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THE COMPOSITION OF
OLD ENGLISH POETRY

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To my mother

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Preface

The long and slow gestation of this book reflects my growth as a scholar, and those whom I have the privilege of thanking in this preface are the very people who have made my academic career possible. Some of the ideas I present in this book go back to the earliest years of my academic training. I wrote a master's thesis on the composition of *Beowulf* in 1983 at Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, under the supervision of Seizo Kasai, whose undergraduate seminar a few years before had introduced me to Old English language and literature. It was Professor Kasai who encouraged me to challenge the common belief that Old English poetry is composed in loose syntax in order to compensate for the strict prosodical requirements. After poring over the individual half-lines of *Beowulf* typed on some sixty-four hundred cards, I proposed a relatively moderate conclusion in a thesis filled with statistical charts, that in *Beowulf* syntactic freedom is allowed only to words within the frame of the half-line, but that, in order to receive this prosodical protection, syntactic divisions must coincide with prosodical divisions. I repeated this conclusion in two published articles, one based on my MA thesis and the other on a new analysis of other Old English poems. Bruce Mitchell and Jane Roberts kindly read these studies and gave me helpful suggestions. Dr Mitchell also included them in his annotated bibliography of Old English syntax, with the comment that 'the concepts are not new but the findings are worth studying'.

If anything at all in my earliest work was worth further studying, I believe that it lies in the heart of this book. For a long time I was aware of a set of 'findings' which apparently contradicted the conclusion of my thesis: the prosodical frame of the half-line certainly allows syntactic freedom to 'heavy' words (nouns, adjectives and the like), but 'light' words

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(conjunctions, pronouns, auxiliary verbs and the like) seem to be subject to strict syntactic restrictions even within the frame of the half-line. I nevertheless refrained from examining this problem, because I knew that such a study would require a systematic analysis of numerous 'light' words, which occur in Old English poetry by the hundred and sometimes even by the thousand.

With these 'worthy findings' still unexamined, I crossed the Pacific in 1985 to pursue graduate work in medieval studies at the University of Toronto. Two events during my first years there are particularly important to the development of my study. First, the large university library gave me the opportunity to consult other scholars' work, including Kuhn's thesis on word stress and word order in Germanic, which, as I discovered, discusses issues related to my 'findings' but from a different perspective. Second, my experience as a research assistant at *The Dictionary of Old English* project taught me how to handle vast amounts of Old English material with the aid of catalogues, concordances and other reference tools. For this, I am especially grateful to Antonette diPaolo Healey and the late Ashley Crandell Amos, then the co-editors of the *Dictionary*, for entrusting to me the compilation of attested spellings for several high-frequency words. Towards the end of that decade, I was finally ready for undertaking my long-meditated project, now the subject of my PhD dissertation.

I wrote my doctoral dissertation under the superb guidance of Roberta Frank. No words can fully express my gratitude for her unfailing and continuous support, first as a supervisor and then as a mentor. Every detail about Professor Frank that I can recall now – her office door which was always open, a talk she gave which was full of wit and humour, the first article by her that I read, which had left me awe-struck, her commitment to the institution, her devotion to the field, and far more – testifies to how much she has taught me, both in words and deeds, about the profession: what high standards I should set for myself, and how much responsibility I should take for the sake of others. I would also like to thank H. A. Roe and Geoffrey Russom for their advice on linguistic and metrical issues in the dissertation. I am grateful to Patricia J. Eberle, whose generous help enabled me to place my work in a larger context. A completed manuscript was read by A. diP. Healey, H. Mayer, A. G. Rigg, H. A. Roe and G. Russom, whose valuable comments put my PhD dissertation into its final shape.

Preface

Upon the completion of my doctorate in 1992, I took a teaching position at New York University as a successor to the late Jess B. Bessinger, Jr, whose concordance to Old English poetry was probably the single most valuable tool for my research. While I taught, I reinforced the theoretical background of my work by writing new chapters and adding more material to the old ones. Some of the new material was taken from the conference papers I had presented at the Modern Language Association Conference and the annual International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University. I owe the enrichment of my study to various support I received from friends, mentors and fellow scholars: Patricia Bethel, Mary Blockley, Thomas Cable, Patrick W. Conner, Edwin W. Duncan, Kari E. Gade, Anna A. Grotans, Pauline Head, B. Rand Hutcheson, Peter J. Lucas, E. G. Stanley and Andrew C. Troup. I am grateful to David Megginson for, among other things, his help in using the computer. I received much encouragement and moral support from my colleagues at New York University, especially from Mary J. Caruthers, David L. Hoover, Anthony Low and Robert R. Raymo. I owe my gratitude to the Department of English at New York University, whose generous Stein Fund facilitated the production of this book.

The last stage of the development of this book entailed the process of transforming a PhD dissertation into a book. For this, my greatest thanks are due to Michael Lapidge, who painstakingly read several versions of my manuscript. Professor Lapidge's suggestions helped me greatly to improve the style of my writing and to clarify arguments in many parts of the book. I completed the typescript during the year of leave as a Visiting Fellow of the Whitney Humanities Center at Yale University. I would like to thank Fred C. Robinson for his kindly mentoring at Yale and also for commenting on part of this work.

I would like to thank my friends and my students who worked with me as research assistants, proof-readers and copy-editors at various stages: Ken J. Anderson, Charles A. Baldwin, Gregory J. Darling, Heide R. Estes, Joanne A. Findon, Catherine Georgi, Michael E. Matto, Bonnie Robinson, Robert G. Stanton, Mineko Takekuma and Sheila M. Walsh. All the remaining mistakes are, however, mine.

I would like to thank Jane A. Mark and Frank J. Visich of Jane's in New York City, where I did most of the revision with my portable computer plugged into their store wall. And last of all, my deepest thanks to my family: to my father for his understanding, to my sister for her

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compassion and to my mother for her support in all these years, for the hundreds of hours of her research assistance at early stages of my work and for her unwavering faith in my potential, which kept me going even when I was not certain about it myself.

Abbreviations

ANQ	<i>American Notes and Queries</i>
ASE	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
ASPR	Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records
BGDSL	<i>Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur</i>
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
DOE	<i>The Dictionary of Old English</i>
EEMF	Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile
EETS	Early English Text Society
ES	<i>English Studies</i>
JEGP	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
MP	<i>Modern Philology</i>
N&Q	<i>Notes and Queries</i>
NM	<i>Neuphilologische Mitteilungen</i>
OES	B. Mitchell, <i>Old English Syntax</i> , 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985)
PBA	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
PQ	<i>Philological Quarterly</i>
RES	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
SN	<i>Studia Neophilologica</i>
SP	<i>Studies in Philology</i>
TPS	<i>Transactions of the Philological Society</i>