutende ne mec ohwonan</i>	<i>ne ic wearp hafu, þræd me ne hlimmeð, hrisil scribeð, sceal am cnyssan.</i>
10	<i>Wyrmas mec ne awæfan þa þe geolo godwebb Wile mec mon hwæpre seþeah hatan for hælepum Saga soðcwidum wordum wisfæst,</i>	<i>wyrda cræftum, geatwum frætwað. wide ofer eopan hyhtlic gewæde. searoþoncum gleaw, hwæt þis gewæde sy.</i>

First of all the wet plain, extremely cold, brought me forth from its interior. I know in my thoughts that I am not made, by excellent skill, from fleeces of wool or from hairs.

Woofs are not wound for me, nor have I a warp, nor for me does a thread resound from the force of many strokes, nor does the whirring shuttle glide over me, nor shall weavers' rods strike me from anywhere. The worms that deck the fine yellow cloth with embroidery did not weave me by the skill that the fates have given them. Nevertheless before men far and wide over the earth I shall be called a pleasing garment.

Say truly, man skilled in clever thoughts and wise in words, what this garment is. (Brooke 127)

The effect of sequencing is achieved by numbering and ordering the successive events which here helps to give the listener a clearer image of the origins of the subject-matter.

The riddle also contains an excellent example of antithesis, which is discussed later in Chapter III.

The *Exeter Book* riddles which follow the pattern of description are more abstract in their selection of features. The process could be compared to painting only the components or elements of the composition not the background. Examples of this form of description can be found in the riddle of the “Badger,” which is also an example of a narrative, the riddle of the “Plow,” and the riddle of the “Bullock”:

#### Riddle 36[38]

	<i>Ic þa wiht geseah</i>	<i>wæpnedcynnes</i>
	<i>geoguðmryrþe grædig;</i>	<i>him on gafol forlet</i>
	<i>ferðfriþende</i>	<i>feower wellan</i>
	<i>scire sceotan,</i>	<i>on gesceap þeotan.</i>
5	<i>Mon mæpelade,</i>	<i>se þe me gesægde:</i>
	<i>“Seo wiht, gif hio gedygeð,</i>	<i>duna briceð;</i>
	<i>gif he tobirsteð,</i>	<i>bindeð cwise.”</i>

I saw a creature of the weaponed kind; greedy of the joy of youth, he allowed as a gift to himself four life-saving fountains to spring forth clearly, to gush in fitting fashion. A man spoke; he said to me; “The creature, if he lives breaks down; if he dies, he binds the living.”

The riddle selects specific descriptors to describe the young bullock: “weaponed kind,” “life-saving fountains.” The final clues derive from the opposing images of the bullock as living—“he breaks down,” meaning he works until he is broken down, and dead—“he binds the living,” meaning his hide is made into straps or thongs for binding others.

#### Classification, Division, and Exemplification

Division and classification (or definition) may be used interchangeably. Riddle 28 is an example of division, Riddle 76 of classification. Riddle 28a works through images:

## Riddle 28a [30a]

	<i>Ic eom legbysig,</i>	<i>lace mid winde,</i>
	<i>bewunden mid wuldre,</i>	<i>wedre gesomnad,</i>
	<i>fus forðweges;</i>	<i>fyre gebysgad,</i>
	<i>bearu blowende,</i>	<i>byrnende gled.</i>
5	<i>Ful oft mec gesiðas</i>	<i>sendað æfter hondum,</i>
	<i>þæt mec weras ond wif</i>	<i>wlonce cyssað</i>
	<i>Ðonne ic mec onhæbbe,</i>	<i>ond hi onhnigap to me</i>
	<i>monige mid miltse,</i>	<i>þær ic monnum sceal</i>
	<i>ycan upcyme</i>	<i>eadignesne.</i>

I am fire-fretted and I flirt with Wind my limbs are light-freighted and I am lapped in flame I am storm-stacked and I strain to fly I am a grove leaf-bearing and a glowing ember From hand to friend's hand about the hall I go, so much do lords and ladies love to kiss me. When I hold myself high, and the whole company bow quiet before me, their blessedness shall flourish skyward beneath my fostering shade. (Alexander 97)

There are many clues that suggest a tree in this Riddle. The primary definition in the Clark-Hall *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* for the word *beam* is “tree” (34). Characteristic of this meaning are the specific denotations such as “grove,” “leaf-bearing,” “ember,” and “shade,” and also the suggestions carried in the introductory images of the tree in the forest. In the second image, the tree is broken down into pieces of wood and burned in the fire. One of the secondary meanings of *beam* is also “piece of wood.” Other images are also suggested in the riddle; a ship and possibly a sunbeam or a column also parallel other secondary meanings for *beam*: “ship,” “column,” “pillar,” and “sunbeam.” A new image of the tree, now made into a wooden cup or chalice being passed around the hall precedes the closing image of the blessed cross. Two curious aspects of this riddle are that the images are presented in hierarchical order leading up to the cross, and that they are all connotations of the Anglo-Saxon word *beam*.

Whereas the riddle of the tree, or beam, disassembles the parts, a practice referred to by ancient rhetoricians as division, other riddles reveal a metaphoric pattern rooted in a reversal of division—the synthesis of parts, otherwise known as classification or definition. Division asks the audience to recognize the different states, or parts of its subject; definition asks its audience to recognize how those different attributes come together to reflect the full realization (or reification) of the subject. Riddle 76 [80] gives the audience four attributes which come together to identify a single referent:

Riddle 76 [80]

	<i>Ic eom æpelinges</i>	<i>eaxlgestealla,</i>
	<i>fyrdrinces gefara,</i>	<i>freat minum leof</i>
	<i>cyninges geselda.</i>	<i>Cwen mec hwilum</i>
	<i>hwitloccedu</i>	<i>hond on legeð,</i>
5	<i>eorles dohtor;</i>	<i>þeah hio æpelu sy.</i>
	<i>Hæbbe me on bosme</i>	<i>æpt on bearwe geweax.</i>
	<i>Hwilum ic on wloncum</i>	<i>wicge ride</i>
	<i>herges on ende;</i>	<i>heard is min tunge.</i>
	<i>Oft ic woðboran</i>	<i>wordleana sum</i>
10	<i>agyfe æfter giedde.</i>	<i>Good is min wise</i>
	<i>ond ic sylfa salo.</i>	<i>Saga hwæt ic hatte.</i>

I am the noble's shoulder-companion, the warrior's comrade, loved by my lord, the king's associate. Sometimes the fair-haired queen, the earl's daughter, lays hand on me, though she is noble. I bear in my bosom what grew in the grove. Sometimes I ride on the proud steed at the head of the host; harsh is my tongue. Often I render reward for his words to the singer after his measure. Good is my nature, and I myself am black. Tell my name. (Gordon 307)

The "Horn" is pictured here as being carried across the earl's shoulder and alongside the warrior, and yet it is often used by the earl's daughter, as well. Filled with mead, the horn can be used as a cup and passed about the meadhall. It can both ride and speak at the head

of its host in battle. Likewise, it can be used as a reward to the scop after he sings his songs. Although the idea of definition is clear here, it must be remembered that true definition places limits or boundaries to a thing. As an ambiguous process the clues in riddles break all boundaries. It is mainly for this reason that although they may work as classifications, few riddles of the *Exeter Book* can be seen as definitions. Only a couple of riddles even remotely suggest this type of form in an attempt to name the species or genus of their subject-matter. The riddle of the “Mailcoat” makes an attempt at definition, but even here the reference is metaphorically made only as “a pleasing garment.” Likewise, in the riddle of the “Bookworm” references are made only metaphorically as a “moth” or “insect.”

Exemplification shows by illustration or examples. The riddle of the “Rake” is just such an example of using an illustration in order to present subject-matter:

#### Riddle 32 [34]

	<i>Ic wiht geseah</i>	<i>in wera burgum</i>
	<i>seo þæt feoh fedeð.</i>	<i>Hafað fela toþa;</i>
	<i>nebb biþ hyre æt nytte;</i>	<i>niþerweard gongeð,</i>
	<i>hiþeð holdlice</i>	<i>ond to ham tyhð,</i>
5	<i>wæpeð geond weallas,</i>	<i>wyrte seceð.</i>
	<i>Aa heo þa findeð</i>	<i>þa þe fæst ne biþ;</i>
	<i>læteð hio þa wlitigan,</i>	<i>wyrtum fæste,</i>
	<i>stille stondan</i>	<i>on stapolwonge,</i>
	<i>beorhte blican,</i>	<i>blowan ond growan.</i>

I saw in the dwellings of men a creature that feeds cattle. It has many teeth a useful nose. It goes along pointing downwards; it seizes booty—loyally and drags it home, wanders about walls, seeks for plants. It always finds those that are not firm, but leaves those beautiful plants that are fast-rooted standing peacefully in their fixed place, shining brightly, blossoming and growing. (Lenhert 127)

This riddle describes by means of an illustration of purpose. Several “clues” make clear that the riddle exemplifies a tool used both for the feeding of cattle and in the garden. The liberal use of adjectives in the riddle also helps to more fully exemplify the rake.

### Comparison, Contrast, and Analogy

The processes of comparing or contrasting are so closely related that they are usually represented together as they are in the riddle of the “Fish and the River”—a good example of the use of contrast in order to compare two elements of nature. In fact, the opening lines speak of basic differences between the two:

#### Riddle 87 [91]

	<i>Min heafod is</i>	<i>homere gepuren,</i>
	<i>searopila wund,</i>	<i>sworfen feole.</i>
	<i>Oft ic begine</i>	<i>þæt me ongean sticað,</i>
	<i>þonne ic hnitan sceal</i>	<i>hringum gyrded,</i>
5	<i>hearde wið heardum,</i>	<i>hindan þyrel</i>
	<i>forð ascufan</i>	<i>þæt mines frean</i>
	<i>mod . . freopað</i>	<i>middelnihtum.</i>
	<i>Hwilum ic under bæc</i>	<i>bregde nebbe</i>
	<i>hyrde þæs hordes,</i>	<i>þonne min hlaford wile</i>
10	<i>lafe þicgan</i>	<i>þara þe he of life het</i>
	<i>wælcraefte awreca</i>	<i>willum sinum.</i>

My house is not quiet,	I am not loud;
But for us God fashioned	our fate together.
I am the swifter,	at times the stronger,
My house is more enduring,	longer to last.
At times I rest;	my dwelling still runs;
Within it I lodge	as long as I live.
Should we two be severed,	my death is sure. (Kennedy 42)

The riddle personifies the fish by giving it the ability to speak—a kind of figurative (or metaphorical) language commonly used by classical writers. The riddler

juxtaposes two images here, one of quietness and the other of constant motion. The two interact in that, although the quiet image, the fish, is surrounded by activity, the river image, the swiftness and strength of the river is balanced by the serenity and endurance of the fish. Through paradox the two images create a further and complex image of stasis. Yet the struggle is paradoxically unequal—although the river does not require the fish, the fish cannot exist without the river. The subject matter of this riddle can also be viewed as a symbol, another important device that depends on substitution of language. The Anglo-Saxon audience could have made a connection between the relationship of a Christian and true faith—the fish is, after all, an important Christian symbol. Surely, the solution to this riddle should be “Fish” or “Fish in the River.”

