Old English - The Story of A Language

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Aims

• Some literature - ‘The Ruin’
• Show where English comes from, and its relationship to other languages
• Why there are different forms of English
• How to pronounce Old English
• How Old English ‘works’
The Ruin

1. Literal Analysis - what happens, where is it about, who is speaking?
2. Thematic Analysis - what is the message?
3. Stylistic Analysis - what devices does the poet use?
The Ruin

Wrætlic is þes wealstān; wyrde gebræcon, 
burgstede bûrston, brosnað enta geweorc. 
Hrōfas sind gehorene, hrēorge torras, 
hrungeat berofen, hrīm on lime, 

5 scearde scūrbeorge scorene, gedorene, 
ældo undereotone. Eorðgrāp hafað 
waldendwyrhtan, forweorone, geleorene, 
heard gripe hrūsan, òp hund cnēa 
werpēoda gewitan. Oft þæs wāg gebād, 

10 ræghār and rēadfāh, rice æfter òprum, 
ofstonden under stormum; stēap gēap gedrēas.

Mōd monade, myne swiftne gebrægd; 
hwætrēd in hringas, hygerōf gebond

20 weallwalan wīrum wundrum tōgædre. 
Beorht wāron burgræced, burnsele monige, 
hēah horngestrēon, hereswēg micel, 
meodoheall monig mondrēama full, 
oppēt þæt onwende wyrd sēo swīpe.

25 Crungon walo wide, cwōman wūldagas, 
swylt eall fornōm secgrōfra wera; 
wurdon hyra wigsteal wēstenstapolas, 
brosnade burgsteall. Bētend crungon, 
hergas tō hrūsan. Forpon þās hōfu drēorgiað 
and þās tēaforgēapa tigelum scēadeð

Splendid this rampart is, though fate destroyed it, 
The city buildings fell apart, the works 
Of giants crumble. Tumbled are the towers, 
Ruined the roofs, and broken the barred gate, 
Frost in the plaster, all the ceilings gape, 
Torn and collapsed and eaten up by age. 
And grit holds in its grip, the hard embrace 
Of earth, the dead departed master-builders, 
Until a hundred generations now 
Of people have passed by. Often this wall 
Stained red and grey with lichen has stood by 
Surviving storms while kingdoms rose and fell. 
And now the high curved wall itself has fallen.

The heart inspired, incited to swift action. 
Resolute masons, skilled in rounded building 
Wondrously linked the framework with iron bonds. 
The public halls were bright, with lofty gables, 
Bath-houses many; great the cheerful noise, 
And many mead-halls filled with human pleasures. 
Till mighty fate brought change upon it all. 
Slaughter was widespread, pestilence was rife, 
And death took all those valiant men away. 
The martial halls became deserted places, 
The city crumbled, its repairers fell, 
Its armies to the earth. And so these halls 
Are empty, and this red curved roof now sheds
THE RUIN

hröstbēages hrōf.
Hryre wong gecrong
gebrocen tō beorgum pēr iū beorn monīg
glædmōd and goldbeorht gleoma gefrætwed,
wlonc and wīngāl wighyrstum scān,

35
seah on sinc, on sylfor, on searogimmas,
on ēad, on Æht, on eorcanstān,
on þās beorhtan burg brādan rīces.
Stānhofu stōdan, strēam hāte wearp
widan wylme; weal eall befeng

40
beorhtan bōsme pēr pā bāpu wāron,
hāt on hrepre; þæt wēs hyðelic.
Lēton þonne gēotan ofer hārne stān hāte strēamas
under .................

45
oppæt hringmere. Hāte ......
..............................
.............................. pēr pā bāpu wāron.
The Ruin

1. Literal Analysis - what happens, where is it about, who is speaking? A single person looking at a Roman ruin, possibly Bath

2. Thematic Analysis - what is the message? That worldly glory passes away, ‘lif is læne’

3. Stylistic Analysis - what devices does the poet use? Compares past with present using images of colour, sound, weather

4. Language analysis - for the future
Our first glimpse of OE Poetry

- L5 ‘scearde scurbeorge scorene, gedrorene’
- ‘sc’ - pronounced ‘sh’
• L5 ‘scearde scurbeorge scorene, gedrorene’
• Line divided into two halves
• Short half-lines
• Alliteration
• Rhyme
heard gripe hrsan,  
op mund chlea
werpecoda gewitan.  
Oft pæs wâg gebad,
10  
ræghâr and rëadfâh,  
rice æfter ëprüm,
ofstonden under stôrmum;  
stëap gëap gedrëas.

