

**The Mind and Spirit of Old English *mōd* and *fer(h)ð*:
The Interaction of Metrics and Compounding**

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1. Introduction

In discussing the language of poetry there can be some question of the relative roles of metrical form and semantic content in determining the poet's choice of words and/or phrasing at particular points. The picture becomes especially clear when the words in question are unattested outside the genre of poetry, some unattested outside a particular poem. The present paper examines a cohesive, though originally somewhat arbitrarily selected subset of compound words attested in Old English alliterative poetry. Through an examination of features such as distribution with respect to metrical patterns, it concludes that there is far more influence from metrical concerns than from semantic intentions in the creation and use of at least some compound forms.

1.1. Old English alliterating poetry

The style of poetry written in Old English (OE) which survives in manuscripts has been analyzed, in metrical terms, into half-lines. In edited texts, these half-lines are typically presented in pairs as long-lines, which are visually separated by a space, the caesura. The motivation for this sort of analysis is the rhythmic and alliterative patterns that apparently operate over these domains—the half-lines are united by regular alliteration and a largely regular pattern of lexical stress. In any metrical scheme, there must be certain constraints on a poet's word choice, and these constraints presumably tighten in proportion with the rigidity of the metre. In OE, this led to the development of sets of synonyms or near-synonyms with different initial segments. This was presumably to allow the poet some flexibility in accommodating the alliterative pattern while permitting the intended message to be expressed (Gneuss, 38, 48; Carr, xix).

1.2. Defining "compound"

OE poetry has a number of formulaic aspects to it, not the least of which is the vocabulary. Words, once created for poetic purposes, could be appropriated by later poets, as circumstances demanded. Such appropriation, to the degree that it exists, allows scholars to identify mini-citations of other poems¹, especially in the case of unusual words, like compounds. The present paper may contribute in the long run to this identification process, selecting as it does two relatively frequent synonymous nouns which poets used in building a remarkable number of compounds (see Appendix).

There is some recurrent discussion as to when a collocation of two or more lexical items may reliably be called a compound, as distinct from a syntactic phrase. In languages with inflectional morphology for case, compounds can be safely identified when one of the words which should be in an agreement or case relationship with the other does not show the expected morphological marking. This, however, does not represent more than a sufficient condition for diagnosing compounding. Modern German compounds, for example, are typically written as single words (*Auslautverhärtung*), whereas Modern English compounds may be written separately (*lottery ticket*), connected by a hyphen (*Indo-European*), or together as a single unit (*baseball*) (Carr, xxiii). The relative age of the compound in Modern English often correlates with the degree of orthographic connectedness, with the oldest and best established compounds almost invariably being written as single words.

OE records do not provide as much assistance in this area as might be hoped, because scribes from the period were quite variable in their practice of orthographic connection. Occasionally, demonstrably separate words, i.e., words from distinct syntactic phrases, are written as single units in manuscripts (Mitchell & Robinson, 25), while at the same time there are other words with inexplicable, seemingly random spaces in them (Carr, xxiii). Modern editorial practice has generally been sensitive to this ambiguous relationship between the written record and actual OE morphology, but in cases of indeterminacy, editors still have to impose a choice on the text. It cannot be assumed that edited versions of manuscripts, as we have them today, have managed to capture the set of all and only the intended compounds of the OE poets.

The formal attributes of a compound, so far as they can apply generally in OE, are as follows:

- (1) They are composed of at least two content morphemes, i.e., each part must be attested as a simplex form elsewhere in the language;
- (2) The right-most member in the compound is interpreted as the head of the compound, determining morphological and syntactic category membership for the whole, and the head is inflected as its simplex form would be;
- (3) The remaining portion of the compound is interpreted as the determinant of the compound, describing or delimiting the head in a systematic fashion; and
- (4) The elements contained in a compound could be recast in a grammatical syntactic phrase with a minimum of reordering, inflection, or insertion of function words

¹ Particularly innovative or striking wording in a well-known poem, if re-employed in a later poem by the same or another author, can serve as an allusion to the original work.

such as prepositions, determiners, or auxiliaries.

