Enjambment as a Test of Style in Old English Poetry

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Enjambment as a Test of Style in Old English Poetry

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Abstract

This study investigates whether enjambment can be used as a test of style in Old English poetry. Enjambment has been mentioned in previous scholarship but has never been the focus of a lengthy study. Data derived from a close reading of 500 lines of *Beowulf, Elene, Exodus,* and *Guthlac B* identified six types of enjambment used by the poets with varying degrees of frequency. This indicates that enjambment was stylistic rather than formulaic; in other words, it was a choice based on the preferences of the poet. After analysis of how each poet used enjambment, this study concludes that enjambment can be viewed as a useful tool for critics of Old English poetry to consider when discussing differences between poems and poets.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family: my wife Felicia, whose unwavering support, encouragement, humor, friendship, and love gave me the strength I needed to undertake and finally finish it, my mother, whose “gentle” prodding kept me moving forward, and my brother, Marty, without whose lifelong advice, inspiration, and generosity of spirit I would not be the person I am today.

Last, but not least, I dedicate this thesis to my wonderful sons, Harry and Dylan, who I hope see it as a reminder to never give up and to always follow their dreams, however different from their “day jobs” those dreams might be.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Sue Weaver Schopf for her (very) longtime guidance, support, patience, and levity, Dr. Talaya Delaney for pushing me towards the finish line and refusing to let me fail, and Chuck Houston for his optimism.

Thank you to the staff at the Harvard Extension School, the Child Memorial Library, and the Goodnow Library in Sudbury, Massachusetts.

Most of all, a special thank you goes to my thesis director, Dr. Daniel Donoghue, whose incredible passion, patience, and vision guided this thesis from beginning to end. He is the best ambassador of Anglo-Saxon poetry one could hope for, always engaging and challenging his students yet rarely making them thole.
Table of Contents

Dedication ................................................................. iv

Acknowledgements ......................................................... v

List of Figures ............................................................. vii

I. Introduction ......................................................................... 1

   Old English Enjambment and the Critics: Always the Bridesmaid, .. 3
   Never the Bride ............................................................. 3
   Enjambment as a Test of Style? ........................................... 6
   Notes on Method ............................................................ 7

II. Categories of Enjambment in Old English Poetry ......................... 9

   Category I: Basic Enjambment ............................................. 9
      Basic Enjambment with A-Verse Adjective Series ................ 11
      Basic Enjambment with Object First ................................. 12
   Category II: Appositive Enjambment .................................. 13
   Category III: Verb Phrases ............................................... 17
   Category IV: Series Enjambment ......................................... 18
   Category V: Enumerative Enjambment ................................ 20
   Category VI: Multiple ..................................................... 21

III. Enjambment as a Poetic Device ........................................ 23

   Enjambment and Alliteration ............................................. 33
Enjambment and the Tennis Match of Perspectives ............... 35
The Enjamed Janus Phrase ........................................ 37
Enjamed Verb Phrases with Multiple Infinitives ............... 42
B-Verse to A-Verse Enjambment and the Weaving of Words ........ 45

IV: The Tale of the Tape: Enjambment Statistics ..................... 49
    Clause Length .................................................. 49
    Percentage of Enjamed Clauses ............................... 50
    Enjambment Type ................................................. 51

V. Conclusion ................................................................ 53

Bibliography ................................................................. 58
    Works Cited .......................................................... 58
    Works Consulted ..................................................... 60
List of Figures

Fig. 1 Beowulf Lines 2699-2709a ............................................. 25
Fig. 2 North Yorkshire Weave Pattern ..................................... 47
Fig. 3 Number of Clauses in 500 Lines .................................... 49
Fig. 4 Percentage of Clauses Greater than One Half-Line ........... 49
Fig. 5 Average Length of Clauses ........................................... 50
Fig. 6 Number of Half-Lines Per Clause .................................. 50
Fig. 7 Unenjambed/Enjambed ............................................... 51
Fig. 8 Enjambment Types in Beowulf ..................................... 51
Fig. 9 Enjambment Types in Elene ......................................... 51
Fig. 10 Enjambment Types in Exodus ..................................... 52
Fig. 11 Enjambment Types in Guthlac B ................................. 52
In poetry, enjambment occurs when a sentence or clause extends beyond the end of the poetic line. A famous example of enjambment can be found in the first lines of T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain. (1-4)

Here, verbs and their objects are separated by line breaks, an effect intensified by the brief pause the reader may encounter while moving his or her eyes from one line to the next.

In manuscript form, Old English poetry bears little physical resemblance to *The Waste Land* or even to modern editions of the Old English poetry itself. Generally written from margin to margin due to the high cost of manuscript material, Old English poetry lacks modern lineation and punctuation. It rhymes extremely rarely, and is built from pairs of alliterating half-lines that were meant to be recited orally in front of an audience. Modern editions “pair alliterating half-lines in a line-by-line format” (Donoghue, “The Enlightened Innocence of Franciscus Junius Encounters the Meters of Boethius” 326) in a layout that resembles modern poetry. For example, *Beowulf* 2809:
“Took from his neck/ the golden ring” is a line made up of two half-lines that alliterate on the “h” sound. For purposes of definition, *Dyde him of healse* is referred to as the a-verse while *hring gyldenne* is referred to as the b-verse. The space between verses is called the caesura.

While readers of modern poetry may identify enjambment as a visual phenomenon or associate it with the moving of the eye from one line to the next, as in the earlier example from Eliot, enjambment is identifiable in Old English poetry, even in manuscript form. Old English enjambment occurs when a unit of syntax extends beyond the b-verse of one line and into the following line. For example, *Beowulf* 2986-7:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{nam on Ongenbio} & \quad \text{irenbyrnan,} \\
\text{heard swyrd hilted} & \quad \text{ond his helm somod}^1 \\
\text{He took from Ongentheow} & \quad \text{iron byrnie} \\
\text{hard-hilted sword} & \quad \text{and his helmet too}
\end{align*}
\]

In this example, a single clause extends from one line to the next. The first part of the clause (line 2986) alliterates on the vowels while the second line alliterates on the “h” sound. While the Anglo-Saxon audience would not have been able to *see* the enjambment in the same way as a reader of *The Waste Land* might, the Anglo-Saxon audience, expecting a certain structure of rhythm and alliteration in the units which make up their poetry, would recognize the shift of alliteration within a single clause and would certainly have recognized with ears what we now recognize with eyes.

---

1 For the purposes of this thesis, all modern punctuation has been removed from the Old English with the exception of delineation of parentheticals.
Old English Enjambment and the Critics: Always the Bridesmaid, Never the Bride

While many scholars have noted the presence of enjambment in Old English poetry, I have not located any studies focusing primarily on enjambment itself. Lehmann calls enjambment an innovation by the Anglo-Saxons relative to other Germanic traditions and indicates that it is the “chief device” (47) used in Old English poetry. In *The Art of Beowulf*, Brodeur writes, “the pressures of long narrative had compelled poets to make extensive use of the run-over line, in place of the end stopped line characteristic of the older non religious poetry” (2). According to Lewis, enjambment marks the transition from the oral-formulaic period into a more literary style of Old English poetry (499). Malone also sees an expansion of the use of enjambment over time, lamenting the lack of structure brought on by the heavy use of enjambment in *Judith* (203). In “The Dangers of Disguise: Old English Texts in Modern Punctuation,” Mitchell highlights what he calls “enjambment of sense” (408) in *Beowulf* 1703b-1705a:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{blæd is aræed} \\
\text{geond widwegas wine mine Beowulf} \\
\text{ðin ofer þeoda gehwylce}
\end{align*}
\]

Fame is well known throughout the wide world yours over all nations

He indicates that this device creates a “momentary riddle” (410) that is experienced by the audience when the poet postpones *ðin* to the third line although it modifies *blæd* in 1703b. This construction may find the audience wondering briefly whose fame the poet is speaking about and how far that fame reaches.
Robinson describes a type of “specifying variation” (“Two Aspects of Variation in Old English Poetry” 74), using Beowulf 1368-9 as an example:

Deah þe hædstapa hundum geswenced
heorot hornum trum holdwudu sece

Translated by Robinson, “Although the heath-stalker, pressed by the dogs, the hart strong in horns should seek the forest” (74). The brief uncertainty that results from the use of the term hædstapa, described by Robinson describes as “artful retardation” (73), is resolved in part through the poet’s use of enjambment.

While enjambment in Old English poetry has been to some extent overlooked by scholars, much has been written about the device in connection with to oral poetry, especially Homer, and also as found in Milton. In “The Distinctive Character of Enjambement in Homeric Verse,” Parry discusses two types of enjambment, unperiodic and necessary (203). He describes necessary enjambment as when “the verse end can fall at the end of a word group where there is not yet a whole thought; or it can fall in the middle of a word group” (203). Parry’s necessary enjambment roughly corresponds to the enjambed clauses we will discuss in this study. Peabody, in The Winged Word, expands on Parry by adding additional categories with special attention to parataxis and hypotaxis (142), topics which scholars of Old English have analyzed extensively.