### Analogy

Analogy is an example of an extended comparison. Its logic suggests that if specific components or elements are similar in some respect, then they are probably alike in other respects. The riddle of the “Shield” is one of the finest examples of an analogy found within these riddles:

#### Riddle 3 [5]

	<i>Ic eom anhaga,</i>	<i>iserne wund,</i>
	<i>bille gebennad,</i>	<i>beadoweorca sæd,</i>
	<i>ecgum werig.</i>	<i>Oft ic wig seo,</i>
	<i>frecne feohtan.</i>	<i>Frofre ne wene,</i>
5	<i>þæt me geoc cyme</i>	<i>guðgewinnes</i>
	<i>ær ic mid ældum</i>	<i>eal forwurðe;</i>
	<i>ac mec hnossiað</i>	<i>homera lafe,</i>
	<i>heardecg heoroscearp</i>	<i>hondweorc smiþa,</i>
	<i>bitað in burgum;</i>	<i>ic a bidan sceal</i>
10	<i>laþran gemotes.</i>	<i>Næfre læcecynn</i>



*on folcstede  
þara þe mid wyrtum  
ac me ecga dolg  
þurh deaðslege*

*findan meahte  
wunde gehælde,  
eacen weorðað  
dagum ond nihtum.*

A lonely wanderer,  
I am smitten with war-blades,  
Worn with the sword-edge;  
Much hazardous fighting,  
Of comfort or help  
Ere I perish and fall  
The leavings of hammers,  
Batter and bite me,  
The brunt of battle  
In all the folk-stead  
wort or simple  
But day and night  
The marks of the war-blades

wounded me with iron,  
sated with strife,  
I have seen many battles  
oft without hope  
in the carnage of war  
in the fighting of men.  
the handwork of smiths,  
hard-edged and sharp;  
I am doomed to endure.  
no leech could I find  
to heal my wounds;  
with the deadly blows  
double and deepen. (Kennedy 139)

For a culture assumed to be so immersed in a heroic tradition of plunder and survival, it is surprising that only a few of the riddles refer to warring elements. The narrative riddle of the “Shield,” 3 [5], is one of approximately ten of these riddles. The riddle works by analogy. Clues in the riddle make clear the connection between the shield and a warrior: “wounded with iron,” “smitten with war-blades,” “leavings of hammers,” “handwork of smiths,” and “marks of the war-blades” all serve as evidence of the fighting that the shield—like a warrior—has endured. Analogy here likens the shield to the Anglo-Saxon warrior through the established heroic traditions. For example, listeners familiar with the story of *Beowulf* would recognize the description of weapons and armor as thanes who either serve or fail their lord. Having seen many battles, this shield has little hope of help in finding “in all the folk-stead any leech with wort or simple, to heal my wounds.” The reference to a “leech,” or physician, helps to create the further illusion of a flesh and

blood warrior, who, as ironically stated by the narrator, cannot be cured of his battle wounds; he is a war-beaten warrior, doomed to death because of a lack of any known “medicinal” relief.

### Narration, Process, and Cause and Effect

Narration is accomplished by following a sequence of actions or events in time. It is often a recounting of the events of some incident or experience. While studying the Anglo-Saxon riddles, Kennedy noted that "By their range and detailed vividness they supplement the pictures of Old English culture derived from the [Anglo-Saxon] narrative poems (39). What he failed to note, however, was that several riddles in the *Exeter Book* also take on narrative form.

One of the oldest known literary forms, the narrative was used by ancient rhetoricians to present issues or cases being argued before an audience or assembly. In the *narratio*, the rhetor stated the issue as clearly and simply as possible—often a basic statement of facts regarding a particular subject. This statement of facts was intended to be informative about the events surrounding an issue, rather than persuasive. Master Roman rhetorician Cicero used the following simple narrative as background for arguing the innocence of Milo, who had been accused of the murder of Claudio. “Milo, on the other hand, having been in the senate all day till the house rose, went home, changed his shoes and clothes, and waited for a short time, while his wife was getting ready.” (57) Sometimes it was useful to give the audience some additional information regarding the issue—a vivid historical or fictional example, analogies and examples chosen for their

relevance to such cases. While ancient rhetoricians often disagreed on exactly what additional information should be supplied to the audience, it was generally agreed that the narrative could contain an account of the “reasons for the dispute,” a “digression to attack opposition, amuse the audience, or amplify its understanding by comparison,” and “analogous fiction, drawn either from history or literature or created by the rhetor” (Crowley 179).

Anglo-Saxon riddles whose form tells a story by stating basic facts about issues, events, or cases can be identified as narrative. But in the riddle, the narrative has been shortened into an informal account which emphasizes action. About fifteen riddles fall into this category—the “Badge,” “Cuckoo,” “Iceberg,” “New Moon and Sun,” “Ore,” “Plow,” “Shield,” three “Storm” riddles, a “Swordrack,” one “Horn” riddle, one “Ship” riddle, and “Creature Death” or “Day.” Often these riddles also supply additional details, information, history, or the opinions of the narrator through one or more rhetorical devices which help to inform or amuse an audience, or further the story, account, or event—devices such as analogy, comparison, maxim, monologue, personification, Prosopopoeia, and vivid description (*enargeia*). The rhetor creates a scene so vivid in Riddle 27 [29] of the “New Moon and Sun” that it allows an audience virtually to experience it first-hand:

#### Riddle 27 [29]

*Ic wiht geseah  
hornum bitweonum  
lyftfæt leohtlic,  
huðe to þam ham*

*wundorlice  
huðe lædan,  
listum gegierwed,  
of þam heresiþe.*

- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 5  | <i>Walde hyre on þære byrig<br/>searwum asetting,<br/>Ða cwom wundorlicu wiht<br/>seo is eallum cuð<br/>ahredde þa þa huðe,</i> | <i>bur atimbran,<br/>gif hit swa meahte.<br/>ofer wealles hrof<br/>eorð buendum;<br/>and to ham bedraf</i>  |
| 10 | <i>wreccan ofer willan;<br/>fæhðumferan,<br/>Dust stonc to heofonum,<br/>niht forð gewat.<br/>wera gewiste</i>                  | <i>gewat hyre west þonan<br/>forð onette.<br/>deaw feol on eorþan,<br/>Nænig siþþan<br/>þære wihte sið.</i> |

I saw a wondrous creature, a radiant air-vessel artfully adorned, bringing booty between her horns, Spoil homewards from the foray. She wished to build herself a bower in the stronghold, set it up with skill, if so it might be. Then came a wondrous creature over the mountain-top—he is known to all dwellers on earth—snatched the spoil and drove the wanderer to her home against her will. Thence she departed westward on a journey of vengeance; she hastened forth. Dust rose to the heavens; dew fell on the earth; night went hence. No man afterwards knew where the creature journeyed. (Gordon 299)

Here, in addition to creating a vivid scene, the image of both the sun and new moon take on human characteristics; they are personified. The scene is the battle between the new moon, which is beautifully described as *lyftfæt leohtlic*, “a radiant vessel of the air,” *listum gegierwed*, skillfully crafted and adorned, and the moon, whose light taken from the sun is represented as bounty. Just as the moon begins her rightful rule over her domain, the sun, in search of his lost light, “spoil,” appears and assumes what now becomes his rightful domain. The riddle is both unique in its subject-matter as well as in its language and the style of its introduction. The vivid image of the hostility between the moon and the sun and their continuing battle over the coveted “booty” reveals established folkloric beliefs: the moon is represented as female, while the sun is represented as male

as in Greek mythology; they battle daily for light and the right to rule. Further, these two traditions are layered with the heroic tradition. By using language which the Anglo-Saxon audience recognized as indicative of struggle and battle—*huðe*, “plunder,” *heresipe*, “warring expedition,” *byrig*, “burg, or stronghold,” and *fæhðum*, “hostility,” the poet was able to create vivid battle images. On one level, the riddle is an entertaining and curious folktale, while on another level it evokes images of the battlefield and the successes, failures, plunders, vengeance, and exile that go with the Anglo-Saxon struggle for survival. The riddle also has one of the most unusual conclusions of all the riddles: the listener is given, not an answer, but rather a vision of the falling away of the night’s darkness as it is supplanted by the glow of the early morning’s mist and glistening dew. The vivid contrast of these last two visual images creates a contemplative reflection upon both the personified bodies and further aids in completing the narrative.

The riddle of the “Swordrack” is also an example of this type of compressed narrative verse:

#### Riddle 53 [55]

	<i>Ic seah in healle,</i>	<i>þær hæleð druncon,</i>
	<i>on flet beran</i>	<i>feower cynna:</i>
	<i>wrætlic wudutreow,</i>	<i>ond wunden gold,</i>
	<i>sinc searobunden,</i>	<i>ond seolfres dæl,</i>
5	<i>ond rode tacn</i>	<i>þæs us to roderum up</i>
	<i>hlædre rærde,</i>	<i>ær he helwara</i>
	<i>burg abraece.</i>	<i>Ic þæs beames mæg</i>
	<i>eape for eorlum</i>	<i>æpelu secgan;</i>
	<i>þær wæs hlin ond acc</i>	<i>ond se hearda iw,</i>
10	<i>ond se fealwa holen;</i>	<i>frecan sindon ealle</i>
	<i>nyt ætgædre,</i>	<i>naman habbað anne,</i>
	<i>wulfheafedtreo.</i>	<i>Ðæt oft wæpen abæd</i>

	<i>his mondryhtne,</i>	<i>maðm in healle,</i>
	<i>goldhilted sweord.</i>	<i>Nu me þisses gieddes</i>
15	<i>ondsware ywe</i>	<i>se hine on mede</i>
	<i>wordum secgan</i>	<i>hu se wudu hatte.</i>

I saw in the hall where warriors were drinking a wondrous tree, of four timbers, brought on the floor, it was adorned with twisted gold and with jewels inlaid most skillfully, and plated with silver—a symbol of His Cross who for us established a ladder between Heaven and Earth before He harrowed Hell, I can easily tell you of this tree's origin; the hard yew and the shining holly, the maple and the oak serve their Lord together and together they share one name an outlaw's tree it is that offered a weapon often to its lord, a treasure in the hall, the gold-hilted sword. Now tell me the answer to this riddle, whoever will hazard a guess as to what this tree is called. (Gordon 305)

Compression is achieved not only through vivid images and symbolic analogies, but also through references to traditional beliefs. Here the reference is to Christianity. The story is the creation and history of the “Swordrack”: its beginning as a tree; its symbolic analogy with Christ and his death and subsequent descent into Hell; the reminder of the ancient beliefs that the Cross was made up of the four woods—yew, holly, maple, and oak; the adornment of the Cross with jewels, gold and silver; its analogy with the outlaw's hanging tree; and finally, its analogy with the warrior's weapon and gilded sword—a different “treasure.” The narrator's creativity and use of these rhetorical devices make the riddle more than just a shopping list of clues for the “Swordrack.” Within these sixteen lines we have not only a vivid description of the past and present life of the four-timbered tree, but also an insight into the Christian and heroic traditions. The narrator fills the verse with rich detail of not only one image, but many images, and he provides his information on more than one level by using many analogies.

The first image is that of the warriors drinking in the meadhall. Our first “glimpse” of the subject comes next, but here the narrator paints several views of the object: a picture of the tree as four timbers; then a picture of the Cross; then the adornment and its analogy between Christ’s life, death, and later descent into Hell; then the tree as an outlaw’s tree or “hanging tree”; and finally the vision of the weapon being offered from the Swordrack to the lord, who is once again drinking in the meadhall. The narrator’s description abounds with color, signs, and symbols: the Cross, wound and twisted with gold, and plated with silver, inlaid with jewels. The cross is a “ladder” for us, a composite of “shining holly,” “hard yew,” maple, and oak; it is the symbol of the tree that outlaws are hung upon; but it is also a “treasure” in the meadhall for us to see, as it stands to offer the “gold-hilted sword,” a weapon, to the warrior. The successive imbrication of these vivid visions provides the listener with a story representative of the life of the tree and Cross, and the personification by the narrator brings the visions and the narrative to life. The Anglo-Saxon audience would also recognize the sword as a weapon based on a strong heroic tradition of defense and would probably make a connection between the sword as a defender of this religious faith. Further, the paradox is presented here by contrasting the images of life with death—crossed timbers made from the tree on which the savior was crucified represent the image of the tree as a cross of death while the image of the cross through the savior’s death becomes the catalyst for eternal life for believers. This use of this paradox is more fully developed in the famous “Dream of the Rood” poem, where

the cross itself takes on the voice of a person—personification—and tells how it “was reared up a cross and raised up a powerful King” (Bradley 161).