A suitable definition of compound could be, therefore, a "terse, unified substitution for a syntactical phrase" (Gardner, 13).

As suggested above, compounds abound in the Germanic languages. Compounding is an extremely productive word-formation process, and apparently this has been the case in Germanic since the earliest times for which records survive. Some scholars who have tried to analyze compounds in the past have run into trouble either with logically incompatible or excessively vague categorization schemes, proving unsatisfactory in both semantic-compositional terms on the one hand, and in syntactic-formal terminology on the other (Gardner, 17-39).

Attribute (4) in the preceding section claims that a grammatical syntactic phrase may readily be constructed containing the head and determinant of any compound, and that this phrase should retain the semantic interpretation of the compound. In fact, an entire analytical framework for compounds has been developed based on the syntax of the "equivalent" Modern English phrases, clearly an unfortunate and avoidable methodological confound (Reibel 1963, described in Gardner, 31-32). Robinson as well recommends this approach to analyzing compounds, yet although his examples employ OE vocabulary, the syntax smacks of Modern English (17). I place "equivalent" in quotation marks and refer to a confound because a system of categorization based on strict modern notions of English grammatical categories ignores discrepancies arising from semantic and syntactic changes between the OE and ModE synchronic grammars. This suggests that an alternative method be found.

There will be no attempt made here, however, to replace or edit previously devised systems of classification. Rather the focus will be on issues related to a very small portion of the lexicon, the OE words *mōd* and *fer(h)ð* and the set of attested poetic compounds derived from them, with the hope that any small generalizations which fall out on this micro-level may prove useful when a larger context is addressed.

1.3. Motives for compounding in Germanic poetry

Gardner summarizes the question quite nicely:

Where a poet used a compound and a syntactical phrase (often just a few lines apart) with identical or almost identical meaning, there must have been a reason for it (11).

This returns to the point made earlier, that subscribing to an alliterating metrical framework constrained a poet's choices. Gardner uses the following example from Solomon and Saturn:

<i>domdaeges dynn</i>	"Judgement Day's din"	Sol 273
<i>on domes daege</i>	"on Judgement's day"	Sol 337

There are two forces conspiring against the alternative **domes daeges dynn* "Judgement's day's din" for line 273: not only is this construction "metrically unfeasible" because of triple alliteration within the half-line, but also the nested genitive construction was apparently strongly

disfavored (Gardner, 11).

Carr, on the other hand, would ascribe the frequency of compounds to the Germanic poets' more general attitude of valuing description over plot (xviii). By this account, the narrative element of Germanic poems is merely a medium in which the poet may display descriptive virtuosity. Carr's claim to this knowledge of past mindsets of course rests on dubious ground, but it is at least worth considering whether it is the poet or the form which is truly the master.

2. *Mōd* and *fer(h)ð*: A case study²

Two synonymous nouns in OE, *mōd* and *fer(h)ð*, which both may be glossed as "mind" or "spirit," are frequently pressed into service in poetic compounds. The present paper has grown out of a study of the limited corpus of lexical items in Timmer's (1966) edition of the poem *Judith*. The glossary provided for the poem contains just over one hundred compound nouns and around sixty compounds that were categorized by the editor as adjectives.

The comment "categorized by the editor" is telling, perhaps, since it suggests some possible alternative analysis of the "adjectives" in question. The head elements of a number of these compounds are not originally adjectives, suggesting the zero-derivation of nouns into adjectives, i.e., derivation with no overt change in form (Lee, 5). Every instance of an "adjective" compound in *mōd* or *fer(h)ð* in *Judith* would apparently be the result of just such a zero-derivation, all the more so given the attested derived adjective *mōdig* and compounds derived from it such as *felmōdig*, *tilmōdig*, and *mōdigwæg* (Bosworth & Toller, 694-95).