Milton’s use of enjambment has also received significant attention; in Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form, Hollander discusses Milton’s “dynamics of line terminus” (96) and writes, “Milton, and Blake when he follows him, is in effect employing the half-covered line, the guess, the correct ‘answer’ and even the moment of
anagnorisis, of discovery of truth with its slight rebuke, as part of the marking process” (101). As an example of Milton’s use of enjambment, Hollander provides this from *Paradise Lost*:

```
this Assyrian Garden, where the Fiend
Saw undelighting all delight, all kind
Of living creatures . . . (IV.285-287)
```

Certainly this example of Milton’s enjambment echoes Robinson’s “artful retardation” and Mitchell’s “momentary riddle” mentioned above. The suspense Milton brings by placing “Fiend” at the end of a line leaves the audience peering over a cliff of possibilities as to what the Devil might do. The ambiguity created by the placement of “all kind” at the end of the line leaves one to sort out whether it refers to a category of a thing or someone/something infused with kindness. Line 287 provides the “discovery of truth” (101) Hollander refers to.

Enjambment often functions as the substrate in which many other Old English poetic devices have sprouted and grown. Leslie writes, “Chiasmus as a stylistic device in Old English poetry would not have been possible without the development of what Kemp Malone calls ‘plurilinear’ units” (77). Plurilinear units, of course, would not be possible without enjambment. Malone sees a transformation from stark end-stopped lines to a rich style of plurilinear composition (202). While Malone identifies three stages of the development of the run-on line (203), he does not conduct the detailed analysis of the plurilinear units that will be the focus of this thesis. Enjambment plays a role in the *apo koinou* that Mitchell sees in Old English poetry (“‘Apo Koinou’ in Old English Poetry?”), as he defines the device as existing in the verse paragraph (496), a structure made
possible in part by enjambment. When discussing the envelope patterns she sees throughout Old English poetry in the preface to *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Old English Poetry*, Bartlett writes that her research led her to believe that “the metrical unit, the Germanic line or half-line, is not the only structural unit in Anglo-Saxon verse, but as with most long non-strophic poems, there is a wave-like movement of the lines, a rising and falling of emphasis--in the language of prose, a paragraph movement.” This description of the effect of enjambled lines echoes Fussell’s comments that with enjambment the audience “get[s] a symphonic sense of flow and flux, a sort of tidal variation” (116).

So, while scholars have mentioned enjambment as a poetic technique, a substrate in which other poetic techniques can be employed, and an indicator of changes in poetic style over time, enjambment itself has not received sufficient attention. The four poems I analyzed for this thesis, *Beowulf*, *Elene*, *Exodus*, and *Guthlac B* show levels of enjambment from a low of 53% to a high of 74%. These percentages show that enjambment is not a rare phenomenon and, in fact, is at the heart of the artistic construction of Old English poetry.

**Enjambment as a Test of Style?**

The question I am seeking to answer in this study is whether enjambment can be used as a test of style in the longer Old English poems — can the quantity and type of enjambment, when compared between poems, paint a picture of compositional differences or similarities that are significant enough to be considered part of poetic
style? To answer this question, I am taking Donoghue’s advice that “Clearly what is needed is an objective test, one that makes as few presuppositions about style as possible and that bases its results on empirically verifiable data” (Style in Old English Poetry: The Test of the Auxiliary, 3). In the same volume, Donoghue also indicates that a pattern of choices a poet makes “may reveal traits of a distinctive poetic style” (7). Grinda agrees, writing that statistical measurements are “useful tools in identifying stylistically related textual groups and what they have in common” (306). After analyzing four Old English poems (Beowulf, Exodus, Elene, and Guthlac B), I identify several categories of enjambment and compared them between poems, ultimately concluding that enjambment is an integral part of Old English poetic construction and therefore a poetic technique worth studying on its own. I also conclude that the analysis of differences of type and quantity of enjambment between poems can be used to highlight the compositional choices that make up part of poetic style.

Notes on Method

This study focuses on enjambed clauses. A clause is defined as unit of syntax that includes a subject and a verb\(^2\). In choosing to focus on clauses, I seek to avoid the pitfalls of examining the relationships between clauses (subordination, parataxis, hypotaxis) and the delineation of sentences in favor of analyzing examples that Parry might refer to as necessary enjambment (203).

\(^2\) As defined by the Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar, “A unit of grammar which typically involves a subject–predicate relationship, and which operates at a level lower than a sentence, but higher than a phrase.”
When translating, I attempted to ignore modern punctuation to ensure that I do not inappropriately separate phrases from their rightful clauses. The translations found in the text are mine unless otherwise noted and are presented half-line by half-line in order to preserve the syntactic flow of enjambment when it is present. Word-by-word translation was necessary to preserve the word order of the original Old English; this close reading allowed me to accurately identify and categorize each enjambed clause.

To begin, I translated 500 lines from *Beowulf* (2682-3182), delineated each clause, located each enjambed clause, and developed six categories of enjambment. Armed with these categories, I went to work on *Exodus* (90-590), *Elene* (386-886), and *Guthlac B* (819-1319), re-evaluating the categories as necessary and eventually codifying their definitions. Throughout the process, I followed the advice of Donoghue and Grinda and attempted to eliminate any subjectivity by adhering to the rigid definitions as strictly as possible, even if some of the distinctions are (necessarily) arbitrary. We will now discuss the six categories of enjambment.
Chapter II

Categories of Enjambment in Old English Poetry

After a close reading of *Beowulf*, *Exodus*, *Elene*, and *Guthlac B*, I have identified six types of enjambment in Old English poetry: simple, appositive, split verbals, series, enumerative, and multiple. As mentioned above, enjambment occurs in no fewer than 53% of the clauses in the poems discussed here. The examples I selected are representative of the many more which can be found in the poems.

Category I: Basic Enjambment

Basic enjambment occurs when a clause extends past the b-verse of one line into the a-verse of the next. The most rudimentary of examples can be found in *Beowulf* 2880b-81a:

þonne ic sweorde drep
ferhþgeniðlan

When I struck with sword
the deadly enemy

Another example of basic enjambment is found in Exodus 144b-145b:

siððan grame wurdon
Egypta cyn  ymbe antwig

When hostile became
the tribe of Egypt  concerning prosperity
In these two examples, the poets simply extend their thoughts into the next line. In

*Exodus* 367a-368a, the poet uses basic enjambment to a more stylistic effect:

```
forþon he gelædde ofer lagustreamas
maðmhorda mæst
```

Therefore he led over ocean currents
the best of hoards

The passage in which these lines are found relates to Noah, and the poet’s reference to the ark’s contents as “the best of hoards” is an example of masterfully imaginative description in which enjambment plays a role by momentarily delaying the surprising description of the animals aboard the ark.

Two other examples from *Exodus* illustrate different nuances of basic enjambment. First, in lines 302b-304a:

```
Sæweall astah
uolang gestod wið Israhelum
andægne fyrst
```

Sea-wall stood
stood upright for the Israelis
for one day’s time

the two clauses (302b and 303-304a) share a subject, *Sæweall* (“seawall”). Here, and elsewhere in this thesis, clauses with shared or implied subjects are considered to be independent of the clauses with which they share a subject. Therefore, *Exodus* 303-304b is an enjambed clause separate from the unenjambed clause (302b) with which it shares a subject. In 191b-192a

```
Cuðoftgebad
horn on heape
```

10
Cuð (“famous”) is an adjective describing the noun horn. Due to the adjective and noun residing on different lines, a translator might be tempted to render this passage as “the famous one often announced/ the horn to the company,” therefore creating apposition not found in the Old English text. Robinson’s definition of apposition (discussed below) insists that apposed terms be the same part of speech (3). In this thesis, this clause and clauses with similar construction are defined as being examples of basic (rather than appositional) enjambment. While conducting my analysis of clauses with basic enjambment, I identified two sub-categories which will be discussed below.

I.a. Basic Enjambment with A-Verse Adjective Series

In this sub-category, two or more adjectives in a line’s a-verse describe a noun found in a previous line. For example, Beowulf 2700b-2701a:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{þæt ðæt sweord gedeaf} \\
\text{fah ond fæted}
\end{align*}
\]

So that the sword stuck in gleaming and golden

and 2703b-2704a:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{wællseaxe gebræd} \\
\text{biter ond beaduscearp}
\end{align*}
\]

Drew a seax bitter and battle-sharp

This sub-category stands apart from what I define as series enjambment, which occurs when the poet includes a multi-linear list of non-appositional concepts that share a
common referent. An example of series enjambment can be found in *Beowulf* 2928-2929:

Sona him se froda fæder Ohtheres
eald ond egesfull ondslyht ageaf

At once to him the wise father of Othere ancient and terrible returned onslaught by hand

Here, *froda*, *eald*, and *egesfull* refer to Ongentheow and function as a list of his attributes. Series enjambment will be discussed further below.

I. b Basic Enjambment with Object First

In this sub-category, enjambed clauses are ordered with the object leading, creating what Mitchell describes as a “momentary riddle” (“The Dangers of Disguise” 410). In *Exodus* 204a-205b, the poet creates a brief moment of uncertainty by beginning the clause with the object:

øðþæt wランス forsceaf
mihtig engel

*Wランス* (“the proud”) is the object of the *mihtig engel* (“mighty angel”), so in modern English the sentence would read “until a mighty angel stood in the way of the proud ones.” This translation removes the brief suspense the found in the original Old English. Of similar construction is *Exodus* 233b-234b:

wace ne gretton
in þæt ringeatæl ræswan herges

the weak did not welcome
in that number of warriors princes of armies
In modern English, this passage would read “princes of armies did not welcome the weak in that number of warriors.” In addition to the ambiguity created by the object/verb/prepositional phrase/subject construction, the placement of ræswan at the end of the clause functions to place emphasis on the commanders, as the solution to the “momentary riddle” is likely to resonate in the minds of the audience.