Riddle 51 [53], the “Battering Ram,” also describes itself as a tree in the forest, but here the riddle represents a destructive force rather than an object of joy:

Riddle 51 [53]

	<i>Ic seah on bearwe</i>	<i>beam hlifian,</i>
	<i>tanum torhtne;</i>	<i>þæt treow wæs on wynne,</i>
	<i>wudu weaxende.</i>	<i>Wæter hine ond eorþe</i>
	<i>feddan fægre</i>	<i>oþþæt he frod dagum</i>
5	<i>on oþrum wearð</i>	<i>aglachade</i>
	<i>deope gedolgod,</i>	<i>dumb in bendum,</i>
	<i>wriþen ofer wunda,</i>	<i>wonnum hyrstum</i>
	<i>foran gefrætwed.</i>	<i>Nu he fæcnum wæg</i>
	<i>þurh his heafdes mægen</i>	<i>hildegieste</i>
10	<i>oþrum rymed.</i>	<i>Oft hy an yste strudon</i>
	<i>hord ætgædre;</i>	<i>hræd wæs ond unlæt</i>
	<i>se æftera,</i>	<i>gif se ærra fær</i>
	<i>genamnan in nearowe</i>	<i>neþan moste.</i>

I saw the tree tower up in the wood glorious with branches; that tree was in joy, growing timber. Water and earth fed it well, until, grown old in other days, it was sorely stricken in its downfall, silent in bonds, its wounds fettered over, adorned in front with dark trappings. Now by the might of its head it clears the way for another malicious foe. Often together, mid storm, they have plundered the hoard. The second was swift and restive if the former fell into danger. No one could venture to grapple with it. (Gordon 305)

Again, enargeia makes the scene come to life: the tree “tower(s),” “glorious with branches” and feels “joy” in “growing timber.” “Watered and fed by nature,” it grows tall and “old,” until the second vision of the tree is presented. In this vision the tree has been felled, and its “bond(s)” and “fettters” have silenced it. It has been “wounded,” and its



front has been covered with dark ornaments or trappings. The tree is now revealed in its new transformation as one type of “malicious foe” clearing the way for “another,” two warmongers plundering the treasure. Our last vision of the tree is as a destructive tool, which gains its force from its partner, but identifies itself as the stronger of the two. The verses are again embellished with color and action so that the narrative moves from picture to picture, as if it were a storyboard. As in the other narrative riddles, personification gives the poem additional realism. The Anglo-Saxon audience would have made an analogy between the life of the tree and the life of the warrior noting the similarity between the heroic events and Anglo-Saxon culture. Drawing from this ideology, the narrator can layer another level of analogy within the riddle, thereby creating something more than the simple “*Saga hwæt,*” answer riddle.

But, perhaps there is no better example of story-telling than in the riddle of the “Cuckoo:”

#### Riddle 5 [7]

	<i>Hrægl min swigað</i>	<i>þonne ic hrusan trede</i>
	<i>opþe þa wic buge</i>	<i>opþe wado drefe.</i>
	<i>Hwilum mec ahebbað</i>	<i>ofer hæleþa byht</i>
	<i>hyrste mine</i>	<i>ond þeos hea lyft,</i>
5	<i>ond mec þonne wide</i>	<i>wolcna strengu</i>
	<i>ofer folc byreð.</i>	<i>Frætwe mine</i>
	<i>swogað hlude</i>	<i>ond swinsiað,</i>
	<i>torhte singað,</i>	<i>þonne ic getenge ne beom</i>
	<i>flode ond foldan,</i>	<i>ferende gæst.</i>

In former days  
Abandoned me dead,  
Or life or being.  
A kinswoman kind,

my father and mother  
lacking breath  
Then one began,  
to care for and love me;

Covered me with her clothing,  
 With the same affection  
 Until by the law  
 Under alien bosom  
 My foster mother  
 Until I grew sturdy  
 Then of her dear ones,  
 She had the fewer

wrapped me in her raiment  
 she felt for her own;  
 of my life's shaping  
 I quickened with breath.  
 fed me thereafter  
 and strengthened for flight.  
 of sons and daughters,  
 for what she did.

(Kennedy 41-42)

The foster-mother in the riddle does not recognize that the overgrown new inhabitant of its nest is an alien species. Because it feeds and nurtures the foundling, it allows the cuckoo, or alien bird, to push the original inhabitants out of the nest, thereby gaining more food and space for itself. The final response from the cuckoo is that, "She [the foster-mother] had fewer of her dear ones, for what she did." To say that one had fewer dear ones is to understate drastically the fact that the offspring were pushed from the nest to their deaths. Personification asks the audience to guess what creature is represented. By personifying the subject-matter of the riddle, the scop engaged his audience, thereby winning a more favorable impression—much like the magician who asks for volunteers from the audience to participate in his tricks. The audience's ability to solve a riddle required a similar kind of mental exercise. Each descriptive element appears to be applicable to many subjects, yet actually applies to only one solution/element.

Unlike many of the other riddles, the object presented in Riddle 30 [32] does not take on any human characteristics yet is referred to in the end as a "creature:"

#### Riddle 30 [32]

*Is þes middangeard  
 wisum gewlitedad,*

*missenlicum  
 wrættum gefrætwad.*

	<i>Sipum sellic</i>	<i>ic seah searo hweorfan,</i>
	<i>grindan wið greote,</i>	<i>giellende faran.</i>
5	<i>Næfde sellicu wiht</i>	<i>syne ne folme,</i>
	<i>exle ne earmas;</i>	<i>sceal on anum fet</i>
	<i>searoceap swifan,</i>	<i>swiþe feran</i>
	<i>faran ofer feldas.</i>	<i>Hæfde fela ribba;</i>
	<i>muð wæs on middan.</i>	<i>Moncynne nyt,</i>
10	<i>fereð foddurwelan,</i>	<i>folcsipe dreogeð,</i>
	<i>wist in wigeð,</i>	<i>ond werum gieldeð</i>
	<i>gaful geara gehwam</i>	<i>þæs þe guman brucað,</i>
	<i>rice ond heane.</i>	<i>Rece, gif þu cunne,</i>
	<i>wis worda gleaw,</i>	<i>hwæt sio wiht sie.</i>

This world is beautified in various ways, decked with adornments. I saw an artful work go forth, excellent in journeys, grind against the sand, move with a cry; the strange creature had not sight nor hands, shoulders nor arms; the curious thing must move on one foot, go quickly, pass over the plains; it had many ribs; its mouth was in the midst, useful to men; it brings to the people provision in plenty, bears food within it, and each year yields to men a gift of which men, rich and poor, make use. Tell, if thou canst, O sage, wise in words, what that creature is. (Gordon 299)

The narrator eliminates a list of several characteristic features of the human anatomy to describe the object. The accepted solution to this riddle is “Ship” which moves on one foot, is held together by its many ribs, and has a hole in its deck. Its clues are a list of paradoxical contrasts—it has neither sight nor hands, no shoulders or arms, and yet it has many ribs and a mouth and is able to move on its one foot.

It is also important to note that this riddle opens with another rhetorical device—the maxim. Maxims are rhetorical devices which represents a culture’s generally accepted opinions in the form of wise sayings or proverbs. Aristotle noted that maxims are drawn from the premises or conclusions of logical arguments, but occasionally may even be a major premise, especially when they represent community wisdom (Crowley 168). Since

the logic of a maxim often comes from deductive reasoning, there may be some connection to the closing lines of Riddle 32, “Tell, if thou canst, O sage, wise in words, what the creature is.” Maxims are not rare in the extant Anglo-Saxon literature. Those from the *Exeter Book* range broadly in topics and contain both implicit and explicit prescriptives. In this riddle the maxim is used as an ornament in the introduction.

Just as the Anglo-Saxon sailor appreciated the beauty of the open sea, he must also have feared its many destructive forces. Riddle 31 [33] allows us to view this other side of the seagoing life:

#### Riddle 31 [33]

	<i>Wiht cwom æfter wege</i>	<i>wrætlicu lipan;</i>
	<i>cymlic from ceole</i>	<i>cleopode to londe,</i>
	<i>hlinsade hlude;</i>	<i>hleahtor wæs gryrelic,</i>
	<i>egesful on earde.</i>	<i>Ecge wæron scearpe;</i>
5	<i>wæs hio hetegrim,</i>	<i>hilde to sæne,</i>
	<i>biter beadweorca.</i>	<i>Bordweallas grof</i>
	<i>heardhipende.</i>	<i>Heterune bond,</i>
	<i>sægde searocræftig</i>	<i>ymb hyre sylfre gesceaft:</i>
	<i>“Is min modor</i>	<i>mægða cynnes</i>
10	<i>þaes deorestan</i>	<i>þæt is dohtor min</i>
	<i>eacen up liden,</i>	<i>swa þæt is ældum cup,</i>
	<i>firum on folce,</i>	<i>þæt seo on foldan sceal</i>
	<i>on ealra londa gehwam</i>	<i>lissum stondan.”</i>

The monster came sailing, wondrous along the wave; it called out in its comeliness to the land from the ship; loud was its din; its laughter was terrible, dreadful on earth; its edges were sharp. It was malignantly cruel, not easily brought to battle but fierce in the fighting; it stove in the ship’s sides, relentless and ravaging. It bound it with a baleful charm; it spoke with cunning of its own nature; “My mother is of the dearest race of maidens, she is my daughter grown to greatness, as it is known to men, to people among the folk, that she shall stand with joy on the earth in all lands.” (Gordon 300)

The identification of the iceberg as a “monster” is immediately followed by a reference to its “comeliness.” The iceberg then begins to take on human characteristics: “its laughter was terrible”; “it was malignantly cruel”; “not easily brought to battle”; it was then “relentless and ravaging.” After the iceberg “binds the ship” with its “cunning charm” (another human characteristic), it completes the image by speaking with “cunning of its own nature.”

This monologue adds another rhetorical device to the riddle, and it is important that the clues which the iceberg gives its audience are indicative of those of family culture, another human characteristic. A monologue was inserted in only one other *Exeter Book* riddle, the Riddle of the “Ox” and in that riddle the speaker is a bystander, not the subject as in Riddle 31.

### Systematic and Process Forms

Process reveals a series of actions or steps that bring about a particular result. There are three clear examples of systematic, or process, riddle forms. This category represents a fascinating type of riddle form wherein the riddler creates clues by describing the process or the system whereby it originates or is created in sequence or steps. For instance, Riddle 24 [26] describes the making of a book, what some believe to be a Gospel-book:

#### Riddle 24 [26]

*Mec feonda sum  
woruldstrenga binom,  
dyfde on wætre,  
sette on sunnan,*

*feore besnybede,  
wætte sibþan  
dyde eft þonan,  
þær ic swiþe beleas*

5	<i>herum þam þe ic hæfde. snað seaxses ecg, fingras feoldan, geond speddorpum ofer brunne brerd,</i>	<i>Heard mec siþþan sindrum begrunden; ond mec fugles wyn spyrede geneahhe, beamtelge swealg,</i>
10	<i>streames dæle, siþade sweartlast. hæleð hleobordum, gierede mec mid golde; wrætlic weorc smiþa,</i>	<i>stop eft on mec, Mec siþþan wraþ hyde beþenede, forþon me gliwedon wire bifongen.</i>
15	<i>Nu þa gerenon ond þa wuldorgesteald dryhtfolca helm, Gif min bearn wera hy beoð þy gesundran heortum þy hwætran ferþe þy frodran swæstra ond gesibbra, tilra ond getreowra, estum ycað fæste clyppað. niþum to nytte. hælepum gifre</i>	<i>ond se reada telg wide mære nales dol wite. brucan willað, ond þy sigefætran. ond þy hygeblipian habbaþ freonda þy ma, sopra ond godra þa hyra tyr ond ead ond hi lufan fæþmum Frige hwæt ic hatte, Nama min is mære, ond halig sylf.</i>

A foe deprived me of life, took away my bodily strength; afterwards wet me, dipped me in water, took me out again, set me in the sun where I quickly lost the hairs I had. Afterwards the hard edge of the knife cut me, with all impurities ground off; fingers folded me, and the bird's delight sprinkled me over with useful drops; it made frequent tracks across the dark brim, swallowed the tree-dye, part of the stream, again moved on me, journeyed on leaving a dark track. Afterwards a man covered me with binding, stretched skin over me, adorned me with gold; and so the splendid work of smiths, circled with wire, decked me. Now the ornaments and the red dye and the glorious possessions make renowned far and wide the Protector of multitudes, in no wise the torments of hell. If the sons of men will use me they will be the safer and the more victorious, the bolder in heart and blither in thought, the wiser in mind; they will have the more friends, dear ones and kinsfolk, true and good, worthy and trusty, who will gladly increase their honor and happiness, and lay upon them benefits and mercies and hold them firm in embraces of love. Ask what is my name, useful to men; my name is famous, of service to men, sacred in myself. (Gordon 297-98)

This riddle is a clever description of the method used to make a book. The process shows the skin being softened, and later dried and scraped by the knife's edge. The skins are then folded, and the process of writing begins. The final step is that of the book being stretched in a binding, wired and illuminated. When the process is complete the book is then offered to the people. The riddle is, unfortunately, incomplete, but its final words appear as an exhortation which urges that listeners should make use of this book for their own sake.