Another point at which the categorization found in Timmer's glossary is perhaps inadvertently misleading is that for each of the citation forms (lexemes) relating to *mōd* and *fer(h)ð*, the actual forms that appear in the text of the poem are inflected for the various cases. Of course, in a case-marking language such as OE, it is absolutely to be expected that a noun or adjective will inflect for case as is contextually appropriate. The problem, if indeed it is a problem, arises due to an idiosyncrasy of OE morphology. Synchronically, there may be said to be two suffixes *-e*, one, an inflection that marks the dative and instrumental cases in the singular, the other, a derivational affix which converts adjectives to adverbs. Diachronically it seems clear that the instrumental forms came to be reanalyzed as adverbs. In the case of *mōd* and *fer(h)ð*, then, we have attested instances of original nouns shifted to adjectives analyzed as adverbs, for example:

oð hie glædmōde gegan hæfdon (Jud 140)
...until they, with cheerful spirits, had reached...

The compound *glædmōde* might be translated by any number of Modern English phrases, but ultimately, which phrase we choose is insignificant, because the OE word *glædmōde* is marked in the oblique, so it does not directly agree with the nominative (plural!) subject *hie*. The next question is whether *glædmōde* is to be interpreted as a noun phrase or as an adverb derived from a zero-derived adjective. It is just the ambiguity that this synchronic syncretism of *-e* creates that

² Glosses for OE words listed in Bosworth and Toller (1989) may be found in the appendix.

causes confusion in taking a definitive stand in assigning grammatical categories to OE lexical items. Timmer (43) makes the bold categorization, *adj.* To be fair, the editor had pedagogical reasons for making a unitary classification, but this notwithstanding, there are both formal and functional reasons to take Timmer's categorization with a grain of salt.

2.1. The distribution of *mōd* and *fer(h)ð* as independent lexical items

Both *mōd* and *fer(h)ð* consist of quantitatively heavy syllables, and as such typically carry lexical stress. For the purposes of OE alliterative metre, this means that they are candidates for participation in the alliterative pattern of any long-line in which they occur. Using the *Concordance to the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* (Bessinger & Smith, 1978; henceforth *CASPR*), a limited token-counting exercise was undertaken, including all and only the instantiations of the lexeme *|mōd|* which are either zero-inflected (*mōd*) or marked with a suffix *-e* (*mōde*, whatever its morphological or semantic value). Of the 157 instances of *mōd*, there are a total of 36 instances where the word does *not* participate in the alliteration of its local long-line. On the other hand, of the 194 instances of *mōde*, there are 79 instances where the word does not participate in the alliteration pattern of the long-line. This means that for these two examples, the word in question actually *does* participate in the local alliteration 77% of the time and 60% of the time, respectively. These proportions can be taken provisionally as base rates of alliteration participation for stressed words.

2.2. *Mōd* and *fer(h)ð* as heads in compounds

There are fifty distinct compound lexemes listed in Bosworth & Toller (1898/1921) which have *-mōd* as their head (693). Ten of these lexemes appear within the text of *Judith*, in a total of 13 inflected instantiations. For each of the ten lexemes, every single inflected instantiation participates in the alliteration pattern of the long-line which contains it. Moreover, when examined in *CASPR*, every attested token of these words in the entire corpus participates in the alliteration pattern of their respective long-lines (Bessinger & Smith, 481, 649, 1127, 1168, 1250, and 1278). There are two marginal cases involving *geðmormōd*:

<i>geðmormōde ofgiefan sceoldan</i>	"...with sad mind had to abandon..."	Phx 412
<i>geðmormōdum Iudith bebed</i>	"...with sad minds Judith commanded..."	Jud 144

It still seems quite clear, however, that the intended alliteration is between [y] sounds, despite the prepositional prefix *of-* in the former and the lack of an orthographic <g> in the latter. If these two examples are allowed, and they are not without supporting precedent, then it may be maintained that there exists a perfect correlation between the appearance of compounds and an alliteration scheme which requires exactly their initial sound at a particular point.

There are sixteen distinct compound lexemes listed in Bosworth and Toller which have *-fer(h)ð* as their head (282). Of these, five are present in the text of *Judith*, in a total of seven inflected instantiations. Again, each of these instantiations participates in the alliteration pattern of the long-line which contains it, and once more *CASPR* shows clearly that every instantiation of these five lexemes in the corpus of OE verse duly participates in their respective local alliteration patterns (Bessinger & Smith, 171, 1092, and 1417).