.....................
Môd monade,  
myne swiftnæ gebrægd;
hwætrêd in hringas,  
hygerôf gebond
20  
weallwalan wîrum  
wundrum tögædre.
Old English: Where does it come
The Success Story of English

- No ‘Germanic language’ was spoken in Oxford or ‘England’ until 1,600 years ago.
- BUT English is now spoken by 3-400 million native speakers and used by millions more
- Of the c. 2,700 world languages and dialects it is the dominant language of commerce, international diplomacy, and the internet
Once upon a time ...

... about 1,800 BC
middangeard between heaven or hell or linked to Old Norse midgard
THE INDO-EUROPEAN FAMILY OF LANGUAGES

INDO-EUROPEAN

- Indian
  - Armenian
  - Iranian
  - Germanic
    - Balto-Slavic
    - Albanian
  - Celtic
  - Hellenic
  - Italic
  - Sanskrit
    - Old Persian
    - Avestan
  - Baltic
    - Lithuanian
    - Russian
    - Polish
    - Old Slavic
  - Irish
  - Welsh
  - Gaelic
  - Breton
  - Greek
  - Latin

- Middle Indian
  - Persian
  - Hindustani, Bengali, etc.
    - N. Germanic
      - E. Norse
    - W. Norse
      - Swedish
      - Norwegian
      - Danish
      - Icelandic
      - Gothic
      - German
      - Yiddish
    - High German
      - Low German
    - Old Frisian
      - Anglo-Saxon
        (Old English)
      - Frisian
    - Middle English
      - Middle Low German
      - Plattdeutsch
    - Low Franconian
      - Old Saxon
      - Low Franconian
      - Middle Dutch
        - Dutch, Flemish

- French Provençal
- Italian
- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Catalan
- Romanian

- c. 3500-3000 B.C.
- c. 1000 B.C.
- 1 A.D. (Anno Domini)
- c. 500 A.D.
- c. 800-1200 A.D.
- c. 1300 A.D.
- c. 1700-1900 A.D.
So where were they speaking

Angles = Angeln
Saxons = Lower Saxony
Jutes = Jutland
Thus English = German

• The first ‘English’ was spoken in an area near southern Denmark/northern Germany
• Part of the languages spoken around that area hence the term ‘Germanic’
• Mann/man, Maus/mouse, haben/have, singen/sing, Hund/hound, Herz/heart …
Ingvaeonic or North Sea Germanic

After Tacitus who described Germanic tribes as *Ingvaeones, Istvaeones*, and *Erminones*.
A Bit of Old Frisian

God made Adam and ....

Thet benete (bones) fon (from) tha stene
Thet flask fon there erthe
Thet blod fon tha wetere
Tha herte fon tha winde ...

c. 1300
Comparing with other Older

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old English</th>
<th>Old High German</th>
<th>Old Norse</th>
<th>Gothic</th>
<th>Modern English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fæder</td>
<td>Fater</td>
<td>Faðir</td>
<td>Fadar</td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fot</td>
<td>Fuoz</td>
<td>Fotr</td>
<td>Fotus</td>
<td>Foot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>þrie</td>
<td>Dri</td>
<td>þrir</td>
<td>þreis</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>þu</td>
<td>Du</td>
<td>þu</td>
<td>þu</td>
<td>thou</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing with the Old English

Note:
Latin - pater / Germanic ‘father’
Latin - pes, Sanskrit - pada etc/ Germanic ‘foot’

So ‘p’ to ‘f’

Also ‘t’ to ‘th’
Latin ‘tertius’, Greek ‘tritos’,
Sanskrit ‘treta’, Irish ‘tri’ / Germanic ‘three’

WHY? See Grimm’s Law and Verner’s Law

O.W Robinson, Old English and its Closest Relatives (Routledge, 1992)
‘The Pity of It’ (1915)