Riddle 25 [27] describes the process of making mead from honey:

#### Riddle 25

	<i>Ic eom weorð werum, brungen of bearwum of denum ond of dunum. feþre on lifte, 5 under hrofes hleo. bapedan in bydene. ond swingere; esne to eorþan, Sona þæt onfindeð, 10 ond wið mægenþisan þæt he hrycge sceal gif he unrædes Strengo bistolen, mægene binumen— 15 fota ne folma. ðe on eorþan swa dole æfter dyntum</i>	<i>wide funden, ond of burghleopum, Dæges mec wægun feredon mid liste Hæleð mec sipþan Nu ic eom bindere sona weorpe hwilum ealdne ceorl. se þe mec fehð ongean minre genæsteð, hrusan secan ær ne geswiceð. strong on spræce, nah his modes geweald, Frige hwæt ic hatte esnas binde be dæges leohte.</i>
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I am valued by men,  
Gleaned on the hill-slopes,  
In dale and on down.  
Wings bore me aloft,  
Safe under roof.  
Now I have power

fetchd from afar,  
gathered in groves  
All day through the air  
and brought me with cunning  
Men steeped me in vats.  
to pummel and bind,

To cast to the earth,	old man and young.
Soon he shall find	who reaches to seize me,
Pits force against force,	that he's flat on the ground,
Stripped of his strength	if he cease not his folly,
Loud in his speech,	but of power despoiled
To manage his mind,	his hands or his feet.
Now ask me my name,	who can bind men on earth
And lay fools low	in the light of day. (Kennedy 42)

Here the process of making mead begins with the gathering of the honey in groves by the bees. The honey is carried indoors and fermented in vats. As correlative terms, cause and effect shows both the result and the force or influence of an action. Here, the effect (a clear use of example) of the beer is shown by its victim who lies flat on the ground, stripped of his strength; the message is again repeated in the conclusion as an exhortation.

The translation of Riddle 26 [28] below also reveals the basic characteristics of the process riddle:

#### Riddle 26 [28]

	<i>Bip foldan dæl</i>	<i>fægre gegierwed</i>
	<i>mid þy heardestan</i>	<i>ond mid þy scearpestan</i>
	<i>ond mid þy grymmestan</i>	<i>gumena gestreona.</i>
	<i>Corfen, sworfen,</i>	<i>cyrred, þyrred,</i>
5	<i>bunden, wunden,</i>	<i>blæced, wæced,</i>
	<i>frætwed, geatwed,</i>	<i>feorran læded,</i>
	<i>to durum dryhta,</i>	<i>dream bið in innan</i>
	<i>cwicra wihta,</i>	<i>clengeð, lengeð,</i>
	<i>Ðara þe ær lifgende</i>	<i>longe hwile</i>
10	<i>wilna bruceð</i>	<i>ond no wið spriced.</i>
	<i>Onð þonne æfter deaþe</i>	<i>deman onginneð,</i>
	<i>meldan mislice.</i>	<i>Micel is to hycganne</i>
	<i>wisfæstum menn,</i>	<i>hwæt seo wiht sy.</i>



A part of the earth is well furnished with the hardest and with the sharpest and with the grimmest of the possessions of men. Cut, rubbed, turned, dried, bound, twisted, bleached, softened, decked, prepared, it is carried from afar to the doors of men. The joy of living people arises within, continues and lingers, who, while alive, for a long time enjoy their desires and say nothing against them, and only after death fall to declaiming and speaking confusedly. To discover what the creature is an important matter for a sagacious man. (Lehnert 125)

The riddle sets out the steps in the process of making beer. The riddle is similar to the riddle of “Mead,” but the components are clearly more complex. Here the barley must be gathered, then cut, rubbed, dried and prepared before it can be consumed. It also includes the suggestion of the effects which follow from the act of consumption.

### Enigmas and Anglo-Saxon Form

An analysis of the classical rhetorical form can help us to see how the Anglo-Saxon riddlers emulated the ancients, but the real development of the Anglo-Saxon riddle can be seen only in a comparison with the riddles which we recognize as composed by the earlier Latin riddlers such as Aldhelm, Tatwine, and Symphosius. These original Latin enigmas contain many rhetorical elements which were either duplicated to some degree or expanded and developed by the riddle makers of the *Exeter Book*. But it is essential to note that the Anglo-Saxon riddles are not simple translations of the original Latin riddles. The Anglo-Saxon riddles develop their own unique art form by adapting the original enigmas. This transformation is achieved in several ways: by removing the title of the riddles and providing only the “translation” so that the information becomes clues; by including runes or substituting runic letters in the riddles; by inserting familiar language and images from the various Anglo-Saxon traditions; by introducing the

element of the erotic into the riddles; by creating stories which would entertain or appeal to an audience; and by including many rhetorical devices for effect so that the audience is engaged in a sort of word-play game or amusement.

A comparison between Symphosius' Latin riddle called the "One-eyed Garlic, or Onion Seller" with *Exeter Book* Riddle 82 [86], (which was patterned after Symphosius' Latin riddle) will serve as an example of how the simple metaphoric Latin riddle was transformed by the Anglo-Saxon riddler into a more complex and intellectually rich form.

(Riddle No. LXXXIV)

*Luscus Alium Vendens*

*Cernere iam fas est quod vix tibi credere fas est:  
Unus inest oculus, capitum sed milia multa.  
Qui quod habet vendit, quod non havet unde parabit:*

The Latin riddle would probably, as some scholars have pointed out, defy solution, however, with its gift of title it is clear that it was never intended to confuse the listener and was merely used as a didactic tool of translation. It opens with a challenge of credibility to the reader, or listener. Then follows a short description of the creature, and concludes with a reference to the seller. The riddle from the *Exeter Book* follows:

Riddle 82 [86]

<p>5      <i>Wiht cwom gongan monige on mæðle, hæfde an eage ond II fet, hrycg ond wombe earmas ond eaxle, ond sidan twa.</i></p>	<p><i>weras sæton mode snottre; ond earan twa, XII hund heafda, ond honda twa, anne sweoran Saga hwæt ic hatte.</i></p>
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A creature came where many men, wise in mind were sitting in the meeting-place; it had one eye and two ears and two feet, twelve hundred heads, back and belly, and two hands, arms, and shoulders, one neck and two sides. Say what is my name. (Gordon 308)

The *Exeter Book* riddle opens with the ominous *Wiht cwom gongan*, then proceeds with a description of the monstrous creature, and closes with the typical Anglo-Saxon *saga hwaet* ending. There is no reference in the Anglo-Saxon riddle to the seller.

But the Anglo-Saxon version, although clearly an adaptation, is an entirely different form with entirely different purposes.

The patterns of style which were selected by the creators of the Anglo-Saxon riddlers also were dictated by purpose and audience. Several major changes have been made in Symphosius' original metaphor. First, the removal of the original title begins the riddling challenge. Next, the descriptive characteristics become riddling "clues" for identifying the subject of the riddle. The additional request at the end of the riddle, *Saga hwæt ic hatte*, "Say what I am," adds the element of personification and demands an answer from the listener. Connecting the subject of the riddle with a creature by identifying both with a common feature is one of the traditional metaphorical methods which is so often seen in the *Exeter Book* riddles. This basic structural change of using the metaphorical device of substitution in conjunction with the elimination of the title results in the creation of a new riddling form as a tool for entertainment.

Riddle 38 [40] (set out in its entirety in Chapter III under prosopopoeia) is another example of Anglo-Saxon development of the original Latin form. The *Exeter Book* riddle is almost a free translation of the final riddle from Aldhelm's collection, *De Creatura*.

The Anglo-Saxon riddle has been solved as “Creation,” but again for the Anglo-Saxon audience, unlike Aldhelm’s listener, there would have been no easy perception of the solution. The familiar Anglo-Saxon ending, “Tell my name,” is missing in the riddle, perhaps because the ending of the riddle is missing, but an additional *Exeter Book* riddle, Riddle 66 [68-69], which has also been compared with Aldhelm’s riddle (Gordon 306), appears to be a freer treatment of part of the *Exeter Book* riddle. Although this riddle is only a few lines long, the ending includes a request to “Tell my name.” The resulting Anglo-Saxon riddle shows the transition from the original Latin enigma to a new riddle genre by making the following changes: by first removing the title and providing “clues” through parallelism, anaphora, and antitheses, by allowing the riddle to speak for itself (prosopopoeia); and (specifically in Riddle 66) by asking its listener to “name it.”

This technique of requesting a response from the listener appears again in another Anglo-Latin translation riddle. Symphosius’ sixteenth riddle appears to be the source for the *Exeter Book* Riddle 45 [47]. The original Latin riddle begins with the title “*The Moth.*”

*De Tinea.*

*Litera me pavit, nec quid sit litera novi,  
In libris vixi nec sum studiosior inde,  
Exedi musas nec adhuc tamen ipse profeci.*

The translation reads:

I have fed upon literature, yet know not what it is; I have lived among books, yet am not the more studious for it; I have devoured Muses, yet up to the present time I have made no progress. (Brooke 239)

Now, compare Symphosius' riddle with Riddle 45 in the *Exeter Book*:

Riddle 45 [47]

	<i>Moððe word fræt.</i>	<i>Me þæt þuhte</i>
	<i>wrætlicu wyrd</i>	<i>þa ic þæt wundor gefrægen,</i>
	<i>þæt se wyrm forswealg</i>	<i>wera gied sumes,</i>
	<i>þeof in þystro</i>	<i>þrymfæstne cwide</i>
5	<i>ond þæs strangan stapol.</i>	<i>Stælgæst ne wæs</i>
	<i>wihte þy gleawra</i>	<i>þe he þam wordum swealg.</i>

A moth ate words. That seemed to me a curious occurrence when I heard of that marvel, that this worm gulped down the utterance of a certain man, this thief in the dark his illustrious discourse and its rough foundation. The pilfering visitor was not a whit the wiser because he had gulped in those words. (Kennedy 141)

Reading both riddles makes it clear that Symphosius' riddle is the source for the riddle in the *Exeter Book*—both are clearly about the same subject. But the descriptive elements have been artfully expanded and developed from Symphosius' original source into a new style of riddle. The title which graced Symphosius' riddle has been removed, and the reader is instead introduced to a *Stælgeist*, a "pilfering visitor," and an occasional use of an oxymoron here, who is not a *wihte* the wiser because of the *wera gied sumes*, knowledge that he swallowed. This clever omission of the solution makes the riddle more challenging to its audience. Secondly, the newly developed riddle has dropped the element of personification and the reader becomes both an observer and a narrator, passing along the story. Thirdly, the original form is rearranged and words and phrases like *wrætlicu wyrd*, "wondrous chance," and *wundor gefrægen*, "well-known wonder," are inserted making the event more of a phenomenon. The riddler has designed a kind of word play in which the reader interacts with the riddling process. Additionally, there is an

underlying message that something is to be gained from consuming the wisdom and knowledge of books, but that consumption here is the ability to interpret, not just to swallow. The result of all this development is the transformation of the enigma from a relatively simple tool to teach logic into a form of poetic art providing intellectual entertainment.

Another example of this transformation can be seen in Riddle 33 [35], the “Breastplate,” a redaction of Aldhelm’s original Latin enigma *De Lorica*:

*De Lorica.*

*Roscida me genuit gelido de viscere tellus;  
non sum setigero lanarum vellere facta,  
licia nulla trahunt nec garrulafila resultant  
nec crocea. Seres texunt languine vermes  
nec radiis carpor duro nec pectine pulsor;  
et tamen en vestis vulgri sermone vocabor.  
Spicula non vereor longis exempta faretris.*

Aldhelm's riddle appears at the end of his collection and contains a significant number of details that later turn up in Riddle 33 [35], the Breastplate. A comparison between Aldhelm's riddle and the *Exeter Book* riddle reveals several major similarities of detail and differences in style and although it has been set out in translation earlier the additional translation will help to better compare the two styles:

5	<i>Mec se wæta wong, of his innape Ne wat ic mec beworhtne hærum þurh heahcræft, Wundene me ne beoð wefle, ne þurh þreata geþræcu ne æt me hrutende ne mec ohwonan</i>	<i>wundrum freorig, ærist cende. wulle flysum, hygeþoncum min. ne ic wearp hafu, þræd me ne hlimmeð, hrisil scriþið, sceal am cnyssan.</i>
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	<i>Wyrmas mec ne awæfan</i>	<i>wyrda cræftum,</i>
10	<i>þa þe geolo godweb</i>	<i>geatwum frætwað.</i>
	<i>Wile mec mon hwæpre sepeah</i>	<i>wide ofer eorþan</i>
	<i>hatan for hæleþum</i>	<i>hyhtlic gewæde.</i>
	<i>Saga soðcwidum,</i>	<i>searopuncum gleaw,</i>
	<i>wordum wisfæst,</i>	<i>hwæt þis gewæde sy.</i>

First of all the wet plain, extremely cold, brought me forth from its interior. I know in my thoughts that I am not made, by excellent skill, from fleeces of wool or from hairs. Woofs are not wound for me, nor have I a warp, nor for me does a thread resound from the force of many strokes, nor does the whirring shuttle glide over me, nor shall weavers' rods strike me from anywhere. The worms that deck the fine yellow cloth with embroidery did not weave me by the skill that the fates have given them. Nevertheless before men far and wide over the earth I shall be called a pleasing garment. Say truly, man skilled in clever thoughts and wise in words, what this garment is. (Brooke 127)

Again, the *Exeter Book* riddle has all the information of Aldhelm's enigma, but the arrangement and form have been greatly modified. For example, a sense of sequence characterizes the introduction of the Old English riddle which now has both a beginning and an ending. Also, the addition of words and phrases like *heahcræft*, *godwebb*, *awæfan* *wyrd cræftum* make the new version refer to a more curious and mysterious garment. Finally, the Old English riddle closes with the characteristic Anglo-Saxon request, *Saga* . . . *hwæt*, which asks the audience to respond with a solution to the clues already given. Clearly, this is no longer the simple Latin recitation which Aldhelm created. It is now a game between the riddler and the audience whereby both can stretch their imagination and skills.