2.3. *Möd* and *fer(h)ö* as determinants in compounds

Möd- appears as the initial element, or determinant, in thirty-nine distinct compounds (Bosworth & Toller, 693-95). Of these, six are not represented in *CASPR* (832-36), while two additional compounds are listed in *CASPR*, *mödgode* ("with divine spirit") and *mödheap* ("bold troop or host"), which are absent from Bosworth & Toller. The total number of inflected instantiations of such compounds attested in OE verse is 128. Without exception, each of these compound forms participates in the alliteration pattern of its local long-line, independent of its position therein.

The story with *fer(h)ö-* is much the same, although with fewer examples in every respect. Fourteen are listed in Bosworth & Toller (282), of which only one (*ferhöufe*) does not appear in *CASPR* (313-14). Present in *CASPR* but not in Bosworth & Toller are *fer(h)ögefeonde* ("with rejoicing heart or spirit") and *feröweg* ("the way or manner of the heart or spirit"). The total number of inflected instantiations of such compounds in OE verse is 32. Again, without exception, each of these forms participates in the alliteration of its respective long-line.

These facts, taken together with those of the previous section, suggest that the correlation between a word's being a compound and its fulfilling a local demand of the metrical scheme is more than coincidence. The deviation from the base rate of participation presented in section 2.1 clearly points to the role of metrical constraints in the poet's choice whether to employ a compound form instead of an equivalent syntactic phrase.

2.4. Reversible compounds?

Among the compound forms under consideration are seven pairs which have the same two component parts in opposite orders, namely, *ferhögleāw* & *gleāwferhö*, *ferhöwērig* & *wērigferhö*, *mödgeōmor* & *geōmormöd*, *mödglaed* & *glædmöd*, *mödgleāw* & *gleāwmöd*, *mödhwæt* & *hwætmöd*, and *mödswið* & *swiðmöd*. Under normal circumstances, a change in the head of a compound results in a change in the semantic interpretation of the whole. Observe, for example, the contrast between the Modern English compounds *housecat* and *cathouse*, or *showboat* and *boat show*. There is, however, no such semantic contrast within the pairs listed here. The words are defined as synonyms, and therefore should have been able to be used interchangeably. The attested distribution is therefore quite telling: within each pair, each compound begins with a different sound, and which of the two compounds appears in a given line is directly correlated with the local alliteration pattern. It would be difficult to dismiss the conclusion that the choice is slavishly determined by the metre.

3. Conclusion

Section 2.1 demonstrated that potential participants in alliteration need not alliterate in their every appearance, yet the distribution of compounds observed in sections 2.2-3 make a clear implication: If a compound, then alliterate. Section 2.4 presents the transitory nature of OE poetic compounds in the attested variable ordering of the component parts while maintaining the identical composite semantics. The conclusion is clear, at least for the compounds presented here (and most likely more generally as well). Metrical concerns drive compounding, with the potential to override semantic conventions. The place of poetic compounds in the OE lexicon, therefore, is ambiguous at best.

Brady (1979) warns against assuming that a given compound is "demanded by the exigencies of alliteration" just in case the word in question "itself sets the alliterative pattern of the line in which it stands" (88). In support of this point, she uses examples parallel to the above, where the compound in question is the first alliterating element in the long-line. The claim that such positions "set" the local alliterative pattern presupposes a strict left-to-right process of composition. There is no evidence that the first of two paired half-lines in linear sequence was necessarily created first temporally, and this is especially unlikely where each of the half-lines belongs to a different clause. Brady's overall emphasis on the semantic content of compounds is likely behind the poem-as-unfolding-narrative perspective, whereas the present paper's metrical hypothesis abstracts away from the narration to focus on undeniable patterns of rhythm and sound with respect to these same objects, the OE poetic compounds.

In sum, there does indeed seem to be some substance to the suspicion that compounds are created or chosen in lieu of simplex forms in syntactic phrases according to metrical convenience. Depending on one's perspective this can be seen either as taking away a measure of spontaneity on the part of the poet, or as providing additional stimulation to and recognition of the poet's ingenuity. In light of the formulaicity of the enterprise in general, and the amount of variation actually achieved, visible even in these two lexical sets, there remained a significant opportunity for creativity, resourcefulness, and self-expression available to the OE poet.