Category II: Appositive Enjambment

Apposition and variation, which can be loosely defined as the use of several words or phrases to describe one thing or concept, is a significant feature of Old English poetry. According to Klaeber, variation is “the very soul of the Old English poetical style” (237). Robinson defines variation as “syntactically parallel words or word-groups which share a common referent and which occur within a single clause” (“Two Aspects of Variation in Old English Poetry” 73) and writes that apposition and variation are one and the same “if apposition be extended to include restatements of adjectives, verbs, and phrases as well as of nouns and pronouns” (73). This thesis uses Robinson’s definition and categorizes enjambled clauses as appositional if words or phrases refer to a single concept, regardless of which part of speech they are.

In Old English poetry, the presence of apposition and variation lead to enjambment, as the lengthening of the clause often forces the clause to extend to the following line. Beowulf 2688-89 contains a basic example of an enjambed clause that contains apposition (apposed items are in bold):

þa wæs þeodsceāða þriddan siðe,
frecne fyrdraca  fæhða gemyndig

Then was the people’s foe  for a third time
fearful fire-dragon  mindful of feuds

While the audience is in little doubt as to what peodscedia refers to, frecne fyrdraca serves as what Robinson refers to as a “clarifying variation” (“Two Aspects of Variation in Old English Poetry” 76). Similarly, the Exodus poet artfully uses an enjambed clause to not only clarify the meaning of a noun but to add emotional weight to the plight of the Israelites:

þeah ðe him on healfa gehwam  hettend seomeron
mægen oððe merestream [209a-210a]

Though for them on both sides  the enemy waited
army or ocean

Apposition in Old English poetry is not limited to nouns; in Beowulf 2699a-2700a the poet uses a noun phrase in apposition to a pronoun:

þæt he þone niðgæst  niðor hwene sloh
secg on searwum

That he the hostile outsider  struck somewhat lower
warrior in armor

Some enjambed clauses with apposition are less concrete than the noun/noun and pronoun/noun groups shown above. When describing Wiglaf’s return to the dying Beowulf, the poet writes:

Ar wæs on ofoste  eftsiðes georn
frætwum gefyrðred [2783a-84a]

The messenger was in haste  eager for return
urged on by treasure
Here, the poet uses the adjective *georn* and the past participle *gefyrðred* to relay Wiglaf’s urgent desire to return before his king’s death. The prepositional phrase *on ofoste* is yet another modifier of *Ar*, syntactically different but similar in effect to *georn and gefyrðred*.

Anglo-Saxon poets were not limited to one concept when using apposition in a clause. In *Exodus* 101b-101a, the poet uses phrases in apposition when describing both Moses and the troop he commands:

```
swa him Moyses bebead
mære magoræswa metodes folce
fus fyrdgetrum
```

As Moses commanded to them
famous chief the creator’s people
brave band of warriors

Here, the apposed words create a momentary puzzle because the referents are divided between Moses (*Moyses, mære magoræswa*) and his followers (*him, metodes folce, fus fyrdgetrum*). Similarly, in *Beowulf* the poet uses an enjambed clause to create an almost cinematic picture of a king giving gifts to his warriors:

```
þonne he on ealubence oft gesalde
healsittendum helm ond byrnan
þeoden his þegnum [2867a-2869a]
```

When he on the ale bench often gave
to hall sitters helm and byrnie
the chieftain to his thanes

With the phrase *þeoden his þegnum* the poet uses apposition (*he* in apposition to *þeoden* and *healsittendum* in apposition to *þegnum*) to sum up not only what s/he has just described artfully but also to encapsulate an important aspect of Anglo-Saxon social order, the outward signs of which (gift-giving) are described in the previous lines. As
will be discussed below, the social order has crumbled and the poet’s use of the word 
healsittendum seems like a subtle comment about thanes who will sit in their leader’s 
warm hall but flee in the face of danger. The Anglo-Saxon poets use this pattern of 
juxtaposition and restatement elsewhere as well.³

Old English poets used appositional enjambment in a way that could be 
interpreted as renaming, as in Exodus 101b-101a: Moses/famous chief and people/brave 
band of warriors. Poets could also use apposition to take description from general to 
specific or specific to general, as found in a single passage of Exodus:

Ongunnon sælafe  segnum dælan
on yðlafe  ealde madmas
reaf and randas  Heo on riht sceodon
gold and godweb  Iosepes gestreon
wera wuldorgesteald [585-589a]

They began the sea-spoils    under a banner to divide
on the shore    ancient treasures
clothing and shields    they rightly divided
gold and cloth    Joseph’s treasure
glorious possessions of men

The apposition in the first clause takes us from the general concept of treasure to the 
specific contents of that treasure: clothing and shields. The next clause takes us from the 
specific (gold and cloth) to the general: treasure/glorious possessions.

Even when using Robinson’s broad definition of apposition, it is important to note 
that this category is the most subjective of the categories. When determining whether an 
enjambed clause contained apposition, I asked whether two words or phrases are 
variations of the same concept. For example, in Exodus 126a-127a:

³ For example, Beowulf 2906b-2908b, Exodus 412a-414a, 419a-420b, 500b-502a.
The warriors saw the direct path
the standard over the troop

one could argue that the warriors saw two things: the right path and the standard.

However, I feel that in this case the standard (being held aloft) and the path are analogous: they show the army where to go. Similarly, in *Beowulf* 2956a-2957a,

Ongentheow is fleeing from Hygelac:

```
beah eft þonan
cald under eorðweall
```

Retreated from there
old man behind the earth-wall

The elderly warrior’s retreat and sheltering behind fortifications are variations of the same concept and are therefore categorized as appositional.

Category III: Verb Phrases

The next category we will discuss involves verb phrases. This category is also somewhat subjective, in that a determination must be made whether to work with Donoghue’s definition of auxiliary verb as “any finite verb that allows a second verb in the same clause to be in nonfinite form, either an uninflected infinitive or a past participle” (5) or to use a stricter definition that defines a verb phrase exclusively as a finite verb with an infinitive. As past and present participles are often used in place of adjectives and are therefore often found in apposition to other words or phrases, for the purposes of this study the verb phrase category will include only constructions that
include a finite verb with an infinitive. This definition is arbitrary but reduces subjectivity in categorization.

Anglo-Saxon poets separate the finite verb from the infinitive to great dramatic effect, creating the “momentary riddle” described by Robinson (410). For example, in *Exodus* 197a-199b, the poet delays the infinitive to create growing tension as to what the Egyptians were planning:

Hæfdon hie gemynted to þam mægenheapum to þam ærdæge Israhela cynn billum abreotan on hyra Bbroðorgyld

They had resolved in a powerful band at daybreak the people of Israel with swords to kill as vengeance for their brothers

Similarly, in Beowulf 2797a-98b:

þæs ðe ic moste minum leodum ær swyltdæge swyle gestrynan

That I was able for my people before my death-day to gain such riches

Category IV: Series Enjambment

Series enjambment occurs when the poet uses two or more of the same parts of speech or words and phrases with the same function as those parts of speech to create a plurilinear list of concepts that are not variations of the same theme. Series enjambment can be descriptive, as in *Beowulf* 2767a-2769b:

Swylce he siomian geseah segn eallgylden heah offer horde hondwundra mæst gelocen leoðocraeftum
He also saw hanging a standard all golden
high over the hoard the greatest of handmade wonders
interlaced with skill

Compared to the examples of appositive enjambment discussed above, the contrast
between the poet’s referring to Beowulf’s men as both healsittendum and þegnum
(2868-9), which mean roughly the same thing, and his describing the standard as golden,
high, handmade, and interlaced is clear. Series enjambment adds new elements to the
description.

Series enjambment can also be employed to provide more than description; it can
also be used to list items or concepts to great poetic effect. The Exodus poet uses a list to
dramatically show how widespread the race of Israel will be, so no one will be able to
count the number of people:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{þæt he ana mæge} & \quad ealle geriman \\
\text{stanas on eordan} & \quad steorran on heofonum \\
\text{sæbeorga sand} & \quad sealte yða [440-442]
\end{align*}
\]

That he alone may count all
stones on earth stars in heaven
beach’s sand salty waves

There is a deliberate excess that adds little to the underlying concept but serves to
emphasize the countless number of descendants. Similarly, in lines 326b-330a the
Exodus poet uses series enjambment to describe a battle scene, employing a cascade of
concepts to make the audience feel as if they are being subjected to a military charge:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{þracu wæs on ore} & \\
\text{heard handplega} & \quad hægsteald modige \\
\text{wæpna wælslhtes} & \quad wigend unforhte \\
\text{bilswaðu blodige} & \quad beadumægnes ræs \\
\text{grimhelma gegrind}
\end{align*}
\]
There was an onrush in the vanguard
rough hand-play    brave young fighters
battle of weapons    fearless warriors
bloody wounds    rush of an army
crash of helmets

While *hægsteald* and *wigend* could be viewed as being in apposition, the effect this clause has on the audience is that of an overwhelming list of action going on at the same time, punctuated by the exclamation point of two helmets crashing together.