Some of the *Exeter Book* riddles we know to be from Latin sources, because we have been able to trace their origins through translation or by identifying their subject-

matter. Others imitate the Latin form and style, but their subject-matter is unique. This can be seen in a comparison between Aldhelm's alphabet riddle and the *Exeter Book* riddle of "Month":

### The Alphabet.

*Nos denae et septem genitae since voce sorores;  
Sex alias nothas non dicimus adnumerandas;  
Nascimur ex ferro rursus ferro moribundae,  
Necnon et volucris penna volitantis ad aethram;  
Terni nosfratres incerta matre crearunt;  
Qui cupit instanter sitiens audire, docernus,  
Turn cito prompta darnus rogitanti verbva silenter.*

We are seventeen sisters voiceless born; six others, half-sisters, we exclude from our set; children of iron by iron we die, but children too of the bird's wing that flies so high; three brethren our sires, be our mother as may; if any one is very eager to hear, we tell him, and quickly given answer without any sound. (Earle 89)

Aldhelm's riddle gives its title as the "Alphabet," so there is no need to decipher the figures or characters depicted in the language. Aldhelm has merely chosen artful language to make his riddle poetic; e.g., these "children" are made and erased, by iron style, or a bird's quill, by three fingers which are represented here as "three brethren," or collectively as "our mother." Thus, the irony comes from the alphabet's ability to answer without making any sound when in its written form. The *Exeter Book* riddle which appears to be patterned after this Latin riddle is Riddle 20 [22]:

### Riddle 20 [22]

<i>Ætsomne cwom to</i>	<i>sixtig monna</i>
<i>to wægstæþ</i>	<i>wicgum ridan;</i>
<i>hæfdon endleofan</i>	<i>eoredmæcgas</i>
<i>fridhengestas,</i>	<i>feower sceamas.</i>



5	<i>Ne meah-ton magorincas swa hi fundedon, atol yþa geþræc, streamas stronge. on wægn weras</i>	<i>ofer mere feolan ac wæs flod to deop, ofras hea, Ongunnon stigan þa ond hyra wicg somod</i>
10	<i>hlodan under hrunge; eh ond eorlas, ofer wætres byht swa hine oxa ne teah, ne fæthengest,</i>	<i>þa þa hors oðbær æscum dealle, wægn to lande— ne esna mægen, ne on flode swom,</i>
15	<i>ne be grunde wod ne lagu drefde, ne under bæc cyrde; beornas ofer burnan from stæde heaum</i>	<i>gestum under, ne of lyfte fleag, brohte hwæþre ond hyra bloncan mid þæt hy stopan up</i>
20	<i>on oþerne weras of wæge</i>	<i>ellenrofe ond hyra wicg gesund.</i>

Sixty men came riding together on horses to the shore; the horsemen had eleven horses of peace, four white horses. The warriors could not pass over the sea they desired, but the flood was too deep, dire the press of waves, high the banks, strong the currents. Then the men began to mount the wagon, and they loaded their horses together under the pole. Then the wagon bore forth the horses, the steeds and earls, proud with ashen spears, to the land across the water's abode; an ox did not draw it thus, nor the strength of asses, nor a roadhorse; nor did it swim on the flood, nor go on the ground beneath its guests, nor did it stir the sea, nor fly in the air, nor return backwards; yet it brought the warriors over the stream from the high shore, and their white horses with them, so that they, the brave ones, stepped up on the other bank, the men out of the wagon and their horses in safety. (Gordon 296)

The solution which has been given most weight for this riddle is "Month." The sixty men are sixty half-days, or one month. The seven holy days and the four Sundays (white horses), or eleven days of peace could represent the month of December. If so, the opposite shore which the men wish to reach could be the New Year. Like the Latin riddle, the Anglo-Saxon riddle asks for no response, but unlike the Latin riddle, it gives no clue

by assigning its title as its solution. The most distinguishing features of this *Exeter Book* riddle are its use of anaphora and the heightening of the descriptions into clues. Marie Nelson noted earlier that the *ne . . . ac* construction in lines 5 and 6 is of the type that aided in the "structure of opposition" process (428), but I believe the important clues are given through anaphora rather than the use of opposition: the *ne . . . ne* phrasing creates the important riddle clues here. There are eight separate phrasings which are intended to describe how the wagon did not arrive on the opposite shore, although it is obvious from the ending that both men and horses arrived safely on the other side. Anaphora used in this manner is common in works by the Latin rhetors, but here it creates more ambiguous clues for the audience.

This step-by-step analysis of the content and form of the Anglo-Saxon riddle has revealed that the Anglo-Saxons used careful selection and arrangement of material when creating the Anglo-Saxon riddles. Like the classical rhetoricians the Anglo-Saxons used analysis, description, definition, enumeration, division, exemplification, comparison and contrast, analogy, and classification for the static modes in creating the Anglo-Saxon riddle. And also like the classical rhetoricians, the Anglo-Saxon riddlers used narrative, process, and cause and effect techniques for creating the progressive riddles. But, unlike their predecessors, either classicist or Anglo-Latin, the Anglo-Saxon riddlers used a selection of material and arrangement of form to create a series of clues, or clue-like language, in order to amuse the listener, or audience. It is this unique method of creation that allows us, possibly, to glimpse the creativity of the Anglo-Saxon riddler.

CHAPTER III  
FIGURES OF STYLE:  
TONE, DICTION AND FIGURES OF SPEECH  
IN THE *EXETER BOOK* RIDDLES

Alfred North Whitehead said that style is, “. . . the last acquirement of the educated mind; [yet] also the most useful” (Corbett 380). This modern conception of style is still based on the Latin word for style, *elocutio*, “speaking out,” and the usual Greek word for style, *lexis*, “thought” and “word.” For Greek rhetoricians, style involved collecting one’s thoughts and then putting them into words. It is from this third canon of rhetoric that the Anglo-Saxon riddlers would have imitated the patterns of sentence composition and ornament thereby amplifying this developing riddle form. Many of the *Exeter Book* riddles acknowledge the importance of style by imitating classical rhetorical methods and devices of tone, style, diction, and figures of speech. Some of the more familiar stylistic devices concern the choice of diction, length and kind of sentences, variety of sentence patterns, coherence, and overall length of the work. Likewise, ancient rhetorical style focused on selected figures of speech, or tropes, to create a specific effect. Although the number of rhetorical devices available to the Anglo-Saxons was extensive, it is helpful to discuss only examples of those devices which the Anglo-Saxon used within the context of the *Exeter Book* riddles and which contributed to developing the riddle beyond the simple metaphoric statement which Aristotle earlier defined.

For the most part, the riddles which exhibit the use of previously established rhetorical devices all raise the art of the riddle form to something which could be viewed as persuasive or extraordinary. For example, the result of inserting figures of speech and thought and other tropes was to elevate the riddle form from the relatively prosaic level of the Latin riddle to the genuinely poetic style. The list of devices which the Anglo-Saxon riddlers used to elevate their form is long: allegory, alliteration, allusion, analogy, anaphora, antithesis, assonance, comparison, contrast, definition, division, enargeia, meiosis, metaphor, paradox, personification, periphrasis, repetition, respice, rhyme, and symbolism—and many are often referred to as figures of speech and tropes.

### **Classical Figures of Thought**

The patterns of thought which so greatly influenced the development of form in the Anglo-Saxon *Exeter Book* riddles are often expressed as rhetorical devices. These figures of thought carry the same topical names as their formal counterparts, and although they work well within that counterpart, they can also be used as figures of thought in other forms as well. Many examples of these figures of thought can be found in the riddles of the *Exeter Book*.

### **Classical Figures of Language**

#### Meiosis, Irony, and Litotes

Rhetorical devices which aid in providing contrast are often referred to as meiosis. Examples of this effect of lessening are irony and understatement (or litotes). Litotes is also a familiar trademark of the Anglo-Saxons and these understatements are

found not only in their prose and poetry, but also in their poetic riddles. The development of understatement from the classical methods sometimes reached grim proportions.

Consider, for example, the riddle of the Badger, or Fox:

Riddle 13 [15]

	<i>Hals is min hwit</i>	<i>ond heafod fealo,</i>
	<i>sidan swa some.</i>	<i>Swift ic eom on feþe,</i>
	<i>beadowæpen bere.</i>	<i>Me on bæce standað</i>
	<i>her swylce swe on hleorum;</i>	<i>hlifiað tu</i>
5	<i>earan ofer eagam.</i>	<i>Ordum ic steppe</i>
	<i>in grene græs.</i>	<i>Me bið gyren witod</i>
	<i>gif mec onhæle</i>	<i>an onfindeð</i>
	<i>wælgrim wiga</i>	<i>þær ic wic buge,</i>
	<i>bold mid bearnum,</i>	<i>ond ic bide þær</i>
10	<i>mid geoguðcnosle.</i>	<i>Hwonne gæst cume</i>
	<i>to durum minum,</i>	<i>him bið deað witod;</i>
	<i>forþon ic sceal of eðle</i>	<i>eaforan mine</i>
	<i>forhtmod fergan,</i>	<i>fleame nergan.</i>
	<i>Gif he me æfterweard</i>	<i>ealles weorþeð—</i>
15	<i>hine berað breost—</i>	<i>ic his bidan ne dear,</i>
	<i>reþes on geruman—</i>	<i>nele þæt ræd teale—</i>
	<i>ac ic sceal fromlice</i>	<i>feþemundum</i>
	<i>þurh steapne beorg</i>	<i>stræte wyrcan.</i>
	<i>Eaþe ic mæg freora</i>	<i>feorh genergan</i>
20	<i>gif ic mægburge mot</i>	<i>mine gelædan</i>
	<i>on degolne weg</i>	<i>þurh dune þyrel</i>
	<i>swæse ond gesibbe;</i>	<i>ic me sibþan ne þearf</i>
	<i>wælhwelþes wig</i>	<i>wiht onsittan.</i>
	<i>Gif se niðsceaþa</i>	<i>nearwe stige</i>
25	<i>me on swaþe seceþ,</i>	<i>ne tosæleþ him</i>
	<i>on þam gegnpaþe</i>	<i>gubgemotes,</i>
	<i>sibþan ic þurh hylles</i>	<i>hrof geræce</i>
	<i>ond þurh hest hrino</i>	<i>hildepilum</i>
	<i>laðgewinnum</i>	<i>þam þe ic longe fleah.</i>

My neck is white, my head yellow, also my sides; I am swift in my going, I bear a weapon for battle, on my back stand hairs just as on my cheeks; above my eyes tower two ears; I walk on my toes in the green grass. Grief is doomed for me if anyone, a fierce fighter, catch me in my covert, where I have my haunt, my lair with my litter, and I lurk there with my young brood when the intruder comes to my doors; death is doomed for them,

and so I shall bravely bear my children from their abode, save them by flight, if he comes close after me. He goes on his breast; I dare not await his fierceness in my hold—that were ill counsel—but fast with my forefeet I must make a path through the steep hill. I can easily save the life of my precious ones, if I am able to lead my family, my beloved and kin, by a secret way through a hole in the hill; afterwards I need dread not at all the battle with the death-whelp. If the malignant foe pursues me behind by a narrow path, he shall not lack a struggle to bar his way after I reach the top of the hill, and with violence I will strike with war darts the hated enemy whom long I fled. (Gordon 293-94)

Scholars have already noted the analogy drawn between the little badger and the Anglo-Saxon warrior. The badger's remark that to "dare . . . await" the fierceness of the "intruder" would prove to be "ill-counsel" is an example of litotes. The consequences of waiting, clearly, are far more serious than simply the taking of bad advice. Here, ill-counsel represents the risk of death and the riddle employs litotes to emphasize an unusually understated, abrupt, and negative commentary, considering the consequences. Litotes underlines the very straight-forward and oftentimes harsh realities of the Anglo-Saxon world. It smacks of the awareness and general acceptance of what could not always be identified or understood, but had to be digested for the sake of survival.