‘I walked in loamy Wessex Lanes, afar
From rail-track and from highway, and I heard
In field and farmstead many an ancient word
Of local lineage like ‘Thu bist,’ ‘Er war’
‘Ich woll,’ ‘Er sholl,’ and bytalk similar
Nigh as they speak who in this month’s moon gird
At England’s very loins…’

Thomas Hardy
A bit of history ...
The ‘migration’ period

• Collapse of Roman Britain (early 5th century) > raids by Picts, Scoti, Saxons
• Romano-British isolated
• ‘adventus Saxonum’ 449 AD (Bede)
• ‘migration’ not invasion - but not how the ‘British’ saw them > Gildas De Excidio Britanniae

*Beowulf*, Bede’s Ecclesiastical History, ASC …
Tribes to Kingdoms

- 6th century sees expansion into Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Lincolnshire, and North East Yorkshire - the time of *Beowulf*?
- 597 St Augustine arrives
- British Resistance (*Mons Badonicus*)
- 6th century expansion into Staffordshire
- War bands > tribes > amalgamation into ‘kingdoms’
- 7th century 12 ‘kingdoms’ > heptarchy (Northumbria, Mercia, Kent, Sussex, Wessex, Essex, East Anglia) > 9th century only East Anglia, Mercia, Northumbria, and Wessex survive
- 7th century - Sutton Hoo burial

**BUT where they settled has a direct effect on LANGUAGE**
Dialects in Old English

- Northumbrian (‘north of the Humber’)
- Mercian (Humber to the Thames, not Essex), nawiht and owiht
- West Saxon (southern England, not Cornwall or Kent)
- Kentish (Kent and Surrey)
- Late West Saxon (LWS)
Dialects/Accents in Modern English

• London/Cockney
• Liverpool/Scouse
• Newcastle/Geordie
• Birmingham/Brummie
• Scots, Welsh, West Country, Cornish, Manx, Irish, etc etc
• Pronounce ‘house’
## Northumbrian dialect words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bearn</th>
<th>Bairn</th>
<th>Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gan</td>
<td>Gan</td>
<td>Go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geomrian</td>
<td>Yammer</td>
<td>Complain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micel</td>
<td>Muckel</td>
<td>Big</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Na</td>
<td>Nah</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocusta</td>
<td>Oxter</td>
<td>Armpit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stæþ</td>
<td>Staithe</td>
<td>Jetty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Toom</td>
<td>Empty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And remember - toon (OE tun), hoose (OE hus), knaa (OE cnawan)
The story continues …

• Pre-migration from Latin *belt, butter, street*
• From the ‘British’ *avon, combe, brock*
• During the Anglo-Saxon period from Latin *candle, angel, cowl*
• During the Anglo-Saxon period from the Danes and Norwegians *awe, call, outlaw*
• In the late Anglo-Saxon period from French *capon, proud*
• Post-conquest from French *castle, crown*
• Keeps doing this - Americanisms, and C U L8R
Après Le Deluge: French Battle Anglo Terms in Web Age

Experts struggle to create equivalents for terms like 'cloud computing'

Posted Oct 14, 09 4:27 AM CDT in Business, Technology, World |

Images (2) [Quotes (1)]

“

Our citizens have a right to communicate without speaking English.

- Xavier North, head of France's General Commission of Terminology and Neology

(Newser) – Defenders of the French language are fighting a rear-guard action against a flood of Anglo-Saxon computing terms. In a process that lags far behind advances in technology, experts are tasked with finding French equivalents for new computing technology. The terms must then be passed by a panel of linguists and professors, who are often puzzled by the concepts involved. The new term must then be approved by the Academie Francaise, the official authority on the French language.

But remember ...
Brittene 13land if ehta hund mila lan5.
7 tpa hund brad. Then fand on fis
13lande fif se peode. englisfc. 7 brt
13tirc. 7 pilfc. 7 pytirc. 7 pytirc. 7
boc leden. Eref t peron buzend pilfc
lander britter.