One nuance of the definition of series enjambment is that the series must occur on more than one line. For example, *eallgylden* in *Beowulf* 2767b is the first adjective in a series, while the *wællseaxe* in line 2703b (discussed above) lacks an adjective in its line and therefore the clause is categorized as basic enjambment with an a-verse adjective series.

**Category V: Enumerative Enjambment**

In *Aspects of Old English Poetic Syntax: Where Clauses Begin*, Blockley discusses the difficulties scholars have experienced distinguishing between enumeration and apposition (52). She identifies a syntactical pattern, “A (verb) / B and C” (53), which she illustrates with *Beowulf* 103b-4a:

```
se þe moras heold,
fen ond fæsten
```

Who the moors held
fen and fastness

She writes

Some critics feel that the compound phrase continues
an enumeration begun with the noun. They see the moors, fen and fastness as three separate things. Others read the phrase as being in apposition with the preceding noun, so that the moors are renamed as fen and fastness (53).

When viewed through the lens of enjambment, Blockley’s “A (verb) / B and C” pattern becomes significant in that the verb is placed at the end of the b-verse and the “B and C” are found in the a-verse immediately following, thereby creating an enjambed clause with a unique syntactical structure. In *Beowulf*, lines 2954-2956a follow this pattern:

> þæt he sæmannum onsacan mihte
> heaðolīðendum hord forstandan,
> bearn ond bryde

that he the sea-men could oppose against battle-travelers the hoard defend his children and women

In *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*, Robinson writes that this series of nouns can be interpreted as being either appositive or enumerative (63). As my analysis is particularly concerned with the relationship between lines, the presence of a clear pattern — however rare — that is easily identifiable and sufficiently unlike the other categories is reason to create the category of enumerative enjambment based on Blockley’s “A (verb) / B and C” pattern.

**Category VI: Multiple**

Some clauses feature more than one type of enjambment. For example, *Beowulf*

2764b-2766a:

> sinc eāðe mæg
This clause features a verb phrase, *mæg* with the infinitive *oferhigan* as well as an appositive construction with *sinc* and *gold on grunde*. Clauses like this will be categorized as multiple enjambment. Having identified six categories of enjambment, we will now discuss how the poets use the technique.
We will now analyze and discuss a variety of examples of enjambment in *Beowulf, Exodus, Elene,* and *Guthlac B* to see how the poets used enjambment to enrich their poems.

To some extent, clause length and enjambment go hand-in-hand; enjambed clauses must be constructed of at least two half-lines, and clauses of three or more half lines must be enjambed. Statistics bear this out, as *Guthlac B,* with the longest average clause length, also has the highest percentage of enjambed clauses. Enjambment is not just about long clauses, however. The rules of Old English poetry insist that each line must alliterate on a different sound. A change in alliteration within a single clause is, in part, what signals the line break and any concomitant enjambment to the audience. The interplay between the clausal unit and patterns of alliteration, as well as the interplay between these structural concerns and changes in the poet’s theme and focus, contribute to the way enjambment adds to the richness of Old English poetry.

Clauses of different length affect the rhythm and flow of the poetry. Nicholson writes:

> Assuming that that critical listener was able to hear more than simply the story, he must then have been excited when the singer passed suddenly from normal verse to a complicated passage of expanded verse, perhaps not unlike the modern
opera-goer’s experience when a singer suddenly moves into a difficult aria following a rather ordinary passage of recitative. (291)

Critics such as Brodeur and Malone (see above) believe that later Old English poetry features more enjambment than the earlier poetry. While avoiding any necessary link between enjambment and quality, I believe that enjambment provided poets with the ability to extend clauses, thereby providing space for apposition, verb phrases with multiple infinitives, and constructions which provide a “momentary riddle.” The ability to use extended clauses also provides the poet with the opportunity to not use extended clauses, allowing poets to use short clauses for dramatic contrast as well.4

Let us now turn to a short passage in Beowulf to closely examine how the poet used enjambment. For the purposes of identification, the separate clauses are presented alternating between bold and standard typeface:

![Beowulf passage with enjambment highlighted](image)

He did not heed the dragon’s head because the hand was burned of the spirited man there he his strength helped He the hostile outsider struck somewhat lower

---

4 For example, *Exodus* 515b and 567b.
The warrior in war-gear so that the sword stuck in gleaming and golden so that the fire began to weaken after that Then again the king himself gathered his wits drew a seax bitter and battle-sharp that he wore on his byrnie

The helm of the Weders cut through the dragon in the middle They felled the foe —courage driving out life— and both of them him had destroyed the noble kinsmen so ought a man to be a thane in time of need

In what is essentially a battle scene, the poet uses a variety of perspectives to introduce and reinforce several themes. Using a table to assist our close reading, we will now examine how the *Beowulf* poet uses enjambment in this passage.

Fig. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>A-Verse</th>
<th>B-Verse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2697</td>
<td>Refocus</td>
<td>Description/status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2698</td>
<td>Description/status</td>
<td>Character focus (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2699</td>
<td>Action (1)</td>
<td>Action (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2700</td>
<td>Restatement/re-focus</td>
<td>Effect (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2701</td>
<td>Effect (1)</td>
<td>Effect (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2702</td>
<td>Effect (2)</td>
<td>Character focus (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2703</td>
<td>Character focus (2)</td>
<td>Action (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2704</td>
<td>Action (3)</td>
<td>Description/pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2705</td>
<td>Action (4)</td>
<td>Action (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2706</td>
<td>Summary of passage (1)</td>
<td>Summary of passage (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2707</td>
<td>Summary of passage (3)</td>
<td>Summary of passage (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2708</td>
<td>Summary of passage (3)</td>
<td>Poet’s perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2709</td>
<td>Poet’s perspective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This passage begins with Wiglaf assuming center stage in the battle with the dragon. He displays his tactical acumen by showing an unwillingness to be injured by the same means as Beowulf, whose injuries are related in a clause with basic enjambment (2697b-2698a) that offers a brief “momentary riddle” as to which warrior has a burned hand. Line 2698b is an unenjambed clause of a single half-line that melds the strength of Wiglaf with that of Beowulf. This multiplication of force will prove successful in the next lines.

The poet now presents two half-lines describing the action of Wiglaf stabbing the dragon (2699), followed by an example of an appositive enjamed half-line (2700a). This half-line is not apposition merely for apposition’s sake, but serves to place the warrior — Wiglaf — front and center in the audience’s consciousness by reinforcing who is striking the dragon. Next, in an enjamed clause categorized as basic enjambment with an a-verse adjective series, the poet describes the effect of Wiglaf’s action (2700b-2701a), shifting the perspective from Wiglaf to the moment of his sword piercing the dragon, a perspective shift the poet reinforces by cinematically describing the sword’s appearance in the a-verse adjective series. The poet then, using an enjamed verb phrase, again shifts the audience’s focus by describing the effect Wiglaf’s blow has on the dragon’s fire (2701b-2702a).

But Beowulf is the hero of this poem, and in 2702b-2703a the poet puts Beowulf back on center stage in a clause with basic enjambment that momentarily slows the action and shifts the audience’s focus to Beowulf’s mental state; the hero’s ability to “gather his wits” in this situation reinforces his courage and sense of responsibility for his people.
The introspection is brief, however, and now we find Beowulf using a smaller weapon to once again attack the dragon. This clause (2703b-2704a), categorized as basic enjambment with an a-verse adjective series, echoes the similar construction and theme of 2700b-2701a by focusing on the weapon’s appearance in the a-verse\(^5\). Two unenjamed clauses follow: the first (2704b) is a descriptive pause in the narrative that will be discussed more below. The second, (2705) is the final action clause in the passage. The poet shifts the audience’s focus from the weapon to the “helm” (protector) of the people — Beowulf. It is the hero that cuts through the dragon rather than the seax.

The poet continues the passage with two short, unenjamed clauses that each summarize, while maintaining focus on the heroes, that the dragon is dead (2706), followed by an appositive enjamed clause reiterating the dragon’s death (2707-2708b). Interestingly, this apposition echoes the apposition in 2700a, as it brings the actors — Beowulf and Wiglaf, the noble kinsmen— squarely into focus. Finally, the poet opines that Wiglaf’s behavior is to be emulated (2708b-2708a).

The poet uses enjambment in this passage for a variety of rhetorical purposes. First, let us turn to 2699-2700a and 2707-2708a. Both clauses are constructed of three half-lines and begin on the a-verse. Both also feature a pronoun in the first half-line that is in apposition to more specific nouns in the third half-line. While both examples could be described as the “specifying variation” (“Two Aspects of Variation in Old English Poetry” 74) Robinson describes, the audience is fully aware of who the pronouns signify and the nouns are not necessary for clarity’s sake in the same way as in Beowulf 1368-9.

\(^5\) This clause also features enjamed alliteration, which will be discussed more below.
In both examples, the poet uses enjambment to direct the audience’s attention to the heroes by inserting them into the final half-line — a place of prominence due not only due to their placement at the end of the clause but also, as they are located in the a-verse, a place that will ensure that they echo in the audience’s ears due to their alliterative link to the following half-line. The relationship between enjambment and alliteration will be discussed below.