### Metaphor

According to Aristotle, "The nature of the riddle is to describe a fact in an impossible combination of words (which cannot be done with real names for things, but can be with their metaphorical substitutes)" (*Poetics* 1458) Since the basic nature of the ancient riddle implied a metaphor, it is not surprising that many of the *Exeter Book* riddles include examples of metaphor. Metaphor allows us to see ordinary things in new ways, or as Aristotle observed, metaphor allows people to learn things in new or unusual

ways. They encourage the encounter with the witty or urbane ideas which, Aristotle said, give pleasure to people, because all people enjoy learning new things. But the Anglo-Saxons found other ways to use metaphors to make ideas concrete, and in doing so, they succeeded in creating descriptions in a new riddle form. Yet while developing this new form, they did not abandon classical devices. Indeed, Riddle 66 [68-9] appears to be original subject-matter developed by classical metaphoric techniques:

Riddle 66 [68-69]

<i>Ic þa geseah</i>	<i>on weg fēran;</i>
<i>heo wæs wrætlice</i>	<i>wundrum gegierwed</i>
<i>Wundor wearð on wege;</i>	<i>wæter wearð to bane.</i>

Over the wave, a weird thing I saw, through-wrought, and wonderfully ornate: a wonder on the wave—water became bone. (Alexander 100)

Again, when the speaker begins the riddle, the challenge is drawn because there is no title to the verse—each description becomes a clue to be deciphered. Further, the subject is metaphorically described as “water become bone.” But the substitution of *bane*, “bone,” for water rather than using the familiar Old English form for ice, *is*, intentionally plants an ambiguous clue.

Methods of Repetition: Alliteration, Anaphora, and Antithesis

Old English poetry as a whole contains the stylistic qualities of repetition through alliteration and variance. Each pair of two half-lines contains two stressed syllables and a variable number and arrangement of unstressed syllables. The pattern of stresses in turn is reinforced by alliteration, or the repetition of the same two sounds in the beginning of the

words. An example of this alliteration can be seen in the first few lines of the Riddle of the “Ox” or “Oxhide,” 10 [12]:

<i>Fotum ic fere,</i>	<i>foldan slite,</i>
<i>grene wongas,</i>	<i>benden ic gæst bere.</i>
<i>Gif me feorh losað,</i>	<i>fæste binde</i>
<i>swearte Wealas,</i>	<i>hwilum sellan men.</i>

The sound /f/ appears initially twice on the two stresses in the first half-line in the words “*Fotum*” and “*fere*,” and in the second half-line in the word “*foldan*.” The initial sound of /g/ appears twice in the second half-line, once initially and once medially in the words “*grene*” and “*wongas*.” The same /g/ sound appears again initially in the second half-line in the word “*gæst*.” This repetition of sounds does not always appear in every line of Old English poetry; however, the number of lines in which it does appear has made it one of the trademarks of style for Anglo-Saxon poetry and has earned from modern scholars an additional appreciation for their art form. Anglo-Saxon audiences, no doubt, appreciated the effect that is achieved from the use of alliteration, a somewhat heavy effect—slow and stately. Another device of repetition was used by the Anglo-Saxon riddlers for a different type of effect—elaboration. The translation of Riddle 6 [8], the “Jay” or “Nightingale,” demonstrates the effect of this method of repetition:

#### Riddle 6 [8]

	<i>Ic þurh muþ sprece</i>	<i>mongum reordum,</i>
	<i>wrencum singe,</i>	<i>wrixle geneahhe</i>
	<i>heafodwoþe,</i>	<i>hlude cirme,</i>
	<i>healde mine wisan,</i>	<i>hleopre ne miþe.</i>
5	<i>Eald æfensceop,</i>	<i>eorlum bringe</i>
	<i>blisse in burgum;</i>	<i>þonne ic bugendre</i>
	<i>stefne styrme,</i>	<i>stille on wicum</i>



	<i>sittað nigende.</i>	<i>Saga hwææt ic hatte,</i>
	<i>þe swa scirenige</i>	<i>sceawendwisan</i>
10	<i>hlude onhyrge,</i>	<i>hælepum bodige</i>
	<i>wilcumena fela</i>	<i>woþe minre.</i>

I carol my song	in many a cadence,
With modulation	and change of note.
Clearly I call,	keeping the melody,
An old evening-singer	unceasing in song.
To earls in their houses	I bring great bliss;
When I chant my carols	in varying strains,
Men sit in their dwellings	silent and still.
Say what I am called	who mimic so clearly
The songs of a jester,	and sing to the word
Many a melody	welcome to men.

The riddle uses ten separate but similar variations of its identity: caroler of songs, clearly calling, keeping the melody, evening-singer, unceasing in song, bringing great bliss, chanting my carols, mimicking so clearly, singing to the world, and welcome to men. Likewise, the riddle uses at least eight separate yet similar variations of its song: in many a cadence, with modulation, change of note, melodious, unceasing, varying strains, songs of a jester, many a melody. Here the effect is clearly intended to give the audience a vivid image of the subject-matter through word association and the suggestion of its repetition of sound. Anyone who has listened to the jay or nightingale can testify that these repetitions of variation all give the listener vivid clues to the subject-matter of the riddle.

### Anaphora and Antithesis

Additional methods of employing repetition are found in the use of anaphora and antithesis. An example of anaphora and antithesis has been shown previously in the riddle

solved as “Month” (page 00) and again in the riddle of the “Breastplate” (page 00). In both of these riddles the effect of providing both “what I am” and “what I am not” clues serves to further confuse the audience.

### Periphrasis

If an *Exeter Book* riddle contains suggestive or erotic language, it can be easily identified as periphrastic, or circumlocutory. An insistence on clarity in classical rhetoric and prohibitions against obscenity, unseemly behavior, and trivial matters suggest that the riddle form which I have described as being a purely Anglo-Saxon creation was most unlikely to have existed during classical times. But the Anglo-Saxons did borrow the Greek idea of periphrasis, or “talking around” a subject to lead the audience away from a direct perception of an image or idea. The Anglo-Saxons had available to them various classical rhetorical devices, which enabled the riddler to avoid a topic for effect or for etiquette’s sake (Crowley 190). In fact, the Anglo-Saxons went even farther by creating suggestive clues that would lead the audience around the correct answer and directly to an erotic answer.

Specifically, then, the circumlocutory, or periphrastic, riddles are those in which the language of the riddle is chosen from a suggestive menu or with a suggestive intent for the purpose of leading the listener not only away from the correct answer, but more importantly, into an entirely bawdy, or erotic, arena for an answer. At least six of the riddles in the *Exeter Book* match these characteristics. The most famous of these are now

referred to as the key/penis riddles because of their similarly suggestive clues and subject matter. Consider *Exeter Book* Riddle 42 [44], which has been solved as “Key”:

Riddle 42 [44]

	<i>Wrætlic hongað</i>	<i>bi weres þeo,</i>
	<i>freat under sceate.</i>	<i>Foran is þyrel</i>
	<i>Bið stiþ ond heard,</i>	<i>stede hafað godne;</i>
	<i>þonne se esne</i>	<i>his agen hrægl</i>
5	<i>ofer cneo hefeð</i>	<i>wile þæt cuþe hol</i>
	<i>mid his hangellan</i>	<i>heafde gretan</i>
	<i>þæt he efenlang ær</i>	<i>oft gefylde.</i>

A curiosity hangs by the thigh of a man, under its master's cloak. It is pierced through in the front; it is stiff and hard and it has a good standing place. When the man pulls up his own robe above the knee, he means to poke with the head of his hanging thing that familiar hole of matching length which he has often filled before. (Bradley 379)

These clues have been carefully selected to be suggestive. Notice that the material of which the subject is made, whether metal or iron, is not revealed; indeed, the audience's attention is misdirected by the reference to “thigh.” Nor does the riddle give the composition of its matching “familiar hole.” Subject clues like “curiosity,” “standing place,” and “hanging thing,” descriptive adjectives like “stiff and hard” and “pierced in front” and verbs like “hangs” and “poke” are all that the audience needs to wander happily down the wrong path for a solution. Furthermore, unlike many other riddles, the subject is not personified nor does it ask the audience to guess what it is. These two facts seem to indicate that the audience needed little assistance with the incorrect answer and perhaps that the riddler was reluctant to spoil the fun by offering more assistance in finding the correct solution.

Riddle 87 [91] is another “Key” riddle which purports to guard its master's treasure, while Riddle 59 [61], a “keyhole” riddle, represents its counterpart. It has been solved as either an “Embroidered Shirt,” or a “Helmet.”

### Riddle 59 [61]

	<i>Oft mec fæste bileac</i>	<i>freolicu meowle,</i>
	<i>ides on earce;</i>	<i>hwilum up ateah</i>
	<i>folmum sinum</i>	<i>ond frean sealde,</i>
	<i>holdum þeodne,</i>	<i>swa hio haten wæs.</i>
5	<i>Siðþan me on hrepre</i>	<i>heafod sticade,</i>
	<i>niopan upweardne</i>	<i>on nearo fegde.</i>
	<i>Gif þæs ondfengan</i>	<i>ellen dohte,</i>
	<i>mec frætwedne</i>	<i>fyllan sceolde</i>
	<i>ruwes nathwæt.</i>	<i>Ræd hwæt ic mæne.</i>

Often a noble woman, a lady, has locked me up tight in a chest. On occasions she would pull me out in her hands and deliver me to her lord and loyal master, as she was bidden. Then he would poke his head inside me. From below, I being upturned, he would conjoin with me in a tight fit. If the recipient's strength kept up, some sort of hairy thing would be bound to fill my ornamented person. Interpret what I mean. (Gordon 308)

Regardless of the correct solution, the suggestiveness of the language indicates that the original intent of the riddler was to mislead the audience in its attempt to solve the riddle.

The situation in the riddles seems to be appropriately described by the Greek term, periphrasis, to represent the two solutions—as in *key* and *penis*. It does not seem precisely a *double entendre* which generally involves a single sign or word having two meanings, one bawdy, one not, as, for example the Renaissance word *die* could mean both death and sexual climax.

Both Riddle 45 and Riddle 46 are indicative of the periphrastic form of riddles.

Riddle 45 describes a “thing growing” and has been solved as “Dough,” while the subject

of Riddle 46, “The Family of Lot,” represents an entirely different type of subject matter. As mentioned earlier, this riddle presents an image of all the family members present at the table. Their dual relationships (Bradley 380) become the subject of the riddle because Lot’s daughters conceived their father’s sons in order to continue the family line. And even though the original source for this riddle is a story from the book of Genesis, the Anglo-Saxons created an elusive interplay among its elements that made it, in fact, a riddle.

Other periphrastic riddles are the riddle of the “Oxhide” and Riddle 23 [25], the “Onion.” The “Onion” riddle has a most humorous introduction:

#### Riddle 23 [25]

	<i>Ic eom wunderlicu wiht,</i>	<i>wifum on hyhte,</i>
	<i>neahbuendum nyt;</i>	<i>nængum sceþþe</i>
	<i>burgsittendra,</i>	<i>nymþe bonan anum.</i>
	<i>Stapol min is steaphead,</i>	<i>stonde ic on bedde,</i>
5	<i>neopan ruh nathwær.</i>	<i>Neðeþ hwilum</i>
	<i>ful cyrtenu</i>	<i>ceorles dohtor,</i>
	<i>modwlonc meowle,</i>	<i>þæt heo on mec gripeð,</i>
	<i>mec on reodne,</i>	<i>reafað min heafod,</i>
	<i>fegeð mec on fæsten.</i>	<i>Feleþ sona</i>
10	<i>mines gemotes,</i>	<i>seo þe mec nearwað,</i>
	<i>wif wundenlocc.</i>	<i>Wæt bid þæt eage.</i>

I am the world’s wonder, for I make women happy—a boon to the neighborhood, a bane to no one, though I may perhaps prick the one who pricks me. I am set well up, stand in a bed, have a roughish root. Rarely (though it happens) a churl’s daughter more daring than the rest—and lovelier—lays hold of me, rushes my red top, wrenches at my head, and lays me in the larder. She learns soon enough, the curly-haired creature who clamps me so, of my meeting with her; moist is her eye! (Alexander 95)

Indeed, a “world's wonder” would be that which makes women happy, is boon to all, and bane to no one! But the language the riddler chooses is suggestive—*reodne*, “red,” and *stonde ic on bedde*, “I stand in the bed.” The conclusion which is drawn is humorous and serious, depending upon the solution which the audience has reached; if the solution is merely an onion, the maiden cries in “joy,” but if the solution is copulation, then the maiden will cry from sorrow, pain, or perhaps regret.