Appendix

Forms marked with * have a corresponding compound with the component parts in the opposite order with no apparent change in the meaning of the whole. Glosses are from Bosworth and Toller (1898).

With *-ferhþ*, *-ferþ*, or *-fyrhþ*:

<i>collen-</i>	"fierce-minded, bold in spirit"
<i>dreōrig-</i>	"sad in soul"
<i>freōrig-</i>	"sad in soul"
<i>gāl-</i>	"mind-lustful, licentious"
<i>gamol-</i>	"'old-souled', advanced in age, aged"
* <i>gleāw-</i>	"of wise mind, sagacious"
<i>sār-</i>	"sore at heart, wounded in spirit"
<i>sārig-</i>	"sad in soul"
<i>stærced-</i> (= <i>sterced-</i>)	"having the mind strengthened, stouthearted, courageous"
<i>stearc-</i>	"of harsh or stern soul"
<i>stīþ-</i>	"of firm, strong mind"
<i>sweorcend-</i>	"with the mind growing gloomy"
<i>swīþ-</i> (= <i>swyþ-</i>)	"of strong mind or soul"
<i>swoncen-</i>	(??) if a variant of <i>swoncer-</i> , then "life having failed, i.e., dead"; if a variant of <i>sworcen-</i> , then "with darkened soul, i.e., dead"
* <i>wērig-</i>	"weary-hearted, disconsolate, depressed"
<i>wīde-</i>	"long life, an age," thus "for a long time, forever"

With *ferhþ-* or *ferþ-*:

<i>-bana</i>	"life-destroyer, murderer"
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<i>-cearig</i>	"anxious in soul"
<i>-cleōfa</i> (= <i>-cōfa</i>)	"the mind's cave, i.e., the breast"
<i>-frec</i>	"bold in spirit"
<i>-friðende</i>	"life-saving"
<i>-genipla</i>	"life-enemy, deadly foe"
<i>-gewit</i>	"mental wit, understanding"
* <i>-gleāw</i>	"prudent in mind, sagacious"
<i>-grim</i>	"fierce of spirit"
<i>-loca</i>	"soul inclosure, bosom, body"
<i>-lufe</i>	"soul's love, mental love"
<i>-sefa</i>	"mind's sense, intellect"
* <i>-wērig</i>	"soul-wearry, sad"

With *-mōð*:

<i>ācol-</i>	"of fearful, timid mind"
<i>an-</i>	"steadfast, eager, bold, courageous, daring"
<i>ān-</i>	"of one mind, unanimous"
<i>ættren-</i>	"of poisonous mind"
<i>æwisc-</i>	"disgraced in mind, ashamed, abashed"
<i>blīðe-</i>	"of joyful mind"
<i>deōr-</i>	"bold of mind, brave"
<i>dreōrig-</i>	"sad of mind"
<i>eād-</i> (= <i>eāð-</i>)	"humble, meek, mild, lowly, obedient"
<i>forht-</i>	"mind-frightened, timid, pucillanimous"
<i>freōrig-</i>	"sad in mind"
<i>gāl-</i>	"light-minded, licentious"
<i>gealg-</i>	"sad in mind, gloomy"
* <i>geōmor-</i>	"sad of mind, sorrowful"
<i>gewealden-</i>	"subdued of mind, self-controlled"
* <i>glæd-</i>	"glad-minded, cheerful, joyous, pleasant, kind, courteous"
* <i>gleāw-</i>	"of wise mind"
<i>gūð-</i>	"of warlike mind"
<i>heāh-</i>	"of high, lofty mind; noble, proud, haughty"
<i>heān-</i>	"dejected, humiliated"
<i>heard-</i>	"of hard, unyielding spirit; self-confident, stouthearted, brave"
<i>hreōh-</i>	"savage, fierce of mind, ferocious, troubled in mind"
<i>hreōwig-</i>	"sad at heart"
* <i>hwæt-</i>	"stouthearted, bold"
<i>irre-</i>	"of angry mood, angry-minded"
<i>lāðvende-</i>	"evilly or hostilely disposed"
<i>leōht-</i>	"of light or cheerful mind, light-hearted, easy-tempered"
<i>meagol-</i>	"of earnest mind, earnest, strenuous"
<i>meaht-</i>	"strong feeling, passion"
<i>micel-</i>	"having a great mind, magnanimous"
<i>ofer-</i>	"pride, arrogance, overconfidence"
<i>or-</i>	"without courage, hopeless, despairing"