Out of the fourteen clauses in this passage, six are unenjambed. Four of these are presented in succession: 2704b, 2705, 2706a, and 2706b. Line 2705 describes how Beowulf cuts through the dragon’s center. It is the only clause in this passage to occupy a full line: it starts on the a-verse and ends on the b-verse. This syntactical and alliterative coincidence creates a feel of solidity within a heavily enjambed passage and the pause after “wyrm on middan” heralds the end of the clause, the line, and the dragon itself. This full-line clause is unique in this passage and is compelling evidence that the Beowulf poet did not work in line-length poetic units but rather chose to vary the length and shape of his clauses. The two following clauses, each made up of a single half-line, also stand out due to their length and lack of enjambment. Reiterating the same concept — heroes killing the dragon — the brevity of these clauses adds to the feeling of pause brought on after line 2705 while piling on praise for Beowulf and Wiglaf, an effect made cumulative by the slight variation the poet employs by using two separate clauses rather than one longer one.

“[D]æt he on byrnan wæg” is a clause one half-line long (2704b) that describes how Beowulf wore the short sword he employs to kill the dragon. Thematically, it is not
out of place in the passage, but could be seen as a curious bit of detail in the midst of a passage infused heavily with action. In a passage replete with enjambment, it clearly stands out as the first short, unenjambed clause. The poet uses variations in clause length and enjambment to call particular attention to this clause, perhaps to remind his audience — many of whom could be wearing weapons — that they, like Beowulf, have a obligation to protect their people from harm by any means necessary. It is a less explicit but certainly no less effective comment on martial responsibility than “so ought a man to be/ a thane in time of need” found in 2708b-2709a.

While this passage in *Beowulf* uses variation in enjambment and clause length to great effect, the relationship between enjambment and alliteration is in play as well. As mentioned above, the prominence of the heroes is reinforced by their placement in the last half-lines of 2699-2700a and 2707-2708a and their presence echoes beyond the caesura with the alliteration on the *s* sounds in the next half line. In both cases, *secg*, translated as “man” or “warrior” is one of the words that alliterates, describing not only the two men involved in the action but their masculine attributes as well. The two clauses that make up 2702b-2704a move from introspection to action, from the internal activity of Beowulf gathering his wits to the act of drawing his weapon; line 2703, “*geweold his gewitte,/ wællseaxe gebræd*” is where introspection and action intersect in a chiastic construction of verb-noun/ noun-verb. The alliteration on the *w* sound provides an interesting nuance, moving from one clause to another to link Beowulf composing himself with the weapon he uses to defend his kingdom, perhaps offering the audience a subtle comment about what makes up Beowulf’s internal essence.
This passage contains several examples of what Lewis calls “enjambed alliteration,” where “the last stress item of one line alliterates with the first stress item of the following line” (593). For example:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{wællseaxe gebræd} & \quad \text{biter ond beaduscearp} \quad \text{þæt he on byrnan wæg} \\
\text{forwrat Wedra helm} & \quad \text{wyrm on middan} \quad [2703b-2705]
\end{align*}
\]

The \textit{b} sound of \textit{gebræd} flows into the next line, as does the \textit{w} sound of \textit{wæg}. The linked \textit{b} sounds of 2703b-2704a provide an aural link from the description of the sword to the sword itself, while also stressing the sword’s deadly attributes. The enjambed \textit{w} sounds are a roadmap of the journey of the sword from Beowulf’s \textit{byrnie} to the \textit{wyrm}’s midsection. Enjambed alliteration is unusual and its rarity makes it likely that the audience would have noticed that a poet was employing it. Similarly, the \textit{s} sounds of lines 2699b-2700 highlight the action of the armored warrior using a sword to strike:

\[
\begin{align*}
niðor hwene sloh, & \quad \text{secg on searwum} \quad \text{þæt ðæt sweord gedeaf}
\end{align*}
\]

While they reside in different clauses, the \textit{s} sounds in \textit{sloh} and \textit{sweord} provide an alliterative link between the striking and the sword, in this case tightening the bond between the clauses. Cross-clausal alliteration can reinforce the relationship between clauses even without enjambed alliteration. For example, in \textit{Beowulf} 2762-2766:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{þær wæs helm monig} & \quad \text{eald ond omig} \quad \text{earmbeaga fela} \\
\text{searwum gesæled} & \quad \text{Sinc eaðe mæg,} \\
\text{gold on grunde} & \quad \text{gumcynnes gehwone} \\
\text{ofehrigan} & \quad \text{hyde se ðe wyll}
\end{align*}
\]

\textbf{There were many helms}

\textbf{old and rusty} \quad \text{many arm rings}
In line 2764, the s sound might briefly cause the listener to think that “sinc” (“treasure”) is going to be part of an appositive construction with the “cleverly fastened” arm rings discussed in 2763b-2764a. This is a trap; the cautionary advice the poet gives in 2764b-2766 admonishes the listener who would assume that the poet would continue to speak positively of treasure beyond line 2764a. This alliterative sleight-of-hand is made possible by the enjambed clause found in lines 2743b-2764a. While in some ways the caesura in line 2764 represents a schism in world view — from willingness to die for treasure to the poet’s cautionary warning about the dangers of seeking it, the s sound in line 2764 binds the two views together as one, just as throughout Beowulf the poet balances the same two impulses.

Another passage from Beowulf which shows how the poet uses enjambment — and lack of enjambment — to draw attention to certain aspects of the narrative. In lines 2864-2872, Wiglaf admonishes those who fled in Beowulf’s time of need:

that indeed may say  he who wishes to speak the truth
that the liege lord  he who gave you treasures
war gear  that you stand in there

æt la mæg secgan  se ðe wyle soð specan
þæt se mondryhten  se eow ða maðmas geaf
coredgeatwe,  þe ge þær on standað
þonne he on ealubence  oft gesealde
healsittendum  helm ond byrnan
þeoden his þegnum  swylce he þrydlicost
ower feor ðode neah  þíndan meahtæ
þæt he genunga  guðgewædu
wraðe forwurpe  ða hyne wig beget

that indeed may say  he who wishes to speak the truth
that the liege lord  he who gave you treasures
war gear  that you stand in there

31
when he on the ale bench often gave
to hall-sitters helm and byrnie
the chieftain to his thanes such as he the grandest
anyway far or near might find
that he completely war-clothing
grievously discarded when fighting befell him

One clause within this passage (lines 2867-2869a) is a beautiful example of how Anglo-Saxon poets use enjambed clauses as a means to richly explore a single concept from a variety of perspectives. These lines succinctly describe how a good Anglo-Saxon ruler should behave and also establishes the relationship between the ruler and his thanes. We begin with the king enthroned within the mead hall. We learn that he has been generous and Wiglaf brings our attention to the beneficiaries of his generosity: those who sit comfortably (and safely) with him. The “helm ond byrnan” that Wiglaf describes are not simply the material items Beowulf gave to his followers; these items represent safety, protection, and the care the king has for his men. Finally, Wiglaf reminds us of the complex king/retainer relationship in the enjambed final half-line of this clause (peoden his pegnum 2869a), which is in apposition to both lines 2867a and 2868a. This half-line is a reminder of the social order that fuels this entire passage and is turned upside down when Beowulf’s men flee.

The two unenjambed clauses in this passage, pe ge þær on standaþ 2866b and ða hyne wig beget 2872b, are each a single half-line long and also call attention to the fractured king/thane social contract; the poet calls special attention to these clauses by leaving them unenjambed in a passage with many enjambed clauses. As Beowulf lies dead nearby, in line 2866b Wiglaf points out that the battle-shy thanes stand before him in
the very war-gear that Beowulf gave them (*þe ge þær on standað*) — gear that represents their king’s care for them. The alliteration falls on *on* in this half-line. It is unusual for a preposition to get this kind of emphasis, but it serves as part of Wiglaf’s rebuke as it emphasizes the shame of wearing the gear Beowulf gave them. What was once a badge of honor earned through loyalty is now a shameful reminder of a broken promise. After describing the king/thane relationship and the quality of the gear Beowulf gave to his followers, Wiglaf admonishes the thanes for not living up to their covenant with Beowulf when it came time for the gear to be used for its designated purpose (line 2872b). This behavior is antithetical to Wiglaf’s, who was “a thane in time of need” (2709a) for Beowulf.

The alliteration in the final lines of this passage takes on an almost ironic quality. The *w* sound in “guðgewædu” (2871b) is echoed in the enjambed following line: “*wraðe forwurpe/ða hyne wig beget.*” The war-gear in line 2871b is discarded in line 2872a, yet the next clause (line 2872b) alliterates on a word that means “war,” an auditory reminder of just how the equipment was meant to be used.

Enjambment and Alliteration

While the relationship between enjambment and alliteration has been touched on above, it deserves more discussion. In Old English poetry, each line has alliteration between the a-verse and the b-verse, as in *Exodus* line 253:

```
   bald beohata bord up ahof
```
“The bold boaster/ lifted up the shield”, which alliterates on the b sound. In this case, the clause, which starts on the a-verse and ends on the immediate b-verse, corresponds to the alliterative unit. In lines where a clause ends on an a-verse and then a new clause begins on a b-verse, the alliteration shared between the two units can provide some interesting interplay. For example, in Exodus 162-165:

Hreopon herefugolas, hilde grædige
deawigfeðere ofer drihtneum
wonn wælceasega Wulfas sungon
atol æfenleoð ætes on wenan

Ravens screamed greedy of war
dewey-feathered over the corpses
black carrion pickers wolves sang
a hideous evening song in expectation of food

The first clause, beautifully enjambed in an appositive construction, describes the ravens that follow armies hoping to feast on the dead. The second clause in this passage describes wolves engaged in the same behavior. Together, these clauses make up what Lucas calls a “beast of battle ‘type scene’” (note 101) which was a familiar motif in Old English poetry. In line 164, the alliterating w sound crosses from one clause to the next, creating an auditory link between the ravens and wolves that adds to the drama of the passage by amplifying the horror of the situation the Israelites find themselves in. While this passage uses cross-clausal alliteration to amplify the link between two concepts, alliteration can also call attention to oppositions. In Beowulf, Wiglaf poignantly watches over his king and the dragon as the uncertain future of his people looms:

healdeð higemæðum heafodwearde
leafes ond laðes Nu ys leodum wen
orleighwile [2909-2911a]
Holds, weary in mind death-watch
over beloved and loathed now the nation expects
time of warfare

The two enjambed clauses in this passage represent the past and the future for Wiglaf.