(See section 3.1.2.1 for a description of the letter shapes.)

of-Britain island is eight hundred miles long.
& two hundred broad. & here are in this
island five languages. english. & brit-
ish. & welsh. & scottish. & pictish. &
book latin. First were inhabitants of-this
land britons.
Which of the following are not found in Old English?

His, he, him, it, the, that, this, come, go, why, who, quick, where, ride, choose, drink, fall, kiss, fill, over, under, in, bath, beam, bear, bid, fast, flood, fiend, little, most, lust, many, queen, soul, sea, sharp, other, often, new, old, mead, gate, wall, gem, young, friendly,
Which of the following are not found in Old English?

His, he, him, hit, se/þe, þat, þis, cume, ga, hwy, hwa, cwic, hwær, ride, geceose, drince, fealle, cysse, fylle, ofer, under, in, baþ, beam, bera, bidde, fæst, flod, feond, litle, mæst, lust, mænig, cwen, sawol, sæ, scearp, ofer, oft, niwe, eald, mede, geat, weal, gimm,
Anglo-Saxon expletives!

• Does using words rooted in Old English mean you are being rude or plain talking?
• Some modern writers:
  • [http://www.optimumcomms.co.uk/Homepage.aspx](http://www.optimumcomms.co.uk/Homepage.aspx)
Ic eom þu eart
He/heiro/hit is þu bist
Hie/Sie sind(on) Hie/Sie beoþ

They are Old Norse?
Speaking Old English
Old English: How does it sound?

- Pronounce everything!
- G g = hard as in OE *God*, soft as in *geard*
- C c = hard as in OE *cyning*, soft as *ceorl*
- Helped in text books as they put a ‘dot’ above soft letters e.g. čild
- ‘sc’ = ‘sh’ (as in OE *scip*)
- ‘cg’ = ‘dg’ (as in OE *ecg*)
- *God* and *gōd*
Old English: How does it sound?

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- ‘cg’ = ‘dg’ (as in OE ecg)
- God and gōd
High

Front or Light

Low

i, y e ä

Back or Dark
Nose (OE nosu)
Lips (OE weler)
Gums (OE goma)
Tooth (OE top)
Tongue (OE tunge)

Throat (OE þrotu)

* Front vowels tend to collocate with soft c’s and g’s
* Back vowels tend to collocate with hard c’s and g’s
Problems with Old English

• Apart from the endings there is the issue of syntax (word order)

‘So much only in this hour of doubt I may now say’
‘If any of the Wise should with this Ring overthrow the Lord of Mordor…’
Problems with Old English

Apart from the endings there is the issue of syntax ('So much only in this hour of doubt I may now say' 'If any of the Wise should with this Ring overthow the Lord of Mordor…').

Star Wars character Yoda's sentence structure is similar to old Anglo-Saxon, a linguistics expert has said.

Author David Crystal also says a number of characters in the Lord of the Rings are excellent examples of non-standard English for children to study.

In his book The Stories of English, the academic even discusses the effect on pronunciation of the BBC and on vocabulary by the Sun.

He said he wanted to attack purists who would not tolerate non-standard English.
Problems with Old English

• Apart from the endings there is the issue of syntax (word order)
• More importantly there are problems of ‘semantics’, what does a word mean?
• Meaning = survival, similar languages, Latin glosses, context > Dictionaries
• Corpus of Old English
• Thesaurus of Old English
Harold is swift. His hand is strong and his word grim.

Late in life he went to his wife in Rome

Is his þegn her ġiet?

His hring is gold, his disc glæs, and his belt læper

His ċicen ran from his horsweġe, ofer his þæþ, and in his ġeard

Se fisc swam under þæþ scip and ofer þone sciellfisc

Se cniht is on þære brycge
And English lived happily ever after ...

... The End
[Line of text from the image]
Summary

- Old English is a Germanic Language, most akin to Frisian
- It borrowed words from other languages and had dialects
- Many Old English words are used today
- Old English was an inflected language
- We need to know a few rules to help us pronounce Old English
Next week

• Second translation workshop!
• Look at the web site and discussion area
• What Old English poems are there?
• Where do they survive?
• How does Old English poetry work?
• How was Old English poetry performed?
• Old English ‘flow’ and ‘da homies in da hood’, it’s ‘bumping’