The original purpose of the riddle was, I believe, to entertain and please the scop's audience and, further, to enhance the esteem of the scop in the eyes of that audience. The additional intention of the periphrastic riddles, I believe, was to create an intellectual challenge by misdirecting the listener thereby increasing the value the listener placed upon the scop. The more difficult or the more humorous the riddle, the more esteemed would be the riddler. To assume, as some scholars have, that the sexual overtones or suggestions within these riddles were not generally acceptable among the Anglo-Saxons or that they mimic class differentiations, or that they may have appealed only to the lower classes ignores the obvious fact that only a handful of these riddles exist (scholars generally reckon fewer than 10) in a collection of almost one-hundred. Furthermore, they were recorded—perhaps even created—in monasteries by learned and literate individuals, and even Leofric, the bishop of Exeter who owned the book, did not find these riddles offensive enough to remove them. And, interestingly enough, the same type of key/penis connections continued to be exploited in ribald song into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and beyond.

What this group of riddles does represent is a cross-section of the Anglo-Saxon culture—the churl’s daughter, the dark-haired servant woman, a southern man, a fair-haired, curly-locked woman, a master or lord, a lord's daughter, and a countryman's comely daughter engaged in an activity that was intended to appear as what it was not, in order to lead the listener down the incorrect or, in this case, sexually suggestive path. This appears to be the recognition of and intentional exposure of a generally accepted subject-matter in a cross-section of Anglo-Saxon society.

The riddles also show us something about the nature of both the scop and his audience. A scop riddled for his audience, and obviously this audience included the most influential Anglo-Saxons. Sexually suggestive riddles must have been a relief from the other darker, harsher aspects of life. The scop must have played to an audience which valued his literary prowess in creating an artifact which gave them practice in suppressing the obvious and sexual solution for one that was not so obvious (no doubt a useful talent in a monastery), much like attempting to listen to the *William Tell Overture* without thinking about the Lone Ranger. This more private side of the Anglo-Saxon's mind—specifically his interest in and amusement at sexually explicit, or suggestive behavior is precisely what makes these riddles so appealing and revealing.

### Prosopopoeia

Many of the *Exeter Book* riddles exhibit the classical rhetorical device of personification, and many scholars have been quick to point out many instances of prosopopoeia, creating “persona.” The *Exeter Book* Riddle 38 [40], “Created Things,”

represents one of the clearest examples of prosopopoeia and, as mentioned earlier, is the longest riddle in the *Exeter Book*. A translation of the first lines from this riddle will reveal its characteristic prosopopoeia flavor:

Riddle 38 [40]

Eternal is the Creator who now rules this earth with sustaining power and governs this world; mighty is the Monarch and rightly King, Master of all; He rules and governs earth and heaven even as these He encompasses. He created me wondrously in the beginning when He first established this earth; bade me dwell long at my vigil, so that I never sleep after, and sleep comes upon me, my eyes are closed in haste.

The mighty Lord everywhere guides this earth with His power; so I at the Ruler's word include all this world. I am so timid, that a spectre, swift moving, can boldly terrify me, and I am everywhere bolder than a boar, when enraged he stands at bay; none of the warriors upon earth can prevail against me save only God who governs and rules this high heaven. I am much fairer in fragrance than is incense or the rose, which in its pleasure springs so peerlessly from the soil of the earth; I am more delicate than it; though the lily is loved by men, bright in blossom, I am better than it, so too perforce I always overpower the perfume of spikenard with my sweetness everywhere. And I am fouler than this dark fen which here reeks of disease. (Gordon 301-03)

Although the complete riddle is over 108 lines, this riddle is incomplete in the *Exeter Book* and the subject of the riddle exists as an individual within the subject matter. The riddle begins with an encomium or panegyric—discourse of praise—to the “Eternal Creator” and continues to praise throughout. After singing its praise to the Creator, it attempts to establish its lineage from the Creator and as “created wondrously in the beginning.” Next, it refers to the Creator as its “loved Father [who] taught me in the beginning.” It later recognizes itself as “born of my mother’s womb.” As seen here, this technique of creating a persona through language helps to elevate the subject matter



while heightening the audience's interest in the clues given. It refuses to name itself, but is filled with both anaphoric language—repeated “I am”—and antithesis—contrary ideas expressed in parallel structures, which are used here to create ironic effect. The repetition yields what “I am,” but it is coupled with its opposite, a counterstatement, which aids in creating the effect of antithesis and an abundance of ambiguous riddling clues. For instance, “I never sleep,” but “suddenly sleep comes upon me;” and “I am timid,” but “everywhere I am bolder.” In fact, the riddle includes at least fifteen of these separate parallel counterstatements.

### Respice

Riddle 12 [14] is one of two *Exeter Book* riddles which have been solved as “Horn” (the second is Riddle 80 [84]). This riddle uses a common technique in much of Anglo-Saxon verse to facilitate a reflection by the speaker upon earlier days. In classical times this technique was called *respice*, the report of a look backward in time:

#### Riddle 12 [14]

	<i>Ic wæs wæpenwiga; geong hagostealdmon woum wirbogum; Hwilum ic to hilde</i>	<i>nu mec wlonc þeceð golde ond sylfre, hwilum weras cyssað. hleopre bonne</i>
5	<i>wilgehleþan; mec ofer mearce; fereð ofer flodas Hwilum mægða sum</i>	<i>hwilum wycg byreþ hwilum merehengest frætsum beorhtne. minne gefylleð.</i>
10	<i>Bosm beaghroden; heard, heafodleas, hwilum honigige wlitig on wage, freolic fyrdsceorp. on wicge wegað,</i>	<i>hwilum ic on bordum sceal, behlyed licgan hyrstum frætwed, þær weras drincað, Hwilum folcwigan þonne ic winde sceal</i>

15	<i>sincfag swelgan          hwilum ic gereordum          wlonce to wine;          stefne minre          flyman feondsceaþan.</i>	<i>of sumes bosme;          rincas laðige          hwilum wraþum sceal          forstolen hreddan,          Frige hwæt ic hatte.</i>
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Time was when I Now the young hero And twisted silver. At times I speak Loyal companions. Bears me o'er marshland. Bears me o'er billows, At times a fair maiden At times hard and headless Bereft of beauty. Winsome on wall, Where revelers drink. Bears me on horse, And I swallow, bright-shining, At times with my strains Proudly to wine. Spoil from the spoiler, Put foemen to flight.	was weapon and warrior; hoods me with gold, At times men kiss me. and summon to battle At times a courser At times a ship brightly adorned fills me with breath; I lie on the board, At times I hand richly embellished, At times a warrior a battle adornment, the breath from his bosom. I summon the heroes At times I win back with sounding voice Now ask what I'm called. (Kennedy 43)
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The reflective and melancholy effect of *respice* is amplified because the riddle is presented as having been spoken by an old warrior, but the audience might well recognize the speaker as the horn, yet another personification. The repetitive language in the riddle echoes the classical rhetorical device of anaphora which occurs when the same word or pattern of words is repeated in several phrases. Here, *Wilum*, “At times,” repeats at the beginning of ten separate phrases. The additional repetition of *beran*, “to bear or carry,” in three separate phrases, also, is not only another use of anaphora, but also reveals the clues to solve the riddle as “Horn.”

## Rhyme

Examples of rhyme within Anglo-Saxon prose or poetry are so rare that the only work recognized with obvious end-rhyme has been, perhaps appropriately, named “The Rhyming Poem.” A less well-known example of internal rhyme can be seen in one of the process riddles, “Beer,” or “John Barleycorn.”

### Riddle 26 [28]

	<i>Bip foldan dæl</i>	<i>fægre gegierwed</i>
	<i>mid þy heardestan</i>	<i>ond mid þy scearpestan</i>
	<i>ond mid þy grymmestan</i>	<i>gumena gestreona.</i>
	<i>Corfen, sworfen,</i>	<i>cyrred, þyrred,</i>
5	<i>bunden, wunden,</i>	<i>blæced, wæced,</i>
	<i>frætwed, geatwed,</i>	<i>feorran læded,</i>
	<i>to durum dryhta,</i>	<i>dream bið in innan</i>
	<i>cwicra wihta,</i>	<i>clengeð, lengeð,</i>
	<i>Ðara þe ær lifgende</i>	<i>longe hwile</i>
10	<i>wilna bruceð</i>	<i>ond no wið spriceð.</i>
	<i>Ond þonne æfter deaþe</i>	<i>deman onginneð,</i>
	<i>meldan mislice.</i>	<i>Micel is to hycganne</i>
	<i>wisfæstum menn,</i>	<i>hwæt seo wiht sy.</i>

A part of the earth is fairly adorned with the hardest and with the keenest and with the bitterest treasures of men, cut, polished, turned, dried, bound, twisted, bleached, softened decked, made ready, led from afar to the doors of men; joy of living creatures is in it, and remains and endures, of those who with long life bethink them, enjoy their desires and do not speak against it; and then after death fall to declaiming and many fashioned mouth-ing. Wise men should ponder much what that creature is. (Gordon 298-99)

If we read this riddle in anything but the original Old English, the rhyme scheme is clearly lost. In Old English the carefully selected and placed process words for the making of beer (in lines 4-7) are clearly intended to rhyme: *corfen/sworfen*

“cut/polished,” *cyrred/ þyrred* “turned/dried,” *bunden/wunden* “bound/wound (twisted),”

*blæced/wlæced* “bleached/softened,” *fræiwed/geatwed* “decked/equipped (made ready),” *clengð/lengð* “remains/endures.” Also noteworthy is the exhortative ending which gently suggests that wise men will benefit from the knowledge that is to be gleaned from this riddle.

There are approximately six other instances of rhyme in the riddles of the *Exeter Book*. The first example can be seen in line nine of Riddle 1, a “Storm” riddle, as end-rhyme:

*hwælmere hlimmeð,                      hlude grimmetð;*

Riddle 9 [11], solved as “Wine,” contains an example of end-rhyme between two different pairs of half lines, lines 6-7:

*þæt heo swa gemædde,                      mode bestolene,*  
*dæde gedwolene,                      deoraþ mine*

Riddle 13 [15], the riddle of the “Badger,” contains the element of rhyme in line 13:

*forhtmod fergan,                      fleame nergan.*

Riddle 32 [34], a “Rake” riddle, rhymes the Old English words for “blow” and “grow” at its close in line 9:

*beorhte blican,                      blowan ond growan.*

Other examples are in Riddle 46 [48], “Paten” or “Chalice” which rhymes *swigende* in line 4 with *helpend* in line 5 and in Riddle 64 [66], the second “Creation” riddle, which rhymes a contrasted image in *underhnige* the Old English word for “overcome” and *oferstige* the Old English term for “submit” in line 6. The final example of rhyme appears

in Riddle 71 [73], “Spear” or “Lance,” which rhymes *cræfte on hæfte*, the Old English words for “strength” and “seized,” at line 22.

### Symbols and Symbolic Language

In addition to the example of symbolism mentioned in the riddle of the “Fish and River,” the riddle of “Paten” or “Chalice,” and the riddle of the “Swordrack,” revealed earlier, there are many other examples of symbolism which appear in the *Exeter Book* riddles. Several examples of symbolism appear in the form of runes or anagrammic messages. Like the early creators of the Latin riddles the Anglo-Saxon riddlers were fascinated with linguistic detail. This is evident in their extant riddles, as well in their use of cryptographic alphabets in manuscripts. Aldhelm, Tatwine and Boniface also used a type of cryptography—a secret script where vowels are replaced by punctuation marks or letters. But the Anglo-Saxons seem to exercise their fondness and pursuit of the obscure not only where cryptography was concerned but also through the use of runes. For example, there are at least eight riddles in the *Exeter Book* which contain some form of runic or anagrammic code, clue, or message. They are the riddle of the “Savior,” the riddle of the “Wildfowler on Horseback,” one of the “Ship” riddles, the riddle of the “Cock and the Hen,” the riddle of the “Sun,” the riddle of the “Swan,” the riddle of the “Magpie, and the riddle of the “Bow.”