Before the king’s death, Wiglaf focused on serving Beowulf; now he must be the
shepherd of his people. The movement of the l sound in line 2910 from “leofes ond
laðes” to “leodum” represents Wiglaf’s new responsibilities and the death of not only
Beowulf and the dragon but the demise of the security that Beowulf’s people knew. Line
2910’s caesura represents a break not only between clauses but in the history of a people.
The l sound shared between these two enjambed clauses evocatively compares the dark
future of a people with the glory of its past.

Enjambment and the Tennis Match of Perspectives

As discussed above relative to Beowulf 2867-2869a, Anglo-Saxon poets use the
flexibility that enjambed clauses allow to vary perspective, bringing the audience’s
attention to different aspects of an action or concept. For example, Beowulf 2906b-2908:

Wiglaf siteð
ofer Biowulfe byre Wihstanes
eorl ofer oðrum unlifigendum

Wiglaf sits
over Beowulf son of Weohstan
earl over another unliving

This passage is a single enjambed clause with “Wiglaf,” “son of Weohstan,” and “earl” in
apposition. The poet controls the audience’s focus by first alternating it between Wiglaf
and Beowulf, then melding them together, and finally delivering the dramatic final
summation in understated Anglo-Saxon style (“unliving”). If one were to imagine the audience’s focus visually, it might look like “Wiglaf/ Beowulf/ Wiglaf/ both men/ dead.” I liken this shifting of foci to the experience of watching a tennis match; one’s focus shifts back and forth from half-line to half-line.

The *Exodus* poet uses the same technique in a passage about Abraham’s near-sacrifice of his son Isaac:

```
se eorl wolde slean eaferan sinne
unweaxenne ecgum reodan
magan mid mece [412-414a]
```

The earl would kill his son young with red edge
son with sword

The poet takes us from Abraham to his son, reminds us of Isaac’s youth and innocence, shows us the sword, and then, using an appositive enjambed phrase, dramatically places both Isaac and the sword in our view. Similarly, the *Exodus* poet uses an enjambed construction with a summarizing half-line in lines 419-420a. God tells Abraham:

```
Ne sleh þu Abraham þin agen bearn
sunu mid sweorde
```

Do not slay Abraham your own child
son with sword

The *Exodus* poet uses this technique in lines 500b-502a as well:

```
mægen eall gedreas
ða gedrencte wæron dugoð Egypta
Faraon mid his folcum
```

force all perished
that drowned were troop of Egyptians
Pharaoh with his army
The poet adds the Pharaoh to three syntactical units referring to the Egyptian army:

“mægen,” “dugod Egypta,” and “folcum,” diverting the audience’s attention from the army to the king and driving home the utter devastation that God has brought upon the Egyptians.

The Enjambed Janus Phrase

In most clauses that feature appositive enjambment, clausal boundaries are easy to discern. For example, in Guthlac B 1301b-1302a:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{swylce he his eagan ontynde} \\
\text{halge heafdes gimmas}
\end{align*}
\]

“likewise he opened his eyes
the head’s holy jewels
the apposition is clear and it is clear that these two half-lines belong to the same clause, as the narrative turns away from Guthlac’s eyes in the next half-line. Other enjambed clauses as not as cut-and-dried. In Exodus 273-275, clause boundaries are unclear:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{þis is se ecea} & \quad \text{Abrahames god} \\
\text{frumsceafa frea} & \quad \text{se ðas fyrd wereð} \\
\text{modig and mægenrof} & \quad \text{mid þære miclan hand}
\end{align*}
\]

This is the eternal God of Abraham
lord of creation who protects this army
brave and powerful with that mighty hand

“Frumsceafa frea” could be in apposition to “god” in line 273b or to “se” in line 274b.

As the identification of clause boundaries is an important part of the data collection necessary for this study, I had to conduct a close analysis of this construction and develop a rule that would allow me to accurately classify both of the clauses involved.
While the idea of construing a single unit of Old English syntax as belonging to units both before and after it has been discussed by critics, this study leads me to focus more narrowly on phrases in the a-verse that could be interpreted as either part of the clause preceding it or part of the clause following it. For identification purposes I call these constructions “Janus phrases,” as they look back to the syntax before them and forward to the syntax after them. In some examples, including Guthlac B lines 971-972 (discussed below), a Janus phrase is located in a clause with multiple infinitives.

In the example from Exodus 273-275 given above, the presence of two finite verbs tells us that this passage is made up of two clauses. The question is whether line 274a is in apposition to 273b — and therefore an enjambed clause of three half-lines — or if it is in apposition to line 274b and therefore part of another enjambed clause built from four half-lines. Statistically this question is important, as my analysis would determine whether this passage had two enjambed clauses or only one. To develop a consistent interpretation, I located Janus phrases in each of the four poems and looked for patterns. I noticed an appositive construction that was similar to the one discussed above, with one integral difference. In Exodus 252-253, the poet describes the lead up to the Egyptian attack:

Ahleop þa for hæleðum hildecalla
bald beohata bord up ahof

---

6 In “‘Apo Koinou’ in Old English Poetry,” Mitchell refers to this as “Apo Koinou” (496); Weiskott calls it “syntactical reversal” (98).

7 Weiskott feels that syntactical reversals add “syntactical but not semantic ambiguity” (98), implying that they could be viewed as part of both clauses by an audience not especially aware of editorial concerns such as punctuation and clause boundaries.

8 As suggested by Daniel Donoghue. The Roman god Janus has two faces, one looking forward and one back.
Lept up then before the heroes the war-herald
bold boaster lifted up the shield

As this passage passes from line 252 to 253, the audience might think that “bald beohata” is in apposition to “hildecalla” and therefore part of an enjambed clause with line 252. Line 253b lacks an explicit subject, however, and while Old English poetry allows for implied subjects I think that in this case line 253 should be considered a complete clause with “bald beohata” as the subject. After analyzing other similar passages, including Exodus 164b-167, I formulated the rule that an a-verse Janus phrase would only be considered an enjambed part of the previous clause if the following clause had an explicit subject, like the “se” found in Exodus 274b or the “þe” in Elene 637b.

Having identified appositive Janus phrases, I also noticed another type of Janus phrase in the poems. In lines 1096b-1098a of Guthlac B, the poet describes the passage of time by using images of nature:

Rodor swamode
ofer niðða bearn nihtrim scridon
deorc ofer dugeðum

The heavens moved
over sons of men number of nights passed
dark over troops

This passage is made up of two clauses, but “ofer niðða bearn” could be interpreted as being the second half of a clause (with basic enjambment) with 1096b or as part of an appositive construction with line 1098a. After considering this and similar passages, including Elene 547b-549a and Exodus 384-386, I made the arbitrary decision to always
attach this kind of phrase to the clause preceding it. Rules established, let us take a look at the incredible richness these enjambed Janus phrases add to Old English poetry.

In *Exodus*, as the Egyptian army approaches Moses rallies his troops [Janus phrases are in bold]:

```
Him þær segncyning    wið þone segn foran
manna þengel    mearcþreate rad
**guðweard gumena**    grimhelm gespeon
cyning cinberge    (cumbol lixton)
**wiges on wenum**    vælhlencan sceoc, [172-6]
```

There the sign-king    with the banner in front
prince of men    rode with the border army
**war leader of men**    mask clasped
king shinguard    (banners shone)
**in expectation of war**    mailcoats shook

The first Janus phrase, “*guðweard gumena*” could be in apposition to the already apposed “*segncyning*” and “*manna þengel,*” or could be the subject of “*grimhelm gespeon*” and therefore apposed to “*cyning*” in line 175a. Perhaps to the audience it serves both purposes. When the poet locates the phrase “*guðweard gumena*” in this position relative to the enjambed clauses preceding and following, he puts the character this phrase represents in a place of prominence within the narrative by describing him in multiple ways. After “*guðweard gumena*” the audience experiences a slight pause, a brief moment of uncertainty: is the phrase part of the previous construction or is “*guðweard gumena*” the beginning of another thought? Even after “*grimhelm gespeon*” carries the audience along to the next thought, “*guðweard gumena*” lingers in the consciousness and is reinforced by the “*cyning*” that follows in apposition. In this case, the poet uses a Janus
phrase to force the audience’s attention on the king. In the space of seven half-lines, the king is mentioned four times, never more loudly than in line 174a.