<i>reomig-</i>	(variant of <i>reōnig-</i>)
<i>reōnig-</i>	"sad at heart, weary"
<i>rēðe-</i>	1) pejorative "of fierce or savage mind" 2) "of [justly] stern or severe mind, wroth"
<i>rēðig-</i>	"of fierce or savage mind"
<i>rūm-</i>	"of liberal mind, liberal in giving"
<i>sārig-</i>	"sad-hearted, of mournful mood"
<i>sceōh-</i>	"fearful (wanton?) of heart"
<i>stið-</i>	1) "of constant mind, resolute" 2) "stern, of stern mind" 3) "of violent or fierce mind" 4) "stubborn, of stubborn mind, obstinate"
<i>styrn-</i>	"stern of mind"
* <i>swið-</i>	1) "great-souled, magnanimous, stouthearted" 2) "of violent mind, arrogant, haughty, high-minded"
<i>þancol-</i>	"having the mind addicted to thought, of acute mind, wise, intelligent"
<i>þearl-</i>	"of severe mind" (in either a positive or negative sense)
<i>til-</i>	"noble-minded"
<i>torht-</i>	"glorious, illustrious"
<i>torn-</i>	"having the mind excited to anger; having rage in the heart"
<i>wērig-</i>	"weary in spirit"
<i>wrāð-</i>	"angry-hearted, incensed"

With *mōd-*:

<i>-blind</i>	"having the mind's eye darkened, undiscerning"
<i>-blissiende</i>	"rejoicing at heart"
<i>-bysgung</i>	"anxiety of mind"
<i>-cearig</i>	"anxious of heart"
<i>-cearu</i>	"sorrow of heart, grief"
<i>-cræft</i>	"mental power or skill"
<i>-cræftig</i>	"possessing mental power, intelligent, skillful"
<i>-cwānig</i>	"sad at heart"
<i>-earfop</i>	"travail of soul, distress of mind"
<i>-gehygd</i>	"thought"
<i>-gemynd</i>	"mind, thought, intelligence"
* <i>-geōmor</i>	"sad at heart, of mournful mind"
<i>-geþanc</i>	"mind, thought, thoughts"
<i>-geþoht</i>	"mind, thought"
<i>-geþyldig</i>	"patient of soul"
<i>-gewinna</i>	"a foe of the mind," thus "care, anxiety"
* <i>-glæd</i>	"of gladsome mind"
* <i>-gleāw</i>	"wise of mind"
<i>-hete</i>	"hostility of mind, hate"
<i>-hord</i>	"the mind"

*-hwæt	"strong of soul, courageous, brave"
-leās	"spiritless, dull"
-least	"want of courage, pusillanimity"
-leōf	"dear to the heart, beloved"
-lufu	"heart's love, affection"
-sefa	(poetic syn. for <i>mōd</i>) "the inner man, mind, spirit, soul, heart"
-seōc	"sick at heart"
-seōcness	"disease of the heart"
-snotor	"prudent of mind, wise, sagacious"
-sorh	"care or sorrow of mind, sorrow of soul"
-stapol	"foundation on which the mind rests"
-stapolfæstness	"stability of mind"
*-swið	"strong of mind or soul"
-þracu	"impetuosity of mind, impetuous or daring courage"
-preā	"pain or torment of mind"
-þrycu	"violence of mind"
-þwære	"gentle, meek, mild"
-þwærness	"gentleness, meekness, patience"
-unmeaht	"disease of the heart" (see <i>mōdseōcness</i>)
-welig	"rich in spiritual or mental gifts"
-wēn	"hope entertained by the mind"
-wlanc	"proud, haughty, of high courage"

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