The riddle of the “Cock and Hen,” Riddle 40 [42], is a straightforward example of the basic Anglo-Saxon runic message:

## Riddle 40 [42]

	<i>Ic seah wyhte</i>	<i>wrætlice twa</i>
	<i>undearnunga</i>	<i>ute plegan</i>
	<i>hæmedlaces;</i>	<i>hwitloc anfeng</i>
	<i>wlanc under wædum,</i>	<i>gif þæs weorces speow,</i>
5	<i>fæmne fyllo.</i>	<i>Ic onflette mæg</i>
	<i>þurh runstafas</i>	<i>rincum secgan</i>
	<i>þam þe bec witan,</i>	<i>bega ætsomne</i>
	<i>naman þara wihta.</i>	<i>Ðær sceal Nyd ( ) wesan</i>
	<i>twega oþer</i>	<i>ond se torhta Æsc ( )</i>
10	<i>an an linan,</i>	<i>Acas ( ) twegen</i>
	<i>Hægelas ( ) swa some.</i>	<i>Hwylc þæs hordgates</i>
	<i>cægan cræfte</i>	<i>þa clamme onleac</i>
	<i>þe þa rædellan</i>	<i>wið rynemenn</i>
	<i>hygefæste heold</i>	<i>heortan bewrigene</i>
15	<i>orþoncbendum?</i>	<i>Nu is undyrne</i>
	<i>werum at wine.</i>	<i>Hu þa wihte mid us,</i>
	<i>heanmode twa,</i>	<i>hatne sindon.</i>

I saw two curious creatures blatantly frolicking out of doors, in copulation. The fair-locked, cocky woman would get her fill beneath her clothes if the job proved successful.

To those men who understand books, I can tell by runic staves upon the floor both the names together of those creatures.

Need (N) must be there, and the second of a pair (N), and the splendid ash-tree (Æ), one in a row, two oaks (AA) and just the same number of hailstones (HH).

Which man has unlocked, by virtue of this key, the fetters of the treasury-door that resolutely guards the riddle, its heart protected by ingenious chains against the adepts? It is now no secret to folk at their wine what those two vulgar-minded creatures are called among us. (Bradley 377-78)

The insertion of the runes is more than simply unusual; it changes the way the reader must respond to the riddle by introducing an additional layer. Not only must readers decipher common language clues as usual, they must also decipher runic clues. The Anglo-Saxons highly esteemed the ability to use and decipher the staves and runes.

As the extant “Rune Poem” attests, the Anglo-Saxon valued the ability to use and decipher the staves and runes. Any literate Anglo-Saxon audience would likely have had enough runic knowledge to be able to solve the puzzle. Even a modern audience can decode the names of the two creatures with the help of the Anglo-Saxon *hana* and *hæn*. Furthermore, continuous retelling would increase the number of listeners who already knew the solution. And although the main purpose appears to have been to entertain the audience by using the runic elements to introduce a quasi-magical dimension, many listeners would have derived additional enjoyment from the suggestive language in the riddle: *undearnunga*, “openly;” *ute plegan*, “play outside or abroad;” *hæmedlaces*, “sexual intercourse, copulation;” and *weorces speow*, “success with respect to a deed,” all suggest copulation, as does *faemne fyllo*, wherein *fyllo* connotes “impregnated.”

Both Riddle 4 [6], “Sun,” and Riddle 5 [7], “Swan,” carry runic clues in their descriptions. Riddle 4 [6] contains the duality of good and evil: what can “gladden the minds of many” can also be used as “foe against foe.” Likewise, what can serve one in strength, must also be “fed well,” but allowing it to go unchecked brings “cruel” retribution. This representation is repeated in the “Sun” riddle as shown below:

#### Riddle 4 [6]

	<i>Mec gesette soð</i>	<i>sigora waldend,</i>
	<i>Crist to compe.</i>	<i>Oft ic cwise bærne</i>
	<i>unrimu cyn</i>	<i>eorðan getenge,</i>
	<i>næte mid niþe,</i>	<i>swa ic him no hrine,</i>
5	<i>þonne mec min frea</i>	<i>feohtan hateþ.</i>
	<i>Hwilum ic monigra</i>	<i>mod arete;</i>
	<i>hwilum ic frefre</i>	<i>þa ic ær winne on</i>
	<i>feorran swiþe—</i>	<i>hi þæs felað þeah</i>

10      *swylce þæs opres,*      *þonne ic eft hyra*  
          *ofer deop gedreag*      *drohtað bete.*

The true Ruler of victories, Christ, set me in the fight. Often I burn living creatures; close to the earth, I afflict countless races with distress, although I touch them not when my Lord bids me fight. Sometimes I gladden the minds of many; sometimes I console from very far off, those whom I make war upon; yet they feel both the hurt and the help, when over the deep tumult I better their life once more. (Gordon 291)

While the Sun can “hurt,” it can also “help.” And although it has afflicted countless races with distress, it sometimes “gladdens the minds of many.” Its very presence can “better” the lives of people and often “consoles” them. Overall, the balance of pain and consolation is measure-for-measure in this riddle. The Anglo-Saxons believed that like the other forces of nature at work in their world, the Sun was set in place and ruled by some greater power. Such a belief may lend a religious connotation here in the reference to “the true Ruler of victories.” Yet, setting the clues for this riddle in a runic context may indicate a secretive, perhaps even pagan form of writing although the church by the time of the *Exeter Book* condoned, even encouraged, the use of runes. It is nevertheless easy to imagine that this riddle, and probably many others in the *Exeter Book*, takes a late version of a runic riddle which had been sanitized and Christianized as it passed from poet to transcriber to copyist to scribe to monastic scriptorium.

In two other riddles, 21 [23] and 22 [24], the solution is buried in a runic anagram. Riddle 21 [23] hints at its identity with its anagrammic clue in its introduction—and also employs personification, mentioned earlier:



## Riddle 21 [23]

	<i>Agob is min noma</i>	<i>eft onhwyrfed.</i>
	<i>Ic eom wrætlic wiht</i>	<i>on gewin sceapen.</i>
	<i>Donne ic onbuge</i>	<i>ond me on bosme fareð</i>
	<i>ætren onga,</i>	<i>ic beom eallgearo</i>
5	<i>þæt ic me þæt feorhbealo</i>	<i>feor aswape.</i>
	<i>Sipþan me se waldend,</i>	<i>se me þæt wite gescop,</i>
	<i>leoþo forlæteð,</i>	<i>ic beo lengre þonne ær,</i>
	<i>oþþæt ic spæte,</i>	<i>spilde geblonden,</i>
	<i>ealfelo attor</i>	<i>þæt ic æror gearp.</i>
10	<i>Ne togongeð þæs</i>	<i>gumena hwylcum</i>
	<i>ænigum eaþe</i>	<i>þæt ic þær ymb sprice,</i>
	<i>gif hine hrineð</i>	<i>þæt me of hrife fleogeð,</i>
	<i>þæt þone mandrinc</i>	<i>mægne gesceapaþ</i>
	<i>fullwered fæste</i>	<i>feore sine.</i>
15	<i>Nelle ic unbunden</i>	<i>ænigum hyran</i>
	<i>nymþe searosæled.</i>	<i>Saga hwæt ic hatte.</i>

Agof is my named reversed. I am a wondrous creature, shaped in conflict. When I bend and from my bosom the poisonous arrow passes, I am eager to sweep away that deadly evil far from me. When the master who contrived that torment for me releases my limbs, I am longer than before, until, fraught with destruction, I spit out the very baleful poison which earlier I swallowed. That which I speak of there parts from no man easily; if that which flies from my womb touches him, he buys that drink of death with his strength, complete atonement firmly with his life. When unstrung I will obey no one, unless cunningly bound. Say what is my name. (Gordon 296-97)

Perhaps more importantly here, the addition of this anagrammic clue helps to establish more closely its original date of creation. If we read the clue anagrammically as *Foga*—*Agof* reversed—then we get nothing. However, Grimm’s Law tells us that the final /b/ in Old English was changed to /f/ about the middle of the eighth century (Gordon 296). By substituting /b/ for the /f/ in the anagram we get “Agob,” which when reversed gives us *boga*, or the word for “Bow.” The original riddle would have read “Agob,” and

the change in the riddle would have been recorded sometime about the middle of the eighth century. Riddle 22 [24] takes a slightly different approach:

Riddle 22 [25]

	<i>Ic eom wunderlicu wiht—</i>	<i>wræsne mine stefne:</i>
	<i>hwilum beorce swa hund,</i>	<i>hwilum blæte swa gat,</i>
	<i>hwilum græde swa gos,</i>	<i>hwilum gielle swa hafoc.</i>
	<i>Hwilum ic onhyrge</i>	<i>þone haswan earn,</i>
5	<i>guðfugles hleoþor;</i>	<i>hwilum glidan reorde</i>
	<i>muþe gemæne,</i>	<i>hwilum mæwes song,</i>
	<i>þær ic glado sitte.</i>	<i>mec nemnað</i>
	<i>swylce ond</i>	<i>fullesteð</i>
	<i>ond</i>	<i>Nu ic haten eom</i>
10	<i>swa þa siex stafas</i>	<i>sweotule becnap.</i>

I am a wondrous creature, I vary my voice; sometimes I bark like a dog; sometimes I bleat like a goat; sometimes I cry like a goose; sometimes I scream like a hawk; sometimes I mimic the gray eagle, the laugh of the war-bird; sometimes with a kite's voice I speak with my mouth; sometimes the song of the gull where I sit in my gladness. They call me G, also A, and R; O gives aid and H, and I. Now I am named as these six letters clearly signify. (Gordon 297)

The anagrammic clue is not given all together in the usual letters the way it is in Riddle 21. Instead, it is dealt out in runic staves. When rearranged, these letters spell out *higora*, or the Old English word for “jay.”

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

This study of rhetorical composition and its comparisons with the established classical rhetorical traditions has given us great insight into the creation of a unique riddle form. Analyzing the various forms of Anglo-Saxon riddles in the *Exeter Book*, identifying those forms, and comparing them to classical rhetorical forms, as well as to various Anglo-Latin riddles, demonstrate that the Anglo-Saxon riddle is a new art form. Furthermore, an examination of the continued emulation of various rhetorical devices and figures has shown that the Anglo-Saxon riddlers, unlike ancient rhetoricians or even Anglo-Latin riddlers, were striving for a very different kind of form and one with a very different purpose—one that would interact with an audience, one which would create a source of entertainment and amusement for the community-at-large. The Anglo-Saxon riddlers made conscious decisions to change the original form first by removing the original titles and next by including the commonologies that were so important and familiar to the audience within the text. They also used traditional rhetorical devices as “clues,” rather than simply as ornamentation by arranging the material in pleasing formats—like systematic forms or narrative forms. All of these, by concentrating on the response of the audience, gave the riddles a new form and purpose.

As many scholars have observed, the riddles give us insight into the Anglo-Saxon culture and community. However, as seen here, the dissemination of information does

not end with the view of the subject-matter. We also gain insight into the method of the riddler and the thought process of the audience through this form.

This grouping and analysis of forms and devices illuminate the dynamic power of the riddles of the *Exeter Book* and the transformation from the original Latin device as a didactic tool to an art form designed to amuse and entertain an audience. Through dissemination of traditions, images, and ideas as stories, descriptions, and games the Anglo-Saxon riddle sprouted a multitude of rhetorical devices and concepts until it grew into an art form which must have been favored by a wide audience. Luckily, while creating the rich abundance of clues within the riddles as word-play, the Anglo-Saxon creators of the riddles left behind a vivid picture of their very existence to be viewed by contemporary audiences, as well.

The foregoing analysis yields valuable insight into the figures of thought and language found within the riddles of the *Exeter Book*. Specifically, what can be seen are the numerous rhetorical devices which appear and are repeated in all of these riddles—devices such as Personification, Prosopopoeia, Anaphora, Antithesis, Respite, Analogy, Irony, Comparison, Contrast, Symbolism, Signs, Maxims, and Litotes. And these rhetorical devices are often the instruments in revealing the nature of the riddle as well as its new and intended purpose as an instrument for entertaining its audience.

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