In line 176a, the poet uses an adverbial Janus phrase to brilliant effect. “[W]iges on wenum” could be interpreted as being adverbial to “rad” in line 173b, “gespeon” in 174b, “lixton” in 175b⁹, and “sceoc” in 176b. In expectation of war, the king could be riding and securing his helmet, banners could be shining, and coats of mail could be shaking. By constructing the passage in this fashion, the Exodus poet creates the feeling of a calm, step-by-step preparation for what lies ahead, a routine likely all too familiar to some members of the audience. In this passage the act of preparing for war is not simply the donning of gear; it is a massive act of heroism on the part of the Israelites, a refusal to break their covenant with God, a refusal to capitulate to the massive army headed their way:

siððan hie gesawon of suðwegum
fyrd Faraonis forð ongangan
oferholt wegan eored lixan
(garas trymedon guð hwærfode
blicon bordhreoðan byman sungon)
þufas þunian þeo mearc tredan [155-160]

When they saw from the south
Pharaoh’s army coming forth
forest of spears carrying troop of horsemen shining
spears readied battle advanced
shield ornaments shone trumpets sounded
banners stood out the army traversed the border

⁹ While Irving and Lucas present line 175b as parenthetical, I believe that it could be also interpreted as either a half-line, stand-alone clause or as a two half-line construction with 176a, leaving 176b to stand on its own. Parenthetical or not it is reasonable to interpret line 176a as being possibly adverbial to “lixton.”
The poet creates a vision of frenzy, an unstoppable wave of warriors headed towards Moses and his people which stands in great contrast to the workmanlike atmosphere back in the Israelite camp, an atmosphere described in understated fashion in the enjambed Janus phrase “wiges on wenum.”

Old English poets use Janus phrases as a way to give specific emphasis to certain phrases within passages. As mentioned above, in lines 1096b-1098a of Guthlac B the poet employs a Janus phrase, “ofer niðða bearn” that could be interpreted as being in apposition to “deorc ofer dugeðum.” By doing so, the poet focuses these lines on the experience of people marking the passage of time by watching the sky turn from day to night overhead, with particular attention to the above/below spatial relationship between the people and the heavens.

While engaged in the process of identifying each clause in the four poems, I found that some Janus phrases create enjambment and some do not. The existence of enjambment in Old English poetry is what makes the use of the Janus phrase such an interesting technique; it is the brief uncertainty as to where a Janus phrase belongs that focuses the audience’s attention on its meaning. Much more analysis could be done on this technique, which is used most frequently in Exodus but is found in each of the poems under consideration in this thesis10.

Enjamed Verb Phrases with Multiple Infinitives

10 Including Exodus 181a, 166a, 497a, 553a, 555a, Beowulf 2691a, 2810a, 2968a, Elene 548a, 637a, 693a, 717a, 754a, and Guthlac B 972a, 1101a, 1103a, 1144a, and 1294a.
A clause features verb phrase enjambment if it contains an auxiliary verb and an
infinitive on separate lines. Poets use this construction in a variety of ways. One
e example can be found in Beowulf 3018-3019:

```
ac sceal geomormod  golde bereafod
oft nalles æne    elland tredan

But must sad hearted    bereft of gold
often not once    in alien land tread
```

Here, the poet delays the infinitive, creating a sense of suspense about what the subject
must do.

Some enjambed verb phrases contain an auxiliary verb and more than one
infinitive. This construction can be used with great effect, as in Exodus 215b-220a:

```
oð Moyses bebead
eorlas on uhttid    ærnum bemum
folc somnigean    frecan arisan
habban heora hlencan    hycgan on ellen
beran beorht searo    beacnum cigean
swoet sande near

Until Moses commanded
earls at daybreak    with brass trumpets
the army to assemble    brave men to rise
to hold their mail coats    to think of courage
to bear bright war gear    to summon with a beacon
the band in the near sand
```

The poet uses multiple infinitives (somnigean, arisan, habban, hycgan, beran, cigean) to
show Moses’s power, authority, and command presence. Moses orders his people to
prepare for battle; had the poet decided to focus on the activities of the army and
constructed a series of short clauses explaining the army’s preparations, such as “brave
men rose/ they thought of courage/ they carried bright war gear,” the focus would rest on
the army’s activities rather than Moses’s ability not only to know what he needed his
eorlas to do but also his ability to get them to do it.

In Elene, Cynewulf uses this pattern to describe the punishment God gives to
Satan for rebelling against Him:

\[
\text{þæs he in ermðum sceal}
\]
\[
ealra fula ful fah þrowian
\]
\[
þeowned þolian [767b-769a]
\]

for that in misery shall
full of all foulness the abhorred endure
bondage suffer

The use of the enjamed auxiliary/infinitive construction highlights God’s ability to force
Satan to experience suffering. It also allows Cynewulf to add additional description with
ealra fula ful, which serves as a brief dramatic delay as well. While the infinitives in this
particular example reside in different half-lines than the auxiliary, in one passage from
Guthlac B the poet locates one infinitive in the same half-line as the auxiliary while
placing the second infinitive at the end of the clause:

\[
\text{þæt he fyrmgewyrht fyllan sceolde}
\]
\[
þurh deaðes cyme domes hleotan [971-2]
\]

That he the decree fulfill must
through death’s coming judgment obtain

The addition of the second infinitive allows the poet to call attention to Guthlac’s
obligations by compounding them via the use of “sceolde” with multiple infinitives. Line
971a, þurh deaðes cyme is a Janus phrase, as it is only through death that both the decree
is fulfilled and judgement is obtained. While verb phrases with multiple infinitives are
found in all four poems considered here, they are by far most frequent in Guthlac B and
Elene. Elene is signed in runes by Cynewulf; Guthlac B is unsigned but many critics, including Bjork, believe that it was composed by Cynewulf as well (xi). Perhaps a comparative analysis of the frequency of multi-infinitive verb phrases between poems might yield interesting results.

B-Verse to A-Verse Enjambment and the Weaving of Words

In “The Interlace Structure of Beowulf,” XXX Leyerle compares how the Beowulf poet weaves disparate narrative threads together to the intricate interlace patterns found in Anglo-Saxon art. He writes, “At a structural level, literary interlace has a counterpart in tapestries where positional patterning of threads establishes the shape and design of the fabric, whether the medium is thread in textile or words in a text” (142). While Leyerle’s analysis focuses more on theme than syntactical structure, his analogy leads me to compare the Anglo-Saxon interlace design to the enjambment we find in Old English poetry. Let us examine Exodus 456b-472a, in which the poet describes the Red Sea enveloping the Egyptian army:

```
ne ðær ænig becwom
herges to hame  ac behindan beleac
wyrd mid wæge   þær ær wegas lagon
mere modgode    mægen wæs adrenced
460  Streamas stodon  storm up gewat
    heah to heofonum  herewopa ðæst
Laðe cyrmdon     (lyft up geswearc)
fægum stæfnum    flod blod gewod
Randbyrig wæron rofene  rodon swipode
465   meredceða ðæst  modige swulton
cyningas on corœre   cyre swiðrode
```

For example, Elene 583b-584a, 588b-590b, 691-693b, 705b-706, 862b-864, and Guthlac B 831-832, 842-844, 989b-991a, 1040b-1044a, 1061b-1063, 1154b-1156a.
sæs æt ende  Wigbord scinon
heah ofer hæleðum  holmweall astah
merestream modig  Mægen wæs on cwealme
fæste gefeterod  forðganges weg
searwum æsæled  sand basnodon
witodre fyrde

None arrived
army to home  but enclosed them from behind
fate with waves  where earlier paths stood
the sea raged  the force was drowned
the streams stood  the storm went up
high to heavens  the greatest of laments
the hateful shouted  (sky above darkened)
in fated voices  blood pervaded the waters
walls of water were broken  the sky lashed
the greatest of sea depths  the brave died
kings in a troop  their choice grew less
at the sea’s end  shields shone
high over the warriors  seawall rose
brave current  force was in death
firmly fettered  the way of advance
clogged in war-gear  sand awaited
a certain army

This passage features nineteen clauses, twelve of which are enjambed. Of the enjambed clauses, ten consist of two half-lines and start on the b-verse and end on the a-verse immediately following. In constructions such as this, Malone writes, “the syntactical and alliterative patterns rarely coincide at any point, and the matter is presented en masse, so to speak. The verses give the effect of a never ending flow, but this continuous effect is gained at a heavy structural cost” (203). In lines 464b-472a, eight consecutive clauses follow the b-verse to a-verse pattern. This does, as Malone suggests, create a sense of flow. Rather than a looser structure, however, I believe that the relationship between alliteration and syntax in these b-verse to a-verse clauses creates a tighter sense of
structure because it creates a firm bond between the clauses. For example, line 468b “holmweall astah” is the beginning of a clause. It has an alliterative relationship with the second half of the previous clause, 468a, as well as syntactical relationship with line 469a (together they make a clause). Line 468b is being pulled back by alliteration and pulled forward by syntax and sense. This is true for lines 464b, 465b, 466b, 467b, 469b, 470b, and 471b. When a group of b-verse to a-verse clauses are placed in succession, it creates a push forward, a tumbling effect that is especially effective in scenes depicting action or dramatic moments. It also creates an effect similar to a square knot — the poetry is made tighter and more cohesive when units are pulled in different directions. The ultimate effect of this technique is solidity and strength of focus rather than looseness. Circling back to Leyerle, the visual representation of the enjambed clauses in the passage above — while a modern editorial construct — brings to mind the Anglo-Saxon interlace pattern as seen in the item from North Yorkshire found below.

Fig. 2
theheritagetrust.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/img_2486.jpg

12 For example, Guthlac B 1268b-1278a, Beowulf 2700b-2704a.
We will now turn to the statistics generated from my analysis of *Beowulf, Elene, Exodus*, and *Guthlac B*. 
Chapter IV

The Tale of the Tape: Enjambment Statistics

The statistics generated from this study show that Old English poets used enjambment in widely varying frequencies; this degree of variation indicates that use of enjambment can be considered an aspect of poetic style.

Clause Length

Clause length and enjambment go hand-in-hand; clauses longer than three half-lines must be enjambed and clauses made up of two-half lines are, as we have seen, often enjambed. Conversely, clauses constructed within a single half-line cannot be enjambed and poems with a large number of single half-line clauses are less likely to feature enjambment. Let’s take a look at some graphs that illustrate the variations in clause length in the four poems.

![Fig. 3](image-url)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beowulf</th>
<th>Elene</th>
<th>Exodus</th>
<th>Guthlac B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>443</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Fig. 4](image-url)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beowulf</th>
<th>Elene</th>
<th>Exodus</th>
<th>Guthlac B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Clauses in 500 Lines

Percentage of Clauses > One Half-Line
Guthlac B features the longest average length of clause and, not surprisingly, the fewest number of clauses. An interesting data point is that in Beowulf, (Fig. 6) clauses made of single half-lines make up the majority with two and three half-line clauses following close behind; in the other poems two half-line clauses rule the day but the number of three half-line clauses declines much more sharply than in Beowulf. Like Beowulf, Exodus is made primarily from one and two half-line clauses, with a lower percentage of three half-line clauses than Beowulf. This shows a repertoire made up of one, two, and three half-line clauses in contrast to the heavy reliance on clauses constructed from two half-lines found in Elene and Guthlac B.

Percentage of Enjambed Clauses

In light of the statistics relative to clause length, the percentages of enjambed clauses per poem is not surprising (Fig. 7). Guthlac B has the highest percentage with

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13 Guthlac B also has the longest median clause length at three half-lines; Beowulf, Elene, and Exodus have a median clause length of two half-lines.
74%. *Exodus* and *Beowulf* feature the lowest percentage, with 53% and 56% respectively\(^{14}\). The sharp drop between the number of two and three half-line clauses in Exodus shows the poet’s preference for the end-stopped style that Malone might praise for its solid structure (203).

---

\(^{14}\) The percentages of enjambed clauses in Fig. 7 exactly matches the percentages of clauses that start on the b-verse in each poem.
Klaeber writes that variation is “the very soul of the Old English poetical style” (237), the enjambment statistics shown above demonstrate that some poets favored variation more than others, at least when constructing enjambed clauses. *Exodus* features the most apposition, at 46% of enjambed clauses. This is partially due to the poet’s use of appositive a-verse Janus phrases. *Beowulf* features the least amount of apposition, with the poet using basic enjambment and verb phrases more than the others. *Guthlac B* and *Elene* are quite similar in breakdown over all enjambment categories, even while *Guthlac B* features significantly more enjambment than *Elene*. This is probably because *Elene* features a significant amount of dialogue, which often starts with formulaic constructions that start on the a-verse and end on the b-verse such as in line 685: “*Elene maðelode/ þurh eorne hyge*15.”

15 Other examples include lines 386, 404, 462, 463, 573, 655, 662, 669, and 806.
In *Style in Old English Poetry: The Test of The Auxiliary*, which loosely served as a model for this thesis, Donoghue identifies a variety of ways in which poets use auxiliaries and compares these techniques between poems. He writes that the differences he found “offer a convenient and verifiable way to measure one aspect of a poet’s technique against another’s” (12). Similarly, in *Old English Syntax*, Bruce Mitchell writes that certain patterns “can serve as a test of style and a guide to the recognition of the characteristics of individual writers” (section 3976, 999).

But is enjambment one of the patterns that can be used to define style in Old English poetry? I believe that based on the significant, measurable differences in the frequency and types of enjambment found in *Beowulf, Elene, Exodus*, and *Guthlac B*, enjambment can be used as a metric with which to compare poems and poets. If, after compiling my initial statistics, I found that each poem featured a frequency of enjambment within the same five percentage points, I might have concluded that enjambment was an under-explored convention of Old English poetry or a mere compositional inevitability brought on by length of clause or some other factor. However, considering the wide disparity I found between the amount of enjambment in *Guthlac B* (74%) and in *Exodus* (53%), I believe that enjambment is a legitimate tool for the student of Old English to use to compare poem to poem and poet to poet.
Exodus features the least amount of enjambment of the four poems. However, even though it has the fewest number of enjammed clauses, Exodus has more appositive enjammed clauses than all of the other poems. This certainly shows a preference — when the poet chose to extend a clause past the end of a b-verse, s/he used appositive constructions much more frequently than the other poets. Apposition is one of the defining features of Old English poetry, a feature that adds to the listener’s experience by offering varied terms for, and perspectives of, a concept. An example of apposition in Exodus that shows the poet’s artistry can be found in lines 135-136a:

ðær on fyrd hyra    færspell becwom,
oht inlende

then in their army    fear-news arrived
pursuit from inland

Here, færspell and oht inlende are apposed. The poet tells the audience that bad news about the pursuing Egyptians has begun to circulate in Moses’s camp and then, perhaps with a dramatic pause after becwom, tells us exactly what the bad news is. The amount of apposition in Exodus greatly enhances the richness of the poem and is testament to the skill and imagination of the poet. Exodus is often thought of as a difficult poem and perhaps it is the high percentage of apposition within a single clause that makes it challenging for the modern audience. The poet’s frequent use of Janus phrases that emphasize and highlight certain aspects of the story make the narrative flow but may also challenge those trying to translate and analyze the poem.

Beowulf features more enjamed constructions than Exodus, but has the least amount of appositive enjammed clauses of the four poems. As apposition is the poetic
technique most associated with Old English poetry, it is interesting to learn that *Beowulf* — for many the artistic standard by which other Old English poetry is judged — features the smallest percentage of it in these four poems\textsuperscript{16}. *Beowulf* leads the verb phrase category, however, highlighting the *Beowulf* poet’s preference for auxiliary/infinitive constructions that extend beyond the b-verse. While the *Beowulf* poet uses twenty-seven enjamed verb phrases over 500 lines, the *Exodus* poet uses a mere eleven; certainly this reinforces my view that type and frequency of enjamed clauses is a legitimate metric to use during a discussion of poetic style. *Beowulf* features the shortest average clause length and the highest incidence of basic enjambment; this speaks of a directness and economy of style that might not be discernible without viewing the poem through the lens of a comparative study of the frequency and type of enjambment found there.

As discussed briefly above, *Elene* and *Guthlac B* are strikingly similar when compared using the types of enjambment found in them. *Guthlac B* has more enjamed clauses in total, but this may possibly be due to the prevalence of dialogue in *Elene.* *Elene* is signed by Cynewulf; *Guthlac B* is not but is often attributed to him (Bjork xi). Comparative analysis of enjambment in these two poems certainly has potential to add to the debate surrounding Cynewulf’s authorship of these poems. For any conclusions to be drawn (or even tentatively suggested) analysis of each poem in toto must occur, as does the introduction of additional poems — if not all the existing Old English poems over a certain number of lines — into the dataset. In both *Elene* and *Guthlac B,* 8% of the

\textsuperscript{16} It is also interesting to note that the most authoritative treatment of apposition, Robinson’s *Beowulf and the Appositive Style,* limits itself to *Beowulf.* A similar treatment of other poems might yield new insight on the poems and the nature of apposition itself.
enjambed clauses use verb phrases. This is interesting in and of itself, but both poems include multiple examples of enjambed verb phrases featuring one auxiliary verb and multiple infinitives — a striking number in comparison to the almost non-existent use of this construction in the passages in *Exodus* and *Beowulf* that I analyzed. Certainly a more thorough analysis of this feature would be worthwhile.

The identification of enjambed verb phrases with multiple infinitives has been one unexpected benefit of this study. The other unexpected discovery has been the recognition of a number of Janus phrases in these poems, with a particularly high frequency in *Exodus*. Janus phrases add a particular flavor to *Exodus* and contribute greatly to the poem’s frequent appositive enjambment. An examination of Janus phrases in other poems as well as a thorough investigation as to where Janus phrases fit into the analysis done by Mitchell and Weiskott would be a worthwhile enterprise.

The quantities and types of enjambment found in this study show that enjambment is an integral part of Old English poetic construction. The Anglo-Saxon audience would have experienced enjambment in a different way than a reader of *The Waste Land*: with ears rather than eyes. The Anglo-Saxons certainly developed an ear for enjambment and could identify and appreciate the “momentary riddles,” apposition, and other subtleties that enjambment brought to the poetry. Enjambed alliteration and end-stopped lines would have stood out in bold relief as well, all adding to the richly woven tapestry of Old English poetry.

The statistics gleaned from my analysis show that *Beowulf*, *Elene*, *Exodus*, and *Guthlac B* demonstrate significant differences in the clause length, amount of
enjambment, and categories of enjambment favored by the poets. The statistical variation and — let’s not forget the poetry — wealth of poetic effects brought about through it indicate that enjambment in Old English poetry should not be taken for granted any longer but should be considered an important tool in the poet’s arsenal to be used as each poet’s style dictates. A comprehensive study of all of the longer poems in the Old English corpus could be of great benefit to the field.
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